



## **Peer Support Supervisor Competencies**

The competencies outlined in this document relate to supervising Peer Workers (Certified Peer Support Specialist, Certified Recovery Mentor roles, and uncertified Peer Worker) roles. From this point on, all roles, certified or not, mental health or substance use, will be referred to as Peer Workers.

The competencies outlined in this document were derived from an extensive review of the following well-known and respected peer support supervision documents or curricula:

- Altarum Institute: “Supervision of Peer Practice: The Challenges and Opportunities for Organizations with Peer Recovery Support Services Programs”, 2018.
- Centre for Excellence in Peer Support & Centre for Innovation in Peer Support: “Supervising Peer Workers”, 2019, (Canada).
- Mental Health Coalition of South Australia: “Lived Experience Workforce Program”, 2022, (Australia).
- National Association of Peer Supporters (NAPS): “National Practice Guidelines for Peer Specialists and Supervisors”, 2019.
- Oregon Family Support Network (OFSN): “Family Support Supervisor Competencies”,
- SAMHSA/BRSS TACS: “Supervision of Peer Workers” ppt presentation (undated).
- Substance Use Peer Supervision Competencies, Oregon (undated).
- Te Pou: “Consumer, peer support and lived experience”, 2022 (New Zealand).
- The Café TA Center: “Peer Supervision” training, 2015.

“Supervision is an Act(ion), not a Role. “

## **Foundational Knowledge**

In order to effectively supervise Peer Workers, it’s imperative to have a knowledge-base in several areas. While this training will touch on these areas, it’s expected that you take the responsibility to increase your knowledge in any areas below that need strengthening. These areas are:

### **A. The Historical Foundation of Peer Support**

1. Understand the historical context of human and civil rights at the root of contemporary mental health peer support.
2. Understand the roots of substance use peer support (both abstinence-based and harm reduction-based).



3. Be familiar with the work of pioneers from which the power and values of lived experience expertise of peer support were developed and articulated.

## **B. Core Principles of Peer Support**

1. Understand the value of shared lived experience in the peer support relationship.
2. Understand the key values of peer support practice, including mutuality and self-determination, and how to apply these in a behavioral health setting.
3. Understand that all peer relationships are VOLUNTARY.
4. Understand the recovery paradigm in mental health and how to apply it within behavioral health services.
5. Recognize and support the concept of “multiple pathways to recovery” in both substance use and mental health recovery.
6. Value the unique role of Peer Workers as being “in” but not “of” the system.

## **C. The Centrality of Relationship**

1. Recognize the central role of “relationship” in supervision and peer support practice that enhance effective supervisory relationships.
2. Understand active listening skills and communication methods that facilitate empathic communication.
3. Understand methods of building supportive, recovery-oriented peer support relationships.
4. Understand processes of recovery and change, and the role of peer support in these processes.
5. Understand concepts of role-oriented limits and boundaries in peer support, and how they differ from clinical practice.
6. Recognize the concept of role confusion and paternalistic over-reach in supervisory relationships with Peer Workers.
7. Understand the tenets of Trauma Informed Care and how this is translated within the peer support relationship.
8. Recognize ways in which one’s own world view, including personal stigmas, stereotypes, and bias, can compromise the supervisory relationship, and know the steps to take for personal supervision to avoid any such interference.



## Core Competencies

The Core Competencies described below create the foundation of this Peer Worker supervision. According to the National Institutes of Health, competencies are “the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that contribute to individual and organizational performance. Knowledge is information developed or learned through experience, study, or investigation. Skill is the result of repeatedly applying knowledge or ability.”<sup>1</sup> This is true for not only the Peer Worker, but also the supervisor.

Supervision competencies have historically been divided into two broad categories: managerial/administrative supervision and “clinical”/practice supervision. These two broad areas can be broken down more fully, to better identify the different functions of the supervisor in the supervision relationship.<sup>2</sup> The competencies are outlined into these categories:

<b>Informative</b> (or relationship building)	<b>Restorative</b> (or supportive)	<b>Formative</b> (or developmental)	<b>Normative</b> (or administrative)	<b>Mediative</b>
Creating mutual expectations and exploring each person’s needs for developing initial trust.	Creating an environment that stimulates open and honest discussions of overcoming challenges and reflecting on inherent biases and vulnerabilities.	Sharing responsibility for both supervisor and PEER WORKER’s professional development, including knowledge and skills.  Includes Communication of Regular and constructive feedback.	Monitoring standards and practice in a way that reflects ethics and values. Defining and supporting roles and responsibilities  Coordinating workload management.	Bridging communication between all team members and advocating for larger organizational changes.

