

15. family peer support



This module explores family peer support work and how, by working from a place of shared lived experience, family peer support workers help guide positive change for families by building trusting relationships with those supporting loved ones.

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EXIT the module

1. welcome

welcome to
WHERE WE ARE AT
family peer
support



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.

The purpose of module **15. family peer support** is to give you a broad view of family peer support and how it connects to the skills and values of peer support work overall.

We recognize that this module is a little different to the others in this training in that it focuses less on the 'how' of family peer support and more on what it includes. Those interested in exploring the path of family peer support work should look at taking additional family peer support worker training.

All of the concepts and core values in this training overall have many layers, and they will look a little different when you see them through the lens of different topics. You will get to experience all of those layers and intersections when you move through each module of the training. Feel free to navigate back and forth between modules as you move along since learning never has to be linear. There will be references to other modules intersected throughout.

Thank you for joining us on this educational journey!

2. gratitude



**Before we begin this
new *learning* journey, we ask that you
reflect on the following question:**

What am I grateful for today?

We know that taking time to reflect can give us the clarity and strength to do what can sometimes be difficult emotional work.

Download the *wonder journal* below and use it to record your thoughts. Please don't rush. Take all the time you need. This journal will be used for several questions throughout the module.



M15_reflection-journal.pdf
54.4 KB

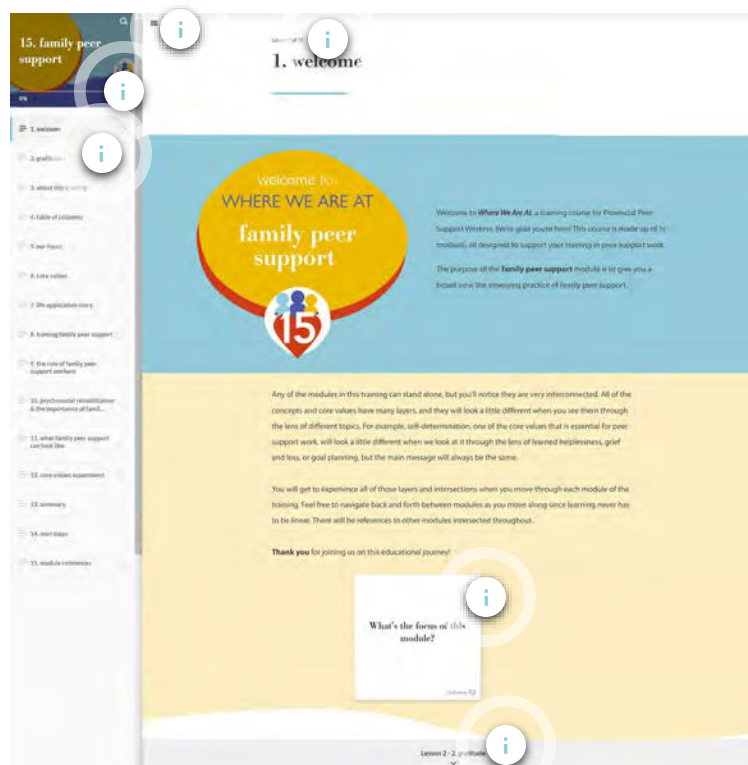


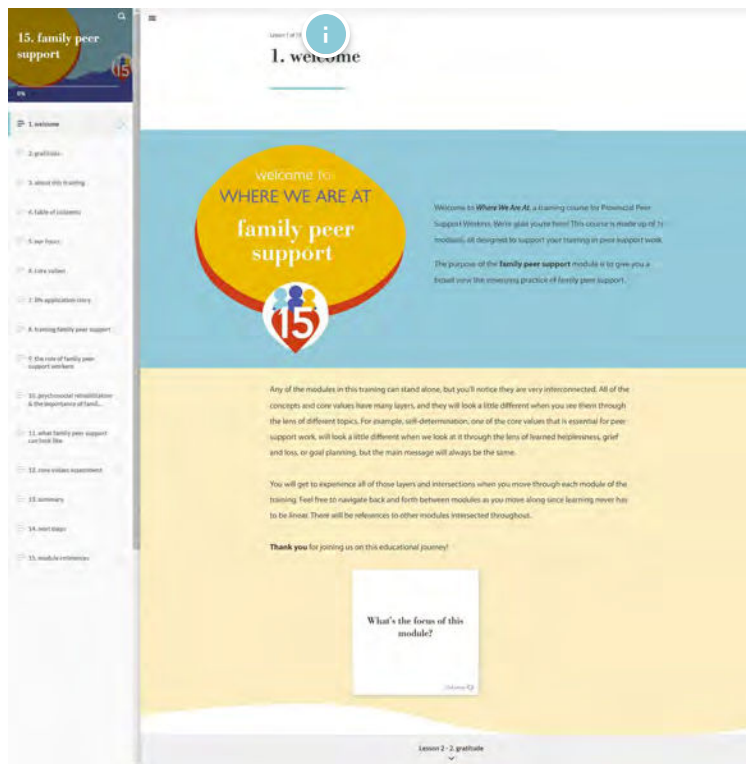
3. about this training

The course content has been guided by consultations that were 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 this 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 15

Above each lesson title, the lesson count is shown.

CONTINUE

reflection journal

As you discovered in the previous section, included in this training is a reflection journal. The journal is designed for you to use throughout the training. It's full of reflective questions related to the topics being explored that will get you engaging in the world around you with curiosity.

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 journal, using the questions as guides

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

CONTINUE

where we are at

provincial peer support worker training curriculum

