

# Supervision of Peer Workers



***SAMHSA***  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale

## Technical Assistance Center Strategy

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# Learning Goals

- 1 Describe the essential functions of supervisors
- 2 Understand the principles and practices of peer support services
- 3 Explore the application of recovery-oriented approaches to the supervision of peer workers
- 4 Learn two critical supervision skills
- 5 Access additional resources to improve your competence in supervising peer workers

# Supervision

# Supervision: Definition

**SUPERVISION** is a professional and collaborative activity between a supervisor and a worker in which the supervisor provides guidance and support to the worker to promote competent and ethical delivery of services and supports through the continuing development of the worker's application of accepted professional peer work knowledge, skills, and values.

# Supervision

- The most important thing about supervision is that it happens
- Supervision should be a priority for early-career peer workers
- All workers need access to supervision
- Supervision is an investment
- Supervision benefits employees, employers and service recipients



# Why Focus on the Supervision of Peer Workers?

- Peer workers fill relatively new and unique roles in the behavioral health care system and supervisors may not understand peer support well enough to provide high quality supervision and the organization may not be aligned with recovery-oriented values
- Leaders in peer-run/ recovery community organizations may not have experience with supervision and may not have organizational structures that support the activity of supervision
- Providing supervision promotes good ethical practices
- Supervisors play a key role in the successful integration of peer workers in the work place

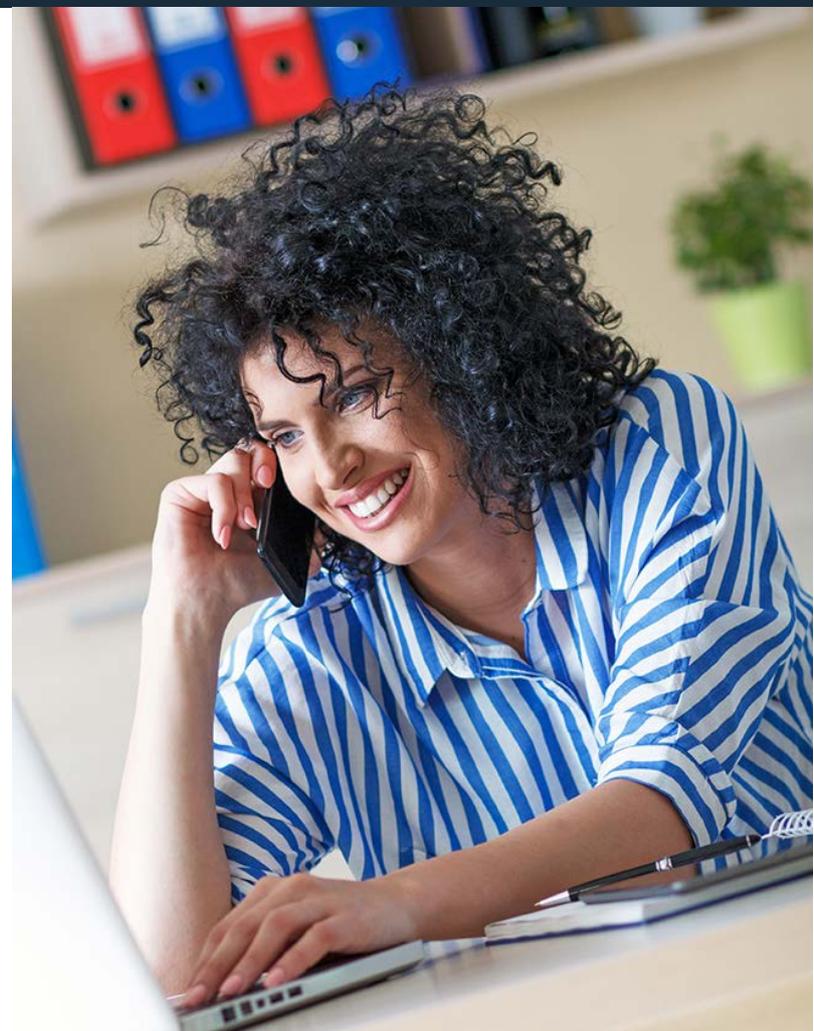
# Challenges to Supervising Peer Workers-for Non-Peer Supervisors

- Supervisors may lack experience and working knowledge of peer practice
- Supervisor may have a clinical approach to service provision
- Lack of knowledge among non-peer staff about peer roles and practice
- Organizations may not be aligned with recovery-oriented values, practices, and culture
- Challenges in integrating peer workers and recovery values in a treatment setting



