

Understanding the values of peer support and the principles that underpin them

(See supporting document, Section 4)

At the core of peer support is the value placed on the use of lived experience of mental health difficulties (including the experience of caring for someone with experience of mental health difficulties) and seeing this as a form of expertise.

This means that the areas of knowledge described in this section are rooted in a PSW's experience and outlook, rather than from formal academic knowledge or training, and that they are applicable to all of the other sections.

An ability to understand and implement the peer support role in a way that is in line with the values and principles of peer support

Values of peer support workers

An ability to understand the values that underpin peer support and how they shape the ways in which PSWs work with and support people

An ability to understand that the peer support role is rooted in working alongside the person to develop an **equal and trusting relationship**, characterised by:

respect – being non-judgemental and not making assumptions about or pathologising the person's experiences or beliefs

reciprocity – a willingness to give and receive support, and learn from difference, with both parties sharing their experiences and benefitting from this

mutuality – a non-hierarchical relationship that is of equal value to both parties, and is based on shared experience of service use and recovery

An ability to draw on knowledge that peer support is:

non-directive – helping the person find solutions that work for them (rather than suggesting solutions)

strengths-based – focusing on and building a person's strengths and their ability to make use of the resources available to them

recovery-focused – creating hope and building autonomy, empowering the person who is being supported to define, lead and own their recovery, and enabling them to identify and work towards their life goals within their communities

Principles of peer support

An ability to draw on experiential knowledge that peer support is based on the following principles:

building safe and trusting relationships based on sharing lived experience of mental health difficulties and services, and using this to develop connections ensuring that relationships are built on the values of **mutuality** and **reciprocity**

respecting the **diversity** of each person's experience, and their particular background or cultural context

recognising and placing value on peers' personal experiential knowledge which can complement, or provide alternatives to, present models of mental health (for example, medical or psychological models)
enabling people who are supported to exercise choice about the way in which peer support is given and received, both directly and at an organisational level (influencing the ways in which peer support is integrated with and offered through teams)
enabling people who are supported to make use of their own strengths , skills and strategies
working progressively to help people learn from their experience and better equip themselves for living well
understanding and recognising the communities that people come from, the communities they choose to be a part of, and the ways in which these have and will shape their experiences
working inclusively by helping people to become (re)integrated into their communities or to overcome the challenges they may face around this, by building and strengthening connections with their families, friends, support networks and wider communities