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Put simply, a peer is a person we identify with in some capacity. This can include anything from age to gender to sexual orientation to shared language.

In behavioral health, **a peer is usually used to refer to someone who shares the experience of living with a psychiatric disorder and/or addiction.** In that narrow context two people living with those conditions are peers, but in reality most people are far more specific about whom they would rely on for **peer support. Trust and compatibility are extremely important factors.**

Peer support is the “process of giving and receiving encouragement and assistance to achieve long-term recovery.” Peer supporters “offer emotional support, share knowledge, teach skills, provide practical assistance, and connect people with resources, opportunities, communities of support, and other people” (Mead, 2003; Solomon, 2004). In behavioral health, peers offer their unique lived experience with mental health conditions to provide support focused on advocacy, education, mentoring, and motivation.

Peer providers can play many roles in support for people living with psychiatric disorders and/or in addiction recovery. They are capable of facilitating education and support groups and working as a bridge linking people to services as they transition from hospitals or jails into the community. Peers also work one-on-one as role models, mentors, coaches and advocates and support people in developing psychiatric advance directions and creating Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP).

Peers go by many names and can work in many different settings. Many peers have additional training and certification that demonstrates their skills and knowledge. Combined with their lived experience and ability to engage and connect with consumers, peer supporters are a dynamic and growing group that continue to transform lives and systems.