1. the foundations

This module will provide a foundational overview for all the modules in this training.

1. welcome

2. about this training

3. table of contents

4. our focus

5. core values

6. there is much to learn

7. you'll get out of it what you put in

8. you're a part of a larger movement

9. a monumental shift in thinking

10. engage with the material

1. welcome

welcome to
WHERE WE ARE AT

the
foundations

1

Welcome to *Where We Are At*, a training course for Provincial Peer Support Workers. We're glad you're here! This course is made up of 16 modules, all designed to support your training in peer support work.

This module, **1. the foundations**, is a bit different than other modules in this training package. Its purpose is to educate you about everything you need to know for this training.

Any of the modules in this training can stand alone, but you'll notice they are very interconnected. All of the concepts and core values have many layers, and they will look a little different when you see them through the lens of different topics. For example, self-determination, one of the core values that is essential for peer support work, will look a little different when we look at it through the lens of learned helplessness, grief and loss, or goal planning, but the main message will always be the same.

You'll get to experience all of those layers and intersections as you move through the training. Feel free to go back and forth between modules, since the modules doesn't have to be done in a speci. c order. There will be references to other modules noted throughout.

We'll cover some overarching topics that will be referenced throughout the whole training, such as:

- [ ] Interconnection

- [ ] Empathy

- [ ] Dealing with Uncertainty

- [ ] Hope, Purpose & Possibility

**Thank you** for joining us on this educational journey!

2. about this training

The course content has been guided by consultations held with peer support workers. It's with the utmost respect for their experience and wisdom that we share these learnings.

course navigation

You may have questions on how to use the course. We designed an interactive diagram to give you the chance to explore the different functions on the screen. Click the buttons below to learn more.
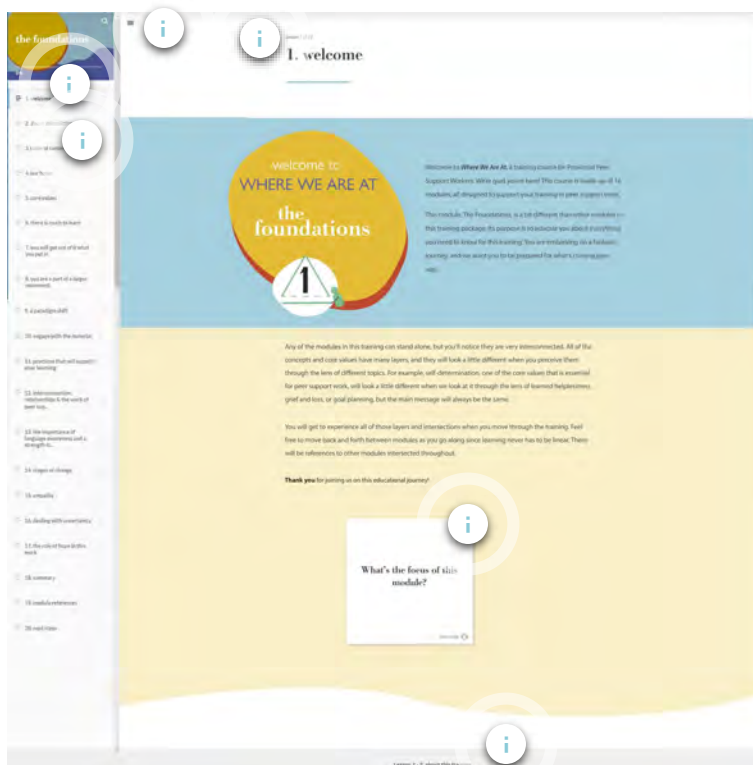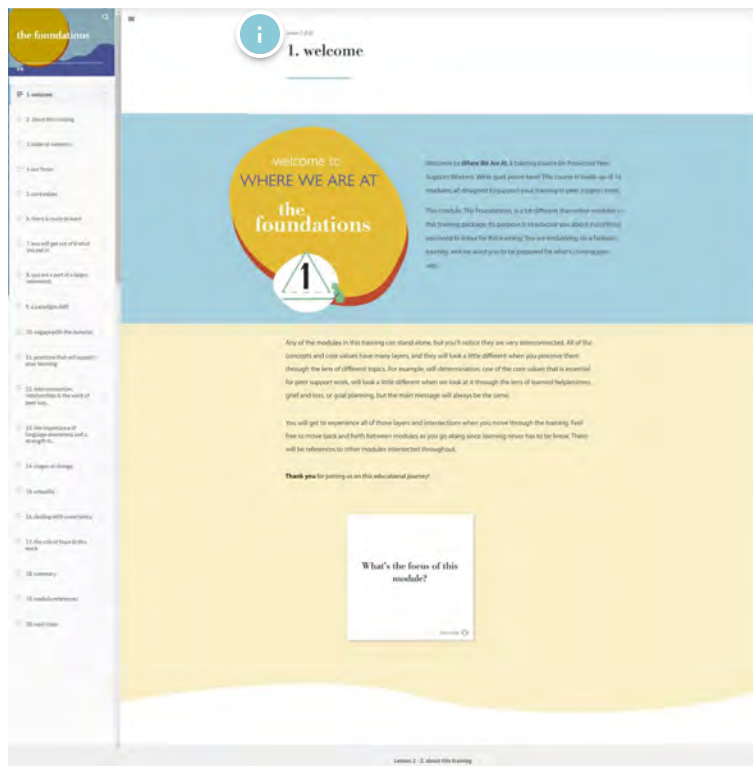
Lesson titles

Lesson 1 of 23

Above each lesson title, the lesson count is shown.

CONTINUE

reflection journal

This training includes a re. ection journal. The journal is designed for you to use throughout the modules. It's full of reflective questions related to the topics being explored, designed to support your engagement with the world around you.

Feel free to use the journal in a way that works for you:

1   You can print it off and write in it or just use it to support reflective processing.

2   You can use the fillable PDF version and complete it online.

3   You can write in your own notebook or journal, using the questions as guides.

We encourage you to find a safe, comfortable spot to engage with these questions.

PDF	**M01_reflection-journal.pdf** 66 KB	↓

CONTINUE

where we are at

provincial peer support worker training curriculum

1. the foundations

An overview of all the practices and knowledge that will be applicable to all of the modules in this training.

2. peer support & wholeness

Provides an introduction to peer support work and explores differences between the peer support role and other roles within the mental health and substance use systems.

3. categories & containers: unpacking our biases

Helps you understand how and why we judge.

4. self-determination

Looks at the concept and theory of self-determination and how peer support workers can contribute to an environment where people trust their own inner wisdom.

5. cultural humility

Explores how to approach your peer support work through the lens of cultural humility and helps you understand how culture (and the destruction of culture) shapes our lives.

6. understanding boundaries & what it means to co-create them ⎯

Examines boundary creation within the context of peer support, grounded in the core value of mutuality.

7. connection & communication ⎯

Focuses on cultivating compassion and empathy, listening deeply to understand, and asking powerful questions to increase reflection and connection.

8. healing-centred connection: principles in trauma-informed care ⎯

Brings together all the learnings from previous modules to support the creation of environments and relationships that are safe and trauma-informed.

9. social determinants of health ⎯

Explores the social determinants of health and how social, economic and other factors lead to better or worse health outcomes.

10. supporting someone who is grieving

Examines how to understand grief and loss in order to support someone who is grieving, without trying to "fix" or "save" them.

11. substance use & peer support

Explores the principles and methodologies around the harm reduction approach to substance use disorders and some of the history around the criminalization of substance use.

12. mental health & supporting those in crisis

Explores the mindset shift necessary to support someone through a crisis.

13. goal planning

Focuses on how peer support relationships can support the creation and meeting of goals.

14. building personal resilience

Explores ways to build resiliency, create wellness plans and practice self-compassion.

15. family peer support

Explores family peer support work and how family peer support workers can create positive change for families by building long-term relationships based on trust with those supporting loved ones.

16. working with youth & young adults

Explores the unique application of peer support principles to working with youth and young adults.

3. table of contents

Below you'll find a short overview of the topics you'll find in this module.

As you move through these topics, please remember you can always return to this page to revisit the main ideas being explored in each lesson.

there is much to learn

The education around peer support is vast.

you'll get out of it what you put in

References at the end of the module give you the opportunity to deepen your understanding of related topics.

you're part of a larger movement ____

See yourself as connected to a broader movement guided by dynamic leaders.

a monumental shift in thinking ____

Explores how peer support is different from traditional clinical support models.

engage with the material ____

Engagement with the materials may mean pushing through self-resistance and discomfort.

practices that will support your learning ____

Looks at how specific practices such as movement, mindfulness and journaling can enhance your learning, supportive relationships – and life in general.

interconnection, relationships & the work of peer support ____

Explores how relationships build connections and assist people to resist the pull of hyper-individualism.

the importance of language awareness & a strength-based approach in this work

Explores how word choice affects healing, and the importance of focusing attention on strengths.

empathy

Examines the role empathy plays in peer support work.

dealing with uncertainty

Looks at the role uncertainty plays in peer support work.

the role of hope in this work

Explores the role hope plays in peer support work.

4. our focus

What's the focus of this module?

To give participants a foundational overview of the practices and knowledge that will apply to all of the modules in this training.

1 of 1

after reviewing this module, you'll be able to...

Define a paradigm shift, and identify how peer support is a paradigm shift from other services in the mental health and substance use systems.

Identify peer support service approaches that are grounded in interconnection.
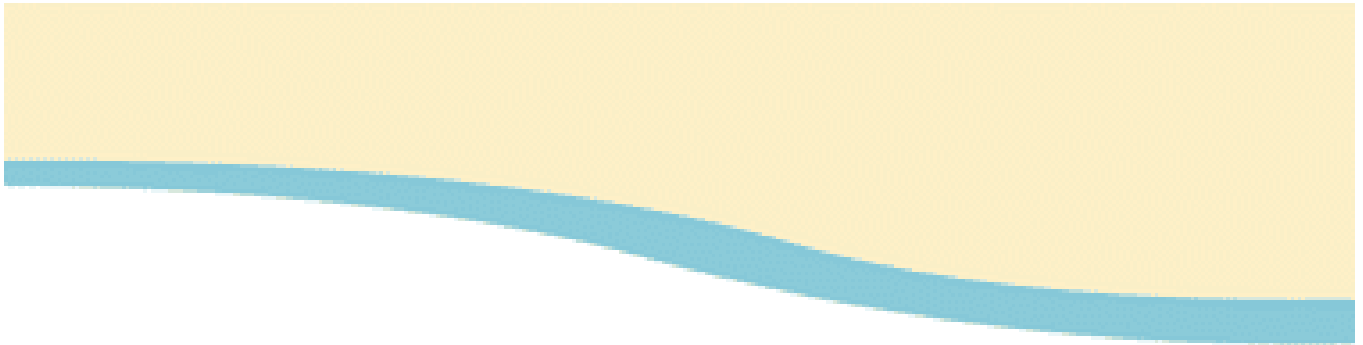
Recognize the importance of being able to sit with discomfort as you engage in the learning process.

Learn and apply practices that will support the learning process for you throughout the training and beyond.
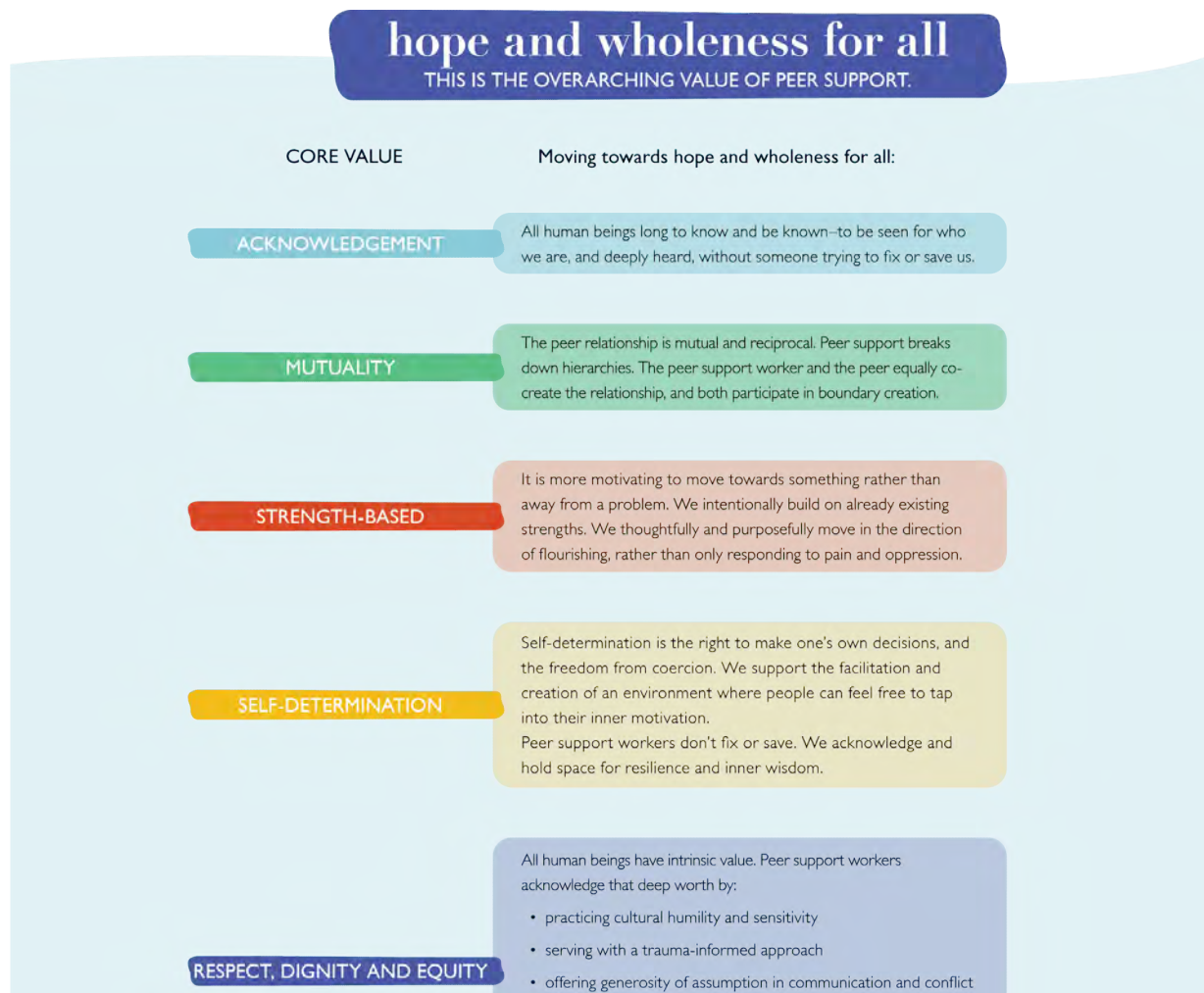
Reframe from a health care perspective that sees people merely as illnesses to cure to one that's strength-based and grounded in hope.

