Core relational skills

Understanding of recovery-focused and person-centred approaches

(See supporting document, Sections 2.4 and 5.1.1)

> There are many ways of understanding the meaning of recovery. Because recovery is person-centred it varies with each individual based on their own goals, beliefs, experiences and aspirations.

An ability for PSWs to draw on their lived experience and knowledge of recovery-focused approaches, personal recovery and processes of self-determination that underpin peer support

An ability to understand the importance of:

> prioritising personal recovery (which focuses on the person and their own beliefs, values and goals) over clinical recovery (which will reflect the values and aims of the service or organisation)

> helping people to lead and take control of their own personal recovery (for example, by ensuring that they have the resources and opportunity to become well-informed about their mental health and any care or interventions they receive)

An ability to draw on the key principles of personal recovery-focused approaches, namely that:

> recovery is self-defined by the person experiencing a mental health difficulty and discussions about their recovery and personal goals should be led by them

> what recovery looks like will vary from person to person and that:

>> recovery is about living a meaningful, satisfying and purposeful life (the life they wish to lead)

>> recovery is unique to each person and will reflect their own goals and aspirations

> there is a focus on people's strengths and helping them to:

>> foster hope and optimism (a sustainable belief in themselves and a willingness to persevere through uncertainty)

>> identify, define and work towards the life they want to live, and having a sense of autonomy over their life

>> build the skills and strengths to manage challenges and setbacks

>> build their sense of self-esteem and develop a positive identity

>> support their ability to meet challenges in life through self-development and self-management

> for most people, social inclusion is an important feature of their personal recovery (as part of a family, friendship group or community, or ability to play a part in society more widely)

> recovery is a progressive process that takes place over time, and will include learning from setbacks

An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that can affect a person's recovery, such as societal factors (such as housing and educational opportunities), familial relationships, traumatic experiences and environmental influences

Able to draw on and share lived experience

An ability to draw on and share lived experience of mental health and life experiences, as a core role of a PSW, for example by:

| conveying an understanding of the person's experiences |
| helping to build the peer relationship |
| conveying optimism and embodying the hope of personal recovery |

An ability to draw on knowledge of the benefits, and also the risks, of sharing lived experience through self-disclosure, and to consider whether sharing lived experience:

| is appropriately timed (that is, offered in response to issues raised by the person) |
| is relevant and appropriate to the other person's experience (both in content and in how much detail is shared) |
| is offered infrequently (so that it does not become a central focus and distracts from the person's own situation and needs) |
| matches the intensity, challenge and meaning of the person's experience |
| retains a focus on the person's needs, aims and goals |

An ability to ensure that the main aim of sharing is to help the person, rather than being an opportunity for the PSW to gain relief or be supported for themself

An ability for the PSW to judge whether:

| they are comfortable with others knowing about the information they are sharing |
| they have resolved the issues that they are sharing (so that the act of sharing does not trigger or worsen their own difficulties) |

Sharing lived experience to support people

An ability for PSWs to safely share their personal experience in a way that:

| helps the person know that they are not alone |
| supports, empowers and brings hope |
| is relevant to the person and their circumstances |
| uses their experience of recovery as an ongoing process (for example, by sharing their previous and ongoing personal efforts to maintain their health and wellbeing) |
| helps people to discover the recovery and self-care practices that work for them |
| maintains appropriate boundaries |

An ability for PSWs to step back from their own experience and reflect on how this may be different to the experience of others, in order to:

| find common ground across experiences |
| recognise when the social and cultural context of the person's situation may reduce the relevance of the PSW's experience (and so influence what they do or do not share) |
| explicitly acknowledge any differences between themselves and the people they support, to improve the peer relationship |

An ability to share specific experiences without indicating that these should be taken as solutions to the person's difficulties, for example:
describing how the PSW has faced and overcome challenges, but being clear that this is an illustration of how challenges can be met, rather than being the route that the person should take

Able to develop and maintain a mutual and reciprocal peer relationship

Knowledge of factors associated with building a peer relationship

An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that can make a positive peer relationship more likely, including being:
respectful
warm and friendly
open and honest
trustworthy
alert and active
flexible and allowing the person to discuss issues that are important to them
An ability to draw on knowledge of factors that can have a negative effect on the peer relationship, such as:
being rigid
being critical
being distant or aloof
being distracted
making inappropriate use of silence

Ability to develop and maintain the peer relationship

An ability to build trust, develop rapport and be respectful
An ability to demonstrate warmth, sensitivity and genuine concern, and provide encouragement and support
An ability to listen and respond to the person's concerns in a manner that is non-judgemental, supportive and sensitive, and that conveys an accepting attitude when they describe their experiences and beliefs
An ability to accept the person's experiences and concerns as valid, and help them discuss these
An ability to help the person being supported express any concerns or doubts they have about the mental health service (including the PSW) or the intervention they are receiving, especially where this relates to mistrust, fear or doubt about the benefits

An ability to establish the boundaries and purpose of the peer relationship in the initial meeting, including discussing the limits to confidentiality and information sharing