# Challenges to Supervising Peer Workers-for Peer Supervisors

- May lack training and experience with supervision
- Lack of knowledge among non-peer staff about peer roles and practice
- Organizations not aligned with recovery-oriented values, practices, and culture
- Peer-run/ Recovery Community Organizations may not have a culture of accountability



# Benefits of Supervision for Peer Workers

- Provides opportunities to reflect on peer support practice
- Delivers better outcomes through learning that comes from exploring and discussing work issues
- Enhances problem solving skills
- Improves clarity and objectivity in decision making
- Supervision empowers, motivates and increases worker satisfaction



# Benefits of Supervision for the Organization

- Supervision is a tool that can be used to achieve the agency's mission and objectives
- Supervision improves performance and helps to manage resources
- The supervisor serves as the mediator and liaison between the agency and the worker
- Good supervision can increase morale and improve retention



# Functions of the Supervisor

Supervision is comprised of 3 basic functions:

**Administrative**

**Educative**

**Supportive**

# Administrative Supervision

## Administrative

Administrative supervision tasks focus on the effective implementation of the agency's policies and procedures and the management of the peer worker's work performance.

- Quality of work
- Work load
- Liaison to operations-payroll, human resources
- Using program resources, including time, effectively
- Conformance or fidelity to the program model
- Record keeping

# Educative Supervision

The logo consists of a central white rectangle with the word "Educative" in black text. This rectangle is flanked by two grey vertical bars. Above and below the central rectangle are two red horizontal bars, creating a cross-like shape.

## Educative

Educative supervision tasks focus on the professional development of the worker through training, modeling and structuring learning experiences.

- Provide time and space to reflect on peer practice
- Focus on knowledge, skills and attitudes
- Provide individualized training and support
- Provide venue for supporting the peer worker's professional development

# Supportive Supervision

A graphic consisting of a dark blue rectangle on the right, a white rectangle in the center containing the word "Supportive", and a grey rectangle on the left.

Supportive

Supportive supervision tasks focus on the person's morale and job satisfaction.

- Give feedback on work
- Discuss personal reactions to the work
- Validate and provide encouragement
- Promote self-care practices
- Advocate for peer support roles

# Fundamentals for Supervisors of Peer Workers

# Supervisors Understand Peer Roles and Practices

- Supervisors understand the variety of peer roles
- Supervisors have a deep understanding of the core competencies of peer workers
- Supervisors understand the specific peer support job of the person they supervise
- Supervisors can learn more about the fundamentals of peer support and peer roles by:
  - Participating in trainings designed for peer support workers
  - Reading articles about peer-delivered recovery support services
  - Learning the core competencies of peer workers

# Supervisors Have a Recovery Orientation and Model Recovery-oriented Practices

- Supervisors endorse and enact recovery-oriented practices and values
- Supervisors believe in the capacity of peer workers to grow and develop professionally
- Supervisors frame difficulties as learning opportunities and structure learning opportunities to help the worker grow
- Supervisors support the development of individualized professional goals
- Supervisors support the integration of peer workers and recovery values



# Examples of Recovery-oriented Values

- Hope-inspiring the growth potential in all
- Person-centered-based on the individual's aspirations
- Strength-based-focused on the unique gifts of each worker
- Personal responsibility-holding people accountable for their commitments
- Interdependence-a balance between team work, autonomy, and mutual support
- Supervisors model these values in their work
- Agencies operationalize these values in their policies, procedures, and practices

# Supervisors Support the Development of the Unique Knowledge and Skills Needed for Peer Support Practice

- Supervisors teach workers the knowledge and skills they need to perform work tasks
- Supervisors evaluate work performance through direct observation, co-working, assessments, and reflection, all in collaboration with the peer worker
- Supervisors structure learning opportunities to help workers grow
- Supervisors advocate for worker's participation in on-going training



# Supervisors Recognize the Connections between Behavioral Health Conditions and Trauma, Health Disparities, and Social Inequity

- Supervisors take a holistic view of a person, that they are more than their diagnosis or addiction
- Supervisors recognize that recovery involves more than symptom reduction or abstinence
- Supervisors recognize the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage
- Supervisors support workers to address issues of poverty, trauma and discrimination

# Supervisors Use Strengths-based Supervision

Strengths-based supervision is a collaborative process between the worker and supervisor enabling them to deliver quality services and supports that draws on the person's strengths and assets

- Seek to discover and amplify the workers' strengths and competencies
- Intentionally identify and amplify the workers' success
- Encourage learning and share responsibility for setting learning goals

# Strength-based Supervision

- Focusing on strengths does not mean ignoring problems, but rather means that the supervision frames problems as learning opportunities
- Feedback and self-assessment are tools in strengths-based supervision



