

Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services

Category I: Engages peers in collaborative and caring relationships

This category of competencies emphasized peer workers' ability to initiate and develop on-going relationships with people who have behavioral health conditions and/or parents/caregivers of children, youth, and young adults with behavioral health conditions. These competencies include interpersonal skills, knowledge about resilience, recovery, and wellness from behavioral health conditions and attitudes consistent with a recovery and wellness orientation.

1. Initiates contact with peers
 2. Uses active listening skills to listen with careful attention to the content and emotion being communicated by peers
 3. Reaches out to engage peers across the whole continuum of the resilience, recovery, and wellness process
 4. Demonstrates genuine acceptance and respect
 5. Demonstrates understanding of peers' experiences and feelings.
- Add - Shares relevant lived experience to develop credibility and trust
Add – Engages in strength-based conversations that support peers to identify strengths, needs and preferences
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Category II: Provides support

The competencies in this category are critical for the peer worker to be able to provide the emotional, informational, instrumental, and affiliation support people living with behavioral health conditions and parents/caregivers of children, youth and young adults may want.

6. Validates peers' experiences and feelings
7. Encourages the exploration and pursuit of community roles
8. Conveys hope for the future to peers about resilience, recovery and wellness
9. Assists peers to recognize and celebrates their efforts and accomplishments
10. Provides concrete assistance and systems navigation support to help peers accomplish tasks and goals.

Category III: Shares lived experiences of recovery

These competencies are unique to peer support, as most roles in behavioral health services do not emphasize or even prohibit the sharing of lived experiences. Peer workers need to be skillful in telling their stories and using their lived experiences as a way of inspiring hope and supporting a person living with behavioral health conditions. Family peer support workers likewise share their personal experiences of self-care and supporting a child, youth or young adult who is living with behavioral health conditions.

11. Relates their own and others' personal recovery stories to peers to inspire hope and demonstrates there are many pathways to resilience, recovery and wellness
12. Discusses ongoing personal efforts to enhance health, wellness, and recovery

13. Recognizes when to share relevant personal experiences and when to listen
14. Describes personal recovery and wellness practices and helps peers identify and practice self-care behaviors that work for them. Add – Helps the peer or family member act on strengths, use barriers or setbacks to increase resilience and recovery, and establish routines to maintain wellness.

Category IV: Personalizes peer support

These competencies help peer workers to tailor or individualize the support services provided to and with a peer. By personalizing peer support, the peer worker operationalizes the notion that there are multiple pathways to resilience, recovery and wellness.

15. Understands his/her own personal values and culture and how these may contribute to biases, judgments and beliefs

16. Appreciates and respects the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of peers and their families

ADD - Knowledgeable about cultural and linguistic diversity, including but not limited to race, gender, age, ethnicity, faith and religion, sexual preference and marital status, economic and social class, language, geographic isolation, and disability – NFFCMH Core Competency

17. Connects with peer or family member where they are and recognizes the complexities and uniqueness of each peer or family member's process of recovery and wellness

18. Tailors services and support to meet the preferences and unique needs of peers and their families.

ADD - Embraces differences of those they support as potential learning opportunities – National Practice Guidelines of Peer Supporters

ADD – Connects with peer or family member without judgment by holding them in unconditional positive regard, with an open mind, and full acceptance of each person as a unique individual – National Practice Guidelines of Peer Supporters

ADD – Understands that own experience and/or outcome may not be the same as the peer or family member they are supporting

Category V: Recovery/Resiliency/Wellness planning

These competencies enable peer workers to support other peers to take charge of their lives. Recovery often leads people to want to make changes in their lives. Recovery planning assists people to set and accomplish goals related to home, work, community, education and health.

19. Assists and supports peers to set goals and to dream of future possibilities
20. Helps peer or family member explore a range of options to accomplish tasks or goals
21. Understands the adult decision-making process and behavior change by being able to
 - a. Establish stable, supportive relationships with peer or family members
 - b. Listen to and validate each family members' feelings and values
 - c. Serve as a role model and appropriately share lived experience
 - d. Assist peer or family member to assess their own strengths, weaknesses, barriers and opportunities

e. Provide necessary support by maintaining appropriate on-going contact – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Partners

22. Helps peers to function as a member of their treatment/recovery support team

23. Supports peers and family members to research and identify emerging, effective, and evidence based practices.

Category VI: Links to resources, services, and supports

These competencies assist peer workers to help other peers acquire the resources, services, and supports they need to enhance their resilience, recovery and wellness. Peer workers apply these competencies to assist other peers to link to resources or services both within and outside of formal behavioral health services. It is critical that peer workers have knowledge of resources within their communities as well as on-line resources.

24. Develops and maintains up-to-date information about community resources and services, both indigenous and formal

25. Assists peers or family members to investigate, select, and use needed and desired resources and services, both indigenous and formal

26. Helps peers or family members to find and use health services and support

27. Accompanies peers or family members to community activities and appointments as requested;

28. Participates in community activities as requested by peer and family members.

29. Understands the continuum of behavioral health services in the area and their approaches to treatment

ADD – Knowledgeable about federal, state, and local agency services and able to assist peers or family members in identifying and accessing services, supports and resources in accordance with the peer or family members' plan – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers

Category VII: Teaches information and skills related to health, wellness, and recovery

These competencies describe how peer workers coach, model or teach information or behaviors that enhance resilience, recovery and wellness. These competencies recognize that peer workers have knowledge, skills and experiences to offer others in recovery and that the resilience, recovery and wellness process often involves learning and growth.