Ability to grasp the person's perspective and world view

An ability to establish the person's point of view by having an open and non-judgemental discussion, taking their concerns at face value and accepting their experience as valid
An ability to understand how the person being supported understands themselves, their experience and the world around them, paying attention to any cultural, spiritual or personal beliefs that are particularly important to the person
An ability to see and understand the other person's perspective (empathy) and to express this empathy and understanding through interactions with them

Ability to recognise and address threats to the peer relationship

An ability to recognise when there are strains in the peer relationship and address these, for example:
giving and asking for feedback in a way that demonstrates a genuine interest in the person
discussing the person's understanding of the role of the PSW and clarifying any misunderstandings
inviting the person to express any negative feelings about the peer relationship and discussing possible ways to improve these
helping the person explore any fears they have about expressing negative feelings about the relationship between the PSW and themself
acknowledging and accepting responsibility for any contribution to strains in the relationship

Engagement skills

An ability to determine a person's readiness to explore options or to try something new, in a manner that builds on their strengths and promotes self-determination
An ability to draw on knowledge of the potential barriers to engagement and the ability to actively work with the person being supported or with colleagues to address these

Matching the meeting location to the person

An ability to be open to the possibility of meeting in locations that are not associated with mental health services if this is what the person prefers (and if this is possible within the service setting), for example:
a local community space such as a library or café
meeting outside, in a park or other quiet space

An ability to balance flexibility in the meeting location with the need to maintain personal safety

Managing endings

An ability to prepare the person being supported for an ending of the peer support intervention, and:
an ability to signpost the person being supported to other resources or sources of support, as required
an ability to support the person to continue with their recovery journey after contact with the PSW has ended, appropriately independent of the PSW (or the mental health service)

Able to engage and support families and carers

An ability to draw on knowledge of the significance of families, carers or a person's wider social or community network in planning and providing care and support
An ability to draw on knowledge that caring for a person with mental health difficulties will have an impact on families and carers, particularly young carers
An ability to draw on knowledge that difficulties may arise between families or carers and the person with mental health needs

An ability to engage the person's family or carer (when appropriate):
to support the person, or be able to speak on their behalf (with their consent) in relation to the care they are receiving
to help families and carers feel comfortable and confident to ask questions when they are uncertain or confused
to support the person's family, carer, social or community network to look after their own mental health and wellbeing, if they experience difficulties as a result of the person's mental health needs

An ability to help families and carers be heard (and responded to), by the team from whom their loved one is accessing support

An ability to help families and carers access organisations and services that offer information, advice or support relevant to their needs (for example, by knowing the scope of available services, the support that they offer, and their access criteria)
An ability to provide support or information to families and carers to help them navigate the system, policies, processes or legal structures that may affect them

Sharing information about the person with their family or carer

An ability to share general information on mental health and wellbeing with the person's family, carers or members of their support network
An ability to draw on knowledge of the limits of confidentiality and information sharing with the person's family, carers, or members of their support network
An ability to draw on knowledge that if the person does not consent, it may not be appropriate to share their personal information with their family, carers or members of their support network

Able to use active listening and communication skills in a peer relationship

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that communication skills will help PSWs gain the best understanding of the concerns, needs and strengths of the person they support, helping them to:
feel respected, heard and understood
feel connected to others (and so feel less isolated and alone)
express themselves and make sense of their experience
reflect on and request the support that they feel is appropriate to meet their needs

An ability to understand that behaviours and actions can be a form of communication (for example, challenging or aggressive behaviour may reflect high levels of underlying anxiety or fear)

Active listening and effective communication

An ability for the PSW to show that they are paying attention to the person being supported, for example, through body language:
sitting close (but not too close) to the person
sitting 'square on' or next to the person (rather than across a desk)
adopting an open posture
maintaining an appropriate level of eye contact

An ability to listen attentively to the person by:
actively listening to their verbal account and trying to make sense of their experiences, behaviours and feelings, and the social context in which these arise
listening to the tone and pace of what is said, as well as its content
helping the person to express themselves at their own pace (for example, being comfortable with silences if the person is finding it difficult to express themselves)

An ability to help the person expand on or explore relevant issues by using:
statements (for example, brief summaries of what has already been said)
questions
non-verbal prompts

An ability to ask both:
'open' questions (that require more than a 'yes'/'no' answer and encourage discussion)
'closed' questions (that usually have a specific answer and are best used to establish factual information)

An ability to judge when questioning is being experienced as helpful and when it is less so (for example, where the person is feeling 'grilled')

An ability to listen to the person with empathy, by:
actively trying to understand their perspective and the way they understand their situation
reflecting their feelings

An ability to convey an empathic understanding of what has been said or conveyed, for example by:
paraphrasing what has been said (but not repeating word for word)
making short summaries that try to connect various aspects of what has been conveyed
using appropriate non-verbal behaviour that is responsive to what has been said (for example through appropriate facial expression or by nodding)

An ability to check the person's understanding by asking them to summarise the discussion and any decisions that may have been agreed

