

# Youth Peer Specialist Manual



Revised: March 2023

# **Welcome, Housekeeping &** **Introductions**

# Getting Started

Welcome to Youth Peer Support training!

Over the next two days, we'll be discussing topics, strategies and methods that will help and guide your work as a Credentialed Youth Peer Support. We'll be covering a lot of ground, so here are some of the things you should know —

1. This training begins with each of us doing introductions (name, where you work, what you hope to get from this training, and identifying your superpower. Regardless of what you know or observe about a person, please respect their identity by referring to them in the way they introduce themselves.

This is a professional training and the expectation is that you will demonstrate a professional persona. This requires active participation in all aspects of this training. You will be expected to stay awake and engaged throughout the training. Please ensure that you are in a confidential setting for the safety of all in the training and no distractions are present (i.e. no training in your vehicle or in your bed, children should not be present, appropriate clothing, etc...)

## **House Keeping Items:**

WIFI-please ensure you have stable internet.

Frequent Breaks-15 minutes approximately every hour

Lunch-30 minutes

Your name must be visible on your video feed, keep your camera on, ensuring your face is clearly seen

Emergency absences only

2. We will be taking regularly scheduled breaks. If you need more, please speak with one of your trainers or excuse yourself. However, know that all the information is important to your work and you should not miss more than necessary!

3. Lunch is on your own.

4. We will be perusing a lot of different topics that may bring up areas of your own lived experience. For this reason, we'll be creating comfort contracts and asking you to refer to them regularly.
5. We will also be asking reflective questions, giving you space to process and checking in each morning. Content warnings will be provided for relevant areas.
6. This participant manual was provided to you electronically.

## **Section 1:**

# **History of Youth Peer Support**

## **The Youth Movement**

“Nothing about us without us!” was coined in the family movement but has been used worldwide to communicate the idea that **no decision should be made without the full and intentional participation of those who will be affected by that decision.**

This sentiment was a driving force behind the Youth Movement — **the children from the family movement grew up** and developed their own voices, skills and desires for change. They were now ready to be at the decision-making table. The family movement supported the youth’s vision to create their own organizational movement to enact real change.

The youth movement began to organize by creating the first national youth advisory called the National Youth Development Board in 2007. This committee of youth and young adults advised the system of care grantees on youth engagement. These leaders realized they needed to do more than simply advise. They created a vision to form a nationally recognized formal entity called Youth MOVE (Motivating Others through Voices of Experience) National. They were originally housed under the Federation of Families, but eventually broke off to stand on their own.

The youth movement focused on —

- Leadership training for youth and young adults to participate in advisory, policy and decision-making tables
- Amplifying youth voice at the local, state and national level
- Promoting the formation of local chapters of Youth MOVE National

The understanding of and appreciation for youth voice has led to the development of professional youth peer workers across the nation and organizations like Youth ERA and Elevate Young Professionals, which lead the field in workforce development, support and coaching of youth peers.

In 2007, Medicaid identified peer support services as an “evidence-based model of care,” opening the door for public insurance programs to start covering and funding peer services.

**History is important because it helps us understand our past, which leads to a better understanding of the present. This is the same reason we try to learn about the background and experiences of the youth we support.**

Understanding history also helps us remember that change doesn't happen overnight. Reminding ourselves of this can be helpful for avoiding unnecessary stress or burnout.

### **Review Questions:**

1. It is the coined phrase in the family movement but has been used worldwide to communicate the idea that no decision should be made without the full and intentional participation of those who will be affected by that decision.
2. This sentiment was a driving force behind the \_\_\_\_\_ — the children from the family movement grew up and developed their own voices, skills and desires for change.
3. The youth movement focused on the following 3 things:

## **Section 2:**

## **Lived Experience**



## **Lived Experience (Heads Up!)**

### **What is Lived Experience?**

YPS assert their legitimacy in youth services not only through traditional education but through the knowledge they gain from their lived experience.

**Lived experience refers to a young person's journey through systems, trauma, and/or other life challenges.**

Some examples can be...

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Foster care
- School violence
- Gang-relation
- Homelessness
- Substance use/addiction
- Trauma
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm
- Incarceration
- Bullying
- & more!

Youth Peer Supports take the knowledge they gain from their lived experience and transform it into the skill of supporting others to achieve their goals and lead happy, healthy & successful adult lives.

## Identifying Your Lived Experience

We'll be writing down areas of our lived experience on sticky notes, but you're encouraged to write them down here as well. Use this as a reference, but put stars next to the items you are not comfortable talking about with a youth or another professional.

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**Review Questions:**

1. YPS assert their legitimacy in youth services not only through traditional education but through the knowledge they gain from their \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Lived experience refers to a young person's journey through systems, trauma, and/or other life challenges. Some examples can be...

## **Section 3:**

# **Strategic Sharing**

## **Strategic Sharing (Heads Up!)**

Strategic sharing is a method for safely and effectively sharing relevant lived experience in a manner that **keeps all parties safe from re-traumatization and achieves a specific goal.**

## **History of Strategic Sharing**

The concept emerged in the 1990s from the National Foster Care Alumni Movement's push for the inclusion of young people at the decision-making table. While the movement resulted in youth voice being heard and valued like never before, many youths also reported negative experiences, such as panic attacks, depressive episodes, other mental health symptoms, and information being available to the public.

Strategic sharing was developed as a way to minimize the risk of re-traumatization and provide support to youth advocating for themselves at decision-making tables. YPS use strategic sharing principles to guide them not only in their advocacy work at the decision-making table but also in their relationships with the young people they support.

## **Strategic Sharing Do's and Don'ts**

Sharing lived experience can make a lasting impact on youth and young adults; it can inspire hope and facilitate real change.

**You are the owner of your story.** It is your right to do with it what you want. If and when you decide to share your story with a young person, you should be careful about it.

If we aren't careful about how we share, we risk re-traumatization of ourselves and the young people we work with, disrupting the empowerment process, and harming our support relationships.

**Review Questions:**

1. Strategic sharing is a method for safely and effectively sharing relevant lived experience in a manner that keeps all parties safe from \_\_\_\_\_ and achieves a specific goal.
2. True or False: You are the owner of your story. It is your right to do with it what you want. If and when you decide to share your story with a young person, you should be careful about it.

**Section 4:**  
**Youth Peer Support Specialists**

# Youth Peer Supports

**Youth Peer Supports are young adults who provide support, encouragement, and assistance to youth and young adults as they transition into adulthood.** They normally have experience in youth-serving systems, with life challenges, trauma, and/or other difficult circumstances.

## **Common Responsibilities for YPS**

YPS work with youth and young adults in a variety of ways. Some responsibilities they may have are —

- Providing one-on-one support, coaching, and advocacy
- Sharing stories of hope to promote resilience and support recovery
- Empowering and supporting youth to meet their needs
- Working with youth to identify their goals and next steps
- Assisting young people as they navigate traditional systems
- Promoting the active participation of young people in conversations with system partners and other professionals
- Encouraging young people to work toward systems change
- Facilitating groups and coordinating community events for young people
- Promoting services that foster the full integration of youth in their communities
- Engaging in decision-making and policy-planning discussions at the local, state, and national level

These responsibilities may depend on the type of program they are working in, the source of funding for their program, their skills, and the needs of the young people they are supporting.

## **Basic Characteristics and Qualifications**

Each YPS should have —

- Passion and enthusiasm for their work
- A willingness to listen to and learn from peers



- Empathy and compassion for youth and young adults
- The ability to be flexible and willing to adapt to the changing needs/ circumstances of young people
- Effective communication and problem-solving skills
- Ever-expanding knowledge and willingness to share what they know

### **Roles of a YPS**

YPS play different roles in different situations — often multiple roles in the same situations! They will take the role of **peer** — of equal standing and belonging to the same societal group or sharing distinct characteristics with the population they are supporting.

They will take the role of **advocate** — arguing for or publicly supporting a cause or policy. They will take the role of **professional** — connected to a profession and usually considered an expert.

