

Peer Specialists often work in different organizations as part of a team.

Session 12

Peer Specialists in the Workplace: *Skills for Effective Teams*

Will discuss the workplace in general, the specific role that a Peer Specialist has within an organization, and skills needed to be an effective team member.

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Questions

1. What does it mean to be professional?
2. Why is a Peer Specialist asked to sign a Code of Ethics before beginning work as a Peer Specialist?
3. Can a Peer Specialist lose their certification?
4. What is different about the role of a Peer Specialist within an organization?
5. Have you ever worked on a team in the workplace? Why is it important to be an effective team member?

Getting Along with Co-Workers

While you are working as a Peer Specialist, you may have to work closely with all kinds of people, some of which you may or may not really like. In these situations, you need to put your personal feelings aside and put the interests of your organization first. What is important is doing your share of the work and following the rules. Following the rules is important because it helps create an atmosphere of order; without rules, we would have chaos or utter confusion. People would come to work when they wanted, talk to people however they wanted, etc. This might sound good, but in reality there would be so much confusion not much work would get done.

Getting Along with the Peers in your Organization

The reason we are here today is because of the individuals we are working with, without them there would be no reason to come to work. Without peers, organizations would not be able to stay in business. Relationships between employees and individuals they work with are important to the success of an organization. Individuals come to our organization for several reasons. They like the services we provide; they like our follow-up services; they like the environment; they like how they are treated. Peer Specialists have a large part to play in ensuring that peers are treated well.

In the space below, give some examples of treating our peers well:

Managing Conflict in the Workplace

Sometimes, however, the individuals we work with can become angry, aggressive, or even verbally abusive. As employees, we need to learn how to deal with conflict or disagreements in the workplace before these conflicts occur.

Part of managing conflict involves developing good communication skills—being able to actively listen to others and provide feedback. To find out about your listening skills, take a moment to fill out the following Listening Skills Questionnaire.

Conflict Styles

As we stated earlier, many times in the behavioral healthcare workplace, we are faced with having to manage conflict situations. Conflict situations often occur when the needs, wants, or values of team members or peers clash. Conflicts occur because of the following:

- **Personal differences**
- **Difference in values (what you believe in)**
- **Difference in perspective (how you see things)**
- **Difference in goals**
- **Cultural differences**

One way to handle conflict is to practice good communication skills-learn to actively listen to people and respond to their needs sometimes can prevent the conflict before it becomes a problem.

Over time, we have all developed various styles for handling and reacting to conflict. The way we have learned to handle conflict may be helping or hindering us. What is important is that we become aware of our own person style for handling conflict, the consequences of that style, and what alternative choices we have. Learning this will help us choose what is most helpful and productive.

To begin with, think about 3 of your most recent conflicts you have had at work. In the spaces that follow, describe what happened, what you did, and the outcome.

	Conflict Situation #1	Conflict Situation #2	Conflict Situation #3
Explain the Situation			
What did you do?			
What was the outcome?			

As you look back over all 3 conflicts, what patterns do you see?

Keeping these 3 situations in mind, use the following descriptions and try to determine your conflict style.

Style 1: Avoidance

Some people will do anything to avoid conflict. They will agree simply for the sake of harmony and even hold back their own good ideas. Sometimes this is caused by fear of emotional confrontations that stem from the myths about human behavior. “It is not nice to fight.” “If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say anything at all.” Acting on these myths, people who avoid conflict are not as productive as they could be. Work teams need to create an atmosphere where everyone will express his/her ideas and opinions without fear of ridicule or criticism. Team members who avoid conflict need to be reassured that their advice counts, that they will not be ridiculed, and that disagreement is natural and healthy. One way to handle team members who avoid conflict is to make sure everyone is heard from before a decision is made.

Style #2: Combative

This style is the opposite of the first one. Combative people give their opinions, ideas, suggestions, etc. very quickly, often without thinking about the consequences. They are emotional and direct with their words so you always know where they stand, but they are so abrasive that people get offended by what they say and, especially, how they say it. Being combative comes across as mean and uncaring, when, in fact, it may come from very good intentions.

The consequence, however, of this style is that other team members and consumers become fearful of saying anything that might be ridiculed or criticized. As others say less, a combative person can dominate the team or workplace. After a while, people begin to resist the combative person’s ideas, even the good ones. Co-workers need to help combative people become more aware of the consequences of their style. This can be done by making sure that everyone is heard from before a decision is made or setting a time limit for speaking so no one person dominates the conversation.

Combative people need help in seeing that their style causes win-lose games to occur and this is the opposite of what they want. We can actually achieve more by choosing our words more carefully, weighing the consequences before we blurt things out, and practicing our active listening skills.