5. core values

The following core values are essential for peer support work.

hope and wholeness for all
THIS IS THE OVERARCHING VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT.

CORE VALUE	Moving towards hope and wholeness for all:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	All human beings long to know and be known–to be seen for who we are, and deeply heard, without someone trying to fix or save us.
MUTUALITY	The peer relationship is mutual and reciprocal. Peer support breaks down hierarchies. The peer support worker and the peer equally co-create the relationship, and both participate in boundary creation.
STRENGTH-BASED	It is more motivating to move towards something rather than away from a problem. We intentionally build on already existing strengths. We thoughtfully and purposefully move in the direction of flourishing, rather than only responding to pain and oppression.
SELF-DETERMINATION	Self-determination is the right to make one's own decisions, and the freedom from coercion. We support the facilitation and creation of an environment where people can feel free to tap into their inner motivation. Peer support workers don't fix or save. We acknowledge and hold space for resilience and inner wisdom.
RESPECT, DIGNITY AND EQUITY	All human beings have intrinsic value. Peer support workers acknowledge that deep worth by: • practicing cultural humility and sensitivity • serving with a trauma-informed approach • offering generosity of assumption in communication and conflict

- mindfully addressing personal biases

Peer support is about meeting people where there are at and serving others with a knowledge of equity.

BELONGING AND COMMUNITY

Peer Support acknowledges that all human beings need to belong and be a part of a community. Peer support recognizes that many people have barriers that keep them from developing community. We actively work towards deconstructing those social blockades that prevent inclusion and acceptance. Peer support workers serve with a social justice mindset, and intentionally practice empathy, compassion & self-compassion.

CURIOSITY

We are always intentional about how curiosity and inquiry support connection, growth, learning and engagement.

This curiosity isn't fueled by personal gain but by a genuine interest in connection. We encourage curiosity while respecting the boundaries and protecting the privacy of the people we support.

We are continually curious, but not invasive, while challenging assumptions and narratives. We ask powerful questions. We offer generosity of assumption to those who think differently than we do. We know that listening and asking questions are more important than providing answers.

*Note on the meaning of the term "generosity of assumption" from the glossary of terms: *Assumptions happen when we don't know the whole story, and allow our brains to fill in the blanks. Often we make negative assumptions about people or situations. Generosity of assumption means that we extend someone the most generous interpretation of their intent, actions, or words.*

6. there is much to learn

As in any field, there is much to learn in peer support work and the education around peer support is vast. Consider this training as an introduction to peer support work. We're covering a lot of ground, and we can't go as deep into each topic as we'd like to. Above all, we want this course to open the door for more potential learning for you!

This curriculum includes free access to our In Community training resources, which are a suite of additional learning tools developed by peer-led organizations in B.C. They go deeper into some of the topics that we only touch on in these modules – see details in the next lesson.

So many additional sources of knowledge and education from leaders of the peer support movement can be found online. Several of those leaders are mentioned in this training, including Pat Deegan, Shery Mead, Mary Ellen Copeland, Dan Fisher and many more. Please consider digging into some of the amazing material available to you online.

CONTINUE

With any education, understanding a concept is the first step. The goal here is to consider the ideas in this curriculum, reflect on them, question them, wrestle with them and eventually have these principles and practices come alive for you and help shape the way you see the world. The learning, and the deconstruction processes that go hand in hand with learning, is similar to peeling an onion. We can continue to go deeper and deeper into our learning the more we engage with it.

The most important part of learning is the process. Creating the ecology to be a lifelong learner through cultivating curiosity is much more valuable than knowing the "right" answer (we explore more about ecologies in the **self-determination** module). This process takes time and energy.

The intention of this training is not to create cookie-cutter peer support workers. Our intention is to support you as an individual to think deeply, practice compassion and engage in critical thinking. This curriculum is designed to support you as you pay attention to personal biases and learn to respond differently to them so that you feel equipped to do the important work of peer support in your community.

Please come back to this material as you need to.

7. you'll get out of it what you put in

As with any learning, you can expand your knowledge in key areas to support your future practice and broaden your skill set.

You can begin your learning journey by exploring our series of In Community peer support trainings.

in community trainings

Created by peers and peer centered organizations throughout B.C., the following In Community trainings were developed to support and amplify the Where We Are At curriculum by giving voice to individuals and organizations doing peer work on the frontlines:

title: Indigenous Peer Curriculum

organization: Canadian Mental Health Association – North and West Vancouver

summary: Development and delivery of decolonized peer support training manual and video modules.

title: Family Peer Support

organization: Family Smart

summary: Creation and delivery of a family peer support curriculum.

title: Popular Education for Forming and Sustaining Associations of People Who Use Drugs

organization: BC Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors

summary: Adaptation of pre-existing training program, the Peer Health Advocate Training (PHAT), a tool created to train people who engage in sex work in peer advocacy and support, centred around enhancing community wellness.

title: Psychiatric ER & Acute Peer Support

organization: North Shore Peer Support Program

summary: The development of specialized training for peer support workers who work or want to work in acute care/emergency department settings to provide them with role definition and skill development.

title: History of Prohibition

organization: Compassion, Inclusion, and Engagement Initiative

summary: The further development of the "History of Prohibition" lesson plan from the Coalition of Substance Users (CSUN) Train-the-Trainer project. The modules in the course could include:

- Prohibition through a gender lens

- Connections between prohibition and drug potency

title: Peer Facilitation

organization: Lookout Housing and Health Society

summary: Adapt the support group facilitator training manual to become a free, public resource for other organizations and groups across the province of B.C. with the inclusion of a video version of the training manual.

title: Hosting Community Gatherings

organization: Canadian Mental Health Association – North and West Vancouver

summary: The creation of a community education toolkit on how to host Peer or a Friend-of-a-Peer gatherings.

title: Peer Health Advocate Training for People Who Engage in Sex Work

organization: Peers Victoria Resource Society

summary: Adaptation of pre-existing training program, the Peer Health Advocate Training (PHAT), a tool created to train people who engage in sex work in peer advocacy and support, centred around enhancing community wellness.

title: Stigma Audit Tool

organization: Experiential Peer Inclusion Consulting

summary: Design and delivery of an experiential worker-designed training program consisting of a suite of open source infographics paired with accompanying onsite training and evaluations to assist organizations.

8. you're a part of a larger movement

"Knowing that you are entering into a movement that is growing day by day, year by year, a movement that will not go away, but continue to grow until all people, no matter who they are or what they have been through, are treated with the same dignity and respect that all humans deserve is a very humbling experience."

Tina Shaw

Please study and learn from leaders in the peer support movement. Look them up, and read and listen to their work. We're lucky to have many of these leaders in our own province, in our own communities. There are some who are national leaders, some who have written books and others who run programs that are known internationally. One of your projects will be to learn more about a leader or organization making a difference in this movement.

It's very important as a participant in peer support that you understand you're a part of something big and significant. It's an honour to be a part of this collective global movement.

It's essential for peer support workers to connect regularly in community of practice gatherings. Working alone without connection to other peers is a recipe for getting swept into the dominant clinical current.

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer the following questions in your reflection journal.~

Have you felt connected to something bigger than yourself before? If so, how did that feel?

How does it feel to know that you are a part of a bigger movement? What can you do to become more connected to it?

What/who do you want to
commit to learn more about in
regard to the movement?

3 of 3

9. a monumental shift in thinking

"A 'peer' is an equal, someone with whom one shares demographic or social similarities. "Support" expresses the kind of deeply felt empathy, encouragement, and assistance that people with shared experiences can offer one another within a reciprocal relationship."

Penny, 2018

CONTINUE

> "Broadly defined, "peer support" refers to a process through which people who share common experiences or face similar challenges come together as equals to give and receive help based on the knowledge that comes through shared experience."
>
> Riessman, 1989

Peers know that the most monumental changes are often personal ones driven by lived experience. That new way of seeing the world and of seeing people and the sharing of that transformation is the beating heart of peer work.

CONTINUE

Peer support is different from clinical support in many important ways. For example, the role of a peer support worker is different from that of a clinician, and the goals of the relationships are also distinct. There can be a tendency to measure peer support against other clinical roles; when we do, it can seem that peer support doesn't measure up. But looking at peer support through a clinical lens is unhelpful. When we speak of peer support, the model is so different that it's almost like speaking a different language. Peer support workers . ll a necessary gap in the system. When people with common lived experience come together, the connection that can happen is powerful, inspiring and can fuel transformation.

"Me too."

Hearing those two words can help us break through an ocean of loneliness, isolation and shame. When we're facing what feels like an insurmountable situation and we meet someone who has gone through a similar experience and has come out the other side, we often experience a great sense of relief.

It's an amazing gift to be with someone who listens deeply to us with a compassion that can only come from a mutual understanding of personal suffering.

Connection with acknowledgement and a spirit of mutuality matters. **Mutuality** is simply a positive, interactive relationship between people who share a common understanding of their obligations to each other.

Nurturing connection takes time. If we create too much busyness in our peer support work and don't leave enough space and time for that kind of connection to occur, everyone loses out on the lasting benefits of peer support.

<div align="center">

CONTINUE

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Honouring, empowering and actively applying the philosophy of peer support when integrating it into clinical systems is critical. Peer support plays a unique and potentially revolutionary role in systems transformation, but we also have to ensure that clinical systems work to make real the changes suggested by peers. When peer support is done well, it works on a micro-level with individuals and a macro-level as a social justice movement. It's important to celebrate that.

Often in B.C., peer support programs are embedded in traditional clinical systems that operate with a model different from peer support. Hiring people with lived experience disrupts that system. It's a wonderful thing to see peer services embedded in programs. However, it's essential that leaders of these systems understand the philosophy of peer support and understand that the very core of peer support goes against the prevailing culture. The dominant culture of any social system is powerful; without thoughtful intention, it's very easy for peer support to become a replica of clinical services, getting swept into the current of the dominant clinical culture.

This curriculum will guide you through the process of understanding the shift to a different way of supporting others – a service that is based on a foundation of mutuality. It's important to pause and think about what that mutuality actually means. It can be easy to speak the language of mutuality but until we unpack what supporting someone in an equitable way means, we won't fully grasp the meaning of mutuality.

In the 1990s, Magic Eye puzzles were really popular. Basically, they were two-dimensional pictures in which, if you looked at them in the right way, a three-dimensional picture would pop out. If you missed that era, search for these puzzles online – they're both fun and frustrating. Similar to those puzzles, understanding the model

change of peer support and the ways this kind of support differs from the clinical perspective, requires a different way of seeing. Just like those Magic Eye puzzles, in order to grasp the meaning, we're going to need to choose to change our perspective.

MAGIC EYE

A New Way of Looking at the World

3D Illusions by N.E. Thing Enterprises
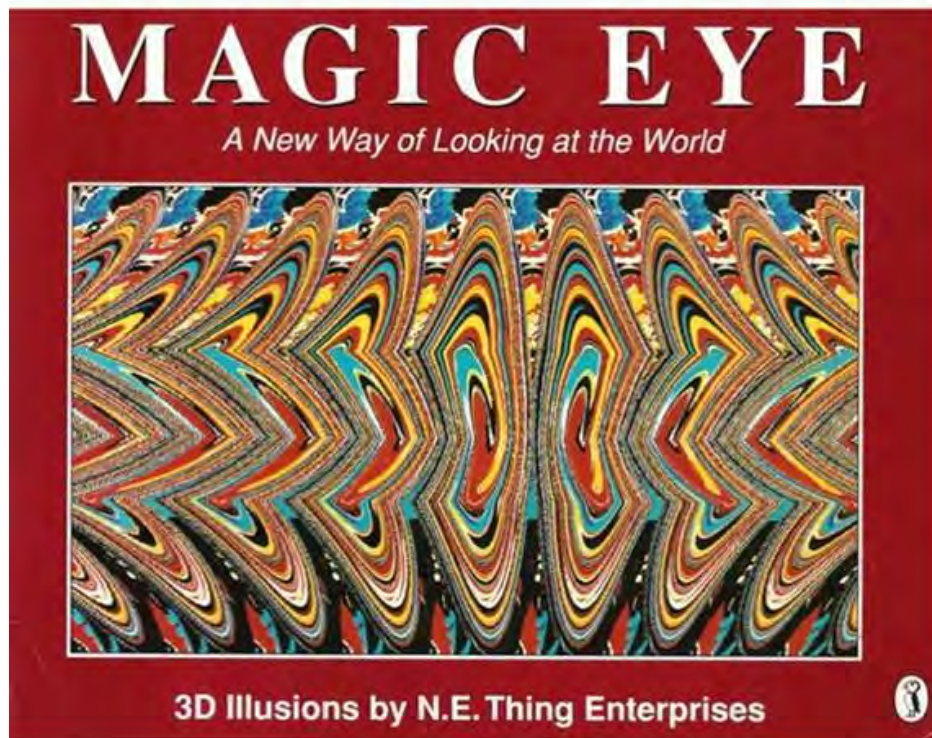
CONTINUE

> "I love helping others who don't have a voice, and I'm not afraid to be vocal if it's going to help others."