The *Where We Are At* educational curriculum includes 16 modules. You'll find a brief description of each below.

1. the foundations

An overview of all the practices and knowledge that will be transferable 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 self-determination, the theory of self-determination and how peer support workers can support creating an ecology 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, by working from a place of shared lived experience, 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.

4. table of contents

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



life application story —

A scenario about shared experiences with a family member.

framing family peer support —

Examines how family peer support fits into the overall values and vision of peer support work, what we mean by family and who we mean when we talk about family peer supporters.

the role of family peer support workers

Explores who benefits from family peer support and the different ways family peer support workers can walk alongside family members.

psychosocial rehabilitation & the importance of family involvement

Touches on how family peer support work connects with PSR and why it's important to involve families.

what family peer support can look like

Looks at how we can shape family peer support work using the foundations of peer support work.

5. our focus

What's the focus of this module?

1 of 1

Supporting a loved one who is living with a mental health diagnosis, engaged in problematic substance use and/or experiencing trauma can be very challenging for one's own mental health. Many family members experience difficulties including loneliness and frustration as they support their loved one to navigate an often-stigmatizing system that may not take the time to understand their struggles. Many families can also find themselves and their loved ones falling through the cracks of the system. Please note that when we say family, we are referring to anyone who has a close or significant relationship with the person experiencing challenges

Family peer support workers have the lived experience of supporting a family member who is living with a mental health diagnosis, engaged in potentially harmful substance use and/or experiencing trauma. Family peer support workers aim to provide the compassion, empathy and emotional support that supporters require in order to prevent isolation, shame and blame.

While all the other modules in this training are applicable to family peer support workers, this module will focus on the unique challenges, specific challenges and core competencies of family peer support.

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



Define the role of a family peer supporter and the application of peer support in supporting families.



