

WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT EXACTLY?

Peer support is both as simple as it sounds, and so much more. Here's a primer to explain the ins and outs.

What is peer support?

Peer support is the supportive connection that happens when people with similar experiences—like mental health, addiction or substance use health challenges—come together with a shared purpose.

Family peer support is also a key type of peer support that exists throughout the healthcare system. In family peer support, people connect based on the shared experience of caring about someone who is experiencing a mental health or substance use health challenge.

The purpose of peer support is always the same: to join forces—without judgment and as equals—to provide support and learn skills. All in the interest of recovery.

Peer support as a service

Peer support can be a formal mental health service on its own, or alongside other services in the mental health and substance use health care system. Today, you can find peer supporters in mental health organizations, on campuses, on care teams and crisis response teams, and even in hospitals.

Personal lived experience alone doesn't set you up to be a peer supporter. You also need a set of specialized skills. A formal peer supporter meets standards, needs special training, and is supervised and paid for their work.



It's not the same as "friendship"

Peer support can look a lot like a friendly, helpful conversation between people who've been through similar things. But it is so much more than that. Peer supporters provide emotional support and offer coping strategies. They help build skills. And they help get people the care and support they need. A peer supporter is an ally—someone by your side with insider knowledge of how systems and services work. They've been there too. And they are trained to help.

“When a peer supporter says: ‘I have a mental illness, too. And it’s not always gonna be like this,’ sometimes that’s exactly what you need to hear.”

The power of peer support

It can make a huge difference in a person's recovery and can profoundly improve how a person feels.

A peer supporter doesn't "fix" or "save" the person they support. They don't make decisions for them. They let the person lead and move forward—on their own steam. It's like being in the driver's seat in one's own recovery.

Peer support is also a big money saver in the healthcare system. It cuts down on time in hospital and on the need for more expensive services and it's cost-effective to deliver. For more, see *The Power of Peer Support*.



“Peer support has been the most important part of my recovery journey, bar none.”



What makes peer support unique and powerful?

It's different from talking to a counsellor or doctor—it's talking to someone who has been there too. With a peer supporter, you can skip the formalities that might exist with a conventional healthcare professional. And you don't need a referral from a doctor to get peer support.

For more information, see *The Power of Peer Support* and *Peer Support in Action*.

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