Heather

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.

Can you think of other times you have had a monumental shift in thinking? If so, what was it?

What do you think about the Darby Penny quote at the top of this page? Movements always happen as a response to powerlessness. Why do you think that is? What other movements do you align yourself with?

Have you been a part of a larger movement for a social cause? If so, what have some of the strengths or gifts been? What have some of the challenges been?

What is your personal definition of a peer? How do the communities

you are a part of define the term or do they use a different term? Consider discussing the term with your friends, co-workers and communities to find out what it means to you!

10. engage with the material

As we have already talked about, peer support is a paradigm shift. The modules that especially encourage these shifts are **3. categories & containers: unpacking our biases**, **8. healing-centred connection: principles in trauma-informed care**, **4. self-determination**, **6. understanding boundaries & what it means to co-create them** and most of the **7. connection & communication** module. One of the most powerful ways we grow and shift is through dialogue with others. If you're taking in-person training, you'll gain so much from your co-participants.

CONTINUE

welcome emotion

You can expect that as you work through the topics covered in this training, you'll have many experiences – ranging from enthusiastic agreement to calm reflection to frustration, overwhelm or resistance. Whatever feelings you're having about the content are welcome. The most important thing is to notice your feelings and to wonder where they may be coming from. Are your experiences or identities being validated in a learning environment for the first time? Are you learning content that you've never considered before? Is there a concept that doesn't currently fit with your worldview or life experience?

Whatever emotional reaction you are having is the one you need to be having – your emotions are welcome and valid. If emotions arise (or if they don't!), try your best to name what's coming up for you, root into your body, stay present and move towards those feelings by asking, "Why am I having the response that I'm having?" Practicing this self-reflection throughout your learning journey will be an invaluable skill, both for your personal wellness and in your peer support roles.

CONTINUE

We encourage you to engage with this material from a place of humility and curiosity.

We encourage diversity and critical thinking. We ask you to engage with the material from a place of curiosity. In fact, sometimes the question can be more important than the answer.

"We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined."

N. Scott Momaday

CONTINUE

question for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer the following question.

What will you do when you experience emotions as you work through this training? (Write down at least three things you'll do to support yourself.)

CONTINUE

discomfort and safety

We tend to want to run from the feeling of discomfort. By definition, it's not pleasant. Discomfort often comes paired with the assurance that pain or hard work is in our future.

We all desire to feel good, content, energized and happy. So, we chase those feelings and in that quest for the best in life, our tolerance for discomfort and uncertainty shrinks. Yet, sitting in discomfort is essential to growth work. There's just no way around it. Avoiding discomfort essentially keeps us stuck in the status quo.
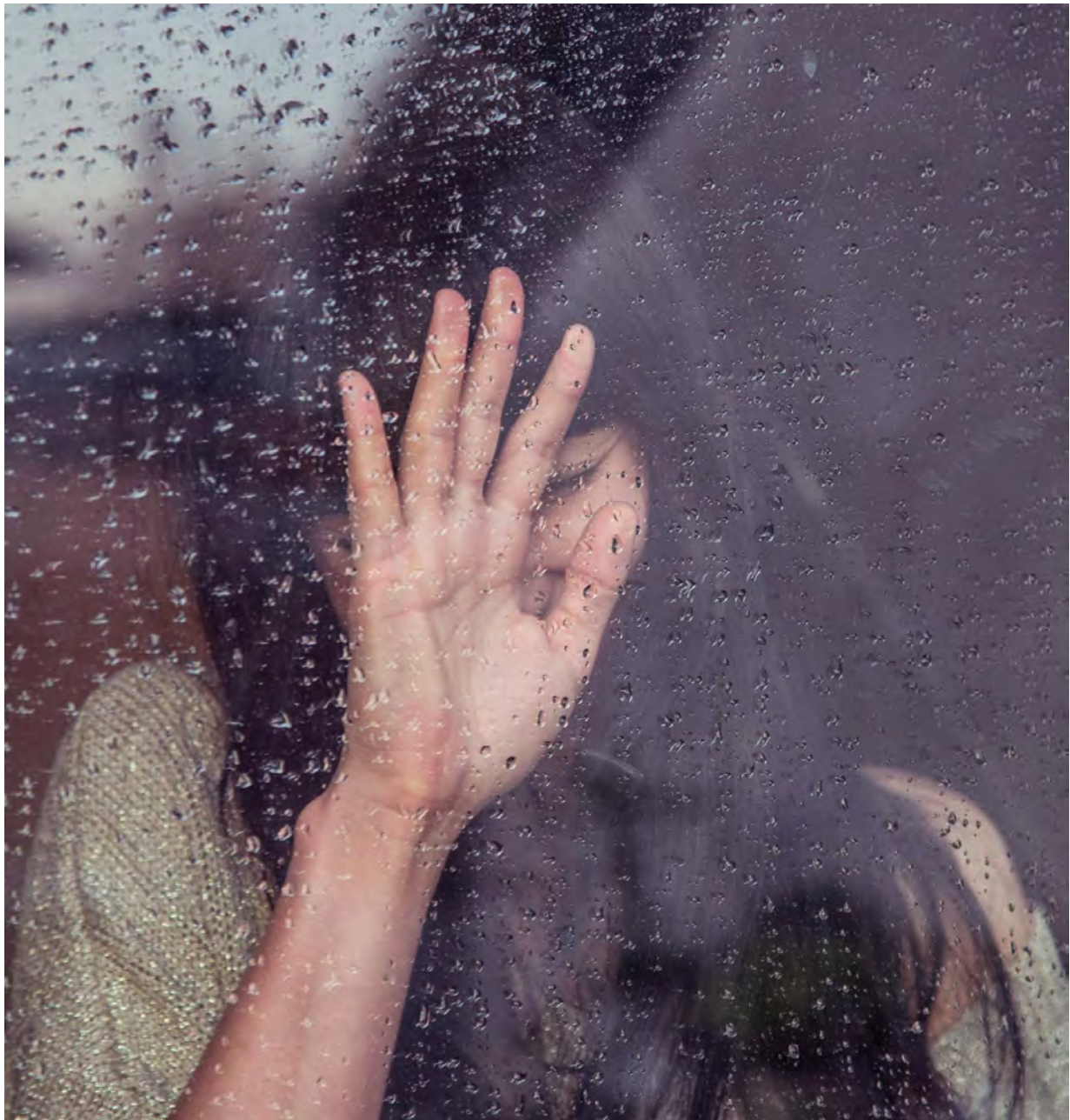
When participating in any kind of intentional growth, we need to brace ourselves for a lot of discomfort. This is the case if we are learning to play guitar, learning to cook for the first time, going back to school or unpacking our unconscious biases.

It's important to change the way we interact with the kind of discomfort that disrupts our status quo. If we want growth, we need to get more comfortable with discomfort by actually seeking it, welcoming it and leaning into it.

Discomfort is just plain hard. Shaking up our strongly held beliefs is a courageous act. Know that intentionally choosing discomfort, and the uncertainty that comes with growth, will allow us to experience both possibility and hope.

It's also important to note that you can be safe and uncomfortable at the same time. The discomfort that comes with growth is safe, even if it doesn't feel that way. It's essential that we learn to expand our tolerance for discomfort and to treat ourselves with kindness and compassion at the same time, because this is hard work.

The act of learning can be uncomfortable, and uncertainty can cause discomfort. Striving for a sense of wonder and excitement in the unknown can counter this feeling, and taking on an adventure can help to promote this outlook.

We hope that this journey will be one of wonder and adventure for you.

CONTINUE

question for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer the following question.
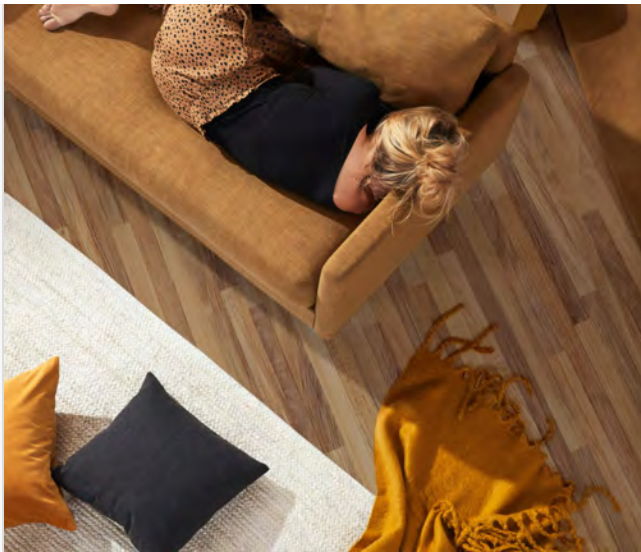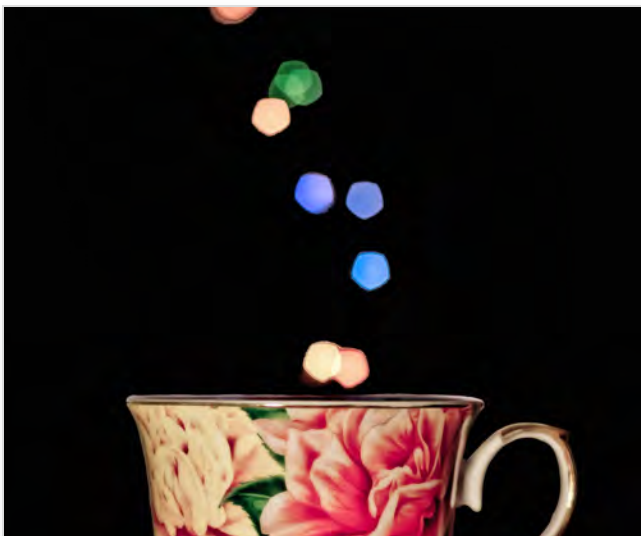
What things do you tend to do when you feel difficult emotions? What has helped in the past?

Treating ourselves with kindness is really important when we are feeling discomfort. Self-care techniques that support our senses can be really supportive when we are struggling. Discomfort can cause us to get anxious or stressed out.

CONTINUE

Write down six things you'll commit to do when you are feeling discomfort. Some ideas are: journal about discomfort, have a cup of tea, go for a walk, call a friend, listen to music, or light a scented candle.
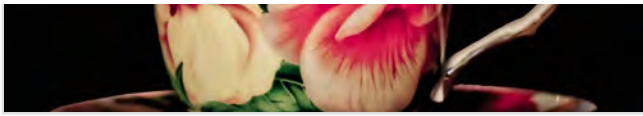
Remember that when you begin your work as a peer support worker, you'll also likely feel some discomfort. The person you're working with will feel it too. It's so important that we remember that all growth is uncomfortable. If we always run from it, we remain stuck.

CONTINUE

What do you think you can do to support the people you work with when they're feeling discomfort?

different cultural approaches to discomfort

When dealing with discomfort, keep in mind that people of different cultural backgrounds may instinctively approach discomfort in different ways. Expand the boxes below to read some general ideas about how cultural background may play a part in how we deal with discomfort.

Asian cultures

In many Asian cultures, there is a strong emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding confrontation. As a result, people may be more likely to avoid expressing their discomfort or negative emotions directly, and instead focus on finding indirect ways to communicate their feelings. This may involve the use of nonverbal cues or subtle hints, rather than direct statements.

Indigenous cultures

In many Indigenous cultures, there is a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all things, and a belief that discomfort or illness is often a result of an imbalance in the natural world. As such, traditional healing practices may involve a focus on restoring balance and harmony between individuals and their environment, through practices like herbal medicine, ceremony or connection to the natural world.

African cultures

In many African cultures, there is a strong emphasis on community and social support, and discomfort or negative emotions may be addressed through communal rituals or practices. This may involve the involvement of elders or other community members in providing guidance and support to those experiencing discomfort.

Latin cultures

In many Latin American cultures, there is a strong emphasis on emotional expressiveness and connection to others. Discomfort or negative emotions may be addressed through open and direct communication, and a willingness to share one's feelings with others in order to seek support and understanding.

Again, these are generalities. Ultimately, every individual will have their own unique approach to dealing with discomfort, shaped by their history, traditions and values.

11. practices that will support your learning

"We learn from each other."