## Review Questions:

1. True or False: Youth Peer Supports are young adults who provide support, encouragement, and assistance to youth and young adults as they transition into adulthood.
2. They will take the role of \_\_\_\_\_ — arguing for or publicly supporting a cause or policy. They will take the role of \_\_\_\_\_ — connected to a profession and usually considered an expert.
3. True or False: YPS play the same roles in different situations — often multiple roles in the same situations!

**Section 5:**  
**Youth Peer Support**

## Youth Peer Support

### What is Peer Support?

Peer support is a non-clinical service wherein peers who have faced similar situations or circumstances offer and receive support to others who are currently in those situations based on **respect, shared understanding, and mutual empowerment**.

The goal of youth peer support aims to support youth and young adults in overcoming the challenges in their lives and build critical skills on their paths to adulthood.

Peer services can include —

- Emotional support
  - Examples: holding one-on-one meetings for youth to share their thoughts and feelings, mentoring and providing guidance, providing recovery coaching/support, supervising youth-led support groups
- Informational support
  - Examples: sharing ways to cope with mental health and other life challenges, exploring relevant health and wellness information, providing ways to learn new life skills and gain valuable life experience
- Instrumental support
  - Examples: assisting with applications, resume building, and assignments, providing transportation support, identifying and connecting to community resources
- Companionship
  - Helping youth feel connected and enjoy being with their peers, organizing

youth focused events where peers can meet, interact and form friendships

### **Who Can Benefit From Peer Support?**

**Peer support is valuable for everyone**, including —

- Those currently receiving formal system services
- Those pursuing an alternate path to wellness
- Those considered “yet-to-be-connected” to services
- Those navigating youth-serving systems (mental health, juvenile justice, education, child welfare, addictions/recovery)
- Those who are part of underserved populations/communities
- Those who are experiencing or have experienced challenging events or circumstances (death of a loved one, homelessness, parental divorce, self-harm)

### **Features of Peer Support**

Peer support...

- Can be delivered in a variety of settings
- Reduces stigma attached to receiving services and normalizes support for system-wary youth and young adults
- Offers flexible and person centered hours/availability
- Can serve as an entry point to receiving services or the a re-entry point for those who have previously disengaged from services
- Helps repair bridges to traditional services (i.e. therapy) through advocacy and by walking alongside youth in the navigation process

## **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: Peer support is a clinical service wherein peers who have faced similar situations or circumstances offer and receive support to others who are currently in those situations based on respect, shared understanding, and mutual empowerment.
2. Peer services can include \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Peer support...

**Section 6:**  
**Ethics and Boundaries**

# **Ethics and Boundaries**

Becoming a Youth Peer Support means agreeing to perform your essential job functions ethically.

## **Ethical Decision-Making**

To investigate a decision you are trying to make, you should ask yourself the following questions —

- Who has the potential for being harmed?
- How great is the risk of harm?
- What laws, organizational policies, or general ethical standards apply?

Being a Youth Peer Support is a profession where you will be engaging with several community partners and reflect the agency you work for. Whether you are on the clock or not, these points still hold true.



# Missouri Credentialing Board Youth Peer Support Code of Ethics



## Introduction

This document is the foundation for standards which will enable the credentialed professional to measure the propriety of his or her conduct in dealing with peers, other professionals and other members of the community. All professionals credentialed by MCB are expected to thoroughly familiarize themselves with their Code of Ethics. The Board is committed to investigate and sanction those who fail to abide by its standards.

*Note: All of the principles and ethical standards have been identified with a dual range of seriousness (except for a few that have only one option available). The intention of this guide is to assist the investigators and the Ethics Committee in applying an 'indication' of seriousness to the hearing panels so that a more standardized method of sanction can be used when applied. All agree that there may be "extenuating circumstances" that differentiate seriousness for violations, i.e., some violations may be a result of oversight or carelessness, when others are clearly intentional and without remorse. With any "SUBSTANTIATED VIOLATION", it is now an expectation that there will be an attached level of seriousness being suggested by the Investigators and the Committee. Those levels are;*

*S = Serious*

*VS = Very Serious*

*ES = Extremely Serious*

Youth Peer Supports (YPS) will maintain high standards of professional conduct and ethics as embodied in the statements below:

1. YPS will be guided by the principles of self-determination for all. The primary responsibility of peer support is to help individuals achieve their own needs, wants and goals. (S)
2. YPS will maintain high standards of personal conduct, modeling accountable relationships, and fostering wellness and self-care along with their own recovery. (VS/ES)
3. YPS will share with peers and colleagues their recovery stories and will likewise be able to identify and describe the supports that promote their own recovery. (S)
4. YPS will respect the privacy and confidentiality of private information shared by individuals utilizing peer support services or other related professional services at the organization. Unless necessary for supervision, required by law, or otherwise consented to by the individual personally, no confidential information will be revealed to anyone. (S/VS/ES)

5. YPS will at all times, respect the rights and dignity of those they serve. (S/VS)
6. YPS will keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery and share this knowledge with their colleagues and those they serve. (S)
7. YPS will never intimidate, threaten, harass, use undue influence, physical force or verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to the individuals they serve. (VS/ES)
8. YPS will not engage in romantic or sexual intimacies with the people utilizing peer support services in the organization where the YPS is providing services. YPS will not engage in romantic or sexual intimacies with an individual the YPS has provided peer services to for a period of 5 years after the peer relationship has been terminated. YPS does not provide peer support services to anyone with whom they've had romantic or sexual intimacies in the past. (ES)
9. A YPS shall not initiate or cultivate a personal relationship once the professional peer relationship has ended with a former peer for a period of five years. This may include, but is not limited to: familial, social, romantic/sexual, financial, business or other types of close personal relationships with former peers. (VS/ES)
10. YPS will practice unconditional positive regard connected to ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or state. (S/VS)
11. YPS will advocate for those they serve that they may make their own decisions in all matters, including when dealing with other professionals. (S/VS)
12. YPS will advocate for the full integration of individuals into the communities of their choice and will promote the inherent value of these individuals to those communities. YPS will be directed by the knowledge that all individuals have the right to live in the least restrictive and least intrusive environment. (S/VS)
13. YPS will strive to avoid dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of those they serve. When a dual relationship or conflict can't be avoided, the YPS informs a supervisor of the relationship or conflict and strives to ensure the individual is not exploited in any way. (ES)
13. YPS will not exchange gifts of significant monetary value with those they serve. (S/VS/ES)
14. YPS will take responsibility for maintaining the integrity and quality of job performance. This includes using work time to the advantage of the peers and always giving the best effort on the job. (S/VS)
15. YPS will strive through words and actions to create a professional atmosphere in the work environment. YPS will use people first language and avoid stigmatizing

language. YPS will not use derogatory language in their communications, whether written or verbal. YPS will avoid negative criticism of colleagues. (VS/ES)

16. YPS will fairly and accurately represent themselves and their capabilities to the peers and the community. (S/VS)

17. YPS will maintain a safe and healthy work environment. (S/VS)

18. YPS will provide services to meet the identified needs of the peers and avoid providing services that are unnecessary or not capable of producing the desired effect. (VS/ES)

19. YPS will not use illegal substances under any circumstance. YPS will not use a prescribed medication in a non-prescribed way and will only use over the counter medication for its intended use. (ES)

20. YPS will not use relationships with individuals utilizing peer support services for financial gain or put the individual at risk of exploitation or harm. (ES)

21. YPS shall report any felony or misdemeanor conviction to the Missouri Credentialing Board within 30 days of the date of conviction. (VS/ES)

22. YPS will report to the MCB any violation of an MCB Code of Ethical Practice and Professional Conduct whether this violation was a self-violation or a violation by another credentialed professional (VS/ES).

| Serious                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Very Serious                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Extremely Serious                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Additional Education:<br>Ethics, Counseling<br>Techniques, specific<br>drugs, other trainings<br>Increased Supervision<br>Reprimand<br>Denial of Credential or<br>Application<br>Reading/Written Reports | Suspension of Credential<br>Suspension of Application<br>Additional Education:<br>Ethics, Counseling<br>Techniques, specific<br>drugs, other trainings<br>Referral for MH assessment<br>Referral for Substance Use<br>Disorder Assessment<br>Denial of Credential/<br>Application<br>Web Posting<br>Agency Notification | Revocation for ____ time<br>Suspension for ____ time<br>Denial of future Credential/<br>Application<br>Agency notification<br>Web Posting<br>Requires permission before<br>applying for credential |

Special Note: Unconditional Positive regard is the basic acceptance and support of a person regardless of what the person says or does, especially in the context of person-centered service.