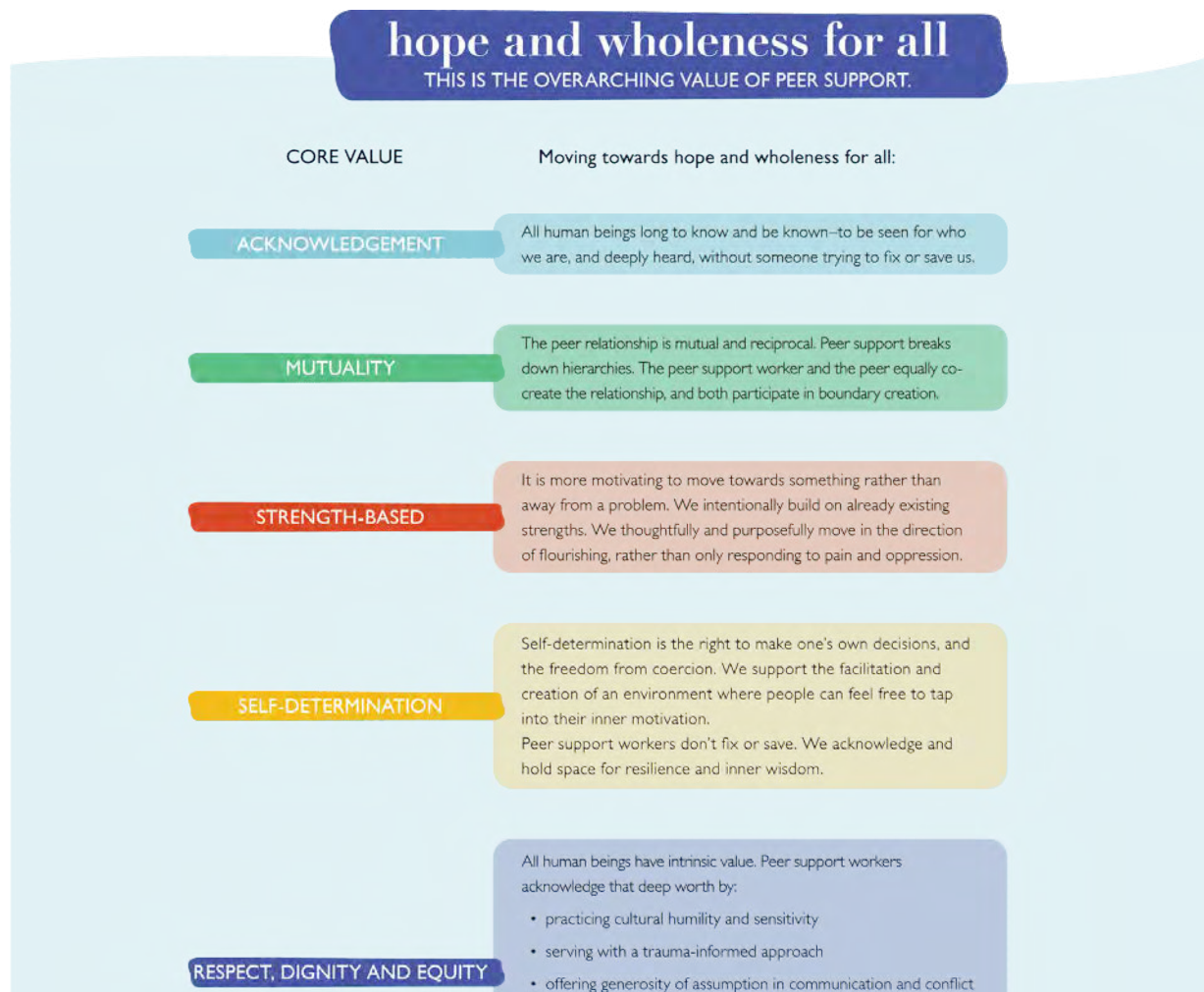
Discuss the value family peer support provides to people who are struggling to support their loved ones while also dealing with their own challenges.



Compare and contrast the content of all other modules and apply it to family peer support.

6. core values

The following core values are essential for peer support work. At the end of this module, you'll be asked to decide which ones are key to this topic.



- mindfully addressing personal biases

Peer support is about meeting people where they 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.

7. life application story

Check out this scenario with Tatiana, Linda and Phil.

scenario

Family peer support worker Tatiana has been supporting Linda and Phil, whose son is struggling with his mental health diagnosis. At first, they felt uncomfortable talking about their son with her, worrying that they were being disloyal, but they've started to open up a bit more, especially after Tatiana has reassured them that anything they talk about is completely confidential.

"I learned pretty quickly I couldn't do this alone," Tatiana explains to Phil and Linda. "I know it takes a lot of courage to reach out for help, but I'm glad you did. It takes a community to support a family when someone's living with a mental health diagnosis ... it doesn't just affect the individual, it affects the whole family."

"Our son has been put on so many different medications, his personality has completely changed. It's hard to tell what's the illness and what's a side effect. Do you have advice on medication and which ones he should be taking?" asks Phil.