# Supervisors Provide a Space to Address Ethical and Boundary Issues

- Most peer workers have been trained about ethics and follow a Code of Ethics that has been adopted by the state in which they work
- Supervisors review agency code of conduct with the people they supervise
- Peer workers are expected to follow both their Code of Ethics and the agency's code of conduct
- The nature of peer support means that boundary issues can be very nuanced and may require opportunities to reflect with a more experienced colleague

# Supervisors Advocate for the Integration of Peer Workers in the Work Place

- Supervisors educate others in the work force about the peer support roles and practices
- Supervisors create opportunities for peer support workers to interact with other team members
- Supervisors work with leadership to create more optimal working conditions for peer workers



# Supervision Formats

# Supervision Formats

Individual supervision

Group supervision

Co-supervision

# Individual Supervision

## Advantages

- Exclusive attention to the worker
- Often experienced as safer by the worker
- More confidential

## Disadvantages

- Dependence can develop
- Exposure to only one perspective in supervision
- Lost opportunity to learn from colleagues

# Group Supervision

## Advantages

- More efficient than individual supervision
- Supervisees share information and may learn from each other
- Can be a powerful way to reduce isolation and may foster group cohesiveness

## Disadvantages

- Working in a group can be experienced as unsafe by some workers
- It may difficult to meet the specific needs of individual participants and there is a risk discussions remain generalized and do not meet anyone's needs in a satisfactory way

# Co-supervision

- Co-supervision is the provision of supervision by more than one supervisor
- This model may be used when the organization does not have supervisors who are peer support workers
- Peer workers may benefit from a second supervisor if their primary supervisor doesn't have the expertise to help them develop in their peer practice
- Often, one supervisor provides more administrative supervision and the other provides more education. Ideally, both provide support

# Co-supervision

## Advantages

- Workers benefit from the guidance of more than one person
- Workers can develop their competencies with a skills peer support worker

## Disadvantages

- Some agencies don't have the resources to offer co-supervision
- There may be challenges in communication or disagreements between the co-supervisors
- Co-supervisors may not share the same expectations

# Supervision Formats

- Many organizations offer multiple formats of supervision to address different professional development needs
- Different workers get different learning needs addressed by different formats
- Organizations that lack supervisors who themselves are peer support workers sometimes make co-supervision by an experienced peer support worker available

# Selected Competencies for Supervisors of Peer Workers

# Competency

Competencies are the combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to enhanced performance and ultimately result in organizational success.



**Beliefs/ Attitudes**

**Knowledge**

**Skills**

# Core Beliefs/ Attitudes for Supervisors of Peer Workers

- Hope-belief in the possibility of recovery
- Person-driven-process is directed by the person's own goals
- Respect-for multiple pathways of recovery and for all
- Growth-oriented-a focus on personal and professional development



**Beliefs/  
Attitudes**

# Knowledge for Supervisors of Peer Workers

- Supervisors need knowledge of the principles and practices of peer support in order to provide effective supervision and improve utilization of the peer role
- Supervisors need to clearly know details of workers' jobs
- Supervisors need to know how to navigate the administration of the agency
- Supervisors need to learn about the Americans with Disabilities Act and reasonable accommodations to enable workers with disabilities achieve success



Knowledge

# Selected Skills for Supervisors of Peer Workers

- There are dozens of skills that supervisors need to be successful in their roles.
- Many lists of skills and competencies for supervisors have been published
- This training will focus in on two critical skills for supervisors
  - 1 Giving strengths-based affirmations
  - 2 Giving feedback



Skills

# Giving Strengths-based Affirmations

- Strength-based affirmations shine a light on all the good things that team members are doing
- Strength-based affirmations contribute increase motivation for professional development
- Strength-based affirmations are different from general praise in that they are specific to a work task or worker attribute

# Giving Strengths-based Affirmations

## Definition

Giving strengths-based affirmations mean expressing a genuine and positive acknowledgement of a specific work task or worker attribute

## Benefits

- Helps workers discover their strengths
- Builds confidence
- Demonstrates supervisors' support of the peer worker

## Steps

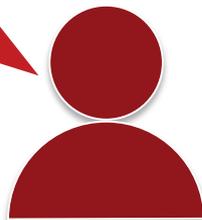
1. Recognize worker's strength
2. Select opportunity to share affirmation
3. State the affirmation

## Condition

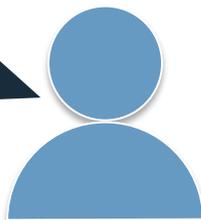
Give strengths-based affirmation when you want to increase a worker's recognition of their strengths