## **Unclear Boundaries**

Boundaries are limits established to enable YPS to build and maintain safe relationships with the youth they support.

Boundaries help YPS —

- Support youth without becoming youth
- Be friendly but not friends with youth
- Understand the limits of their role as a peer support provider
- Role model effective communication and professionalism
- Avoid the rescuer role
- Stay focused on helping youth meet their needs
- Avoid burnout or compassion fatigue
- Maintain their physical and emotional safety

## **Establishing Boundaries**

Effective peer support relies on mutual relationships that focus on youth engagement, building rapport, and walking alongside the youth in their journey. It's helpful to view relationships between you and the young people you work with through an intimacy continuum made up of the following zones —

- Zone of Safety (always okay)
- Zone of Vulnerability (sometimes okay and sometimes not)
- Zone of Abuse (never okay)

## **When Helping is Harmful**

Although YPS naturally and sincerely want to help others, they must remember that helping too much often results in unintended harm.

Helping too much can —

- Diminish a youth's sense of self-efficacy
- Disrupt the empowerment process
- Trivialize goal-setting
- Cause the YPS to burn out
- Lead to codependency
- Reinforce problematic behaviors
- Neglect opportunities for growth/skill-building

The most helpful thing you can do as a YPS is to support the youth you serve to move toward positive development and encourage them to believe in their ability to do things for themselves.

## **Review Questions:**

1. To investigate a decision, you are trying to make, you should ask yourself the following three questions:
2. As an YPS, you are responsible for knowing the YPS Code of Ethics. There will be questions on your exam taken directly from the YPS Code.
3. True or False: The most helpful thing you can do as a YPS is to support the youth you serve to move toward positive development and encourage them to believe in their ability to do things for themselves.

**Section 7:**  
**Professional Conduct**

# Professional Conduct

Every agency and organization will have their own dress code and expectations for the youth they employ. The following tips are designed to serve as a general guide for young professionals navigating their responsibilities as peer supporters. You're encouraged to speak with your supervisors with specific questions or concerns regarding your employer's dress code.

## Dress Code for Peer Supporters

As a YPS, you perform a wide variety of job functions. The dress codes they follow are widely variable and often flexible. Some of the potential job duties you may have include —

- Providing one-on-one peer support
- Advocating for youth needs in school
- Leading team meetings
- Participating on committees
- Speaking to system partners at conferences

In some of these roles, you will be expected to dress professionally due to representing your agency or organization in the public eye. This serves to legitimize your role and gain the respect of colleagues, as the position of YPS is still very new to the workforce.

Other roles in your position look very different, as you also serve as a peer when meeting one on-one with youth. **Dressing too formally risks over-professionalizing the peer support process, which can result in youth who are less likely to participate long-term.**

Dressing in a more casual and youth-friendly manner makes it easier for YPS to build rapport and develop trusting peer relationships with the youth they support. However, you should still model a professional look and good hygiene practices. Avoid pajamas, or clothing with references to drugs, sex, or disrespectful remarks.



Your appearance tells a story about you — when it comes to showing tattoos, piercings, and other parts of your physical story (such as scars), remember that they are also part of your story, and that **your story is your own to reveal or not reveal.**

If you need to be in more than one role or place throughout a day or a trip, you may want to pack a change of clothes in a bag to ensure you're prepared for whatever the day may bring. Look at your schedule beforehand to determine what the best options are for you.

### **Professional vs. Youth Language**

Acting as a peer, an advocate, and a professional requires you to be multilingual, so to speak. You'll be required to speak to a multitude of people in ways they can relate to and understand. Remembering the lines between professional language and youth language can help you to relate to the people you're communicating with — they can also help you to bridge the gaps between the two when advocating for youth voice and mentoring youth to advocate for themselves.

**Review Questions:**

1. As a YPS, you perform a wide variety of job functions. The dress codes they follow are widely variable and often flexible. Some of the potential job duties you may have include —
2. True or False: Dressing in a more casual and youth-friendly manner makes it easier for YPS to build rapport and develop trusting peer relationships with the youth they support.

**Section 8:**  
**Confidentiality and Mandatory**  
**Reporting**

# Confidentiality & Mandatory Reporting

Keeping something confidential means keeping the thoughts, feelings, and experiences a person shares private. Most organizations have confidentiality rules and procedures for employees who handle personal and other sensitive information. These rules typically aim to assist providers as they are faced with having to make decisions and answer difficult questions.

Some of the most common ethics violations in peer support are breaches of confidentiality. In addition to your agency's rules, it is crucial that YPS understand the laws and regulations that govern confidentiality in their state.

## The Value of Confidentiality

**Effective peer support depends on an atmosphere of trust and confidence** in which the participant is willing and able to honestly and completely disclose facts, memories, emotions, and fears. Due to the often-sensitive nature of the subjects discussed in peer support, **the disclosure of the information shared may cause the participant undue hardship**, including but not limited to embarrassment, shame, emotional distress, and physical danger (i.e. threats, self-harm).

When supporters are transparent about the legal limits to confidentiality, YPS can build trusting, long-term support relationships with youth. The youth they serve can also make informed decisions about what they share with YPS.

## Protected Health Information

Health care providers have always been required to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their patients' health information. While YPS are not healthcare providers in the traditional sense, they do provide mental health support services to vulnerable populations. For this reason, **YPS are ethically obligated to maintain the confidentiality of any health information they receive from the young people they support.**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), passed in 1996, was created to establish baseline security and privacy standards to protect participants' medical records and other protected health information (PHI).

For peer support, PHI describes any information that is created or received by a YPS that relates to —

- A young person's past, present or future mental or physical health Treatment, care, or services provided to a young person
- Past, present, or future identifying information (name, address, date of birth, Social Security number, phone number, photographs)

### **Basics of Securing PHI**

Protected Health Information can take many forms —

- Verbal or written information
- Information stored in computer files
- Information stored in paper files/notes

The same confidentiality standards apply to conversations between YPS and the youth they support that apply to notes and records. Each organization or agency will have its own procedures for securing PHI.

The following basic guidelines are recommended for ensuring confidentiality in peer support —

- When taking notes, limit the use of identifying information and use initials when necessary
  - Use double lock protection for all written protection (ex. using locked boxes containing PHI)
  - Password protect (encrypt) all electronics and electronic files, including via email
  - Shred or delete any unnecessary documents that contain PHI
- Waiving Confidentiality

Participants have the option to waive their right to confidentiality if they wish to allow the YPS to share information with their friends, family, and/or other providers. Requirements may include but not be limited to: Release of Information filled out correctly and signed-if under 18 (and not emancipated) must have guardian signature. Please refer to your agency for specific policy and protocols concerning ROI's.

A young person typically waives confidentiality so that the YPS can communicate with family members, supervisors, social workers, counselors, and other providers. In these cases, the young person must sign and date an ROI (Release of Information) that states what information can be shared and with which parties.

**YPS must make sure the waiver has not expired and that it specifically names the person before sharing any information with an outside party.**

For this reason, it's critical that YPS remain professional and respectful in all communications with youth and young adults.

### **Exceptions to Confidentiality**

In Missouri, information is considered confidential **unless during the exchange of services (i.e. peer support, therapy, medical care) the professional judgment of the provider (i.e. YPS) indicates a clear and immediate danger to others.**

Agencies or organizations reinforce these standards by indicating through their policies and procedures situations wherein confidentiality cannot be maintained.