"I'm not sure what medication would be best, but I know how complicated it is navigating medication. It was a big challenge when my partner and I were working on that with our daughter. We also had a few psychiatrists that just weren't the right fit. I had no idea that you can request a different psychiatrist, but that's something

you can do that can be very helpful. A lot of people don't know this either, but pharmacists are happy to answer questions and concerns and can be a great resource."

"It feels like this'll never get any easier," says Linda.

"That's totally understandable. Recovery is an ongoing process and it's so hard for everyone involved. Something that really helped me as a parent was making sure that I had enough support, so that I could prioritize my own mental wellbeing. Do you have other people in your life who could be a part of your support team?"

"Well, our son has a psychiatrist, a counsellor and a few friends," responds Phil.

"That's great, but what about for yourselves?"

Phil and Linda look at each other. Linda slowly replies, "Most of our friends don't really understand what it's like."

"I hear you! We also felt completely alone and scared when our daughter was first diagnosed. None of my friends had been through anything similar or really understood what we were going through. Sometimes we even felt like our parenting was being judged. It took a while, but eventually I found a support group for family members with a loved one living with a mental health diagnosis. That group was a huge lifeline for me. That might be something you could look at, if you feel it'll be a helpful resource?"

Linda looks uncertain. "We don't really have time for a group like that, between work and everything going on."

"Well, if you had different priorities..." mutters Phil.

Tatiana gently steps in, telling them "I know it can be easy to blame each other and yourselves, but it's nobody's fault that this is happening. Family members may not be on the same page, and that's okay. Every family member goes through the process of recovery at their own pace and in their own way. I found that connecting with others in group and talking about our struggles and difficult emotions really helped me. My partner preferred doing research and accessing one-on-one therapy. The bottom line is that none of us can be strong all the time. Support is so essential to getting through this, but you also need to do this at the pace that works for you."

"I feel like he'll never get back to being himself. I barely even recognize him anymore," says Phil.

"I get that. I remember feeling like that too, wondering where my daughter had gone. It's like you're grieving a loss of the person they were. Something that really helped me was once I found the right support, I began to feel like there was reason to hope for positive change. One of the things that ultimately helped me the most was educating myself about my daughter's condition and finding stories of other people who've recovered. That gave me a lot of hope."

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



Thinking back on the peer support strategies and core values we've explored in other modules, in what ways do you think Tatiana effectively supported Linda and Phil?

1 of 3



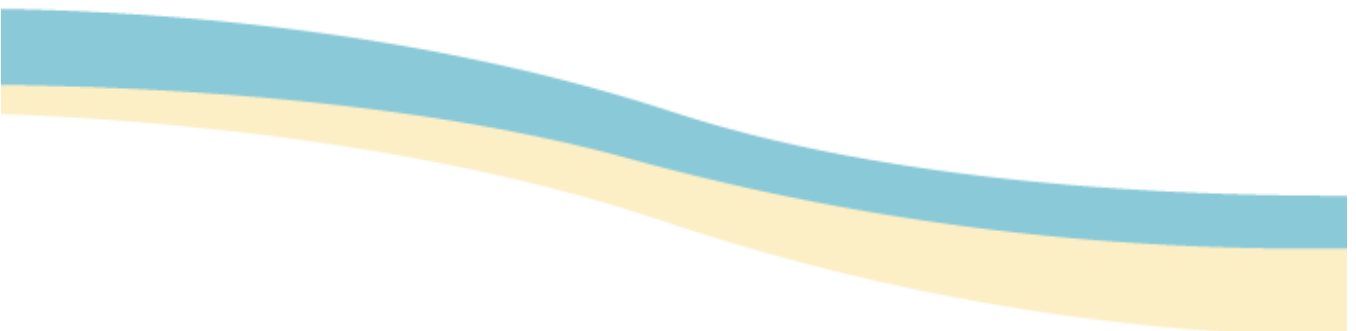
Do you think Tatiana shared her lived experience in a way that connects to the journey that Phil and Linda are on and that honours the peer support practice? If so, how? If not, why not?

2 of 3



Is there something you would do differently if you were in Tatiana's position?

