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Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct Certified Peer Specialists and Trainees

Introduction

This code of ethics applies to all Washington state certified peer specialists and peer specialist trainees, guiding their interactions with participants, the participant's family members, or other supportive individuals. These guidelines are intended to work in conjunction with the Ethical Practice of Peer Support Services rules found in WAC 246-929-210 and the regulations for the profession found in both 18.420 RCW and chapter 246-929 WAC.

Vision

Certified peer specialists and trainees shall provide services with a trauma-informed, person-centered approach. Their methodology should be recovery-oriented and relationship-focused, working only with participants who are voluntarily seeking services.

Code of Ethics

With the mutual nature of peer support work, the focus must remain on the participant. To maintain the highest ethical standards, certified peer specialists and certified peer specialist trainees should:

- Conduct themselves with professional competence and integrity, in a manner that fosters the peer specialist's own recovery.
- Respect the participant's right to choose their own methods of recovery and advocate on behalf of the participants to make their own decisions in all matters, including when interacting with other health care providers.
- Maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their participants when possible. Threats to harm themselves or others must be shared with appropriate authorities and/or treatment providers.
- Share personal recovery stories and lived experience as a way of inspiring and supporting their participants to enhance their health, wellness, and recovery in a way that is relevant to the participant's needs.
- Provide support for their participants holistically through all stages of recovery and be willing to meet the participants where they are. Peers have the right to decline meeting a participant in an environment where the peer doesn't feel safe.

- Support the full integration of individuals into the community of their choice. Individuals have the right to live in the least restrictive and least intrusive environment.
- Recognize any personal challenges, barriers, circumstances, biases, behaviors, or conditions that may impact their own ability to provide care for their participants and take appropriate action.

The following guidelines should be followed to maintain professional conduct and clear, ethical boundaries between the peer and their participants:

- Do not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, religion, national origin, marital status, veteran status, political belief, disability, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition, or state.
- Respect the beliefs and values of the participants. Do not directly or indirectly impose their own values or beliefs onto the participant.
- Never intimidate, coerce, threaten, harass, use undue influence, physical force or verbally abuse the participants they support.
- Do not make unwarranted promises of benefits or outcomes.
- Do not take advantage of the peer relationship for personal benefit, material or financial gain. Do not exchange personal gifts of monetary value. Do not loan, donate, or borrow anything from each other, especially money.
- Respect the boundaries of peer work and never engage in any sexual or intimate activities with their participants or the family members of - participants.
- Do not provide services to individuals with whom the peer specialist has had a prior romantic or sexual relationship, or with the family members of those individuals.
- Do not provide services to their own family members or personal friends.
- Avoid dual relationships with participants when possible. When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, navigate with caution and in consultation with the peer's supervisor, if applicable.
- Do not perform services outside their area of training, expertise, competence, or scope of practice. Peers may not assess or diagnose the participant's mental health or substance use disorder and may not make any medical diagnosis or offer medical advice.

If you have questions or concerns about the practice of peer specialists or information about becoming a peer yourself, please visit the department's webpage at www.doh.wa.gov or call 360-236-4700.