



CTRI
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RESOURCE INSTITUTE

PEER SUPPORT

Equipping the Natural Helper

**We envision a world where
everyone is trauma-informed.**



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PEER SUPPORT

Equipping the Natural Helper

When challenges in life occur, people naturally reach out for support from those closest to them – coworkers, friends, and family. Their initial response can go a long way in terms of normalizing the challenge, planning the next steps, and exploring additional resources. Progressive workplaces and communities recognize the importance of being prepared for challenges, and are proactive in better equipping natural helpers with the skills they need to be a supportive resource to others. This workshop explores the support process, key qualities of the peer helper, and issues that may arise when assisting others. This is an interactive and experiential training where participants will work through activities designed to enhance their communication, develop helping skills, and learn practical strategies for supporting others.

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What Is Peer Support?

People have been dealing with all manner of problems (e.g., stress, conflict, relational challenges, mental health) since time began. A theme that spans many problems is that they tend to grow in silence and isolation. The path away from problems lies in connection.

Historically people have faced numerous challenges without the support of professional supports. When challenges arose they turned to those they could trust: family, friends and trusted community members. As North American society has become more individualized

(and more professionalized) some of these collective support practices diminished. Recently, the benefits of peer support have been more recognized as progressive workplaces, agencies and schools have been proactive in equipping their natural helpers to be of greater support in their contexts.

Key Terms

- **Peer** – A person who shares similarities (e.g., co-worker, student, age, shared experience or attribute – e.g., trauma, mental health, sexual orientation) with another person or group.
- **Support** – A person who is intentionally active to help assist a person(s) who is struggling. What constitutes support will vary depending on the peer, the individual(s) struggling and the situation. Examples of support may include: supportive listening, acknowledging, validating and normalizing experiences, coaching, problem solving, advocacy, exploring resources, navigating systems, mentoring.
- **Peer Support** – An intentional process by which a person of a similar background uses their shared experience and knowledge to actively support another.
- **Counselling/Therapy** – An intentional process guided by a theoretical framework (e.g., solution focused, narrative, cognitive behavioural) facilitated by a trained counsellor/therapist to help another resolve or better manage problems and challenges.

Populations Utilizing Peer Support

- Schools
- LGBT2SQ+ and allies
- First responders – fire, paramedics, police
- Those struggling with addictions and/or mental health
- Workplaces
- Those affected by trauma
- Military
- People with disabilities

Reflection

01 | What types of situations and issues may be best suited for peer support?

02 | What situations and issues may be best suited for professional supports?

Benefits and Challenges

There is power in connection. What better means of connecting than with those of a shared experience? But... a shared experience can be both a benefit and challenge. Awareness of all benefits and challenges of the peer support program is vital to its effectiveness.

Benefits of the Peer Support Process

- Increased connection
- Increased sense of trust
- More “real” (as compared to a professional)
- Stepping stone to other resources
- Less hierarchy in terms of power
- Personal, direct knowledge of issues and resources

Benefits to the Peer

- Helping others as a means to bettering themselves
- Empathy and skill development
- Sense of accomplishment
- Stepping stone into other helping vocations

Benefits to the Organization

- Beneficial and cost effective means of providing support

Challenges of a Peer Support Process

- Resource heavy – it takes time and energy to develop, maintain and support the peer program.
- Without awareness and intentionality on the peers’ part there is the risk of assumptions influencing actions, which may include judgement and offering unsolicited advice.
- Peers are already engaged in their lives (e.g., work, school, etc.) and this role could become an extra burden.
- Risk of experiencing the downsides of helping, such as compassion fatigue, burnout vicarious trauma.

Reflection

01 | What benefits do you anticipate to experience (think personally and collectively)?

02 | What challenges may arise? How might you meet these challenges?

Peer Support – Roles

The intention of the peer is to offer support. However, what support looks like and what is needed will vary case by case. Peer awareness of what role best fits the needs of the individual(s) and the context of the situation is central to offering appropriate support.

PEER SUPPORT ROLES

Active Listener

Problems thrive in silence and isolation. Having a person of shared experience, who “gets it” and is able to sit and listen to the challenge, can be quite the gift. There is a tendency for problems to diminish or solutions to appear when challenges are vocalized and heard by a supportive person.

Coaching for Problem Solving

A curious, helping stance can better support the person struggling to consider next steps. As part of coaching and problem solving, the peer explores:

- Ideas on what is needed
 - “Do you have a sense of how I can be a support?”
 - “What might be helpful at this time?”
- Internal resources: personal strengths, supports, previous leanings, etc.
 - “What’s been helpful in the past?”
 - “Who do you reach out to for support?”
- External resources: offer resources that may fit the circumstance
 - “Some people have found_____ helpful; would you like some more information?”

Advocacy/Navigation

Problems can appear quite large. Facing them can be a lonely, intimidating and confusing process. Having someone “in the know”, who has “been there”, can be helpful to navigate next steps and resources. At times, having someone to stand up for or advocate is also needed. Such a role is especially helpful when there are issues of marginalization (e.g., mental health issues, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) or involvement with larger structures (large institutions, systems, etc.).