Anita – Peer Worker

CONTINUE
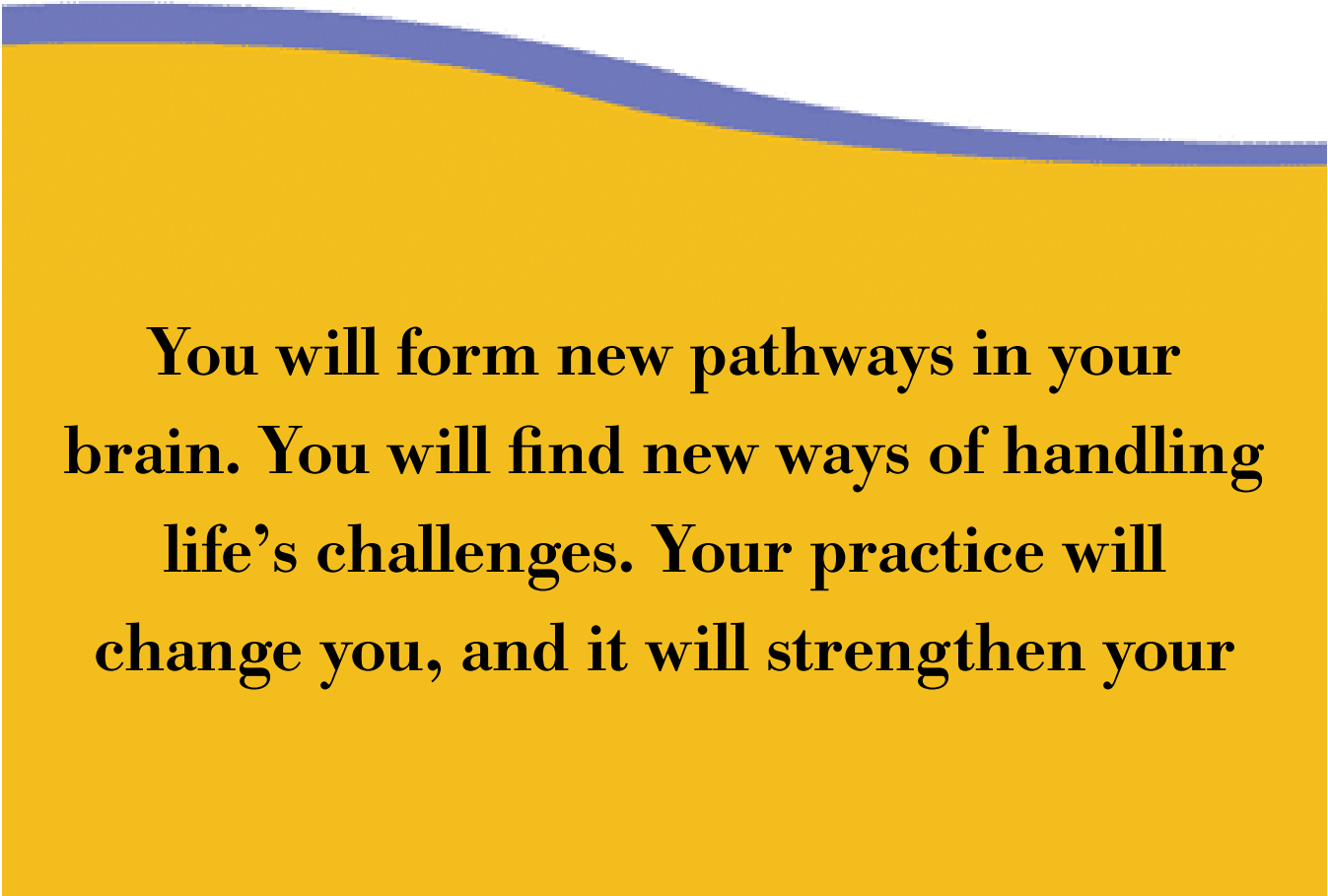
Throughout this training, you'll be encouraged to create practices that will enhance both your work and your life in general.

When we use the word "practice," we mean the same kind of practice you would commit to in order to learn how to play an instrument, or how to code or to respond to an overdose. As much as we'd love to do these things once and be experts right away, we know that learning new skills takes commitment and the practice of doing something over and over again.

We know through the study of neuroscience that our brains are malleable. Brains can be shaped and when we choose to engage in regular practices, to disrupt our status quo and to get curious, we're actually creating new neural pathways!

When you engage in any regular practice, you will be changing your brain.

CONTINUE

You will form new pathways in your brain. You will find new ways of handling life's challenges. Your practice will change you, and it will strengthen your

skills and abilities as a peer support worker.

CONTINUE

movement and the mind-body connection

Most of us grew up being educated in environments that required us to sit in our seats to learn. We didn't have the freedom to get up when we wanted; often we even needed permission from the teacher to go to the bathroom.

In one of our modules, we explore our need to create categories and containers and the limitations that come with siloed thinking. Often, the body and mind are thought of as very separate parts of ourselves. That kind of thinking can lead to the "sit and get through it" approach to learning.

Today, thanks in large part to the influence of non-Western ways of learning that integrate our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual selves, we know that learning must include absorption and synthesis. We need to move knowledge from living only in our heads to also living in our bodies, otherwise our learning stays at surface level.

Just like we understand the importance of living an integrated, holistic life, we also need to approach learning with that same insight. The truth is, we learn better when we move our bodies.

MIND

BODY

SPIRIT

EMOTION
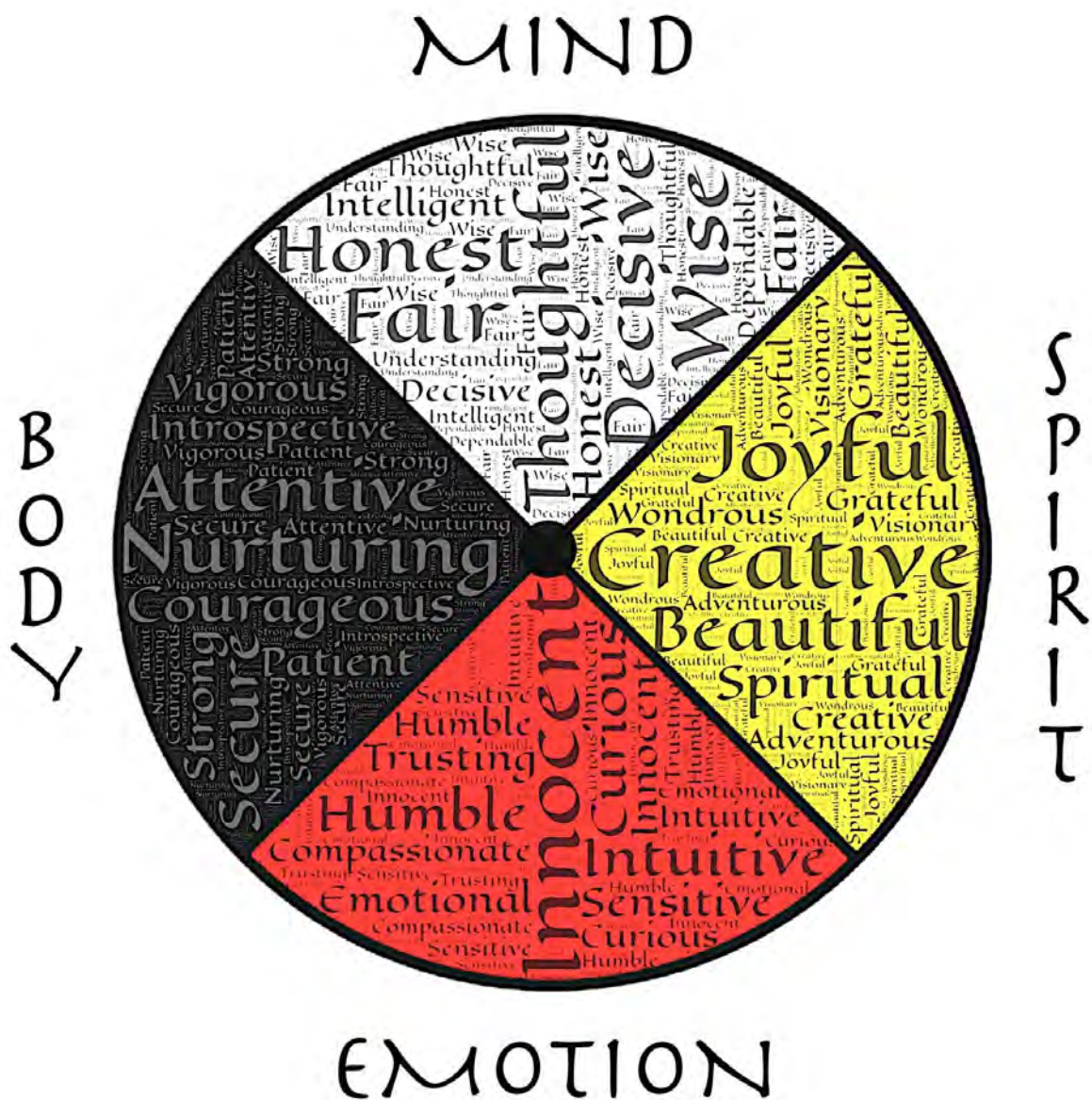
Throughout the training, whether you're learning online or in person, we'll guide you through some simple movements to support the learning process. We also encourage you to stretch or move (in a way that feels good

for you) anytime you feel the need to do so and within your physical capabilities. Don't feel like you have to wait for a break or until the end of the module.

Move when you feel the need to move.

Also, remember the value of movement when you're working as a peer support worker. You might consider, for example, having "walking meetings." Moving our bodies supports us to connect with others in different ways. Many people also loosen up when they're moving in a way they don't when sitting across the table from someone.

Of course, remember that not all people can go for a walk, whether because of physical, neurological or mental health reasons, so we must constantly adapt our approach to suit the capabilities of the people we're working with or meeting with. But moving our bodies, however much we are able to, can bring many health benefits. What a gift that in our role, we get to support people to access these beneficial practices.

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer the following questions.

How will you remind yourself to move as you learn? Will you set a timer? Take regular breaks?

What movements feel doable within your learning space?

CONTINUE

learning assessment

We recognize that you are the experts in peer work. Your experience and lived expertise is what's most important.

We want **you** to be the one to assess your own learning.

As you move through the training, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- What did I learn today that really resonated with me?

- What can I do to make the learning today stick?

- Is there anything that came up today that caused resistance in me? Why? What can I do to continue wrestling with it?

- Did I give the material enough of my attention? If not, why?

- What can I do to enhance my learning?

- What can I do to support myself as I continue to learn this material on my own?

- What is something I appreciated about today's material?

What you choose to do with this is up to you. You can write your thoughts down or you can simply use the questions to reflect quietly on what you have learned.

CONTINUE

mindfulness as a practice
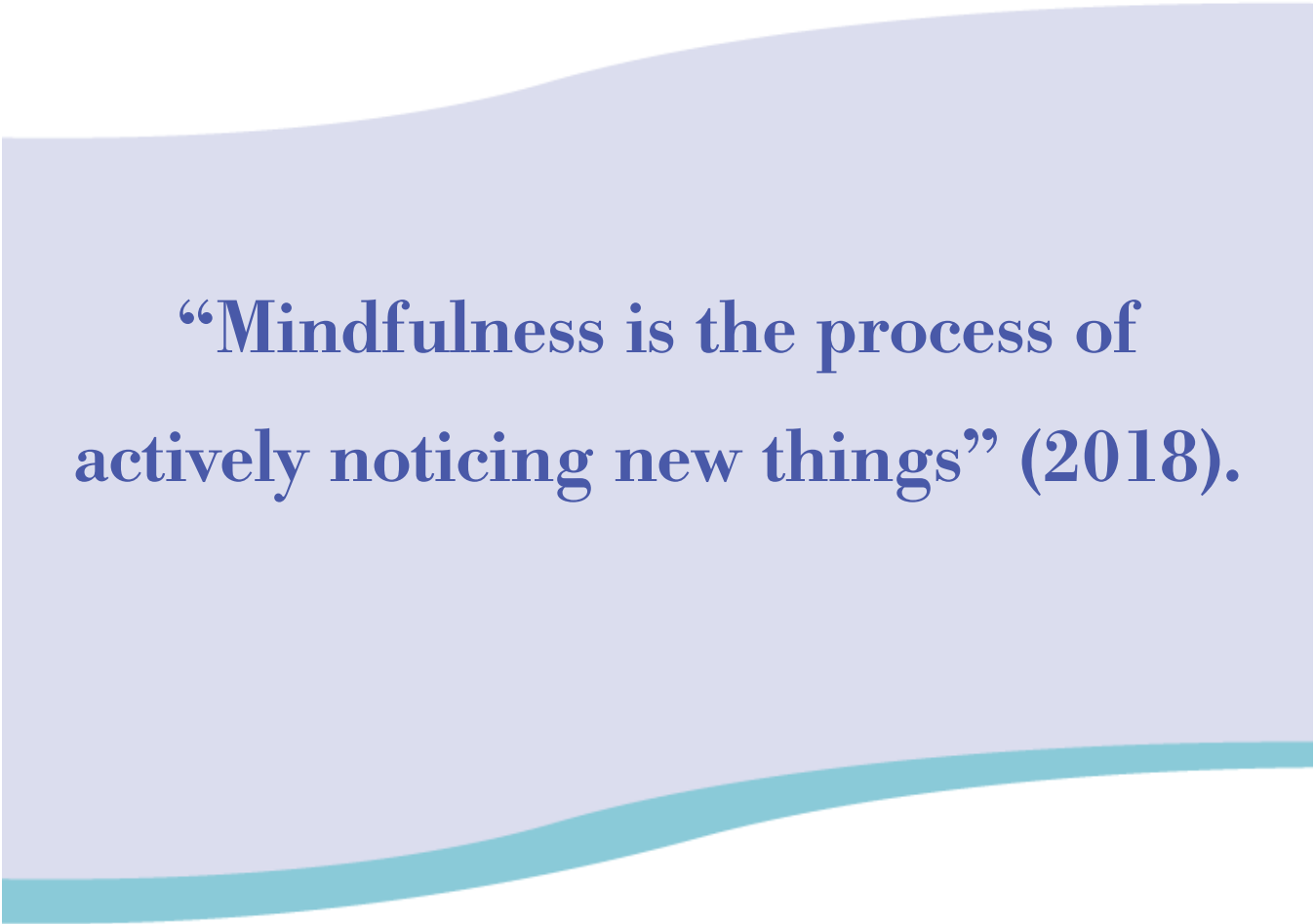
We'll be covering mindfulness as a practice throughout the training. There is so much research that supports the positive impact of mindfulness practices on our mental and physical health.