<sup>1</sup> NIH at <https://hr.nih.gov/about/faq/working-nih/competencies/what-are-competencies>

<sup>2</sup> Guidance Manual On Strengthening Supervision for the Social Service Workforce. (2020). Global Social Services Workforce Alliance  
[https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Guidance\\_Manual\\_Strengthening\\_Supervision\\_Social\\_Service\\_Workforce\\_0.pdf](https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Guidance_Manual_Strengthening_Supervision_Social_Service_Workforce_0.pdf)



### **Informative (Relationship Building)**

Supervisor:

- Builds trust and develops the integrity of the supervisory relationship with Peer Worker through honest and respectful communication.
- Understands and communicates the specific peer support job of the Peer Worker.
- Demonstrates belief in the capacity of Peer Worker to grow and develop professionally.
- Operates within the values and principles of peer support work, using a Trauma Informed and Recovery approach.
- Works from a place of mutuality and respect.
- Understands and demonstrates capacity to implement person-centered, strength-based supervisory relationships.

### **Restorative (or supportive):**

Supervisor:

- Facilitates an environment supportive of critical reflection, growth, and development of peer support skills and practice through discussion, reflection, activity, and exploration.
- Understands and facilitates reflective practice in all aspects of the work.
- Explores with Peer Worker how power in relationships, including the relationship between the supervisor and Peer Worker, affects those with histories of trauma.



### **Formative (or developmental)**

Supervisor:

- Maintains own knowledge and skills relating to Peer Worker work practice – e.g., history, best practice, innovations.
- Understands and focuses on providing support for the sharing/enhancing of knowledge and skills to support professional development and improved service delivery.
- Supports Peer Worker to be successful within their professional discipline by focusing on the knowledge, aptitudes, skills, and competencies that the Peer Worker has and needs for their role to be successful.
- Supports identifying areas for growth and setting professional goals using active listening skills.
- Utilizes supervision time to identify, discuss, and process situations where there is role ambiguity or role confusion.
- Supports Peer Worker in obtaining ongoing training to advance their personal efficacy and competencies in delivering peer delivered services through participation in classes, community of practices, conferences, webinars, and other forms of education and training that focus on peer practice.

### **Normative (Administrative)**

Supervisor:

- Understands and clearly defines a concrete description of job tasks, duties, obligations, and competencies.
- Utilizes the job description to assign duties and to perform annual evaluations.
- Maintains confidentiality in line with policies, procedures, and guidelines of any organizations involved, relevant legislation, and within those agreed upon with the Peer Worker.
- Evaluates work performance through direct observation, co- reflection, and assessments, all in collaboration with the Peer Worker.



- Understands and assists Peer Worker in understanding and navigating boundaries within the framework of peer support values and ethics.
- Ensures supervision occurs on a regular basis, determined in partnership between supervisor and supervisee. Ad-hoc supervision should be provided when needed.
- Clarifies organizational systems, structures, and processes.
- Considers reasonable precautions for staff safety when working in any environment; including meeting in the community.
- Supports workplace wellness, focusing on work performance rather than the Peer Worker's disclosed mental health and/or substance use challenge(s).
- Understands the core tenets of the ADA, applying them universally across peer and non-peer staff.
- Uses processes to address work performance issues that are consistent across peer and non-peer staff.
- Acknowledges their responsibility to initiate corrective action when faced with unethical conduct.

### Mediative

#### Supervisor:

- Advocates for, and promotes the value of the Peer Worker role within the workplace and community.
- Assists all team members/colleagues with understanding the Peer Worker role and the perspective and experience of these roles.
- Reinforces the non-clinical nature of the Peer Worker role, including documentation consistent with the peer values, to avoid peer drift and cooptation.
- Supports and welcomes the Peer Worker's input in decision-making at all levels.
- Works with leadership to create more optimal working conditions for Peer Worker.
- Supports the integration of Peer Worker roles and recovery values in agency practices.