Mentor

When in a new position or situation (e.g., new school, workplace), having someone to go to with questions, to receive guidance and direction, can be helpful.

Practice Consideration: What advice do you have on giving advice?

Reflection

01 | What roles best fit your context?

02 | What role(s) do you naturally gravitate to? How may this influence your interactions?

03 | To what degree will you be proactive in providing support (e.g., outreach, checking in with those that may be struggling)?

04 | How will you make yourself accessible for others to seek you out?

How Do We Make a Difference?

Rate the following according to which you think makes the biggest (5) to least (1) difference in the success of a supportive interaction over time for a person:

Techniques and interventions applied by the peer	_____
Hopefulness and confidence that the interaction will help	_____
Quality of the relationship between the peer and person(s)	_____
Other steps made by the person(s) outside of the peer relationship	_____

In all aspects of a peer role, it is important to regard and treat people with respect and authenticity.

The ideas and skills in this workshop are based on the foundation of **strengths-based concepts**.¹

- All individuals have strengths and resources that will be helpful toward solving their own problems.
- Process must focus on the person's skills, interests and support systems.
- It is helpful to identify what is going well for the person and then build on that.
- The peer relationship is collaborative in nature, rather than seeing the peer as the expert.

Notes:

¹ Jones-Smith, E. (2014), Ward, C.C., & Reuter, T., (2011).

Key Qualities of the Peer

As peers, there is a natural benefit to having a shared experience, as this can assist in connecting. There are also things we can intentionally do to further the connection. The way we approach and interact with the people needing our support contributes to building a culture of effective helping relationships. Many people have natural skills in this area. With awareness and intention, these skills can be developed and deepened.

What Does It Take to Build a Positive, Supportive Connection?

- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Emotional intelligence
- Curiosity
- Good listening skills
- Cooperation/collaboration
- Respect and appreciation of diversity
- Organization/coordination skills
- Assertiveness
- Self-care
- Passion
- Flexibility
- Creativity
- Sense of humour
- Competence
- Hopefulness
- Others?

Reflection

01 | Which of these abilities do you (or others) see in yourself? Are there some you wish to develop?

02 | Which of these skills do you think are most relevant in your peer role?

Why Do You Want to Be a Peer?

Knowing what inspires and fuels your choice to be involved in a helping role can help you maintain passion and focus within the peer support context.

01 | What drew you to helping people? What keeps you here?

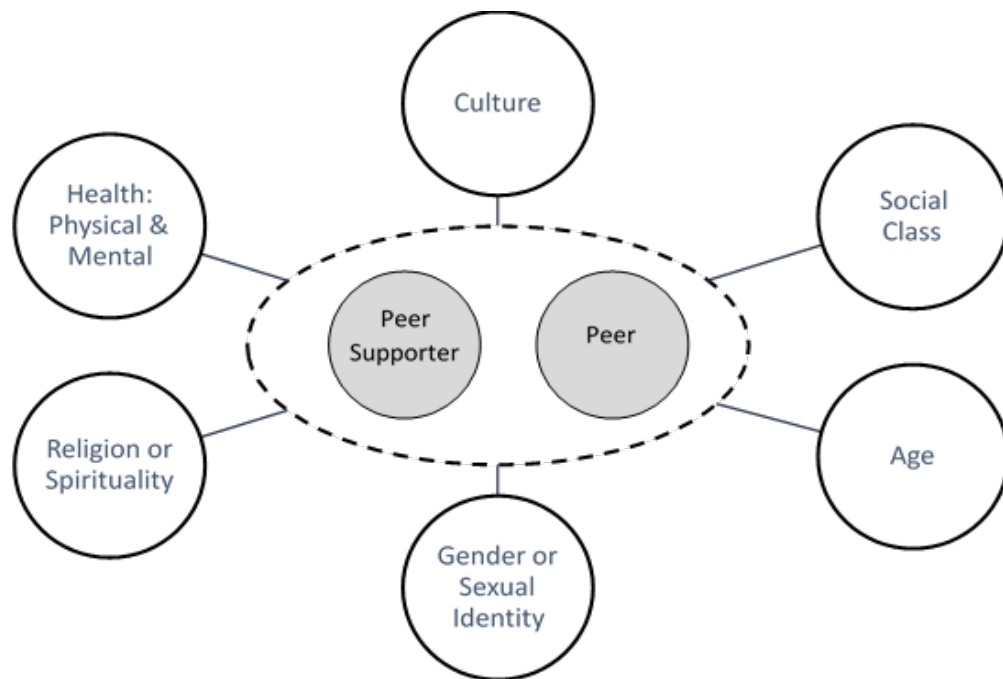
02 | Consider specific people who have inspired you. What is it about them that influenced you? What of these qualities do you see reflected in yourself?

