

Being culturally informed and prepared to provide respect to all peers is essential to quality peer support services.

Session 5

Providing Culturally Informed Support

Explores the concept of cultural competence and gives peers tools to assess and improve their competence.

Culture — A set of beliefs, norms and values concerning the nature of relationships, the way people live their lives, and the way people organize their environments.

Discussion Question — What are some different culture groups you can think of?

Cultural Competence - to be respectful and responsive to the health beliefs and practices—and cultural and linguistic needs—of diverse population groups. Developing cultural competence is also an evolving, dynamic process that takes time and occurs along a continuum.

Why is cultural competence important for peer specialists?

Many providers in the United States are taught to approach behavioral health based on white, middle class norms and beliefs. Others assume that their beliefs (whatever they may be) about what causes and reduces emotional difficulties are universally true. Peer supporters, with their lived experience of behavioral health challenges, are often no exception. Additionally, they may have limited experience with people who do not share their particular background.

Since peers are the foundation of support and mutual assistance, their cultural skills are critical for engaging and supporting people with behavioral health issues. These skills stem from shared experiences of behavioral health problems and social stigma. Peer supporters and leadership who come from diverse backgrounds themselves benefit from culturally competent recruitment, retention and promotion practices. Remember, enhancing cultural competency is not for white peer providers alone. Everybody—no matter what their background—has things to learn about how people from diverse communities view their behavioral health experience and how they wish to be treated. This is why cultural competence is an expectation of all peer providers, their leaders and the programs they run.

Group Activity — Importance of Cultural Competence

List below the cultural and other groups you identify with the most. Include specifically your family's cultural, ethnic and racial background groups; your personal characteristic groups (age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.); your family roles and relationships (wife, father, sister, uncle, etc.); your community or other group memberships and any spiritual or religious affiliations.

Next, circle the two most important groups you identify with--

Now, imagine you are going to receive peer support from a peer specialist who knows everything on your list except those you circled. Write your thoughts and feelings about this in the space on the bottom of this page, and then turn the page for some additional questions for consideration.

Would that peer specialist be able to provide effective peer support without knowing the two most important groups or their importance to you?

What are some ways you can make sure peers you work with are comfortable sharing the identities or groups that are important to them?

Share your thoughts and observations you wrote above with the large group (if you wish to).

Group Activity - Cultural Competence Assessment

Complete the following assessment. Feel free to share your answers with the group.

A = Things I do frequently

B = Things I do occasionally

C = Things I do rarely or never

D = I don't believe this applies to me

Physical Environment, Materials and Resources

_____ 1. I display pictures, posters and other materials that reflect the cultures and ethnic backgrounds of peers served by my program or agency.

_____ 2. I ensure that magazines, brochures and other printed materials are of interest to and reflect the different cultures of peers served by my program or agency.

_____ 3. When using videos, films, or other media resources, I ensure that they reflect the cultures of peers served by my program or agency.

Communication Styles

_____ 4. For peers who speak languages or dialects other than English, I attempt to learn to use keywords in their language so that I am better able to communicate with them.

_____ 5. I attempt to determine any familial colloquialisms used by peers that may have an impact on services provided.

_____ 6. I use visual aids, gestures and physical prompts in my interactions with peers who have limited English proficiency.

_____ 7. I use bilingual staff members or trained/certified interpreters for services with peers who have limited English proficiency.

_____ 8. I use bilingual staff members or trained/certified interpreters for services with families who would require this level of assistance.

Values and Attitudes

- _____ 9. I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with those of cultures or ethnic groups other than my own.
- _____ 10. I intervene in an appropriate manner when I observe other staff members within my program or agency engaging in behaviors that show cultural insensitivity, bias or prejudice.
- _____ 11. I understand and accept that the idea of family is defined differently by different people.
- _____ 12. I recognize and accept that peers from culturally diverse backgrounds may desire varying degrees of acculturation into the dominant culture.
- _____ 13. I recognize that the meaning or value of medical treatment and health education may vary greatly among cultures.
- _____ 14. I recognize and understand that beliefs and concepts of emotional well-being vary significantly from culture to culture.
- _____ 15. I accept that religion and other beliefs may influence how peers respond to illnesses, disease, disability and death.

- _____ 16. Before visiting or providing services in the home setting, I seek information on acceptable behaviors, courtesies customs and expectations that are unique to peers of different cultures.
- _____ 17. I seek information from peers or other key individuals that will assist in service adaptation to respond to the needs and preferences of culturally and ethically diverse peers served by my program or agency.
- _____ 18. I advocate for the review of my program's or agency's mission statement, goals, policies, and procedures to ensure that they incorporate principles and practices that promote cultural diversity and cultural competence.

There is no answer key with correct responses. However, if you frequently responded "C," you may not necessarily demonstrate values and engage in practices that promote a culturally diverse and culturally competent service delivery system for peers. This cultural assessment is found in SAMHSA TIP 59 with slight changes to wording to be more applicable in peer setting.

Session 5 – Review Questions – Providing Culturally Informed Support

1. Who has the most to learn from others from diverse communities?
2. Are ALL peers expected to strive for cultural competence