



Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental
Services
Office of Recovery Services

Core Competencies for Certified Peer Recovery Specialists Background

A peer is defined as a person in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorder or, in the case of family peer support, a family member of a person living with a behavioral health condition.

Peer Recovery Specialists are individuals that use their lived experience to assist others in seeking knowledge and experience of recovery.

What are Core Competencies?

- The integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to the quality of a person's work performance.
 - **Knowledge** is information and understanding learned through experience or training.
 - **Skill** is the result of applying knowledge or ability to a set of circumstances and **attitude** is the manner in which a behavior is performed.
 - **Attitudes** often align with the principles or values of a practice.
- Foundational and essential
- Required by all positions that provide peer support in behavioral health services.
- Common across a range of roles and environments.
 - Peer roles in some settings or program models may require advanced or specialized competencies in addition to basic core competencies.
- Guide delivery and promote best practices in peer support.
- Inform peer training programs
- Provide standards for certification
- Inform self-evaluation and
- Inform job descriptions and performance evaluations
- Principles and Values

All competencies should be performed in a manner that aligns with the principles of recovery-oriented, person-centered, non-coercive, trauma-informed and relationship-focused.

- **Recovery-oriented:**
 - Peer support provides a hopeful framework for the person to envision a meaningful and purposeful life, recognizing that there are multiple pathways to recovery.
- **Person-centered:**
 - Peer support is directed by the person participating in peer support service. Peer support is personalized to meet the specific hopes, needs and goals of an individual.
- **Non-coercive:**
 - Peer support never involves force and participation in peer support is always voluntary.
- **Relationship-focused:**
 - Peer support centers on the affiliation between peers. Characteristics of the relationship are: respectful, empathetic, and mutual.
- **Trauma-informed care:**
 - Peer support utilizes a strengths-based framework that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

Virginia Core Competencies

- **Current Body of MH/SUD Knowledge**
 - Knowledge of current body of knowledge of recovery from substance use disorder and/or mental health conditions (wellness, trauma)
 - Define mental illness and substance use disorder recovery
 - Knowledge of key language and terms
 - Explain individual advocacy
 - Knowledge of current research practices and trends in MH and SUD
- **Recovery Process - Promoting Services, Supports, and Strategies**
 - Knowledge of recovery plans, strengths-based recovery planning, and recovery goal setting (WRAP, Relapse Plan)
 - Knowledge of the recovery process and recovery-promoting services, supports and strategies
 - Explain major recovery models (12 steps, Intentional Peer Support, SMART Recovery, Women for Sobriety, Celebrate Recovery)
 - Knowledge of multiple pathways to recovery
 - Explain evidence-based practices, practice-based evidence, and promising practices
 - Explain recovery plans and recovery goal setting (such as, but not limited to, WRAP)
 - Assist individual with goal setting
 - Promote self-determination and choice
- **Crisis Intervention**
 - Knowledge of basics of crisis intervention
 - Explain de-escalation techniques
 - Explain basic suicide prevention concepts and techniques
 - Knowledge of peer role and activities for peer support during crisis
 - Identify and utilize legal and ethical policies and practices
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of distress
 - Recognize various crisis and emergency situations

- **Values for Role of Peer Recovery Specialist**
 - Knowledge of the role of peer recovery specialist values such as strengths-based, mutuality, unconditional high regard, shared experience, etc.
 - Explain the concept of a strength-based approach to recovery
 - Ability to share experience using lived experience
 - Establish and maintain a peer relationship rather than a hierarchical relationship
 - Establish a respectful, trustful relationship
 - Practice non-judgmental language
 - Identify strengths and resilience in others
 - Knowledge of peer recovery philosophy and practices

- **Basic Principles Related to Health and Wellness**
 - Knowledge of basic principles related to health and wellness
 - Define the concepts of health and wellness
 - Understand the concepts of recovery and resilience
 - Recognize the importance of holistic health
 - Understand the impact of mental illness and substance use disorders on the experience of health and wellness

- **Stage Appropriate Pathways in Recovery Support**
 - Knowledge of stage-appropriate pathways that support recovery
 - Knowledge of medication assisted recovery
 - State the stages of recovery
 - State the stages of change
 - Knowledge and use of motivational enhancement techniques

- **Ethics & Boundaries**
 - Knowledge of ethics, confidentiality, boundaries and self-care as practiced in non-clinical settings (ADA, HIPAA, 42CFR, Advanced Directives).
 - Adhere to peer code of ethics
 - Recognize and adhere to the rules of confidentiality
 - Explain how and why individuals should establish an Advanced Directive
 - Knowledge of and adherence to professional and personal boundaries
 - Understand self-care principles

- Establish working relationships with other professionals
- Use organizational/departmental chain of command to address ethical issues
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Practice**
 - Knowledge of cultural sensitivity and practice
 - Define culture, elements of culture, and its impact
 - Ability to communicate utilizing first person and person-centered language
 - Recognize different types of cultures
 - Explain key recovery language and culture concepts
 - Knowledge of the influence of cultural heritage on individuals and groups
 - Knowledge of and sensitivity to how cultural identity can influence the dynamics in communication.
 - Knowledge of and sensitivity to how cultural identity shapes the helping process.
- **Trauma and Impact on Recovery**
 - Knowledge of trauma and its impact on recovery from mental health and substance use disorders
 - Define trauma and its impact on recovery process
 - Explain trauma informed care and recovery support
 - Understand the symptoms of PTSD
 - Skill in identifying physical and sexual abuse symptoms
 - Knowledge and awareness of risk indicators when working with others
 - Identify and respond to personal stressors and triggers
- **Community Resources**
 - Identify community resources, including crisis services, community supports and professional services
 - Ability to access and refer to community resources
 - Ability to coach others to navigate community resources
 - Knowledge of and ability to collaborate with community organizations and other partners
 - Demonstrate effective networking skills

- **Delivering Peer Services within Agencies and Organizations**
 - Knowledge of how to deliver peer support on an individual level and in an agency, organizational, systems and federal setting
 - Define systems level advocacy
 - Knowledge of Virginia’s service delivery systems
 - Provide peer support within an organizational culture and requirements
 - Understand documentation requirements of activities to meet organizational requirements
 - Knowledge of when to seek out and use supervision
 - Advocate for peers and recovery support services within the organizational culture
 - Differentiate between the levels of advocacy