03 | What rewards do you anticipate as a result of this role? How may these influence you?

04 | What challenges do you anticipate in this role? How might these influence you? How do you want to meet these challenges?

Exploring the Peer Context – Similarities and Differences

One of the advantages of the peer is the common experience. This can both be an asset and also create challenges. It may lead to assumptions (rightly or wrongly) about the other's experience and what may be helpful. Continued reflection on our similarities and difference is needed within a peer framework.



01 | What are the areas where you share similarities? What beliefs and values does this lead you to assume you share?

02 | Which areas represent some difference of experience or influence?

03 | What are areas of strength and challenge you seeing in your peers? How may this influence your support?

The Peer Support Process

Preparing for the Process

There is an art to helping others. Any good artist needs to know themselves, their audience and the tools, techniques and principles that guide their work. And like an artist, the peer needs a reflective practice on the following:

- Self-awareness: their strengths and challenges
- Peer awareness: issues of similarity and difference with those they are working with and the benefits and challenges within

Tools for the Process

Central to the helping relationship is the sense of connection. In order to connect, communication skills and emotional intelligence are the peer's primary tools.

Guiding the Process

Principles guiding the helping process include:

- Ethics
- Boundaries
- Strengths-based focus
- Trauma-informed practice

Notes:

Essential Listening and Communication Skills

Communication is a central part of any relationship, and peer relationships are no exception. Communication is a two-way street involving the speaker and listener, and each have an important role in the effectiveness of the interaction. As peers, we need to constantly review:

- What the other person(s) is communicating.
- What we are communicating.
- How we are doing so.
- How this is being received and interpreted.

Although communication begins at birth and continues at every moment throughout our life, positive communication is a skill and takes practice, intentionality and review. Some people are better at it than others. Positive communication includes:

- Attending to different parts of communication.
- Listening skills.
- Validating and reflecting of feelings.
- Open-ended, curious questions.

THREE PARTS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is much more than the words being said. There are three distinct elements:

- Verbal (Words) _____
- Vocal and Tonal (Tone) _____
- Visual (Body Language) _____

Total Message

100%

Both the speaker and the listener need to fully attend to these elements for communication to go optimally.

Notes:

LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is much more than attending to what is being said and catching the nonverbal cues. It also involves communicating that we are attentive to what the speaker is saying. We do so by incorporating a variety of techniques:

- Attention to own body language: e.g., slight lean towards the speaker, open posture, nod of the head, attention to eye contact.
- Allowing for silence.
- Offering small verbal encouragements: e.g., “Yes”, “Okay”, “Sure”, etc.

Common Blocks to Listening Well

- Thinking of our next great question.
- Asking too many questions.
- Thinking of our own stories.
- Jumping ahead to solutions too fast.
- When our body language does not match our words.

Identifying, Acknowledging and Reflecting Emotions

Active listening includes Identifying, acknowledging and validating a person’s feelings that are being expressed verbally or nonverbally. This contributes to the connection, the speaker feeling understood and that you are paying careful attention to them. A good reflection includes a brief recap of what was stated, highlighting the key emotion(s):

- “It makes sense that you are really angry in this situation.”
- “You seem worried that this might continue to be so hard.”
- “This new policy seems really unfair to you!”

What is it like for you to be around other people’s feelings?

OPEN-ENDED AND CURIOUS QUESTIONS

An essential tool in a peer's toolbox is the skill of asking a good question. By asking good questions, we can ensure we are basing our help on what the person really needs. Open-ended, curious questions encourage a full, meaningful answer using the person's own knowledge and feelings. These types of questions differ from closed-ended questions, which only encourage short or single-word answers. For example, asking, "Do you want to talk to your mom about that?" (closed) versus "What would you like your mom to know about this?" (open).

Examples of open-ended, curious questions:

- "Can you tell me more about how you are doing when you're alone?"
- "What other worries do you have today?"
- "How did she respond when you said that?"
- "How would you like today's meeting to go?"

Putting Active Listening Skills Together

Practice by first reflecting the emotion involved, then follow with an open-ended question.

01 | "My teenage daughter and I have not been getting along – we fight all the time. I don't think I'm a very good parent."

Identify and acknowledge the emotion:

Open Question:

02 | "You aren't being helpful at all! This is a terrible organization!"

Validation/Reflection:

Open Question:

03 | "Last night my buddies and I got drunk and stole some dude's cell phone."

Validation/Reflection:

Open Question:

Essential Emotional Skills

Emotions are a normal, natural and needed aspect of our lives. They help us develop goals that match our values and hopes, build healthy relationships and get motivated to make choices and decisions. We all experience emotions every day. However, many people have a difficult time identifying or understanding their own or others' emotions. They can also vary greatly in intensity, and we need skills to manage them so they don't overwhelm us or make us reactive.

Reflection

How do you recognize when your emotions are getting too big to manage? What happens in your body, thoughts or behaviours?