3 of 3

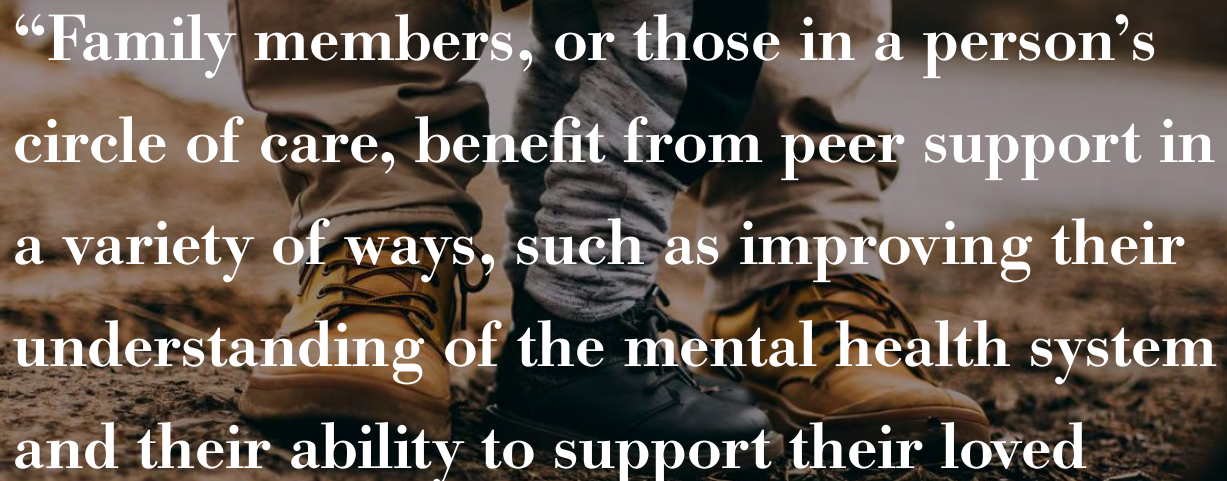


8. framing family peer support

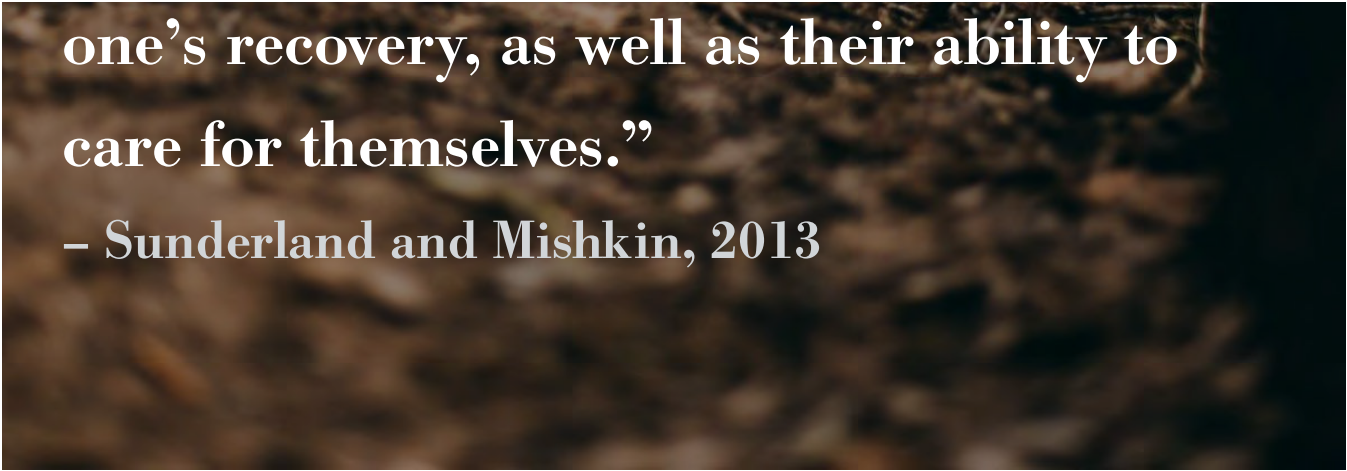
Family peer support is grounded in the same core values as peer support. Family peer support recognizes that when a loved one is experiencing or has experienced trauma, living with a mental health diagnosis or a substance use disorder, this can lead to stresses and challenges for the family members or circle of care of that loved one.