Mindfulness is an embodied awareness of what's happening around you.

Consider deepening your awareness of your mind, emotions and feelings. Consider deepening your awareness of your body, noticing how your skin is being touched by the air, by your clothing, by your chair.

It's very easy to start living on autopilot. We do the things we need to do, but we aren't really present. We're thinking of the next thing we need to do. According to Dr. Ellen Langer, a mindfulness researcher at Harvard University:

"Mindfulness is the process of actively noticing new things" (2018).

We recognize that the origins of mindfulness are in Indigenous wisdom practices and that this wisdom has been co-opted, commodified and colonized.

We, therefore, encourage you to expand your learning by seeking out Indigenous authored resources on Indigenous mindfulness practices.

One such source is Dr. Michael Yellow Bird, who has written on the process of Neurodecolonization which they describe as:

"Neurodecolonization seeks an understanding of how mind and brain function are shaped by the stresses of colonialism and compromise the well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Some stressors include, but are certainly not limited to racism, hate crimes; loss of territories, culture and pride; high levels of mortality, poverty, and poor health; and disregard of Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and rights. Neurodecolonization involves combining mindfulness approaches with traditional and contemporary

secular and sacred contemplative practices to replace negative patterns of thought, emotion and behavior with healthy, productive ones" (https://www.indigenousmindfulness.com).

Keep in mind that not all people will find benefit from practicing mindfulness, and some people may even find it makes them feel worse. Everyone is different and we must be open to the possibility of different responses, even though a vast number of people find mindfulness helpful.
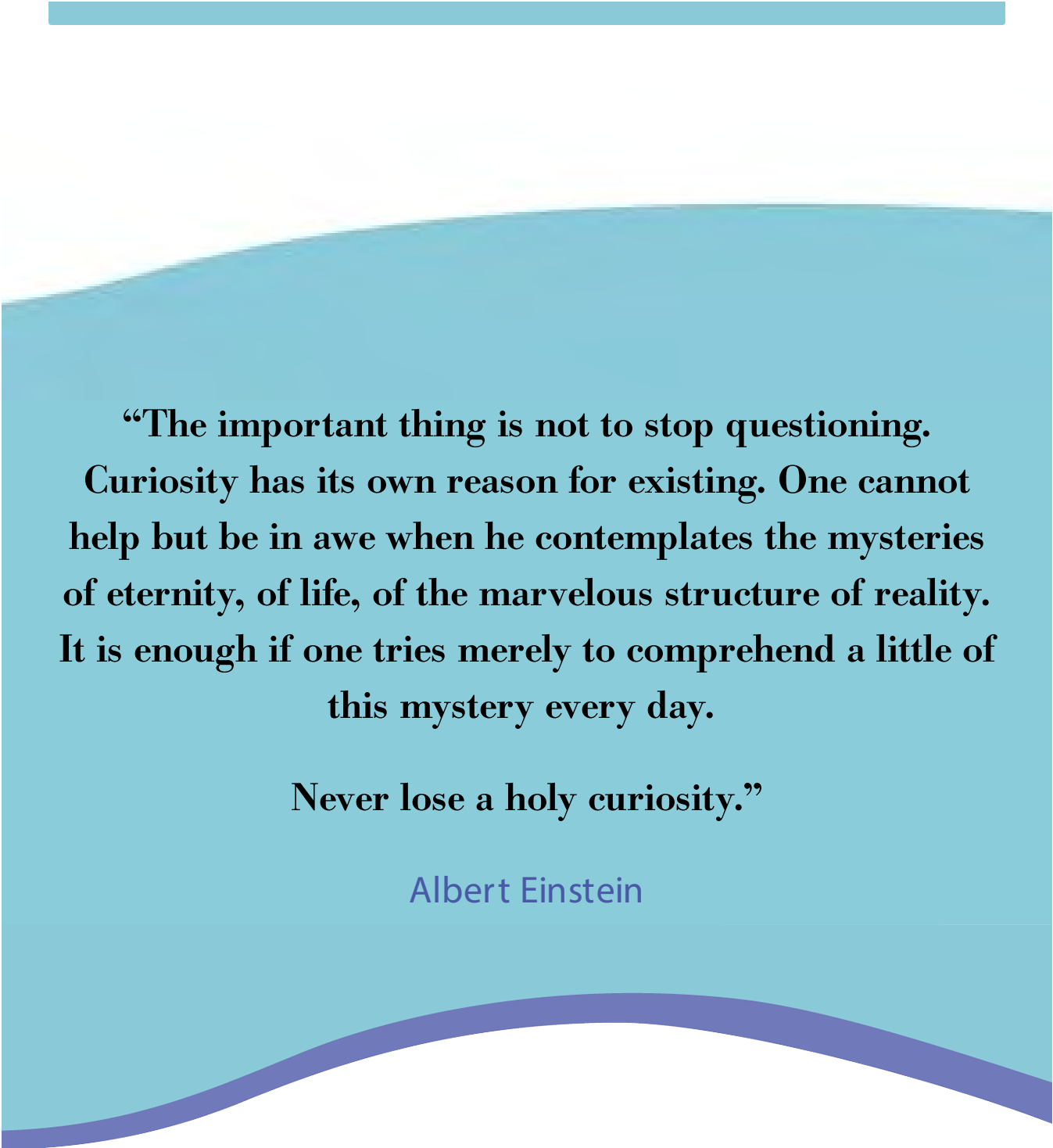
CONTINUE

question for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer this question.

Right now, no matter where you are, notice five new things around you. Five things you haven't noticed before.

1 of 1

CONTINUE

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day.

Never lose a holy curiosity."

Albert Einstein

practices for neurodivergent learners

Every learner has different strengths and preferred learning techniques. For neurodivergent learners, certain practices may be helpful when approaching the material in this course. Expand the boxes below to learn more.

Body doubling ___

Body doubling is a technique that can be used to help someone focus on tasks that may be difficult to complete otherwise. It involves having another person present in the same physical space while working on a task.

The body double serves as a supportive presence, providing a sense of accountability and companionship without necessarily engaging in the task itself. For example, the body double may sit at a nearby desk, read a book or do their own work while the other person works on their task. The presence of a body double can help the that individual stay focused and motivated, as well as provide a sense of structure and routine. This can be particularly helpful for individuals who struggle with distractibility, procrastination or feelings of overwhelm.

Text to speech ___

Using text-to-speech technology can be helpful in a variety of ways.

1. **Difficulty with reading or writing:** Some individuals may struggle with reading or writing due to conditions such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Text-to-speech technology can help these individuals to access written information more easily and efficiently, and can also assist with the creation of written work.

2. **Sensory processing issues**: Some individuals may experience sensory processing issues that make it difficult to process auditory information. In these cases, text-to-speech technology can provide an alternative means of accessing information that does not rely on auditory processing.

3. **Language processing difficulties**: Some individuals may also struggle with language processing, which can make it difficult to understand written or spoken language. Text-to-speech technology can provide an additional means of accessing and comprehending written information.

4. **Communication difficulties**: Some individuals may use text-to-speech technology as a means of communication, particularly if they have difficulty with verbal communication due to conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or speech and language disorders. Text-to-speech technology can allow these individuals to express themselves more easily and effectively, and can facilitate communication with others.

PDFs
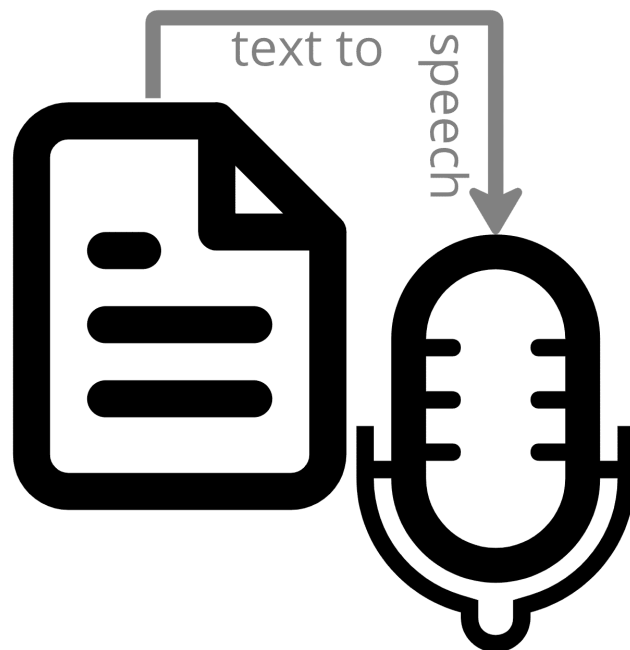
There are many reasons why someone might choose to print off a PDF version of an online course. Here are a few possibilities:

1. **Difficulty with screen reading**: Some people with conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD, or autism may find it challenging to read from a computer screen for extended periods. Printing off a PDF version of the material may make it easier for them to focus and avoid eyestrain or headaches.

2. **Need for tactile feedback**: Some individuals benefit from having tactile feedback when learning new material. Printing off a PDF version of the course may provide this tactile experience and allow them to interact with the material in a way that feels more intuitive or engaging.

3. **Preference for physical materials**: Some people simply prefer to have physical copies of materials they are working with, rather than relying solely on digital versions. This may be due to a variety of factors, such as sensory preferences, difficulty with organization or time management, or a desire to have more control over their learning environment.

The PDF version of each module is located on the opening page where you launched it.

'Out of sight, out of mind.'

"Out of sight, out of mind" refers to the difficulty that some people may have with maintaining awareness of objects or tasks that are not immediately visible or present in their environment.

For example, someone with ADHD may struggle to remember to complete tasks that are not immediately in front of them or that require sustained attention. The individual may benefit from strategies such as creating reminders, using visual aids, or developing structured routines to help them stay on track and remember important information even when it is not immediately present in their environment.

Time-blindness

Time blindness refers to a difficulty in perceiving and understanding the passage of time. It is a common issue for many neurodivergent individuals, including those with ADHD and autism.

These people may have trouble accurately estimating how much time has passed, how long a task will take, and how much time they have left to complete a task. This can lead to problems with planning, scheduling, and time management, as well as difficulties with punctuality and meeting deadlines.

Strategies such as visual aids, timers, and routines can be helpful in managing time blindness and improving time management skills.

It's important to note that not all neurodivergent people will experience these challenges in the same way, and some may not experience them at all. It's important to approach each person as an individual with their own unique strengths and needs.

12. interconnection, relationships & the work of peer support

> "Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."
>
> Chief Seattle

CONTINUE

hyper-individualism

One of the biggest societal challenges of our time is the effect of hyper-individualism on our communities. One might say that this has been a steady problem stemming from a colonization mindset.

hyper-individualism	A tendency for people to act in a highly individual way, without regard for others.

In British Columbia, when we refer to colonialism, we're usually referring to a specific type of colonialism called settler colonialism, which is defined in the following way:

settler colonialism

Settler colonialism is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Essentially hegemonic (meaning ruling or dominant) in scope, settler colonialism normalizes the continuous settler occupation, exploiting lands and resources

1 of 1

CONTINUE

This hyper-individualistic worldview can keep us separated and disconnected from one another, which ultimately leads to loneliness and decreased compassion. For people who are struggling with mental health

and/or substance use challenges, a societally-drive, individualistic mindset may push them deeper into despair and isolation.

We're not saying that individualism is all bad. A defined sense of self, self-awareness, self-determination, autonomy over one's choices, awareness of one's strengths, and clear boundaries combined with personal responsibility are all very important for our well-being. A well-defined sense of self actually can support interconnection.

Interconnection is about balancing the needs of self while recognizing that we're also a part of something greater than ourselves. What we choose to do individually has an impact on the whole. We can really only flourish when we feel a sense of belonging and connection with others. Community and connection are important to our well-being, just as eating nutrient-rich foods benefits our bodies and minds. We can't have a healthy and fully actualized existence living in isolation.

Hyper-individualism is an extreme form of individualism and it means that someone is so focused on self with very little regard for others. Some simple examples of hyper-individualism are:

- [ ] Focusing only on the success and wealth of an individual, rather than considering what they can contribute to society

- [ ] Underfunding public transportation and making individual car ownership the main focus

- [ ] Avoiding asking for help, even when help is needed, for fear of being seen as weak, dependent or incompetent

- [ ] Over-using non-renewable resources with no regard for the impact on other people and the natural world

- [ ] Driving dangerously (running a stop sign, speeding, texting or driving while intoxicated) with no regard for others' safety

- [ ] Avoiding addressing systemic challenges, such as racism, classism or stigma.

collectivist cultures

Perhaps many of us haven't had the chance to experience a collectivist culture. Collectivist cultures are those that prioritize the interests of the group over individual interests. In such cultures, individuals are expected to place the needs of their family, community or organization over their own needs and desires. Examples include many Asian, African, Latin American and First Nations cultures. In these cultures, people tend to value social harmony and cooperation, and there is a strong emphasis on loyalty to one's group.