Identifying Emotions

Some people have a large emotional vocabulary. Others have difficulty identifying emotions beyond mad, sad and glad.

Some tools to practice recognizing, identifying and expressing emotions:

- Connecting with the physical side of emotions (butterflies in the belly, tight chest, etc.)
- “Feeling face” charts – matching what you see with what you feel on the inside
- Storytelling (with writing, cartoons, puppets, song, oral, etc.)
- Music, poetry, drama, other creative expression

Understanding Emotions

A common yet misguided understanding of emotions separates them into the positive (e.g., happy, glad, surprise, etc.) and negative (e.g., anger, sadness, guilt, etc.). Emotions are neither good nor bad, they just are. It can be helpful to understand emotions as messengers or signals of something that matters to us. A key task in understanding emotions is discerning whether the message matches the current situation. It takes skills to hear the signal, to interpret the message (some emotions can be tricksters) and then to choose our response.

As peers, an important aspect of assisting people to understand their emotions is slowing down the process to be able to practice each of these skills:

- What emotion(s) are you experiencing?
- What is your emotion trying to tell you? What are the possible messages?
- Does the emotion(s) and its intensity fit the situation?
- Are there other explanations for this emotion happening right now?
- In the past how has this emotion(s) influenced your behaviour?
- How do you want to respond in this situation? How do you want to manage your emotion?

REGULATING EMOTIONS

When we can recognize, identify and understand our emotions better, we can also practice managing the intensity of the emotion. This is important for building other skills:

- Reducing impulsive behaviours.
- Promoting choice and flexibility of how to respond to different situations.
- Making decisions that are a good fit for us.
- Calming the body and mind overall to deal better with the stress of our lives.

Some Tools for Practicing Emotion Regulation

Calming techniques

- Belly breathing or cycle breathing.
- Listen to music.
- Meditation, prayer, smudging, ceremonies or engaging in cultural traditions or worship.

Physical exercise and movement

- Go for a walk, run, swim.
- Yoga, stretching, rhythmic movement.
- Do housework or gardening.

Creative expression

- Write in a journal, colour, do puzzles.
- Engage in art, make music, build something.
- Dance, sing, rap, move with feeling.

Communicate and connect with others

- Family member or friend.
- Utilize professional supports (counsellor, crisis lines).
- Debrief and connect with co-workers, managers and other helpers in your field.

Reflection

01 | When do you think emotion regulation skills become important for you in your role?

02 | Which emotion regulation skills do you use when working with others?

Ethics

Working well with people is built on a foundation of values. Human beings have the right to make independent choices about their own lives – as peers – we sometimes have to determine where we fit in alongside these choices and what our own response or level of support will be.

Ethics

The branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the moral reasoning of an individual which governs his or her actions. Ethics can also be jointly shared and held by larger groups and professional bodies. Ethics are used to answer what is **right?** And what is **good?**

Ethical Awareness

A continuous and active process that involves questioning and self-awareness about personal and professional responsibility as well as predictable human vulnerability.

Codes of Ethics

A clearly defined list of principles employed by a professional association to govern the conduct of its members. Organizations may develop their own code of principles.

Common Values and Principles Guiding Ethics



Notes:

PUTTING ETHICS INTO PRACTICE

Confidentiality

A central feature of any helping relationship is the promise to keep information private and secure. As peers, this means maintaining the privacy and dignity of staff. This includes keeping any information shared by staff, or your peer involvement with staff, confidential. There are exceptions to confidentiality, including risk and safety.

Boundaries

The physical, emotional and relationship limits to what is shared or included in your helping relationship. Examples may include:

- Physical space and contact (physical touch, eye contact, frequency of meeting).
- Expectations of peers (what tasks will you do for the relationship).
- Expectations of the others (what is expected of them to receive help).
- Contact outside of the official peer role.
- Other _____

What are the grey or messy areas that may come up in your role as a peer?

Power

Within any helping relationship there are issues of power and vulnerability. Being aware of this, especially when asking others to give us any information or talk about areas of vulnerability, is a key part of how we act ethically and respectfully. Sometimes we need to share power (give people more choices), and sometimes we need to be more directive to guide or effect change (enforce a policy). Clarity of what our role is and why we are asking or doing things helps ensure positive use and sharing of power.

Ethical Dilemmas

Issues that arise out of ordinary or exceptional circumstances where the best course of action is unclear, or where any course of action may put someone in jeopardy of violating ethical principles. Sometimes conflicting values can be at play so that rather than finding one right answer, the dilemma is between two (or more) possible right answers.

01 | Name an ethical dilemma that you've faced in the past.

02 | What did you do about it?

03 | List some possible ethical dilemmas that you can imagine facing in your role as a peer.

Finding Strengths and Resources

Understandably, people become focused on what is causing them pain and stress. When we shift the focus to include exploring what is going well, and what people already have competence in, this can free up energy and hopefulness. This allows people to be aware of more choices available to them.