They include when —

- There is disclosure of child abuse or neglect
- There is disclosure of elder abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation
- There is disclosure of abuse toward someone who experiences a disability
- There is disclosure of abuse toward someone who experiences mental illness
- A youth expresses the desire and/or a plan to harm others

- There is a need to discuss a youth with a supervisor

In these situations, the YPS as a Mandatory Reporter must report the information to the appropriate authorities.

## **The Duty to Warn**

At the same time, YPS must also recognize that their responsibility extends not only to the youth they support, but to society at large. This means that **there are certain circumstances wherein the information shared necessitates disclosure to protect vulnerable individuals (including the youth themselves) from harm.**

Examples of this include —

- Threats of mass violence
- Disclosure of plan to attempt suicide
- Threats against another youth

**If one of the youth a YPS supports says that they plan to hurt someone else and they identify a specific target and/or have the means/ability to carry it out, then they are obligated to warn the person who has been targeted.** This is called the “duty to warn” and it must be taken seriously.

**When it is unclear if the young person is a danger to themselves or others, the YPS must contact their supervisor immediately to develop a plan of action.**

At this point, YPS can still maintain confidentiality by not revealing the person’s name (ex. “I’m working with a youth who...”

In these cases, it is recommended to document —

- An assessment of the threat made by the young person
- An assessment regarding the identity of the targeted person
- An assessment regarding the young person’s ability to carry out the stated threat

- Any attempts made to contact law enforcement and/or the targeted person

### **Telling Youth You're a Mandatory Reporter**

YPS are mandatory reporters because they have regular contact with vulnerable individuals (i.e. youth) and are therefore **legally required to make a report when abuse or neglect is either observed or suspected**. YPS must be transparent about their obligations as mandatory reporters and explain their duties in a way that is easy to understand.

**It is important to be careful about how we communicate these obligations to avoid confusion or feelings of betrayal in the future and preserve trust in your support relationship long term.**

An example of something a YPS might say:

**"I'm here for you and more than willing to listen to whatever you would like to share."**

Confidentiality is very important to me, and I will do my best to make sure that anything you tell me isn't shared without your permission. However, there are some exceptions. I am required by law to report any instances of abuse and neglect. I will always do my best to let you know if and when I'm going to make a report."

### **Making a Mandatory Report**

YPS serve as mandatory reporters 24 hours a day, seven days per week. Reports must be made as soon as possible regardless of if you observe the abuse or neglect during work hours or on personal time.

The following basic steps can help YPS feel more confident making a mandatory report —

1. **Decide if you need to make a report —**



a. Report if you have reasonable cause to believe that any member of a protected class has suffered (or may suffer) abuse, neglect, or another act of violence.

b. Trust your gut. If you think you should, do. Even if the incident happened ten years ago, report it.

c. **Always contact your supervisor for support and guidance.**

d. Remember that it is not your job to be an investigator. This means —

i. Not sure if it's true? = Report it.

ii. Did it happen a long time ago? = Report it.

iii. Not sure who the "victim" is? = Report it.

iv. Don't have all the details of what happened? = Report it.

v. A youth told you they have plans to hurt themselves or someone else? = Report it.

vi. Only have a gut feeling that something isn't right? = Report it.

2. Gather the information you need.

a. Name of the child

b. Name of the parent(s)

c. Name of the alleged abuser

d. Where the child can be located

3. You may also be asked —

a. What are the worrying behaviors that you are calling about today?

b. What happened to the child/children as a result of the worrying behaviors?

c. What are you most worried will happen to the child/children if nothing in the family changes?

d. What actions have been taken other than making this call?

e. Is there anything going on in or around that family that would make this situation more difficult to handle?

f. What are the best aspects of the adult's care for the child/children?

g. What needs to happen differently for you to be confident the children are safe enough?

h. On a scale of 1-10 where 10 means the child is completely safe right now

and means that if no action is taken, the child could be seriously hurt or injured in the next 24 hours, where would you rate this family?

4. Give the youth the option to be involved.

- Give them the option of making the call with you, making the call themselves, or having you make the call independently. This establishes their power and fulfills your commitment to remaining youth-driven.
- Identify the agency or authorities you need to notify.
- When deciding which authorities to contact, focus on the person(s) who has been harmed or is in danger of being harmed and choose from the following age and ability categories —

i. The Children's Division Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (CA/NHU) 1-800-392-3738

ii. If it is an emergency or life-threatening situation, call 911 immediately and then report it directly to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

5. Make the report.

- Provide as much information as you have.
- Ask them to record that you called even if the incident has already been reported.
- Record the name of the person you reported to and the case number.
- Provide your contact information for them to call you if they have any further questions.

6. Safety plan and follow up.

- Work closely with the youth to develop a safety plan. It's good to have numbers for hotlines and other 24-hour services on hand.
- Check-in with the youth regularly and do a welfare check if necessary.

- Focus your efforts on maintaining trust and rapport in your support relationship.

### **Reporters, Not Investigators**

While YPS are required to report observed and suspected cases of abuse and neglect, **they are not required to, and should in no circumstances, serve as investigators.** There is no reason to ask youth unnecessary questions or try to get to the bottom of the suspected abuse/neglect.

Doing so has the potential to shame the youth and disrupt the support relationship. The YPS's only job is to **report** and not to assume or attempt to determine —

- Whether the person is guilty or not
- Whether the incident happened too long ago
- If the person was lying or joking

YPS should use this as an opportunity to **make sure the youth knows that you believe them and are committed to making sure they are safe.**

## **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: YPS serve as mandatory reporters 24 hours a day, seven days per week. Reports must be made as soon as possible regardless of if you observe the abuse or neglect during work hours or on personal time.
2. At the same time, YPS must also recognize that their responsibility extends not only to the youth they support, but to society at large. This means that there are certain circumstances wherein the information shared necessitates disclosure to protect vulnerable individuals (including the youth themselves) from harm. Examples of this include:
3. True or False: While YPS are required to report observed and suspected cases of abuse and neglect, they are not required to, and should in no circumstances, serve as investigators. There is no reason to ask youth unnecessary questions or try to get to the bottom of the suspected abuse/neglect.
4. True or False: Effective peer support depends on an atmosphere of trust, confidence and in certain rare instances secrecy in which the participant is willing and able to disclose facts, memories, emotions, and fears.
5. For peer support, PHI describes any information that is created or received by a YPS that relates to —

## **Section 9:**

# **Early Signs and Symptoms of Psychosis**

# Early Signs & Symptoms of Psychosis

Research in the past 20 years into the causes of psychosis has shown that there are distinct early signs and symptoms of psychosis. **Many of these signs are difficult to differentiate** as they often look like typical developmental behavior but with closer observation are actually the first signs of a serious mental illness. When intervention occurs at the time that these early signs occurs, **it is possible to reduce, delay, or possibly prevent the onset of psychosis.**

## At-Risk Mental State

Prodrome is a retroactive concept that is only appropriate for individuals already diagnosed with psychosis. Otherwise, “at -risk mental state” is more appropriate.

**The at-risk mental state is not linked with a diagnosis.** Most people in this phase will not develop symptoms beyond this point. However, their symptoms may become chronic.

These are the characteristics of at-risk mental state —

- Mood disturbance
- Increasing anxiety
- Sustained loss of functioning or decline in functioning from baseline, e.g. decline in school attendance, drop out of school, employment problems, decline in education performance, poor hygiene, sleep disturbance, etc.
- Presence of sub-threshold psychotic symptoms, i.e. occasional auditory hallucinations or episodes of suspiciousness beyond normal reasoning

Early signs and symptoms can include cognitive changes affecting areas such as:

- Olfaction (sense of smell)
- Working memory
- Information processing speed

- Sensory changes
- Affective changes (the manner in which we deal with things emotionally)
- Low-level or intermittent symptoms of psychosis

These can cause:

- Increased difficulty at school or work
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly
- Suspiciousness or mistrust of others
- Changes in the way things look or sound
- Odd thinking or behavior
- Emotional outbursts
- Poor personal hygiene

**Review Questions:**

1. True or False: When intervention occurs at the time that these early signs occurs, it is possible to reduce, delay, or possibly prevent the onset of psychosis.
2. Early signs and symptoms can include cognitive changes affecting areas such as:



**Section 10:**  
**Recovery**

# Recovery

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential. It should also be noted that recovery isn't just about addiction — it can be viewed using a much wider lens.