An ability to ask the person whether all the issues that they wished to raise have been discussed

An ability to be mindful about one's own perspective and how this might influence their relationship with the person

An ability to attend to indications that the person is finding topics distressing, or hard to discuss (for example, by noting non-verbal behaviours such as agitation or excessive movement)

An ability to remain calm while showing empathy and continuing to communicate sensitively with people experiencing distress

Overcoming barriers to communication

An ability to draw on knowledge that where verbal communication is challenging for a person, other forms of communication (such as drawing or writing) may be an effective and appropriate alternative

An ability to work with the person to identify practical barriers to communication and to identify ways to minimise their impact, for example by:

> asking the person about how best to communicate with them and how they would like to be communicated with

> using communication aids

> adjusting the complexity of the language being used

> managing the surrounding environment (for example, relocating to a different space to assure privacy)

An ability to address any difficulties a person has communicating or expressing themselves by making appropriate adjustments, such as:

> listening carefully and asking the person to clarify or repeat information if it is hard to understand what has been said

> allowing time for them to respond

> using simple, straightforward, everyday language

> limiting the number of key concepts or ideas that are communicated in a sentence

> using concrete examples (rather than abstract ideas)

> asking short, simple either/or questions (but taking care to avoid leading questions)

> creating a context for comments or questions (to help them understand the reasons for them)

> regularly asking them to summarise or repeat what has been discussed (to check that they have understood accurately)

To gain an accurate sense of the person's account, an ability for the PSW to be aware of (and avoid) any 'filters' they may find themselves imposing, for example:

> listening in a judgemental way

> making assumptions or jumping to conclusions instead of listening carefully

Able to work with difference

(See supporting document, Section 6.2)

> Working in a culturally competent way depends on valuing diversity, equality and inclusion, respecting the beliefs, practices and lifestyles of people who use services, and how these may impact on their mental health or experience of mental health services.

Stance

An ability to work in a person-centred way (providing care that is led by the person's concerns)
An ability to treat everyone with dignity, compassion and respect
An ability to ensure that people with mental health difficulties are treated with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion and consideration

An ability for PSWs to:
equally value all people for their particular and unique characteristics
support people who experience mental health difficulties who come from different social or cultural backgrounds
be aware of stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in themselves and others (and be able to challenge these)
develop the knowledge and skills to advance mental health equality

Knowledge of the relevance and impact of people's beliefs, practices, demographic factors, identities and lifestyles

An ability to draw on knowledge that the demographic groups included in discussion of 'different' beliefs, practices or lifestyles are usually those that are or have been subject to disadvantage, discrimination or exclusion
An ability to draw on knowledge that people can be a member of more than one group or community and that the implications of different combinations of identity and lifestyle factors need to be held in mind
An ability to maintain an awareness of the potential significance for practice of social and cultural variation across a range of domains, including:

ethnicity, race and culture
gender, gender identity and sexuality
religion and belief
socioeconomic status
age
disability
communication and language

An ability to draw on knowledge of the relevance and potential impact of these social and cultural factors on mental health, and on the effectiveness, appropriateness and acceptability of particular mental health interventions

Knowledge of social and cultural factors that may have an impact on access to support

An ability to draw on knowledge of social and cultural issues that commonly restrict or reduce access to support, for example:

language and communication
social exclusion and isolation
mistrust of statutory services
lack of knowledge about available services and how to access them
the range of cultural concepts, understanding and attitudes about mental health that affect views about help-seeking, treatment and care
stigma, shame or fear associated with mental health difficulties or diagnoses

An ability to draw on knowledge of the potential impact of social inequalities and exclusion on the development of mental health difficulties, and on access to and experience of mental health services, resources, support and opportunities
An ability to draw on knowledge of the impact of factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage or disability on practical arrangements that influence attendance and engagement (for example, transport difficulties, poor health)

Ability to communicate respect for a person and their family or carers

Where people from a specific sociodemographic group are regularly seen within a service, an ability to draw on knowledge of relevant beliefs, practices and lifestyles
An ability to identify protective factors that are provided through membership of a specific sociodemographic group (for example the additional support offered by an extended family or community)

Ability to gain an understanding of the experience of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles

An ability to collaborate with people to develop an understanding of their culture and world view, and the implications of any culturally specific customs or expectations for the ways in which challenges or difficulties are described and presented, and:

an ability to apply this knowledge in order to work with the person in a manner that is culturally sensitive, culturally consistent and relevant (and that guards against cultural stereotyping)

An ability to take an active interest in a person's social and cultural background, and to demonstrate a willingness to learn about their sociocultural perspectives and world view (to help build a trusting relationship with them)

Ability to demonstrate awareness of the influence of the peer support worker's own background

An ability for all PSWs to draw on an awareness of their own backgrounds, group memberships and values, and how these may influence their perceptions of the person they support, the challenges or difficulties they present, and the relationship between the person and the PSW
An ability for PSWs to reflect on power differences between themselves and the people they support, and to work to minimise these in order to promote reciprocal and equal relationships