29. Educates peers or family members about health, wellness, resilience, recovery and supports

30. Participates with peers or family members in discovery or co-learning to enhance resilience, recovery and wellness experiences

31. Coaches peers or family members about how to access services and navigate systems of services

32. Coaches peers or family members in desired skills and strategies

33. Educates family members and other supportive individuals about resilience, recovery and wellness supports

34. Uses teaching strategies that match the preferences and needs of individual peers.

ADD – Assists peers or family members to identify and build informal family and community supports – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers

Category VIII: Helps peers to manage crises

These competencies assist peer workers to identify potential risks and to use procedures that reduce risks to peers and others. Peer workers may have to manage situations, in which there is intense distress and work to ensure the safety and well-being of other peers.

- 35. Recognizes signs of distress and threats to safety among peers and family members and in their environments
- 36. Provides reassurance to peers or family members in distress
- 37. Strives to create safe spaces when meeting with peers or family members
- 38. Takes action to address distress or a crisis by using knowledge of local resources and service and support preferences of individual peers or family members
- 39. Assists peers or family members in developing advance directives and other crisis prevention tools

ADD – Understands the duty to do no harm and how to include the peer and family member in complying with all laws and regulations regarding protection of children and vulnerable adults and duty to warn/protect a person from harm – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers

Category IX: Communication

These competencies provide guidance on how peer workers interact verbally and in writing with colleagues and others. These competencies suggest language and processes used to communicate and operationalize the value of respect.

- 39. Uses respectful, person-centered, family driven, youth guided, culturally responsive, and recovery and wellness-oriented language in written and verbal interactions with peers, family members, community members, and others
- 40. Uses active listening skills
- 41. Clarifies understanding of information when in doubt of the meaning
- 42. Conveys point of view when working with colleagues
- 43. Documents information as required by program policies and procedures
- 44. Aware of, and complies with, the content of confidentiality regulations and laws and can help the peer or family member understand their confidentiality rights and responsibilities and possible exceptions as it applies under HIPAA, IDEA, 42CFR-Part 2, Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) and state child protection, domestic violence statutes and regulations, juvenile justice and in criminal cases – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Partners

ADD – Respects peer and family members' rights for privacy

Category X: Collaboration and teamwork

These competencies provide direction on how peer workers can develop and maintain effective relationships with colleagues and others to enhance the peer support provided. These competencies involve not only interpersonal skills but also organization skills.

45. Works together with other colleagues to enhance the provision of services and supports
46. Actively engages providers from mental health services, child welfare, juvenile justice, education, addiction services, the faith-based community, community organizations and physical medicine to meet the needs of peers or family members
47. Coordinates efforts with formal and informal service providers to enhance the health and wellness of peers or family members
48. Coordinates efforts with peers' family members and other natural supports when appropriate
49. Partners with community members and organizations to strengthen opportunities for peers
50. Strives to resolve conflicts in relationships with peers and others in their support network.

Category XI: Leadership and advocacy

These competencies describe actions that peer workers use to provide leadership within behavioral health programs to advance a resilience, recovery and wellness-oriented mission of services. They also support the skill development of peers or family members to advocate for the legal and human rights of themselves and other peers.

51. Uses knowledge of relevant rights and laws (ADA, HIPAA, IDEA, Olmstead, etc.) to ensure that peer's or family member rights are respected
52. Uses a skill building approach to empower the peer or family member to advocate for their needs and desires in treatment team meetings, community services, living situations, education, and with family members
53. Uses knowledge of legal resources and advocacy organizations to support the peer or family member in building their advocacy plan
54. Participates in efforts to eliminate prejudice and discrimination of people who have behavioral health conditions and their families
ADD – Understands and promotes interventions to prevent or overcome stigma about behavioral health in society – NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers
55. Educates colleagues about the process of resilience, recovery and wellness and the value of support services
56. Actively participates in efforts to improve the organization
57. Maintains a positive reputation in peer/professional communities.

Language puts peer in lead role rather than to walk alongside – peer should empower, mentor, role model, etc – not to do for them – peer should not be the voice, the should help them find their voice and the ability to use it

Category XII: Growth and development

These competencies describe how peer workers become more reflective and competent in their practice. The competencies recommend specific actions that may serve to increase peer workers' success and satisfaction in their current roles and contribute to career advancement.

58. Understands personal and professional limitations based on own knowledge, skill or experience and seeks assistance from others when needed - NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers

59. Uses supervision (mentoring, reflection) effectively by monitoring self and relationships, preparing for meetings and engaging in problem-solving strategies with the supervisor (mentor, peer)

60. Reflects and examines own personal motivations, judgments, and feelings that may be activated by the peer work, recognizing signs of distress, and knows when to seek support

61. Seeks opportunities to increase knowledge and skills of peer support.

ADDITIONAL CATEGORY – Education – Taken from NFFCMH Core Competencies for Parent Support Providers

Since special education support services extend to the age of 26, it is important that the continuum of peer workers (adult, parent and youth) have knowledge and understanding about the educational system and how to support peers or family members in its navigation.

1. Aware of timelines, procedures and regulations related to Individual Education Plans, §504 plans and §1400 (c) (14) and (d) Transition plans

2. Knowledgeable about resources for parents

3. Knowledgeable about communicating written goals and outcomes

4. Aware of procedural safeguards and enforceable regulations

5. Aware of mediation

6. Understands effective meeting skills for parents and youth

7. Aware of bullying and stigma associated with emotional, mental or behavioral challenges