This is a very personal experience which means something different to everyone. Each person's recovery path is different because each person has their own unique needs and lived experiences. Even the official definition is considered "working" because it is always changing as people provide feedback.

## 10 Guiding Principles of Recovery

SAMHSA has identified 10 guiding principles that enhance recovery.

1. Recovery emerges from hope
2. Recovery is person-driven
3. Recovery occurs via many pathways
4. Recovery is holistic
5. Recovery is supported by peers and allies
6. Recovery is supported through relationships and social networks
7. Recovery is individually based and influenced
8. Recovery is supported by addressing trauma
9. Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibility
10. Recovery is based on respect

## Dimensions that Support Recovery

Four major dimensions support life in successful recovery.

1. **Health** — overcoming or managing health symptoms and making informed choices that support emotional and physical wellbeing

- a. Examples: abstaining from the use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and non-prescribed medications if one struggles with addiction; doing regular self-care activities; getting regular exercise; practicing intuitive eating habits

2. **Home** — having a safe and stable place to live

3. **Purpose** — participating in meaningful daily activities and practices

- a. Examples: work, school, volunteering, caretaking, creative projects

4. **Community** — engaging in and maintaining positive relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope

- a. Examples: friends, mentors, family members, romantic partners, sports teams, clubs

These dimensions are things we hope to foster with all the young people we serve (not just those in recovery) and especially with those who experience higher needs. No two recovery pathways are the same, and what works for one person won't necessarily work for another.

This framework can help us look at each youth from a more holistic perspective and assess the needs of each dimension in their life.

**Review Questions:**

1. The four major dimensions support life in successful recovery are:
2. True or False: Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential. It should also be noted that recovery isn't just about addiction — it can be viewed using a much wider lens.

**Day 2:**  
**Youth Peer Specialist Training**

**Section 11:**  
**Trauma Informed Care, Respect, and**  
**Safety**

**What is Trauma? Trauma is rooted in a sense of loss.** Trauma can be the result of what has been done to us, what we have done to ourselves and others, and/or what we fail to do.

Discussion: What are some experiences or events that can be traumatic to someone?

- Trauma refers to intense and overwhelming experiences that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well-being.
- These experiences may occur at any time in a person's life. They may involve a single event or may be repeated events over many years.
- Any trauma experiences that overwhelm the person's coping resources can often lead the person to find a way of surviving that may work in the short term, but may cause serious harm later in life.

**Traumatization occurs when internal and external resources are not enough to cope with a real or perceived threat (van der Kolk, 1989).**

The impacts of Trauma

- Trauma damages our sense of control, understanding, and purpose
- Trauma affects physical, social, and emotional health and wellbeing over the lifetime
- Trauma shapes neuro-physiological development

## **Trauma Informed**

It is important to remember that Trauma does not excuse behaviors! It helps us understand the behaviors and our own reactions.

So what do we do?

We need to presume that people have a history of traumatic stress and exercise **universal precautions** by providing services that are **compassionate**.

As Youth Peer Specialists our job is to provide Trauma Informed Care. It is not our job to try to fix the trauma- that's what trauma specific treatment is for.

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

The **How:** compassionate service delivery

Sensitive practices that can be implemented anywhere by anyone

### **Trauma-Specific Treatment**

The **What:** specific clinical services

Therapeutic interventions implemented by trained clinicians

### **The Principles of Trauma informed care**

1. **Safety:** Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how traumatic events may impact safety across the lifespan.

Domains of Safety

- Physical: free from injury to the body; environment that evokes ease

In the following domains, safety is fostered through the experience of connection and belonging.

- Social: free from bullying and peer isolation; connected to people/belonging
- Moral: free from persecution for belief; Individuality is celebrated
- Psychological: free from emotional distress, fear, anxiety, shame; compassion is a practice and mindfulness is promoted

2. **Trustworthiness:** Foster genuine relationships and practices that build trust, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries and creating norms for interaction that promote reconciliation and healing. Understand and respond to ways in which power can affect the development of trusting relationships.

3. **Choice:** Maximize choice, addressing trauma and the experiences surrounding it impact both perceptions about and ability to act upon choice.

4. **Collaboration:** Honor transparency and self-determination, and seek to minimize the impact of power differentials while maximizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for making meaningful decisions.



**5. Empowerment:** Encouraging self-efficacy, identifying strengths and building skills which leads to individual pathways for healing while recognizing and responding to the impact of historical trauma and oppression.

### **Putting principles into practice**

#### **Safety**

- Use a respectful and compassionate manner to support belonging
- Speak in a calm, caring tone
- Take time to familiarize the person with the surroundings and available resources & supports
- Actively listen without judgment
- Ensure inclusive and equitable treatment for everyone

#### **Trustworthiness**

- Ask the person how you can help them
- Listen to understand the perspective and experience of the person
- Tell the person what to expect and how long it will take
- Explain all instructions in terms the person can understand
- Do what you say you are going to do; apologize if you are not able to or if you made a mistake

#### **Choice**

- Allow the person to decide where to sit / stand in the room
- Give choice for where difficult conversations will be held
- Provide as many choices without compromising safety
- Seek consent and explain rationale for actions and instructions
- Make sure you can follow through with choices provided

#### **Collaboration**

- Be inclusive and equitable in sharing information
- Listen to understand and not necessarily respond or “fix”
- Allow the person to problem-solve independently, offering support when needed
- Provide opportunities to take on leadership roles
- Acknowledge individual and shared responsibilities

#### **Empowerment**

- Ask “What happened to you” rather than “What is wrong with you?”
- Pay attention to body cues; many survivors have been conditioned to be passive and defer to authority and so may not disclose distress

- Take time with the person so they feel genuinely heard
- Ask the person what they need to meet their goals
- Model and build self-confidence, celebrating all accomplishments, large or small

### **Review Questions- Session 11 & 12 Trauma Informed Care:**

1. What are 3 internal resources and 3 external resources

2. What question is the appropriate question to ask someone who has experienced Trauma?

3. What is the difference between Trauma Informed Care and Trauma Specific services?

4. What are the 5 principles of Trauma Informed Care?

When working with young people, YPS must —

- Respect norms, rituals, and values as they relate to the young person
  - Rituals — behaviors and routines that provide a sense of identity and purpose
  - Values — ideas that hold worth and dictate one's preferences and personal trajectory
  - Norms — verbal and nonverbal behaviors
- Understand that it is impossible to have a complete understanding of a person's background
- Ask the young person about their background and how they would like to be treated.
  - What name would you like me to use?
  - Would you like me to open the door for you? (If they use a wheelchair)

**Review Questions:**

1. When working with young people, YPS must —Respect\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ as they relate to the young person.

**Section 12:**  
**Youth Empowerment**

# Youth Empowerment Basics

Youth empowerment describes the process of supporting youth to use their full abilities to enhance their capacity to make informed choices and transform their lives into ones they desire.

## **What do Youth Need to Empower Themselves?**

Empowerment is not something youth can achieve overnight. It's important to be patient with youth as they proceed on their journeys to self-empowerment. YPS help youth empower themselves by providing opportunities to build skills and gain the experience necessary for them to become successful contributing members of their communities.

## **To empower themselves, youth need access to the following —**

- Non-authoritarian leadership (ex. Youth Peer Supports, wrap around youth partners, mentors)
- A safe, welcoming environment (ex. drop-in center, community group, sports team)
- Opportunities to experience and exercise power (ex. committees, advisory boards, treatment plans)
- Education, training, and opportunities to build hard and soft skills (ex. tutors or other academic support, leadership groups, this training!)
- Mentorship, development opportunities, and feedback (ex. one-on-one peer support, coaching, interview practice and feedback)

Benefits of Youth Empowerment

**Youth who are empowered —**

- Experience increased self-confidence
- Take on more responsibility
- Follow through with their goals
- Develop their voice and are able to speak for themselves
- Experience personal power and are able to act
- Can honestly express their opinions and emotions

**Review Questions:**

1. True or False: Youth empowerment describes the process of supporting youth to use their full abilities to enhance their capacity to make informed choices and transform their lives into ones they desire.
2. Youth who are empowered —

**Section 13:**  
**Positive Youth Development**



# Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) describes the intentional efforts of youth, adults, communities, agencies, organizations, and schools to optimize developmental progress by providing young people with opportunities to enhance their skills and abilities.

