

Peer Recovery Supports: Effective self-disclosure as a recovery support tool

Peer Recovery Support professionals provide a multitude of recovery support services and assistance. A vital piece of this peer to peer relationship, that ensures this relationship is successful, is the 'lived experience' component to the peer recovery support services provided. The purpose of self-disclosure, of that 'lived experience' within the non-clinical role of peer recovery support, is to instill hope, optimism, assist with stigma, including the loneliness that is associated with the diagnosis the person has. By effectively and ethically self-disclosing the peers 'lived experience' it provided an example that recovery is possible, and the person may be able to achieve the goals they have established as part of their recovery process.

When organizations place the peer recovery support role under clinical policy and procedure or guidelines, such as limited or prohibiting self-disclosure, it does not allow the Peer Recovery Support professional the ability to use the experiential knowledge element of their role that is a value-based component to the evidence-based practice (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services 2007) of peer recovery support. Trained/Credentialed Peer Recovery Support professionals are educated on the importance of sharing their 'lived experience' through effective, ethical and supportive self-disclosure. Any concern regarding boundary issues and ethical adherence is minimized when an organization utilizes trained/credentialed peer recovery support whom have been educated on effective, ethical and supportive self-disclosure.

Multiple publications have cited the importance of Peer Recovery Support professionals utilizing self-disclose as a recovery support:

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 recovery stories and using their lived experiences as a way of inspiring and supporting a person living with behavioral health conditions. Family peer support worker likewise share their personal experiences of self-care and supporting a family-member who is living with behavioral health conditions.

1. Relates their own recovery stories, and with permission, the recovery stories of others' to inspire hope
2. Discusses ongoing personal efforts to enhance health, wellness, and recovery
3. Recognizes when to share experiences and when to listen
4. Describes personal recovery practices and helps peers discover recovery practices that work for them

(SAMHSA BRSS TACS Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services)

Peer support requires a balance of empathy and self-disclosure while maintaining professional boundaries with consumers. (Emerging Roles for Peer Providers in Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders; Susan A.ChapmanPhD, RN¹Lisel K.BlashMPA²KimberlyMayerMSSW³JoanneSpetzPhD²)
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379718316052>

One of the major "recovery tools" that peer support providers bring to mental health services is sharing their own recovery story. (Making Effective Use of Your Recovery Story; Mark Parker, BA, Certified Peer Specialist Michael Uraine, Certified Peer Specialist New England MIRECC Peer Education Center)