Possible Areas of Strengths

Character strengths – honesty, discipline, perseverance, courage		Emotional strengths – ability to feel deeply, shift emotional states	
Knowledge strengths – wisdom, understanding, curiosity	Social strengths – outgoing, charisma, good listener	Physical strengths – energy, robust health, hand-eye skills	
Creativity strengths – willing to try new things, colour, music		Practical strengths – organizing details, time management	

Questions to Help Identify Strengths

01 What comes easily to you? When have you felt successful?
02 When can you lose track of time and be completely immersed?
03 What do others ask you to help them with?
04 What would your _____ (e.g., partner, best friend, mother, dog, etc.) say about what they appreciate about you?

A Trauma-Informed Lens in Every Role

Trauma is prevalent in our world and has an impact on many of the people we interact with. Compassionate and trauma-informed care is essential to providing effective support and building sustainable services.

What Does It Mean to Be Trauma-Informed?

- 01 | Recognize how common traumatic impact is for people, and how this vulnerability is at the surface when people are seeking help.
- 02 | Learn about how trauma impacts individuals and their relationships. Identify ways these impacts can show when people get involved in your program.
- 03 | Respond by putting this knowledge into practice to have a trauma-informed approach.

Components of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- *Safety and Acceptance* – Create an environment that facilitates a sense of safety and security, understanding that we can't make people feel safe.
- *Trust and Respect* – Recognize the value of authentic respect toward all people.
- *Choice and Collaboration* – Make intentional space for people to have a voice and input into their treatment or care. Respect that people get to choose whether to accept help.
- *Empowerment and Inclusion* – Include diversity in culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, age and ability.

How do you see these components fit into your role and setting?

Spotlight on Challenge – Insider Knowledge

One of the primary benefits of being a peer is the shared experience with others. With a shared experience comes insider knowledge of common challenges faced within their context. With this comes ideas, solutions and resources that may be best used to meet the challenge(s) faced.

Reflection

01 | What are common challenges that are encountered within your context?

02 | What have you learned about the challenge? (Consider what is helpful and what is not.)

03 | How may you use these learnings to support others?

04 | What external resources may also be helpful within your context?

Putting It All Together - Conversations With Those Who May Be Struggling

Peers are in a unique position to be a support to others who may be struggling with a variety of problems. It is often difficult for those experiencing a problem to come forward with their struggles. As such, it can be easier for the vulnerable person to engage in conversation if asked directly.

CHECKING IN

When thinking through some of the specifics of checking in, consider these steps.

Preparing for the Conversation

- Familiarize yourself with potential resources.
- Check your own assumptions.
- Consider how to structure the conversation.
 - How will you bring this up?
 - Consider timing and location.

Having the Conversation

- 01 | Get centred. Be curious and listen. (Use active listening skills, normalize and validate experience.)
 - “What’s been going on for you?”
 - Listen, listen, listen. Paraphrase to demonstrate empathy.
 - Normalize their feelings.
- 02 | Explore the current situation (use curious questions and explore strengths)
 - “That sounds challenging. Have you been able to talk about this with someone else?”
 - “What has been helpful in dealing with...?”
- 03 | Explore needs.
 - “Do you have a sense of what may be helpful?”
 - “How can I be a resource?”
 - “Is it ok if I check in on you next week?”

- 04 | Be concrete with naming observable behaviours (if relevant):
- “I have noticed a change in you. You appear more withdrawn and you have been coming in late.”
- 05 | Provide resources.
- “Are you familiar with our EAP resource?”
- 06 | Make a plan.
- “So, what are your thoughts for next steps?”
- 07 | Set a time to reconnect.
- “I will plan on touching base again next week to see how things are going.”
- 08 | Follow up on the conversation.
- “I’ve been thinking about you since our last conversation and just wanted to check in with you.”

Things to Avoid

- *Being the amateur psychologist:* “I think you have depression.”
- *Believing you know what is best for people:* “I too get stressed. This is what you’ve got to do...”
- *Monopolizing or telling your story:* “You think you got it bad? Let me tell you about my week...”
- *Giving advice and trying to fix the problem:* “Have you tried this or that?”
- *Using clichés:* “Life gives you only what you are able to handle.”
- *Unnecessary prying or voyeuristic exploration:* Asking for unnecessary personal or private information.

Additional Considerations

- The person may not want to talk with you.
 - Normalize this, highlight concerns and emphasize the door is open to discuss this further when the time is right.
- Be mindful around the stigma of mental health concerns and how these dynamics may play out.

Do!

- Listen. Listen. Listen.
- Let them know you notice: “Hey Jan, you seem down lately.”
- “Let me know if there is anything I can do.”
- Let them know you care.
- Normalize their feelings.
- Assist them in mobilizing support.

Supporting the Supporter

As peers seek to support others, they too need support and recognition. The following may encourage the continued development and maintenance of a peer support program.

Leadership

Peer support programs are only as strong as the organizational leaders who initiate, develop and support them.