Unlike other approaches that aim to correct what is “wrong” with youth, PYD practitioners seek to empathize with young people before educating and engaging them in productive activities.

The term PYD is most commonly used in professional spaces but can be used to describe most of the strategies and techniques we employ as YPS. In this field, terminology often overlaps and can become confusing. **In other words — PYD is just another way to describe the work we do.**

## History of PYD

PYD grew out of the prevention field which focused on preventing individual challenges like unintended pregnancy, substance use, and suicide before they surface in youth. Over time, advocates and providers **shifted their focus toward resilience** and identified one vital strategy for achieving positive outcomes — **asset building**.

Researchers found that youth and young adults who have a diverse set of assets (or protective factors) are better able to overcome adversity and experience more positive outcomes.

Examples of protective factors are —

- Family support
- Relationships with caring adults
- Relationships with caring adults

- Positive peer groups
- Sense of self
- Confidence
- Future goals
- Community and school engagement

These findings encouraged the development of programs and interventions aimed at reducing risk and strengthening protective factors which ultimately facilitated the PYD approach.

### **Elements of PYD in Programming**

Programs hoping to foster Positive Youth Development must be able to provide **physical and psychological safety and structure, access to supportive relationships, and opportunities to serve as equal partners.**

Every PYD activity should ideally **boost self-awareness, foster connections to caring adults, and build leadership skills.** It should be noted that although PYD encourages leadership development, youth are not required to leave. We do, however, encourage youth to attend, actively participate in, contribute to, and even lead PYD activities.

## **Review Questions:**

1. PYD grew out of the \_\_\_\_\_ which focused on preventing individual challenges like unintended pregnancy, substance use, and suicide before they surface in youth.
2. True or False: Programs hoping to foster Positive Youth Development must be able to provide physical and psychological safety and structure, access to supportive relationships, and opportunities to serve as equal partners.

## **Section 14:**

# **The 40 Developmental Assets®**

## The 40 Developmental Assets

The 40 Developmental Assets are a list of identified research -based skills, relationships, behaviors, and experiences that influence the development of youth and young adults and help them to become contributing successful adults. The Asset framework seeks to provide young adults with **a clear vision of the future and the building blocks they need to transition successfully into adulthood.**

Research shows that the more “assets” a young person has, the more success they will achieve in their life.

### The Asset Checklists

These checklists are a type of strengths and needs assessment YPS can use to help young people reach goals and conquer challenges. **How you use these tools depend on the way your model is structured. *Some of these assets will need to be altered to fit the experiences and needs of each young person individually.***

### Development Opportunities

When working with youth, it is crucial to create asset development opportunities that connect with their goals. Their success depends on whether they’ve had sufficient opportunities to build the necessary assets.

### The Asset Process

The process is important because it provides the YPS with an understanding of where the youth is at and what areas should be supported. It also serves as the framework that underpins each support relationship and provides both the youth and the YPS with continuous momentum throughout the process.

## **Review Questions**

1. Research shows that the more \_\_\_\_\_ a young person has, the more success they will achieve in their life.
2. True or False: The Asset Process is important because it provides the YPS with an understanding of where the youth is at and what areas should be supported.

**Section 15:**  
**Youth Voice**

# Youth Voice

The Ladder of Youth Voice (Hart's Ladder) is an assessment tool designed to encourage service providers and other youth development professionals to think about why and how young people participate in their communities.

The ladder has 8 rungs, each describing a different degree of participation.

**Rung 8 is the optimal level of involvement, while rung 1 is the least desirable.**

The ladder is not meant to represent an entire population; instead, it represents each instance of youth voice and involvement. For example, in a classroom, 75% may experience rung 4 (youth informed) while the other 25% may experience rung 6 (youth/adult equality).

The first three rungs represent degrees of non-participation where adults hold most (if not all) of the power. The 4th and 5th represent initially intentional steps toward involvement. The top 3 rungs in the ladder describe intentional youth/adult partnerships that are designed to foster authentic engagement by youth in their communities.

## The 7/8 Debate

There is some disagreement as to which rung actually represents the ideal form of engagement. Two dominant perspectives exist — first, that shared decision-making (rung 8) has the most benefits for both parties; second, that youth are most empowered when they make decisions on their own with support from adults (rung 7).

While both arguments have merit, **the ultimate decision should be left up to individual groups** as to which rung describes the optimal level of engagement to



fit their specific needs.

*\*For more information about the ladder, the Free Child Project by Adam Fletcher has done extensive work and produced extensive materials about youth and young adult leadership/policy. To learn more, you can visit [freechild.org](http://freechild.org).*

**Review Questions:**

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ (Hart's Ladder) is an assessment tool designed to encourage service providers and other youth development professionals to think about why and how young people participate in their communities.

**Section 16:**  
**Networking & Advisory Councils**

# Networking Groups & Advisory Councils

A networking group is a supportive and skills -based environment in which youth learn about resilience, self-advocacy, and leadership. If the agency and the youth served by the agency will support it, a networking group can also progress to an advisory council, a leadership-based group in which the youth involved take part in decisions being made at the agency and take initiative on projects and advocacy which they choose.

The desired outcomes of a networking group are —

- **Provide a supportive environment for youth with lived experience** — youth will have a space to share their experiences and receive support from the other youth as well as the Youth Peer Supports facilitating the group.
- **Increase leadership skills** — youth will receive information and do interactive activities and projects that increase their leadership skills as well as their confidence in their own leadership abilities. Given the agency's collaboration, youth will be provided opportunities to use these leadership skills in their community and their agency.
- **Increase self-advocacy skills** — youth will learn more about how to advocate for themselves in their treatment as well as in their everyday life through interactive discussions, activities and projects. The group will give youth a platform to discuss the things that are important to them, and (given the youth's consent) will provide input to the YPS and the agency or organization regarding the desires and priorities of the youth.
- **Increase resilience** — youth will receive information on research related to the lived experience they want to hear about, and will learn about (non-clinical) coping and selfcare skills that will help them navigate their lived experience. They will participate in activities and discussions aimed to help them build resilience. This is still a very new program and is being updated as we learn more about how

to improve and achieve these outcomes. Many different activities, curricula, and lesson plans have been used so far and as a YPS, you will find many more! Right now, we are brainstorming networking groups and advisory councils and finding out more about how to make them the best they can be. Here is some space to take notes during our brainstorming session —

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**Review Questions:**

1. The desired outcomes of a networking group are —

**Section 17:**  
**Advocacy**

# Advocacy

Advocacy is the intentional support shown to a particular person, issue, or establishment.

## Advocacy Skills

The most effective advocates have the following skills —

- Assertiveness
  - Practice clear communication
  - Prepare solid, concise arguments to support their ideas
  - Are unafraid to disagree with authority
  - Avoid aggressive, rude, demeaning, or threatening behavior
  
- Organization
  - Maintain thorough meeting and research notes
  - Record meetings and the people they met with/spoke to in a detailed calendar
  - Utilize a to-do list with deadlines and goals
  
- Collaboration
  - Collaborate with system partners and agencies
  - Identify allies they can learn from and work well with
  - Reach out to other organizations for help
  
- Persistence
  - Commit to their goals and fight for what they believe in
  - Are able to move past frustration periods with greater ease and accomplish more than most



- Active listening
  - Seek the perspective of others
  - Listen to collaborators and dissenters to strengthen or alter their arguments
- Open-mindedness
  - Learn from others by keeping an open mind
  - Understand that dissenters bring unique value to the table and generate more effective advocacy
- Resilience
  - Overcome challenges
  - Focus on solutions, not just problems
  - Adapt to changing circumstances and settings
- Self-efficacy
  - Believe in themselves and their abilities
  - Have control over their motivation, behavior, and environment

## **Why Do Young People Need Advocates?**

It is critical for the YPS to solicit the youth/young adult's voice in conversations with system partners, caregivers, and gatekeepers, especially when they have expressed a need or desire for the YPS to act as their advocate.