# Strengths-based Affirmations: Examples

*"You showed a lot of courage when you reminded the team that Nathan has a right to make an informed choice about which recovery home he wants to go to."*



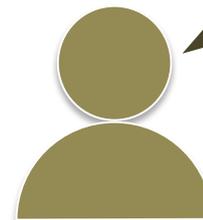
*"The recovery plan you developed with Ian showed that you really understand how to do person-centered planning"*



*"I like the way you welcome people and help them feel comfortable here."*



*"I want to let the team know that Steven organized this in-service training. He's a master at creating a training and lining up speakers."*



# Giving Feedback

- This skill is similar to affirming strengths in that it provides workers with the information they may need to develop their practice
- Feedback is always framed as a learning opportunity
- Feedback strengthens a person's ability to reflect on their own performance

# Characteristics of Good Feedback

- Specific-refers to a particular activity
- Objective-based on unbiased observation
- Timely-when the worker will most benefit from the feedback
- Individualized-tailored to the learning needs of the worker
- Genuine-comes from a place of kindness
- Actionable-suggests activities designed to improve performance

# Giving Feedback

## Definition

Giving feedback means communicating your objective appraisal of the worker's performance of a specific work task or worker attribute

## Benefits

- Helps workers discover areas they need to develop
- Contributes to a culture of growth and development
- Demonstrates supervisor's interest in helping the peer worker to grow in the role

## Steps

1. Ask worker to give themselves feedback on a specific task or attribute
2. Share your objective appraisal of the worker's performance, starting with strengths and moving to areas that need improvement
3. Check in with the worker about their reactions to the feedback
4. Collaborate with the worker to develop activities for learning

## Condition

Give feedback when the worker is ready to hear it and always in private

# Giving Feedback Example

Nancy, a supervisor and Edgar, a peer recovery coach who works in a hospital emergency room are meeting for supervision. Earlier in the day, Nancy observed Edgar interacting with a person who had had a recent opioid overdose and overhead Edgar say, “Well I hope your next overdose doesn’t kill you” and walk away.

*Edgar, tell me about your interaction with Mr. Rose this morning.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Oh man, that was frustrating! I couldn't get anywhere with that guy. He wasn't having any of what I could offer. I thought that maybe he would go to treatment this time. I thought we had a good connection too.*

*You were surprised that he was wasn't interested in what you were offering today.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Yeah, I guess I got let-down, you know?*

# Giving Feedback Example *(continued)*

*If it's okay with you I'd like to share my perspective but first I'd like to hear from you about what you think you did well and what you'd like to do better next time.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Well I don't know what I did well. It wasn't my best work.*

*Well, start with one thing that you did well.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Well, I did well just starting a conversation with him. I was able to introduce myself and talk to him about what had happened to him last night.*

*So initiating contact has become a strength for you. What do you think you need to improve?*

Nancy

Edgar

*I'm not sure. I don't know what I could have done differently. I wasn't expecting him to reject my offer and I just reacted.*

# Giving Feedback Example *(continued)*

*What would you have liked to have done instead of having the reaction you had?*

Nancy

Edgar

*I don't know. I should have not reacted like I did. I just walked away.*

*You wish you had not broken the connection you had with him.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Yes. I was kind of mad at him.*

*I'd like to give you some feedback on what I think you could do differently next time.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Yes. That could be helpful.*

# Giving Feedback Example *(continued)*

*I observed that you rushed in and offered a treatment bed without first asking him what he thinks he needs. Getting the person to start thinking about possible solutions can be empowering and the person feels less pressured.*

Nancy

Edgar

*That sounds right.*

*We can review and practice some pieces of motivational interviewing, especially rolling with resistance. These skills take a lot of practice and you're making progress and we can work together to help you move forward.*

Nancy

Edgar

*Sometimes I feel that I won't ever get it.*

*You feel discouraged because it can be so hard to use these skills when you need to. But I've seen you work hard to get better at other skills and I believe that you'll develop these skills too.*

Nancy

# Selected Supervisor Skills Summary

- Giving strength-based affirmations and giving feedback are two critical skills of supervision
- These skills both work to help people increase their ability to assess their own performance of work skills
- These skills also work to help people to get and achieve professional goals

# Supervisor of Peer Workers Summary

- Peer workers fill new and unique roles in the behavioral health work force
- Supervision of peer workers is not dramatically different from supervising other roles, but there are specific competencies these supervisors need
- Supervisors of peer workers need to develop their knowledge of peer roles and practices, embrace a recovery orientation, and advocate for the integration of peer workers