Individual Supervision/Consultation

A more senior peer or professional meets periodically in order to consult or debrief issues that come up as part of the support process. This time may also focus on continued skill development and the intersection of the peer role with their personal life.

Group Consultation

Periodic opportunities for the peers to meet together in order to support and learn from each other. This may be an opportunity to explore themes encountered during their work, or consult regarding specific situations.

Continued Training Opportunities

One of the benefits of being a peer is further skills development. Progressive peer programs look towards providing opportunities for the entire peer program to engage in training together. This provides both learning opportunities as well as team development. There is

also value in outside training opportunities in which individuals take part and report on learnings gained.

Recognition

Peers bring their own special gifts to support. The umbrella agency or organization must be intentional in acknowledging these gifts in both formal (e.g., recognition events) and informal (e.g., notes of appreciation) ways.

Impact of Helping on the Peer

Working with other people and walking beside them through crises, times of stress and change influences our lives.

01 | How have you been impacted by your work?

02 | How has this work expanded your capacities or strengths in life (personally or professionally)?

03 | Are there areas you notice stress show up when you become overwhelmed or feel empathy fatigue? Does this show up emotionally, physically, cognitively, socially or spiritually?

04 | What keeps you motivated and inspired in your work?



Impact can show up in many areas of our well-being, both as strengths and as challenges.

Staying Healthy in Your Role

Wellness involves attention at individual, team and overall organizational levels. Continuing to build on essential skills to do your job well is part of increasing wellness. Consider how your role can play a part in both your own individual attention to wellness and also the wellness of your team, colleagues or organization.

Individual

What steps can you take to strengthen your own skills and overall well-being?

Team

What are ways your team members or colleagues contribute to your well-being? How do you contribute to theirs?

Organization

01 | Which areas of your overall organization contribute to a greater or lesser sense of well-being?

02 | Consider which area(s) you have more influence. What next steps do you want to take with what you have learned today?

Appendix

LISTENING HABITS QUIZ

A key skill for helpful supporting is good listening. Check out some common listening habits to see which might be part of your listening style:

- 01 | I interrupt the other person often to get my point in.
 - ☐ Rarely if ever
 - ☐ Often
 - ☐ When I have a much more important point
- 02 | I make assumptions about what the other person is going to say next.
 - ☐ I know them well so I usually can
 - ☐ Not often at all
 - ☐ Often
- 03 | I answer another person's opinions with, "Yes but..."
 - ☐ About 50% of the time
 - ☐ Not very often
 - ☐ Usually
- 04 | I avoid looking at a person while they are talking to me.
 - ☐ Depends if I like them or not
 - ☐ Not very often
 - ☐ Usually
- 05 | I avoid staying on any one subject with my speaking partner.
 - ☐ Sometimes
 - ☐ Rarely if ever
 - ☐ I can dodge any issue
- 06 | I prepare what I'm going to say in response while the other person is talking.
 - ☐ When I'm nervous
 - ☐ Never
 - ☐ I always do this
- 07 | I tune out if the other person is too long-winded.
 - ☐ Never
 - ☐ Often
 - ☐ Yes, but I can hide it well
- 08 | I give people advice when they are done talking.
 - ☐ It's my job to tell people what to do
 - ☐ I rarely do this
 - ☐ I check if advice would be helpful

How Did You Answer?

- 01 | Best answer: *Rarely*. An interruption may be interpreted that you don't care what they have to say. If you need to interrupt, it is a good idea to explain why.
- 02 | Best answer: *Not often at all*. When we make assumptions we might miss out really understanding and hearing important information.
- 03 | Best answer: *Not very often*. "But" is a powerful word that tends to erase the agreement you just made. If you mean no, say "No". If you want to add something, say "and" instead of "but".
- 04 | Best answer: *Not very often*. Although you don't have to constantly look at a person or necessarily make eye contact, turning toward the speaker and giving your attention conveys respect and helps you take in fully what they are saying.
- 05 | Best answer: *Rarely if ever*. It is best to keep a clear focus on one topic at a time until both people feel understood and not dismissed or confused.
- 06 | Best answer: *Never*. If you are planning your own response you are no longer listening. Wait until the person is finished and take some time if you need.
- 07 | Best answer: *Never*. The other person can usually sense when you tune out. This can give the message you don't care and also result in missing information.
- 08 | Best answer: *I rarely do this*. Although sometimes it might be your job to give advice, generally when we are in a peer role this is not helpful. First people need to feel heard and understood, and they can often find their own answers.

If you got seven or more right: You are a gifted listener. You have great skills for ensuring people feel that you care about what they have to say.

If you got four to six right: You are well within the range of average listening habits. People probably wouldn't consider you a bad listener; however, you have room for improvement in several areas.

If you got less than four right: You have some work to do! Your listening habits are likely getting in the way of your effectiveness.

Questions to Consider

- What are the areas of listening that you need to be more aware of?
- Are you surprised at your results?