YPS's intentional advocacy enable the young person to observe advocacy skills in action and provide feedback on the YPS' advocacy efforts to ensure they are adequately representing their voice.

## **The Zone of Helpfulness**

Advocates can tend to become over-involved if they're not being mindful of their role and the needs of the youth they're supporting.

Advocates can become over-involved if they're not being mindful of their role and the needs of the youth they're supporting. **It is important to be able to look for signs that you may be overinvolved or under-involved.**

Advocating for someone does not mean speaking or doing things for them that they can or want to do for themselves. Advocacy is about supporting the youth to use their own voice and working to ensure their voice is heard and shown proper respect.

**Review Questions:**

1. True or False: It is critical for the YPS to solicit the youth/young adult's voice in conversations with system partners, caregivers, and gatekeepers, especially when they have expressed a need or desire for the YPS to act as their advocate.
2. True or False: It is impossible for advocates to become over-involved in their role of supporting youths.

**Section 18:**  
**Communication Skills**

# Communication Skills

Effective communication skills are an invaluable asset for Youth Peer Support. Strong communication skills directly enhance our ability to —

- Build rapport with the youth we support
- Assist youth in creating their own goals & dreams
- Assess strengths and needs
- Provide emotional support and guidance
- Advocate for youth needs or amplify youth voice
- Motivate youth to create positive change
- Ensure that team members are informed and on the same page
- Role model positive coping skills and inspire hope

Four basic communication skills can help anyone become a confident and effective communicator.

## Preparing

Communication benefits from thoughtful preparation and planning. It is helpful for each party to have some idea of what they hope to achieve through conversation. When the situation permits, YPS should take time to think about and prepare for their conversations. You can use the five W's (Who, What, When, Where, and Why) to create a rough plan for the conversation they want to have. However, this kind of preparation isn't always practical or possible. Most of the time when we are talking to someone we've built a relationship with, we have enough information about them and their needs to navigate any conversation with a certain level of confidence.

## Nonverbal

Communication is not just about what we say. Up to 2/3 of all communication is

nonverbal and the majority of information is transmitted through visual and sensory cues.

Here are some of the ways people communicate without words —

- Posture
- Movement
- Tone of voice
- Gestures
- Objects
- Clothing
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Spatial distances
- Touch

Here are some tips for communicating nonverbally —

- Maintain a relaxed posture and face the person you are speaking to
- Nod your head (but not too often) to indicate that you are listening
- Maintain culturally appropriate eye contact and a friendly expression
- Try to avoid fiddling with objects or tapping your feet
- Use a neutral, confident, and relaxed tone of voice

Each conversation you have comes with its own context and necessitates certain verbal and nonverbal adjustments to be effective.

## **Listening**

Active listening refers to a person's efforts to understand what the other person is saying and how they are feeling.

Here are some tips for active listening —

- Give them your complete attention and limit distractions
  - Find a quiet place

- Put your phone or computer away
- Move any clutter or distracting objects out of the way
  
- Let them talk
  - Interrupting or talking too much can send the message that you don't respect the person or want to listen to what they have to say
  
- Think about *what* they are saying, not *how* you want to respond
  - Most people try to stay a few steps ahead of their conversation partners by focusing on what they are going to say next. This can make it nearly impossible for both parties to understand each other fully. Remember to take a breath and really listen to what you hear
  
- Notice their body language and other nonverbal cues
  - Crossed arms or restless movements can indicate anger or frustration
  - Rapid and high-pitched speech can indicate anger, excitement, or nervousness
  - Slow or monotone speech can indicate boredom, sadness or tiredness
  
- Keep an open mind and refrain from judging
  - Respect the person's right to feel the way they do, even if it is different from how you feel or how you think they should feel

## **Speaking**

Even when talking to a youth, everything the YPS says should encourage the conversation to continue and deepen. When speaking, YPS should avoid responding in a manner that is judgmental or closes off communication.

Here are some strategies you can use when speaking to youth or other conversation partners—

- Ask open-ended questions
- Use reflections

- Share relevant pieces of your story that support resilience

It's important not to monopolize these conversations and only share for one of the following reasons —

- Inspiring or motivating
- Highlighting their strengths
- Reinforcing your peer identity (building rapport)
- Modeling positive behaviors
- Stimulating problem-solving

## **Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions are those that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

Typically, these questions begin with "What," "How," "When," or "Where."

Some examples of open-ended questions you may want to use are —

- Who is important to you and why?
- If you could do anything right now, what would it be?
- What do you like about yourself?
- What is a hobby you'd like to try?

Here are some tips for asking effective open-ended questions —

- Try not to embed advice into your questions
- Be careful not to overwhelm the youth by asking too many questions
- Give the youth enough time to process your question before moving on

## **Reflective Listening**

Reflective listening (also known as "mirroring") is one of the most effective communication strategies YPS can practice. This is the process of seeking to understand what someone is saying, then repeating (or paraphrasing) what



you've heard, to make certain the message was heard correctly.

Reflective listening can —

- Demonstrate that you are listening to and invested in what the other person is saying  
(builds trust and rapport)
- Give the other person an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings and ensure accurate communication
- Help the listener clarify how the speaker is feeling
- Ensure the speaker feels in control of where the conversation is going
- Encourage the speaker to notice their strengths/skills

It should be noted that reflection does not equal agreement. A common misconception is that providers who use reflections reinforce a person's negative self-perception by giving the impression they agree with what's been said. In truth, reflections themselves are not indicators of agreement or approval, they simply indicate that what was said was heard and understood. Youth typically aren't sharing because they want to be judged or critiqued; usually, they are looking for acceptance.

## **Communication in Context**

Communication is always contextually-based and influenced by many internal and external factors.

There are many factors that influence communication —

- Perceptions
- Worldview
- Lifestyle
- Value system
- Educational background
- Language
- Family background

- Geographical influences
- Socioeconomic status
- Health considerations

## **Identity Considerations**

Identity is defined as the behaviors, values, traditions, languages, and beliefs that characterize a particular group. Each person's thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs are shaped to some degree by their identity.

Here are some of the ways Identity can influence communication —

- Language — we live in a multifaceted world and a country of different beliefs/Values, and English is not always a person's primary or preferred language.
  - Greetings — some people greet others by hugging or kissing them, others shake hands, and some use no physical contact whatsoever.
  - Expressiveness — some people will talk openly with anyone, display a wide range of facial expressions, and use their hands to illustrate their points. Others may be reluctant to speak with strangers and may appear guarded or shy.
  - Physical space — some people prefer to sit or stand close to the person they are talking to when having a conversation. Others prefer to keep their distance.
  - Eye contact — in some backgrounds, making direct eye contact is considered part of social etiquette. In others, making eye contact is considered disrespectful.
- Some tips for Individual considerations —
- Ask questions about each young person's background, interests, goals and concerns
  - Don't assume that youth will exhibit certain behaviors and beliefs because they are from a particular background/lifestyle
  - Think about the way your own background affects your thoughts, behaviors and beliefs
  - Ask yourself if you need to make any adjustments to your expressed beliefs and behaviors to communicate effectively with youth and fellow staff
  - Don't judge youth who are different from you or label them as having character

flaws

## **Health Considerations**

A person's health status may affect their ability to pay attention, concentrate, perceive a situation realistically, sit or stand for long periods, or make eye contact.

YPS can use the following strategies when working with youth who have a hard time paying attention, concentrating, or taking in lots of information —

- Repeat information as many times as is needed
- Provide written information they can review later
- Ask for verbal confirmation that the youth understood what you said

It is also important to be aware of any stigma a youth may have faced due to their personal health status or any other reason.