In collective-oriented cultures, relationships are of utmost importance. These cultures tend to value the opinions and decisions of their family and community members over those of individuals. For example, in Asian cultures, such as Japan and China, people place a great emphasis on respecting and obeying authority figures, such as parents and elders. In African cultures, people often prioritize the needs of their extended family, even above their own needs. In these societies, individualism is not highly valued, and people are expected to work together to achieve common goals.

Canada's First Nations people have a deep-rooted collectivist culture that emphasizes the importance of community and interdependence. They believe in working together as a group rather than focusing on individual success. Elders are highly respected and valued as sources of wisdom and guidance. Decision-making is often done through consensus-building and discussion, with everyone having a chance to share their thoughts and opinions. Sharing of resources, such as food and shelter, is also common. First Nations people place great importance on the preservation and protection of their culture, history and land. They recognize the interconnectedness of all things and strive to maintain a balance between humans and nature. Through their collective approach, Canada's First Nations people have built strong and resilient communities that have withstood the test of time.

This training emphasizes the importance of supporting the individual while resisting the tendency towards the excessive individualism that is pervasive in our culture.

For an example of collectivist approaches to health, a powerful resource to explore is the 'Indigenous Harm Reduction= Reducing The Harms Of Colonialism' manual linked to in our resources section.

relationships and interconnection

well-being is optimal when we
focus on interconnection
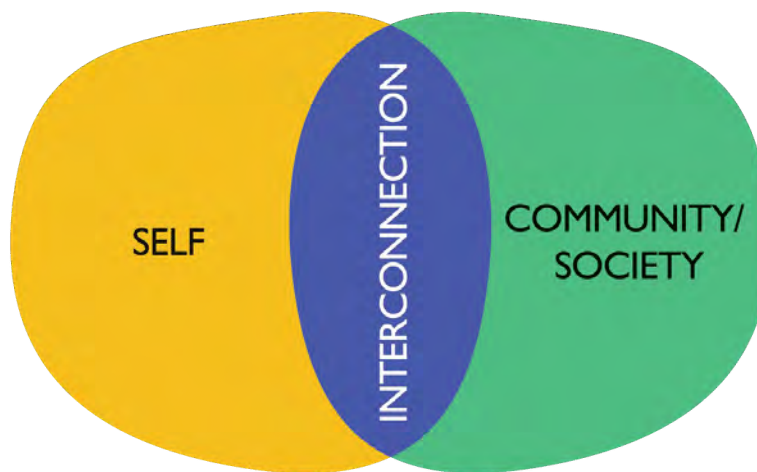
When we have relationships with others, we become more fully aware of who we are meant to be. As therapist Esther Perel says, "we are shaped by our relationships." The dynamic connection between two people creates something amazing. We are each changed by each of our relationships.

Think of relationships like an electrical circuit. Power flows through a source to an object, then back to the source. The power has to flow back and forth through both the source and the object, otherwise it will not work.

Peer support is about relationship and connection. This means breaking away from the dominant mindset of hyper-individualism, and instead grounding our work in the core beliefs of interconnection and interdependence.

Interconnection is the mindset that everything is connected. It supports the intrinsic value of all life. We're all connected to each other – our communities, our nations and the very earth we live on.

Interdependence recognizes that all human beings need community and belonging. While it's certainly a goal to be able to take care of oneself and create self-nourishment practices, full independence encourages isolation and loneliness. We need other people in our lives. Sharing our stories and practicing vulnerability with people we trust is the antidote to shame.
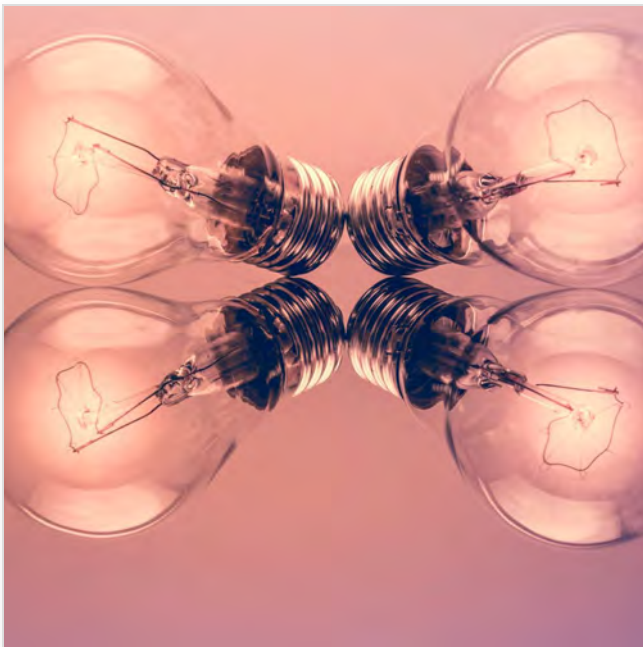
Peer support is an amazing opportunity to nurture the development of interconnection and interdependence mindsets in the people we support.

questions for reflection

Reflect on the following questions in your reflection journal.

Do you have relationships in your life that feel like an electrical circuit, meaning that energy flows back and forth between both people?

How does it feel when there is equality and connection in your relationships?

13. the importance of language awareness & a strength-based approach in this work

"Words have great power. The power to help, the power to heal, and the power to hurt. Use this power carefully."

Anthony Douglas Williams

CONTINUE

One of the core values of peer support work is a strength-based approach. From the B.C. Peer Support Standards of Practice document: "It is more motivating to move towards something than away from a problem. We intentionally build on already existing strengths. We thoughtfully and purposefully move in the direction of flourishing, rather than only responding to pain and oppression."

Everything in this training will encourage you to treat yourself – and support others – with a strength-based approach. When we support people from a deficit-based mindset, we can unintentionally keep them stuck.

CONTINUE

what we focus on expands

This means that whatever we give attention to tends to grow. If we're always focused on problems, these problems begin to take over our minds and emotions, especially in matters of the heart. Instead, if we focus on our strengths, on the things that are going well, then they will grow too. That's not to say that we don't address big personal or societal problems. For example, we're not saying that if someone has a self-declared problematic relationship with substances that they should ignore the problem and focus solely on strengths. There are certainly some problems that we need to address for our own well-being.

If we're only focused on solving problems, we get stuck in the status quo.

Here's a little example:

focus on the problem

Mark is unemployed after a crisis. He's starting to get back on his feet, but he's not able to get back to work yet. He has a lot of time on his hands, and he's struggling with significant boredom. The only thing he knows to do with all his time is to be on his phone. He spends hours and hours a day on social media, watching videos, playing games. He's struggling with some big feelings around losses that happened because of his crisis, and the phone is a good distraction. If his only focus is putting his phone down, he's still tied to the "problem." He might find himself struggling many times a day with his phone use and because of that, he continues to feel tied to the problem – boredom and excessive phone use. When he's not on his phone, he's thinking about it. Maybe he's successful with curbing his phone use, which is great, but he still hasn't changed his problem with boredom. He's stuck in the status quo.

focus on strength

Instead, what if Mark decides to focus on his strengths, and moving towards where he wants to go, instead of where he wants to move away from? He decides to talk to a trusted supporter so he can process his losses. He was a writer early in life, so Mark starts journaling and writing poems several times a week. This helps him with sorting through some of his big feelings. He remembers that he loves photography, and he has a great camera collecting dust in his closet. So, he pulls it out and each day spends some time walking around his neighbourhood taking photos. He then wants to learn photo editing. He takes an online course to learn some new techniques. He also realized that he has let some of his relationships fade away. So, each day he commits to either call or text a friend. Soon he finds himself going for coffee and walks with people he hasn't seen in months or years. Mark remembers that he is a kind and good friend, who has a great sense of humour, and people actually really like to be around him.

In the second scenario, Mark has moved away from being tied to his problem, and he has created opportunity for hope and possibility. He will likely still use his phone from time to time, but it now has less hold on him, because he's replaced the need with things he values.

If we take a strength-based approach (what is working and how can we build on it), we can create new possibilities. Building on our strengths supports resiliency. This isn't about ignoring challenges; it's just a paradigm shift in how we approach problems.

The words we choose give meaning to our narratives and have astounding power. Words create our reality. This is also why it's essential to choose language that is person-first.

However, we must also remember that in certain situations identity-first language can be equally essential or preferred. For example, many autistic people are more comfortable with identity-first language and often refer to themselves as autistic rather than having autism. Many deaf people also prefer identity-first language, and reject the term "hearing impaired" because the inability to hear isn't perceived as a deficit. Whenever possible, ask the person how they prefer to be referred to.

We will continue to look at the application of a strength-based approach, as well as person-first language, in other modules.

CONTINUE

A note about strength-based thinking. While we strive to focus on others' strengths, we should keep in mind that a person's worth isn't linked to how much they do with those strengths. What's easy for one person may be extremely difficult for someone else. By honouring their efforts to use their strengths, regardless of the outcomes, we steer clear of any judgements and instead celebrate the beautiful qualities they offer to the world.

> **"We should always remember also that even though we should focus on strengths, a persons value also shouldn't just be derived from how much they DO in life but also WHO they are in life."**
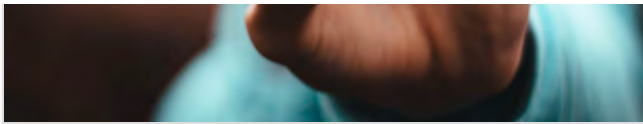>
> Millie Schultz

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer the following questions.

Have you noticed times when you have been affected by someone's words?

Have you noticed your own self-talk? How do you feel when you speak negatively to yourself? What about if you switch things up and speak to yourself with kindness? How does that feel?

There is a popular phrase that says, "words create worlds." When you read that, what comes to mind for you?

14. empathy

Empathy will play an important role in everything you do in your role as a peer support worker. Empathy will come up throughout the training.

empathy

Empathy is an awareness of someone else's feelings and the ability to connect to others through shared emotion.

CONTINUE

When we tap into empathy, we know that we could very easily be in the same situation as that person, if we haven't already been there.

In her book *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)* (2008), Brené Brown references nursing scholar Teresa Wiseman's four attributes to empathy:

☐   The ability to see the world from another person's perspective

☐   Staying out of judgement

☐   Paying attention to, and doing our best to understand, another person's emotions

☐   Communicating your understanding of that person's feelings

Sympathy is feeling bad or sad for someone without putting yourself in another's shoes. Sympathy can have an element of pity, whereas empathy is feeling *with* someone – empathy involves perspective-taking.

The difficulty with empathy is that it makes us vulnerable, because we have to tap into the difficult feelings inside ourselves to connect with the other person. That can feel scary.

As supporters, we need to practice good self-care and self-compassion.

Empathy puts us in someone else's shoes, but it's not supportive if we're so enmeshed in the situation that we fall apart. Choosing to be empathetic and compassionate is important, while also avoiding becoming overwhelmed and becoming immobilized from taking on someone's difficult emotions as your own. Part of your self-care will be figuring out how you take care of you while you are supporting someone else. We will dig into this topic more in other modules including module **14. building personal resilience**.

three types of empathy

Psychologists Daniel Goleman and Paul Ekman break down empathy even further, citing three specific types: cognitive, emotional and compassionate.

Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to understand and recognize the feelings and thoughts of others. This type of empathy involves the use of perspective-taking and active listening skills to comprehend another person's perspective. People who possess strong cognitive empathy can read nonverbal cues, listen attentively and put themselves in someone else's shoes to better understand their experiences.

Emotional empathy involves feeling and sharing the emotions of others. It's an innate ability to experience another person's emotions as if they were your own. Emotional empathy enables people to develop deeper connections with others, show more compassion and respond appropriately to their emotions. However, it's essential to maintain boundaries and not let others' emotions overwhelm you.

Compassionate empathy combines both cognitive and emotional empathy, but with an added element of action. People who have compassionate empathy not only understand and feel the emotions of others but also take action to help or alleviate their suffering. It involves not just feeling empathy but also taking steps to alleviate the other person's pain, whether that's through offering support or providing resources. Compassionate empathy can lead to more meaningful connections, helping to build stronger relationships based on trust, respect and understanding.

empathy and autism

Some studies have suggested that individuals on the autistic spectrum may have a reduced ability to perceive and respond to emotional cues in others, which can affect their ability to understand and interpret other people's emotions. This may lead to difficulty in empathizing with others in certain situations.

However, other studies have found that autistic individuals may just experience empathy differently, rather than not experiencing it at all. Some individuals on the autistic spectrum may experience cognitive empathy, having no problem understanding another person's perspective or point of view without necessarily feeling the same emotions as that person. Additionally, some individuals may experience "empathic distress," where they feel

overwhelmed by another person's emotional state, but may struggle to identify and articulate their own emotions.

These are general tendencies and individuals on the autistic spectrum may experience empathy differently depending on a variety of factors, including their own personal experiences, individual differences in their autism profile and environmental factors.

15. dealing with uncertainty

When we were kids, we were often afraid of the dark. We didn't know what creepy things lurked in the dark corners of our bedrooms. Although as adults we tend to be more comfortable sleeping in a dark room at night without fear of monsters in the closet, we're still afraid of the unknown.