COPING EXERCISES – WORKING WITH BREATH

Learning to monitor and work at regulating breathing can greatly support settling and rejuvenation. It is often easier to first learn and practice these exercises with a support person.

01 | Practice noticing and describing breathing rhythms. *Pause and notice:*

- Where can I notice my breathing? In nostrils or mouth, feeling chest rise and fall?
- What is the pace of my breath like? Shallow, jagged, gulping, smooth, stop and start?

02 | Practice shifting the rhythm of breath.

- Place one hand on chest and other hand on abdomen. Practice breathing into each hand in order to feel the difference between chest and belly breathing.
- Use an image to help focus on taking a slow, full breath to completely expand lungs, and then to exhale fully, emptying the lungs.
 - Imagine blowing up a balloon and then watching it deflate.
 - Inhale at a pace to comfortably suck through a straw and exhale at a pace to blow off the petals of a flower one by one.

03 | Continue to practice these techniques at a consistent time in the day (e.g.: upon waking, before eating, while riding the bus, when settling into bed, etc.).

Additional Tips

- Sometimes it helps to breathe through the nostrils instead of the mouth.
- Regulated breathing moves more into the belly rather than high in the chest. Learn to expand the belly when inhaling and allow it to naturally be soft and empty when exhaling. It is important not to push too hard to change one's breathing. Start with just one or two longer, deeper breaths then allow breathing to go back to natural rhythm.

Cycle Breathing Exercise

- First take a few breaths to settle your attention on your breath – wherever you can best notice it – your nostrils, belly or chest.
- Begin to gently structure your breathing: as you inhale count slowly to 4 matching your full inhale with the count 1-2-3-4.
- Pause and hold your breath for a count of 2.
- As you exhale slowly and until your lungs are completely empty, count so that you are matching your full exhale with the count 1-2-3-4.
- Repeat several times, gradually lengthening your count.

EXERCISES USING MOVEMENT AND ATTENTION TO THE BODY

Strategy: Stretching Exercises

Moving and stretching muscles and ligaments allows the release and flow of built-up stress hormones and chemicals in the body and brain from anxiety.

- Intentionally yawn and stretch the jaw and face muscles. This pairs well with remembering to do some regulating breath exercises.
- Sit or stand with spine upright, stretching shoulders back, opening up chest.
- Dynamic stretching (exploring full range of motion):
 - Shoulder and arm circles, going from small to big and exploring directions.
 - Hip circles – place your hands on your hips and swing the hips forward, then circling them around – go in both directions.
 - Knee circles – place your hands on your knees as you bend them slightly, slowly circle the knees together – go in both directions.
 - Ankle circles – one ankle at a time either with your toe on the ground or holding foot in the air – circle the ankle around – go in both directions.

Strategy: Neck Rolls

Stand or sit with your spine upright and so you are well supported. Gently release your head so that it tips forward – only as far as is comfortable. Explore small, gentle neck rolls from side to side (caution going back) and stretching. Find what is comfortable right now. Clicks and cracks in the neck muscles are normal as they release and let go. Do not push or strain this movement—listen to the limit of your body.

Tip: Any physical activity that involves and allows full range of motion of different muscle groups can greatly aid emotion regulation if it is approached with an attitude of leisure, relaxation and pleasure. Example: basketball, soccer, running, walking, hiking, biking, tai chi, yoga, dance, skating, etc.

Notes:

Strategy: Muscle Tension and Release

Inhale and tense each muscle group for four to ten seconds, then exhale and completely relax the muscle group (do not relax it gradually). Give yourself 10 to 20 seconds to relax. Slowly move through each muscle group one at a time. Following is a suggested guide for moving through different muscle areas and how to tense them:

- **Hands:** Clench and release them both together.
- **Wrists and forearms:** Extend fingers and bend your hands back at the wrist.
- **Biceps and upper arms:** Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the elbows and flex your biceps.
- **Shoulders:** Shrug them up to your ears.
- **Forehead:** Wrinkle it into a deep frown.
- **Around the eyes and bridge of the nose:** Close your eyes as tightly as possible. (Remove contact lenses before beginning the exercise.)
- **Cheeks and jaws:** Smile as widely as you can, and open the mouth as wide open as you can.
- **Around the mouth:** Press your lips together tightly.
- **Chest:** Take a deep breath and hold it, then exhale.
- **Back:** Arch your back backwards. Then relax. Circle your back forward so you are folding in toward your chest. Then relax.
- **Stomach:** Suck it into a tight knot.
- **Hips and buttocks:** Press the buttocks together tightly.
- **Thighs and hamstrings:** Clench the big muscles in your upper legs hard. This can also be done one leg at a time.
- **Lower legs:** Tense the lower legs and feet. This can be done one leg at a time. Lift each foot up at the ankle to tense the front of the leg.
- **Feet:** Curl toes down as far as you can. This can also be done one foot at a time.

Take a few minutes at the end to breathe through your whole body, inviting all muscle groups to relax as fully as possible.