## **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: Open-ended questions are those that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”
2. Reflective listening (also known as \_\_\_\_\_) is one of the most effective communication strategies YPS can practice. This is the process of seeking to understand what someone is saying, then repeating (or paraphrasing) what you've heard, to make certain the message was heard correctly.
3. True or False: It is also important to be aware of any stigma a youth may have faced due to their personal health status or any other reason.

**Section 19:**  
**Strengths Based Approach**

# **The Strength-Based Approach**

The strength-based approach is a way of viewing youth and young adults as capable and resilient in the face of adversity.

This approach aims to recognize each young person's existing strengths to promote lasting positive change. The best way to practice being strength-based is to start looking for strengths in everyone we meet (including ourselves!).

## **Guiding Principles of Strengths-Based Practice**

1. All young people have the potential to lead the lives they desire
2. What we focus on becomes our reality
3. The language we use creates our reality
4. All youth want to succeed
5. Positive change happens in the context of authentic relationships
6. Youth values must drive the change process
7. Young people have more confidence in their ability to succeed when they are invited to start with what they already know
8. Change must be a collaborative, inclusive, and participatory process

These are not just theoretical; they reflect the real values and attitudes held by providers that shape the way we support and care for youth and young adults.

While this is not a comprehensive list, it helps us ensure that we are meeting an established standard of care.

## **From Deficits to Strengths**

Deficit-based approaches tend to —

- View young people as the cause of the challenges they face
- Focus on what's wrong instead of what's right
- Label young people as resistant, difficult, or in denial
- Provide “one size fits all” services
- Use punishment or shame to promote change

## **Further, the deficit-based approach —**

- Usually comes too late, intervening after a problem has surfaced rather than working to prevent it from happening in the first place
- Often punishes without explaining why the behavior needs changing
- Limits personal power which can result in defensiveness, low self-esteem, aggression, and/or recidivism

As the youth movement grew and our profession expanded, the potential of youth and families to thrive in the face of adversity became more and more evident and providers started to see young people as “having potential” instead of being “at-risk.”

## **How Can We Be Strength-Based?**

Remaining strengths-based means —

- Asking “what is right?” instead of “what is wrong?”
- Shifting focus from labels and diagnoses to overall wellbeing
- Believing that young people have the strength they need to reach their goals
- Serving as collaborators rather than experts in the change process
- Using strength-based language
- Helping youth identify strengths within themselves and within their peers

## **Helping Youth Identify Their Strengths**

When a young person dwells on their weaknesses, it can have a profound effect on their self-esteem and leave them feeling hopeless.

Here are some things you can do to help youth recognize their strengths —

- Use strength-based language
- Celebrate small successes like substantial milestones
- Encourage them to look for strengths in their peers

## **The Importance of Strength-Based Language**

We are often unaware of how our language impacts our attitudes as well as the world around us. As YPS, our words can either convey that we value, believe in and genuinely respect youth and young adults OR they can make it clear that we don't.

The strength approach chooses different words to describe the challenges youth and young adults face. This language enables us to see opportunities, solutions, and hope instead of problems and hopelessness.

If the strength-based approach is to be something that guides our work, it should be evident in the language we use when —

- Supporting youth
- Interacting with our coworkers and community partners
- Documenting the services we provide
- Assessing youth and programs
- Training other youth development professionals

## **The Desired Outcome**

**Resilience** is the desired outcome of the strength-based approach.

Being resilient means that you are able to overcome and recover quickly from difficult circumstances or situations.

Resilient youth —

- Feel important and appreciated
- Are optimistic and have a strong sense of hope
- Believe that they are in control of their future
- Know how to set realistic goals and expectations
- Utilize positive coping strategies
- Have effective interpersonal skills and know when to ask for help
- Understand the importance of helping others

YPS can promote resilience in youth and young adults in the following ways —

- Role-model positive coping skills

- Share lived experience to inspire hope
- Ensure that youth are driving the process
- Help youth improve their interpersonal skills
- Offer regular and dependable peer support
- Emphasize the impact of sharing your story to help others

### **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: When a young person dwells on their weaknesses, it can have a profound effect on their self-esteem and leave them feeling hopeless.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is the desired outcome of the strength-based approach.  
Being resilient means that you are able to overcome and recover quickly from difficult circumstances or situations.



**Section 20:**  
**Needs**

# Needs

Typically, we would define needs as something that a person must have to live, succeed, or be happy. For our purposes, the term “needs” can be understood as the underlying conditions or causes that lead to unwanted or challenging behaviors.

We need to have an accurate picture of each young person’s strengths and needs in order to provide individualized and effective peer support. **Youth don’t fail, plans do.** Understanding youth’s unmet needs allows us to support youth in creating a plan they will be successful in.

**It’s important to focus on building on strengths and attending to unmet needs instead of focusing on managing behavior.** If needs continue to go unmet, the challenging or unwanted behavior is likely to escalate, resulting in more misguided attempts to contain the behavior.

## Extracting Needs from Unwanted Behaviors

To find the underlying needs in any scenario, we must start by asking ourselves the following questions —

- What is the unwanted behavior or unmet need?
- What is the young person’s goal or ideal outcome?
- What message is the youth trying to send with their behavior?
- What is the theme or driving force behind the unwanted behavior?

Next, it’s important to identify needs using the driving forces and messages we’ve identified.

Here are some tips for identifying youth’s needs —

- Choose something the youth will want to focus on
- Focus on the “why” and not the “what” or “how”
- Look beyond surface deficits to find the larger unmet need
- Use descriptive terms

Once needs have been identified, the YPS should sit down with the youth to make

sure they understand how you identified each need. Finally, you should work with the youth to refine and prioritize the needs before choosing one to focus on.

**Every person's needs will be different, but our job is always to make sure that the young person's voice is what is driving the process.**

### **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: Every person's needs will be different, but our job is always to make sure that the young person's voice is what is driving the process.

**Section 21:**  
**Elevator Speech**

# The Elevator Speech

An elevator speech is a brief yet compelling way to introduce yourself and make connections by sharing your background and experience. It's called an elevator speech (or pitch) because it should be short enough to present during a short elevator ride.

Elevator speeches are typically used for networking purposes or as a job searching tool, but for YPS the purpose is slightly different.

These are the times a YPS might deliver an elevator speech —

- Conferences
- Community meetings
- Decision-making bodies
- Schools
- Community events
- Wraparound meetings

Elevator speeches are more formal than some introductions; they are typically delivered in a professional setting and follow a basic structure.

## Elements of an Elevator Speech

A great elevator speech typically includes the following elements —

- Your name, title, and the organization/agency you work for
- What makes your work unique
- Your goals for the future

## Tips for Delivering an Elevator Speech

Here are some tips and strategies for delivering your elevator speech —

- **Be brief, but don't rush** — an effective elevator speech should take no longer

than a minute. Focus on what matters; if you try to jam as much information as you can into your elevator pitch, you risk them not being able to understand you.

- **Be persuasive** — your goal for each interaction won't always be the same, but you should always aim to spark the listener's interest so that they'll remember you down the line.
- **Avoid deficit language** — remember that your goal is to spark hope in your listener. Focus on resilience and strengths, rather than deficits.
- **Make it accessible** — avoid jargon and other terms that people who are unfamiliar with peer support wouldn't know.
- **Practice** — the best way to get comfortable sharing your elevator speech is to practice; eventually, it should come naturally!

## **Review Questions:**

1. True or False: Elevator speeches are typically used for networking purposes or as a job searching tool, but for YPS the purpose is slightly different.
2. A great elevator speech typically includes the following elements —

## **Section 22:**

# **Final Review and Next Steps**

### **Thank You**

Thank you for attending the 2-day YPS training. Please ask the trainers any clarifying questions at this time.

## **Next Steps**

After the Training You Will Need To:

1. Take and Pass the YPS Exam
2. Complete the YPS Application at [www.missouricb.com](http://www.missouricb.com)
3. Contact the Missouri Credentialing Board (MCB) directly if you have any questions—573-616-2300.