

PEER NAVIGATION

Peer Navigation involves trained individuals, often with lived experience, guiding and supporting others through complex systems such as healthcare, social services, or community resources. This role emphasizes empathy, advocacy, and assisting individuals in overcoming barriers to accessing and navigating the various resources supportive of their well-being journey.



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At the time of this publication, Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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PEER NAVIGATION

The essence of Peer Navigation is a shared experience and understanding of finding one's way through systems and resources. Peer Navigation often involves additional training and support for the Peer Specialist to ensure that they can effectively use their experiences to support others as they navigate their own journeys. Peer navigation services can be formalized programs within institutions or community-driven initiatives.



PEER NAVIGATION

Peer Specialists offer navigation to support individuals in accessing community resources or specific organizational services that may be intricate or challenging to reach. This assistance is often offered in tandem with transitions from systems that have temporarily removed individuals from community life, such as crisis, hospitalization, or incarceration but can also facilitate connection with community-based resources. This support is typically provided by Peer Specialists who have similar experiences as those they are assisting.

ADDITIONAL STAFF REQUIREMENTS

No additional staff requirements are needed to offer this service. Peer Navigation may also be offered by a Peer-Operated/Managed Organization or more traditional behavioral health organizations.



PEER NAVIGATOR TASKS

"Support someone to navigate systems by offering your own lessons learned, what has worked/didn't work, sharing resources, accompanying someone to access the resources." -Cherene Caraco



Addressing issues or resolving problems with individuals upon request.



Collaborating with the individual to investigate resources, consider strategies, and assess decisions.



Assisting individuals in coordinating the services of their choice.



Assisting individuals in scheduling, preparing for, and optionally accompanying them to appointments or meetings.



Assisting individuals in comprehending available resources to help them achieve their goals. Exploring various options, solutions, and subsequent steps.



Participating in activities alongside the individual to enhance community engagement (e.g., learning/using public transportation, aiding in connecting to resources).



PEER NAVIGATORS TOOLS

...“Exploring connections to community (places/people/animals that support the person to feel safe, validated, like they belong, etc.)” -Sera Davidow

Model hope and recovery.

Empathetic listening.

Sharing personal stories.

Finding a point of commonality as a way of rapid engagement.

Utilization of open-ended questions.

Work with peer guests to set achievable goals.

Extensive knowledge of local resources and how to access them.

Ideally, peer staff have intersecting identities with the individuals they are supporting.

Role-playing exercises for new or challenging situations (e.g., medical appointments, court appearances, etc.).

APPROPRIATE USE OF PEER NAVIGATORS

Grasping and acknowledging trauma and providing support in a manner that avoids re-traumatization.

Create a relaxing environment that promotes kind and patient interactions.

Ensure their services are VOLUNTARY!

Focus on strengths and skills.

Represent demographics of the area, including both language and culture.

Ensure confidentiality and that the individual is present in any conversation about them.

INAPPROPRIATE USE OF PEER NAVIGATORS

"A case manager focuses on the task (making appointments, referrals, etc.) frequently without the person present. A Peer Support Specialist (Peer Navigator) focuses on the relationship and the tasks are opportunities for doing "with," providing exposure to, building skills, growing confidence, and practice in making decisions. They are done in the context of relationship, done with, and are directed and decided by the person."

-Cherene Caraco

Do not make decisions, referrals, etc. on behalf of an individual without their involvement

Do not act as a clinician or case manager

Do not assess, diagnose, or treat

Do not give advice ("you should," "you could," "you won't," "you don't," etc.)

Do not assume roles not related to peer navigation

Do not require individuals to navigate to or participate in activities not of their choice

Do not accept gifts or money from individuals in services

Do not "fix" or "manage" problems for individuals in services

SUCCESSFUL PEER NAVIGATORS

Profound familiarity with local resources and how to access them

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities in line with peer support principles

Effective and supportive supervision by an individual well-versed in peer support, preferably a more experienced peer

Clinician co-workers, if on the team, comprehend and respect the peer role

Establishment and maintenance of healthy boundaries

Comprehensive training, including continuous staff development on peer roles, ethics, boundaries, and job duties, including crisis intervention

Career advancement opportunities

Equitable pay

Conflicts & Resolutions

Like all professional disciplines, there is an ethical code for peer specialists. Some routine practices to maintain cleanliness and/or safety might compromise ethics and values. Organizations need to consider these conflicts and design policies in ways that reduce these conflicts for peer specialists.

“Create formal structure and role responsibility documents/guidance that differentiates peer roles from other providers, ideally in a way that separates the peer provider from any exercise of coercion.”

-Nev Jones

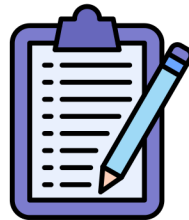
Duties drifting so that they are identical/nearly identical to Case Managers.



Coach/support the individual in making calls/arranging services for themselves with support.

Prioritize collaboration and support, assisting in calls or advocacy as needed, and emphasizing support over representation.

Taking notes or maintaining documentation about the individual without involving them.



Discuss content of the note as it is being developed with the individual.

Organizations may let Peer Navigators skip note writing or allow individuals to review and suggest changes, enhancing transparency and collaboration.

Job expectations that do not fall within a Peer Support role.



Job descriptions include duties consistent with the peer support role and ethics.

Create expectations that all staff adhere to the functions outlined in their job descriptions without exceeding these duties.

Avoiding conflict is simpler when navigation services are exclusively provided by peer specialists/supporters via a peer-run organization.

PEER DRIFT

The issue of "peer drift" raises substantial concerns among the peer experts. This phenomenon occurs when Peer Specialists deviate from their distinctive role, values, and mindset, providing services that resemble those offered by other professional staff. Some peer experts are hesitant to endorse peer navigation services due to its perceived similarity to case management, which can lead to peer drift.

Within these discussions, some respondents proposed the establishment of "firewalls" within programs, clearly delineating the duties of Peer Navigator versus Case Manager and clearly defining the Peer Navigator role within the job description. Questions remain if a properly trained clinician can offer appropriate Peer Navigator supervision, with recommendations that supervision be provided by a supervisor who is also a Peer Specialist.



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