Uncertainty is scary. Uncertainty is uncomfortable and really hard. We crave certainty. We want to know the answers. We feel more empowered when we have closure.

Uncertainty creates stress and it activates our sympathetic nervous system, which causes a stress response.

university college experiment

In 2016 University College London's Neurology research department conducted an experiment on uncertainty. The experiment proved that the high feelings of uncertainty created more stress than clarity about impending pain. The 45 participants in the experiment played a video game where they had to overturn rocks and guess if there was a snake under the rock. When they were wrong, they got a mild electric shock on their hand. At times throughout the game, it was predictable when they would get shocked, and then the game would fluctuate so that participants were increasingly uncertain of when they would be shocked. What they found was that when

the chance of getting a shock was 50/50, people's stress levels were at the highest. When their chance was 0 percent or 100 percent, they had the lowest stress response.

This research suggests that uncertainty creates more stress than the pain itself!

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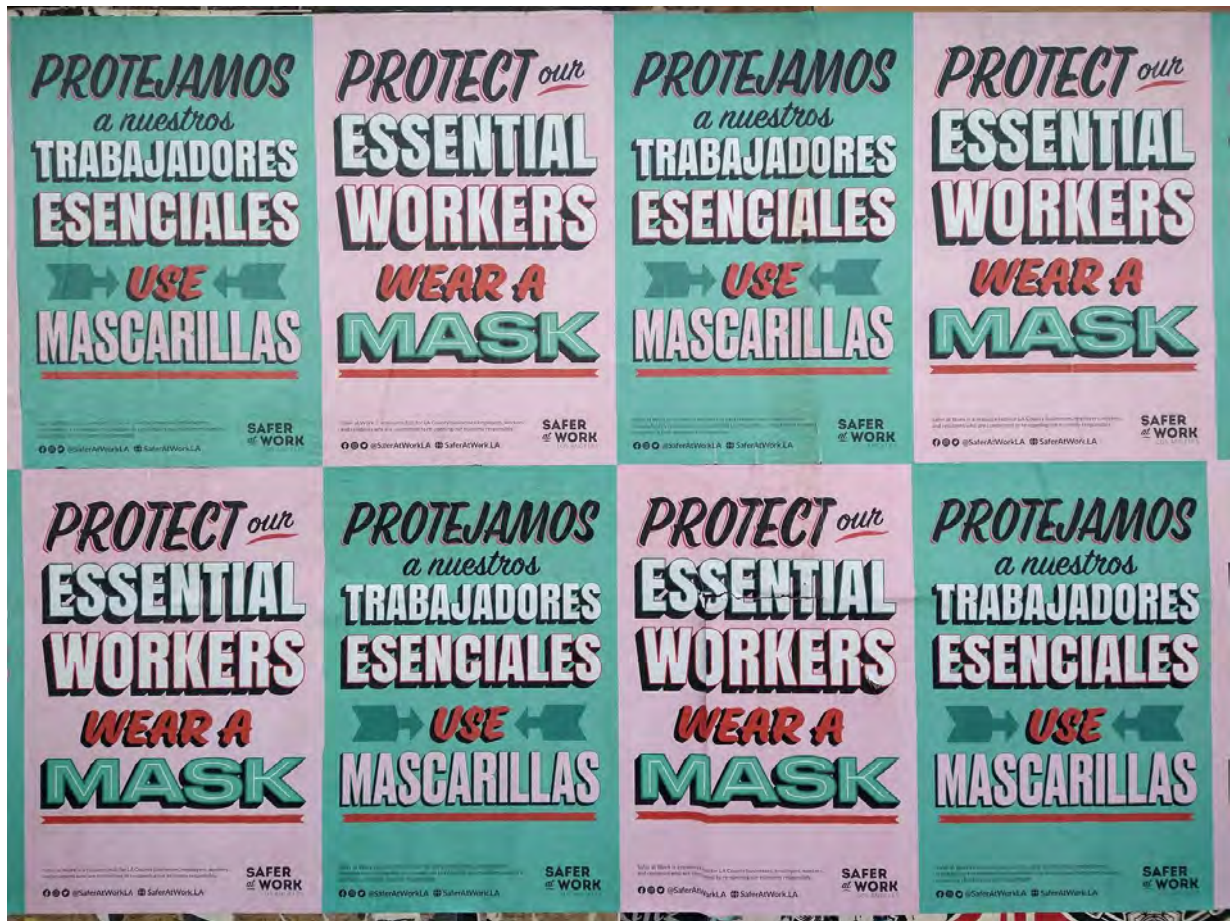
At a biological level, we don't like uncertainty so we always look for certainty and answers. We do anything we can to bring an end to the unknown. Consider the uncertainty of COVID-19. It created a much longer season of uncertainty than anyone ever expected. Western society values control, the rights of the individual, freedom and certainty, and COVID-19 challenged all of that! So much loss, and many, many months of living in the unknown. The uncertainty of COVID-19 impacted many people's well-being.

In the article *Your Fear of Uncertainty Can Disempower You* (2020), neuroscientist Beau Lotto says that people are more likely to feel disempowered when they are uncertain. He says that disempowerment also affects our perceptions. Lotto says, "So … what happens to your brain when it perceives itself to be disempowered? Ignorance, gullibility, delusion and even anger can ensue."

We are more likely to perceive patterns that aren't really there and project meaning onto something or someone else. We see things as bigger and scarier than when we don't have a sense of control.

In the section on Ambiguous Loss in module **10. supporting someone who is grieving**, we'll dig into the role of uncertainty in loss and how that uncertainty can delay the grieving process.

One thing we can be certain of in this life is that we will have times of uncertainty. It's part of the human experience. Understanding what happens to us in uncertainty helps us handle it better because there are actually good side effects of not knowing.

As you move into peer support work, it's important to remember that uncertainty will affect both you and the people you will work with.
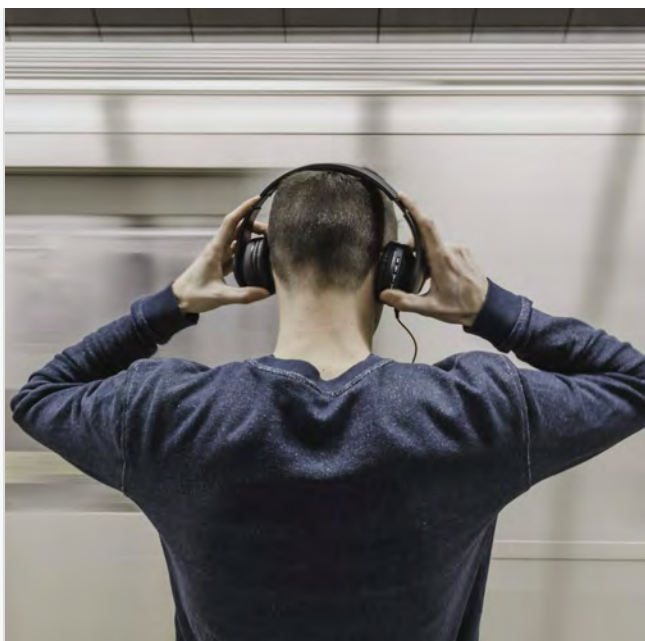
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questions for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer the following questions.

How do you deal with uncertainty?

What practices support you when you feel stressed out in uncertainty?

CONTINUE

the upside of uncertainty

We can pretty much agree that there are a lot of challenges that come with uncertainty, but let's look at some of the amazing things that are also tied to not knowing.

Creativity thrives in uncertainty. In fact, creativity requires uncertainty to flourish! When everything is predictable and routine, there's less need to get creative. When everything is certain, we can get stuck in the status quo. When things are uncertain, we have the opportunity to innovate. Risk taking supports us to build courage and grow.

An example of the upside of uncertainty involves music. When the pattern of music is too predictable and certain, it's less interesting to listen to. But when there are some unexpected changes in the rhythm, melody or instrumentation, the music is more interesting.

In the state of not knowing, we become more open to new possibilities. That's why paint-by-number is a much less creative process than grabbing a canvas, some paints and brushes and choosing to see what happens!

When we speak about creativity in this sense, we aren't talking about being an artist. We are talking about creativity in thinking and approach – basically divergent thinking. Wikipedia describes divergent thinking as this:

divergent thinking is...

...a thought process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. It typically occurs in a spontaneous, free-flowing, "non-linear" manner, such that many ideas are generated in an emergent cognitive fashion. Many possible solutions are explored in a short amount of

We can't be spontaneous and free . owing if we're trapped in the predictable. When faced with the unknown, and we feel courageous and empowered (we might also be feeling fear as well; courage and fear are not mutually exclusive), we are able to think differently and see new possibilities that we simply couldn't see before.

"Uncertainty also is where we find the very cognitive flexibility that creativity depends on. Creativity, after all, is about bending the rules. It's about perceiving things as they have not yet been perceived. It's about positioning reality in a way that it has not yet been positioned. And it is about flexing your thinking in a way that allows you to see new perspectives – and new possibilities. When it comes to creativity, uncertainty is like mental yoga."

Claire Dorotik-Nana,
Uncertainty: The Path to Creativity?

CONTINUE

"To be hopeful means to stand in the present moment and to embrace the uncertainty of the future. Not one can predict who will and will not recover. No one can posit a certain future because the future is, by definition, uncertain and ambiguous. All we can authentically do is to stand with two feet in the present and to face the ambiguous, uncertain future with hope…"Hope is not hope if its object is known".
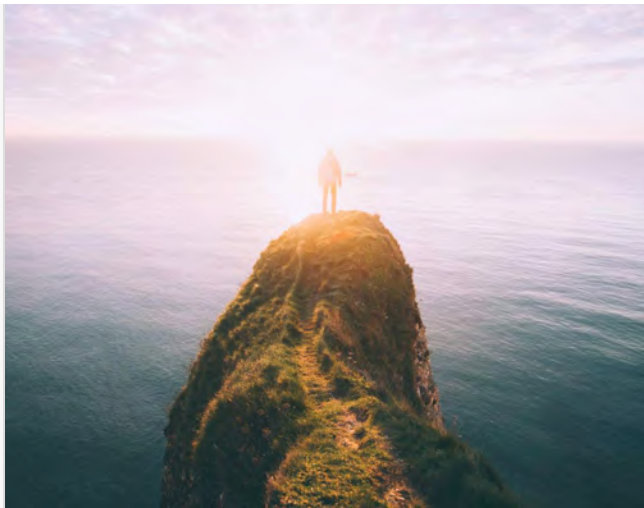
Pat Deegan

'Hope and Recovery: Part 2'

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Use your reflection journal to answer these questions.

Can you think of a time when uncertainty created an opportunity for you to find a new possibility? Describe.

Uncertainty tends to cause fear. Yet we know uncertainty is also the path to new possibilities. What can you do to support yourself when you are in the midst of uncertainty?

CONTINUE

### increasing our tolerance for uncertainty

Knowing that uncertainty can create havoc in your body, and hearing that uncertainty is the key to creativity and new possibilities, feels like a tricky thing to balance, doesn't it?

There are several things we can do to support ourselves to create more tolerance for uncertainty.

Here are a few ideas:

Normalize ambivalence
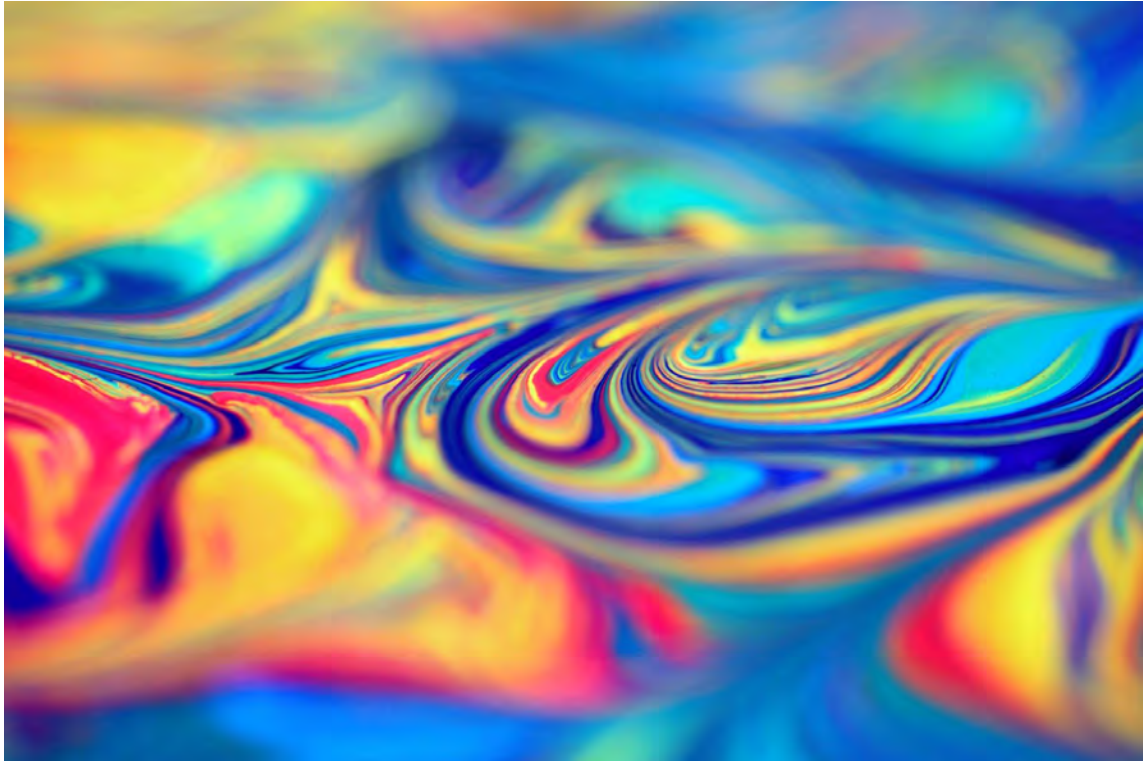
Ambivalence is the state of having mixed or seemingly contradictory feelings. We tend to want to be all one thing or another (for example, happy *or* sad, dissatisfied *or* grateful), but the reality is that we can often feel many complex feelings at the same time. It's normal to feel fear and courage simultaneously. We can also feel feelings of sadness and gratitude all swirled together. When we learn to first identify these feelings, and then allow them to exist together, we increase our tolerance for uncertainty. We cover more about this in module **10. supporting someone who is grieving**.