Style #3: Collaborative

A story frequently told in seminars tells of two girls fighting over the same orange. Their mother finally intervenes and cuts the orange in half. The first girl throws away the orange peel and eats the fruit. The second girl throws away the fruit and uses the peel to bake a cake. If the two girls had collaborated (worked together), they would have seen that underneath their conflict were needs that were not in conflict. In other words, a win-win solution can usually be found. Collaborative people don’t assume there has to be a winner and there has to be a loser. Instead, they communicate

with the people they are in conflict with and, eventually, come to a mutually agreed upon solution that both parties can live with. This style achieves a balance over the other two styles.

A collaborative team member does not avoid conflict, but doesn’t create it unnecessarily either. Team members must learn to be collaborative and work through conflict to arrive at win-win solutions. Win-lose solutions leave hurt feelings which hinder the ability to work together day after day.

Style #4: Accommodation

This style is characterized by the desire to please others at the expense of a person’s own needs.

Managing Conflicts Action Plan:

1. Go back to the 3 conflict situations that you described earlier. Which of the 4 conflict styles did you use most often? (Avoidance, Combative, Collaborative, Accommodation)

2. What do you need to **stop doing** to change the way you respond to handling conflict?

3. What do you need to **start doing** to manage conflicts better?

******Break******

Ground Rules for Managing Conflict

1. Conflict is natural and inevitable
2. Conflict can be constructive. If people agree too much, nothing creative may even occur.
3. Out of conflict can come greater commitment
4. Be aware when ridge positions are being maintained
5. Try to help each other see what is best for the organization or team and look beyond your own personal interests
6. Keep in mind these common barriers to collaboration:
 - **Poor listening**
 - **Wanting to be right at “all costs”**
 - **Believing there is only one “best” way and that is “your’ way**
 - **Placing blame versus focusing on solving the problem**
 - **Attacking people rather than attacking the problem**
 - **Stereotyping people**
 - **Presuming we already know what others think**
 - **Not being open and honest**
 - **Letting a few dominate a meeting**
 - **Not sharing the same information with everyone**
 - **Letting egos, power, status, etc. get in the way**

7. Keep in mind the following elements in reaching an agreement:

- **Share information**
- **Blind trust**
- **Listen actively to the “words and the music” (Feelings are as real as facts)**
- **Try not to judge, evaluate, or criticize before you understand**
- **Stay open to new ways of doing things**
- **Always look for a way to negotiate a win-win solution, where each party gains something.**
- **Communication, a 3rd party mediator, etc.**
- **Clarify the key interests and needs of conflicting people and list alternatives that might address these.**
- **When a team or team member is locked in conflict, brainstorm creative options.**
- **Paraphrase what has finally been agreed on to make sure true agreement has been reached and there is a commitment to carry out the solution.**

The Process of Effective Communication in Situations with Potential Conflict

Step 1) Observe and Affirm the other’s position, values, and concerns

Step 2) Relate the other’s position, values, and concerns to your experiences as a peer

Step 3) Offer a “we” statement that acknowledges the common ground and promotes partnership in creating another way of doing things.

SCENARIO 1

You are a Peer Specialist working on an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team at the local Community Behavioral health Center (CBHC). Your team has been working with Mary for the past year. Mary’s team includes you as her Peer Specialist, her psychiatrist, her case manager, her therapist, her nurse, and her rehabilitation specialist. Everyone on Mary’s team wants her to live a life of Recovery in her community. Mary recently mentioned to you that she might want to find a job. You have decided to bring her interest in a job up at the next meeting of the ACT team members.

SCENARIO 2

You are a Peer Specialist in a Maximum Security Mental Institution. A client who has serious behavioral issues asks you to attend his treatment team meeting. This meeting is for a 90 day review period. He has just reached the program’s highest level and is very excited about his progress. His guardian is traveling a great distance to attend this treatment team meeting. At the meeting the team briefly references his progress. The team members and the guardian take turns providing negative feedback about his past issues. The client was asked if he had anything to add, he looks at you and asks if you have anything to say.

SCENARIO 3

You are a Peer Specialist working in a Consumer Operated Drop-In Center. You work with other Peer Specialists as a team to provide services to the participants of the Drop-In Center. Carlos has been coming to the Drop-In Center for several years. He is homeless, he attends all of the Recovery meetings offered at the Center, and he loves to play pool with the other participants at the Center. Carlos has never shown any interest in finding a permanent place to live, but recently he has been asking you what he would need to do in order to find an apartment. You decide to talk to the other Peer Specialists about helping Carlos find housing.

Session 12 – Review Questions – Peer Specialists in the Workplace

1. Peer Specialists like all positions at time experience conflict in the workplace. What are the 3 steps for effective communication during potential conflict?

