

What is a Peer?

Put simply, a peer is a person we identify with in some capacity. This can include anything from age to gender to sexual orientation to shared language. In behavioral health, **a peer is usually used to refer to someone who shares the experience of living with a mental health condition.** In that narrow context two people living with a mental illness are peers, but in reality most people are far more specific about whom they would rely on for **peer support. Trust and compatibility are extremely important factors.**

Peers are people in recovery from
mental health conditions

**They are living proof that
recovery is possible**



Peer support is the “process of giving and receiving encouragement and assistance to achieve long-term recovery.” Peer supporters “offer emotional support, share knowledge, teach skills, provide practical assistance, and connect people with resources, opportunities, communities of support, and other people” (Mead, 2003; Solomon, 2004).

Peer Supporters support others in recovery

They utilize their:

lived experience

formal skills

knowledge of systems



To provide support through:

advocacy

education

mentoring

motivation

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Peer Supporters (also known as peer providers, peer support specialists, navigators, peer advocates, peer counselors, to name a few) can play many roles in supporting people living with mental illness, such as:

- Facilitating education and support groups
- Linking people to services as they transition from hospitals or jails into the community
- Working one-on-one as role models, mentors, coaches and advocates
- Supporting people in developing advanced directives and creating Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP).

Benefits of Peer Support

Peer support is considered a best practice by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Research shows peer support services can have a big impact on the individuals receiving services they support by:

- Reducing symptoms and hospitalizations
- Increasing social support and community participation
- Decreasing lengths of hospital stays and costs of services
- Improving well-being, self-esteem, and social functioning
- Encouraging more thorough and longer-lasting recoveries

Peers go by many names and can work in many different settings. Many peers have additional training and certifications that demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Combined with their lived experience and ability to engage and connect with individuals receiving services, peer supporters are a dynamic and growing group that continue to transform lives and systems.



Peer support changes lives.