Choose language that reflects possibility instead of single solution-focused answers

We can get more comfortable with the unknown if we shift our thinking away from being solution-focused and instead choose openness to multiple possibilities. There's never one right way to approach a situation – there are many roads that will bring us where we want to go. We often want to find the right answer, but what if there isn't one? What if, instead, there are several right answers? Choosing to be open to new possibilities both increases our tolerance to uncertainty and it increases our creativity. For example, staying away from "either/or" thinking and instead choosing "both/and" thinking supports building a tolerance for uncertainty.

Practice self-compassion & acceptance

Self-compassion is about offering ourselves the same kindness and generosity that we would offer someone else. Self-compassion is a practice. When we integrate self-compassion in our lives, we're kind to ourselves when we mess up, because we know that all human beings make mistakes. When we're in struggle, we offer ourselves kindness and we choose to self-soothe. Some examples of self-care are having a cup of tea, going for a walk outside, having a bath, laughing with a friend or listening to good music. We talk more about this in module **14. building personal resilience**.

Be curious, ask questions – be more interested in the questions than the answers

When we are curious, we actually calm the sympathetic nervous system. Curiosity increases our sense of calm. For example, when we feel stressed out and overwhelmed, we can get curious about how we're feeling and ask ourselves reflective questions. Questions like: "What led me to feel this way?" "What if I approach this situation differently?" "What can I do to support myself right now?"

What other questions support this kind of reflective curiosity?

CONTINUE

"The opposite of recognizing that we're feeling something is denying our emotions. The opposite of being curious is disengaging. When we deny our stories and disengage from tough emotions, they don't go away; instead, they own us, they define us. Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending—to rise strong, recognize our story, and rumble with the truth until we get to a place where we think, Yes.
This is what happened. This is my truth.
And I will choose how this story ends."

Brené Brown,

Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead

CONTINUE

There are many benefits of curiosity, which is why we picked it as one of our core values. Curiosity also creates opportunity for possibility and creativity.

16. the role of hope in this work

Hope is a word that can rub some people the wrong way. It's a word that can feel trite and wishy-washy sometimes. Often, we distill hope down to the desire to see a speci c outcome. However, hope is much bigger than that. Hope is a powerful force, and one that is necessary for survival.

We just talked about how uncertainty can create opportunity for possibility. Hope is more about creating opportunity for possibility than it is about wishing for a specific outcome. Hope is about finding a bit of purpose and meaning so we can get out of bed in the morning. Some might say that hope is as important to our survival as food and water. Hope supports our immune system; it fuels our cells.

> "In my work, I've found that moving out of powerlessness, and even despair, requires hope. Hope is not an emotion: It's a cognitive process – a thought process made up of what researcher C. R. Snyder called the trilogy of 'goals, pathways, and agency.' Hope happens when we can set goals, have the tenacity and perseverance to pursue those goals, and believe in our own abilities to act. Snyder also found that hope is learned."
>
> Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*

courageous hope

All growth and change, whether on the micro or macro level, begins with HOPE. Click the hearts below to read more.

Hope is not wishy-washy. It's not the same as wishing on a star; we can water down the meaning when we say things like, "I hope it's sunny tomorrow."

Hope spreads to those around us because we are so interconnected.

Hope is never solitary. We are deeply interconnected. When one of us loses hope, we all experience the loss. We can also hold hope for loved ones who have lost theirs.

Hope is essential to well-being.

Hope is messy. It often goes hand in hand with a battle of sorts – either an internal battle or a societal activism. Battles are messy and scary. (Think of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey work).

Hope involves action and movement. It's like a muscle we develop that gets stronger as we use it. The birth of hope can often be really humble, but it can grow into a powerful force for change.

Hope is the spark that motivates us to do anything, including simply getting up in the morning or embarking on a big, new adventure. Many people who are lost in despair struggle with basic things like getting up or eating.

Hope ebbs and flows. Sometimes it's close, sometimes it's very distant.

Hope always involves risk. Always.

Hope is wildly courageous. Acting on our hope requires uncertainty and bravery. Disrupting the status quo (personal or societal) is really, really hard.

Connection is essential for hope to flourish. Because we are wired for connection and belonging, hope always involves other people. When we're considering movements such as peer support, this means solidarity and working together.

Hope is focused. Opening ourselves up to hope means that pain will likely make itself known to us along our journey. But when we reflect on everything above, we can trust in our resilience.

May we all nurture hope within ourselves and may we intentionally and collectively create personal and social ecologies that nurture hope in others.

May we all nurture hope within ourselves and may we intentionally and collectively create personal and social support systems that nurture hope in others.

17. core values assessment

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question for reflection

Answer this question in your reflection journal.
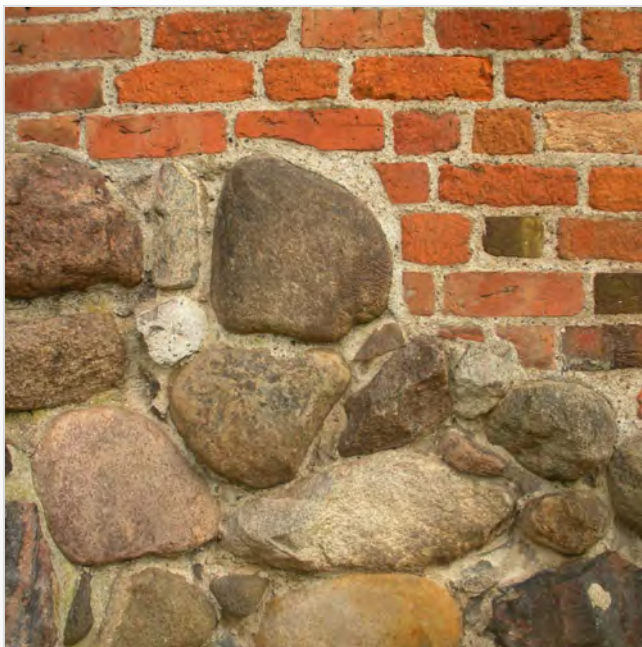
In what ways have the core values (see list below) intersected with the topics in this module?

1 of 1

CONTINUE

core peer support values

acknowledgement

All human beings deserve to be seen for who they are.

IN ACTION: Peer support strives to acknowledge – and deeply hear – people where they are in their journey.

PSWs SUGGEST: Asking open-ended questions and actively listening to the PSW to see if they feel comfortable sharing their experience. Ask: "What do you think about that situation?" "Is there a coping strategy that you have used in a previous similar experience that worked for you?"

mutuality

All healthy relationships are mutual and reciprocal.

IN ACTION: Peer support relationships are co-created, with all parties participating in boundary creation.

PSWs SUGGEST: Having a conversation about what is and isn't okay to discuss with the PSW.

" ...Even though I am a PSW, it's painful for me to make eye contact with people. Hopefully, clients will see that if I'm looking away that it actually means that I am deeply listening to them. Being vulnerable and open seems to allow the other person to do their version of the same, building trust and respect and co-creating the relationship."

strength-based

Every human being has strengths.

IN ACTION: Peer support intentionally builds on existing strengths. It thoughtfully and purposefully moves in the direction of flourishing, rather than only responding to pain and oppression.

PSWs SUGGEST: Finding things that the PSW feels really confident about and expanding on those areas or delving into those areas and supporting their choices.

self-determination

Motivation works best when it's driven from within.

IN ACTION: Peer support encourages self-determination and acknowledges and holds space for resilience and inner wisdom.

PSWs SUGGEST: Support the PSW in making decisions and doing things on their own – based on their wants, needs and goals.

respect, dignity and equity

All human beings have intrinsic value.

IN ACTION: Peer support honours human value by

- Practicing cultural humility and sensitivity
- Serving with a trauma-informed approach
- Offering generosity of assumption
- Addressing personal biases mindfully
- Meeting people where they are
- Serving with a knowledge of equity

belonging and community —

All human beings need to belong and be a part of a community.

IN ACTION: Peer support recognizes that many people have barriers that keep them from developing community and it actively works towards deconstructing those social blockades that prevent inclusion and acceptance. Peer support encourages a social justice mindset, and intentionally promotes empathy, compassion and self-compassion.

PSWs SUGGEST: Help PSWs feel wanted and cared about. Help them find resources that foster a sense of community and belonging.

"My quality of life improves immensely when I am surrounded by one or a community of people who understand me. I don't feel alone. I can be myself among people who I know understand me on a deeper level. When I feel like I can be myself, I feel more confident and able to take positive risks, thus improving the quality of my life. The root of this is connection and being able to be seen for who I truly am. Peers can help people be seen in a real way."

curiosity —

Curiosity and inquiry support connection, growth, learning and engagement.

IN ACTION: Peer support

- Is continually curious

- Challenges assumptions and narratives

- Asks powerful questions

- Offers generosity of assumption to those who think differently

- Knows that listening and asking questions is more important than providing answers

PSWs SUGGEST: Ask questions and be engaged in learning about your PSWs. Find out about their culture and explore with them.

18. summary

Let's review some of the key concepts covered in this module.

☐ Questioning the concepts in the training will help make them your own.

☐ Many resources are available if you choose to deepen your knowledge of this subject.

☐ You are part of something larger. Take time to learn from leaders in the peer support movement.

☐ Peer support must not replicate the model of traditional clinical services. It's a paradigm shift and thrives on mutuality.

☐ The topics covered in this course may trigger feelings of resistance. You are encouraged to engage with such feelings from a place of humility and uncertainty; they can help you break free from the status quo.

☐ Creating healthy practices will enhance your home and work lives. One such practice is to incorporate movement into all aspects of learning. Another is that of reflection, which will be done in this course by keeping a journal. Mindfulness, the awareness of what is happening around you, is another encouraged practice.

☐ Hyper-individualism is the opposite of interconnection. Hyper-individualism promotes an unhealthy focus on self. Interconnection and relationship-building are the core of peer support. They acknowledge that all human beings need community and belonging.

☐ Peer support work is strength-based; this means focusing on the strengths of others so that part of them grows and develops. A strength-based approach creates new possibilities and promotes resiliency.

☐ The Stages of Change theory lists six stages people go through when they engage with behavioural change. This theory can be a helpful tool for supporting growth and change in others.

☐ Tapping into empathy helps us understand others and better support their growth. But using empathy demands we set boundaries that protect us from getting enmeshed in other people's situations.

☐ Uncertainty creates stress. It affects both you and the people you will work with. On the upside, uncertainty often fuels creativity. We can increase our tolerance for uncertainty by normalizing ambivalence, practicing self-compassion and exercising curiosity.

☐ Hope is about creating opportunity for possibility. All growth and change begins with hope.

19. next steps

We want to thank you for taking the time to walk alongside peer support workers on a shared path of learning from lived experience.

You are now ready to guide your team through the Peer Support Worker training curriculum!

Please head home to https://peerconnectbc.ca where you will find the individual training modules and facilitation guides. You will also find a resource page at that site to continue your learning about peer support work and the issues surrounding it.

A Project of BCcampus, Funded by B.C. Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions

Released July 2021

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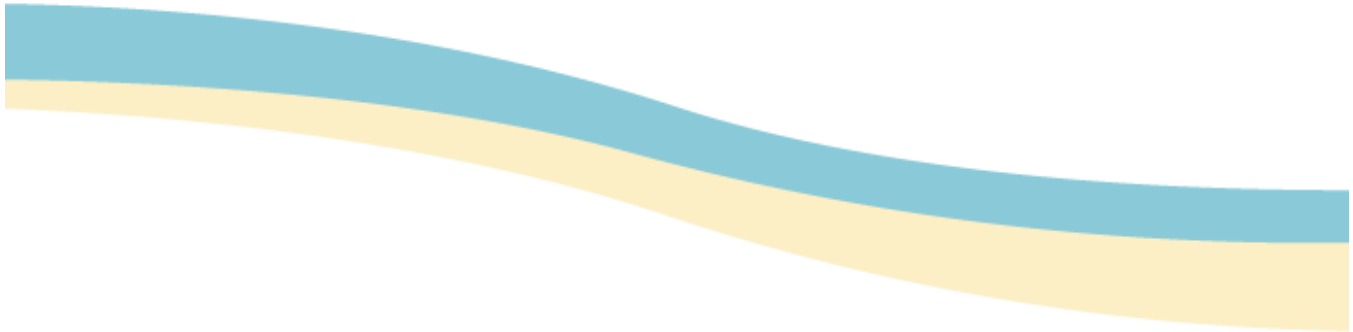
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Graphic Designer: *Jeseye Tanner*

Peer Portraits: *Jesse Winters Photography*

Instructional Design & Development: *PathWise Solutions Inc.*

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