Rhythmic Movement

Activities with consistent physical rhythms help with physical and emotional regulation.

- Walking is a natural rhythmic movement – matching the breath to the pace of walking supports the body and mind working together to settle.
 - As you step, inhale and say to yourself “breathing in”.
 - As you step, exhale and say to yourself “breathing out”.
 - Continue – you can also replace these with other phrases.
- Dancing, swinging, jumping rope, swaying and stretching can all be intentional rhythmic movements used to support regulation.
- Play simple rhythms while listening to music using a drum, the floor and your feet, your hands, and clapping or other percussive instruments.
- Collaborative games involving music, drum-beat, clapping rhythms.
- Humming or singing while doing simple movements.

Being Still or Quieting: Practicing Resting

Create a tranquil space by limiting stimulation (light, sound, interruption, etc.) and practising stilling the body and the mind. Choosing a simple stimulation to focus the mind can help, such as a mantra, music without lyrics, soothing visual to look at.

It can be particularly useful to practise this after spending some time doing more active movement. This supports the body to release stress and chemicals and then deepen the state of regulation. Note that this doesn't have to be completely still. Some people regulate better with some stimulation (walking slowly, swimming, gentle movements).

USING THE 5 SENSES TO CONNECT TO THE PRESENT

The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Exercise

This is best learned with a support person guiding first. Then a person can easily remember and guide themselves silently in their own mind.

Guiding Instructions

- What are 5 things you hear? (pause and list); 5 things you see? (pause and list) and 5 things you feel (touch)? (pause and list). (Key to really notice each item as listed.)
- Continue in same way:
- What are 4 things you hear, see and feel (touch)?
- What are 3 things you hear, see and feel (touch)?
- What are 2 things you hear, see and feel (touch)?
- What is 1 thing you hear, see and feel (touch)?

This exercise can be repeated several times until a person feels more grounded and settled.

SELF-SOOTHING USING THE 5 SENSES

With Vision

Buy one beautiful flower; make one space in a room pretty; light a candle and watch the flame. Set a nice place at the table for a meal using your best things. Go to a museum with beautiful art. Go sit in the lobby of a striking old hotel. Look at nature around you. Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars. Walk in a nice part of town. Fix your nails so they look pretty. Look at beautiful pictures in a book. Go to a ballet or other dance performance.

With Hearing

Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to invigorating and exciting music. Pay attention to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling). Sing to your favourite songs. Hum a soothing tune. Learn to play an instrument. Be mindful of any sounds that come your way.

With Smell

Use your favourite perfume or lotions, or try them on in a store; spray fragrance in the air; light a scented candle. Put lemon oil on your furniture. Put potpourri in a bowl in your room. Boil cinnamon, bake cookies, cake or bread. Smell the roses. Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.

With Taste

Have a good meal; have a favourite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate; treat yourself to a dessert. Put whipped cream on your coffee. Sample flavours in an ice cream store. Suck on a piece of peppermint candy. Chew your favourite gum. Get a little bit of a special food you don't usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice. Really taste the food you eat; eat one thing mindfully.

With Touch

Take a bubble bath; put clean sheets on the bed. Pet your dog or cat. Have a massage; soak your feet. Put creamy lotion on your whole body. Put a cold compress on your forehead. Sink into a really comfortable chair in your home or find one in a luxurious hotel lobby. Put on a silky blouse, dress or scarf. Try on fur-lined gloves or fur coats in a department store. Brush your hair for a long time. Hug someone. Experience whatever you are touching; notice touch that is soothing.

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Notes:

CTRI Workshops and Services

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Our training is available through open enrollment **public workshops** that anyone can attend virtually or in-person, **private workshops** held on-location or virtually for your group, and **on-demand** and **webinar** formats. What follows is a sample of the 50+ workshop topics we offer. For a complete list, please visit our website.

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Trauma-Informed Care – Building a Culture of Strength

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Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – Tools for Thinking Differently

Motivational Interviewing – Strategies for Supporting Change

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Play Therapy – Tools for Helping Children and Youth

Self-Injury Behaviour in Youth – Issues and Strategies

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- Unlimited access to all on-demand webinars whenever and however often you want. New content is added throughout the year.
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CONSULTING SERVICES

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TRAUMA-INFORMED ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Our free online assessment tool evaluates your organization based on five key elements of a trauma-informed organization. Complete the questionnaire to receive an 8-page report, or contact us to receive a quote to have us facilitate an assessment for your whole organization. This information will help you evaluate, understand, and discuss how your organization can become more trauma-informed.

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- *Counselling Insights: Practical Strategies for Helping Others with Anxiety, Grief, and More*, edited by Vicki Enns, with contributions from eight CTRI trainers
- *Counselling Activities Workbook: Handouts and Exercises for Working with People*, edited by Wilma Schroeder, with contributions from CTRI trainers
- *A Little Book About Trauma-Informed Workplaces* by Nathan Gerbrandt, Randy Grieser, and Vicki Enns

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