Because the peer support relationship is based on the connection and understanding that comes from having experienced and overcome similar challenges, those with lived experience are in a position to provide valuable peer support to others in a similar position.

Family peer support is a core tool for supporting the family as a whole, while also addressing the needs of each person involved.



“Family members, or those in a person’s circle of care, benefit from peer support in a variety of ways, such as improving their understanding of the mental health system and their ability to support their loved

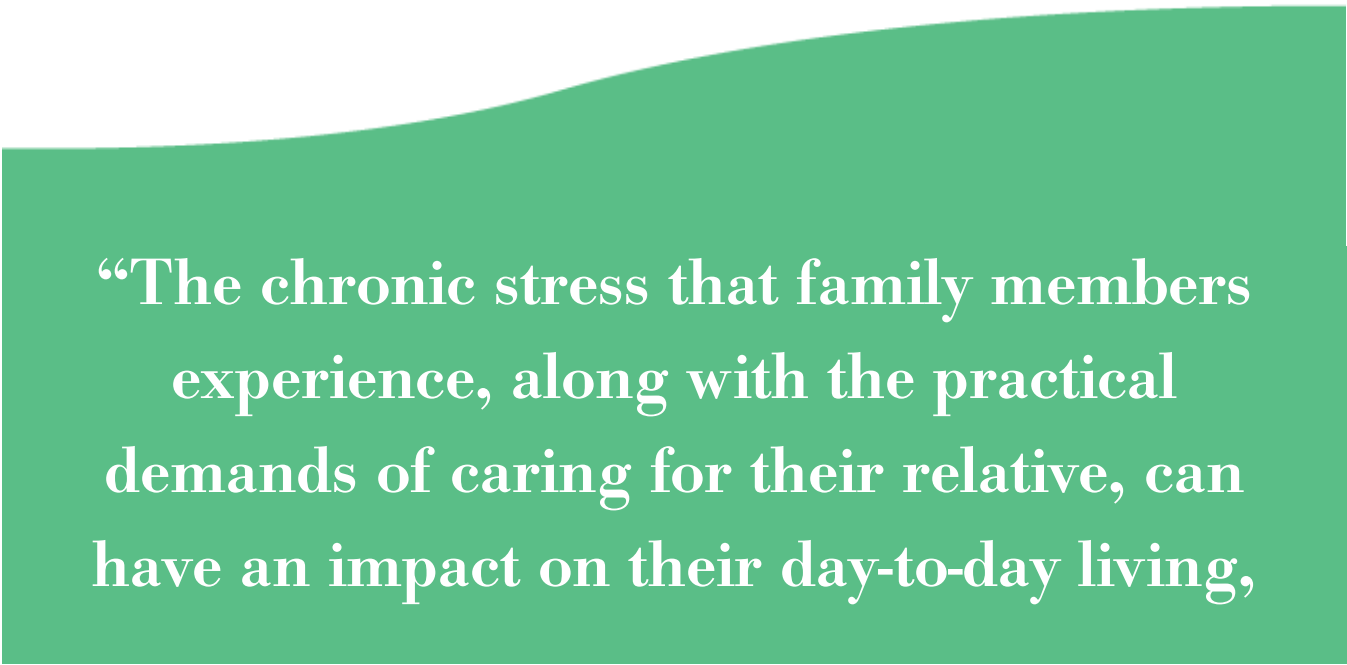


one's recovery, as well as their ability to care for themselves.”

– Sunderland and Mishkin, 2013

As the Family Mental Health Alliance (FMHA) explains, watching a loved one struggle with a substance use disorder, trauma and/or mental health diagnosis can have significant impacts on everyone involved. Parents, partners, siblings, children and others in the person's circle will react in different ways and have their own ways of coping. This can also change at different stages of the loved one's journey.

Family members often find themselves in a position of trying to understand and support their loved one, while attempting to honour the loved one's right for self-determination and autonomy. This attempt to find some kind of balance can be emotionally draining and overwhelming.



“The chronic stress that family members experience, along with the practical demands of caring for their relative, can have an impact on their day-to-day living,

health, social and family relations, careers
and financial situation.”

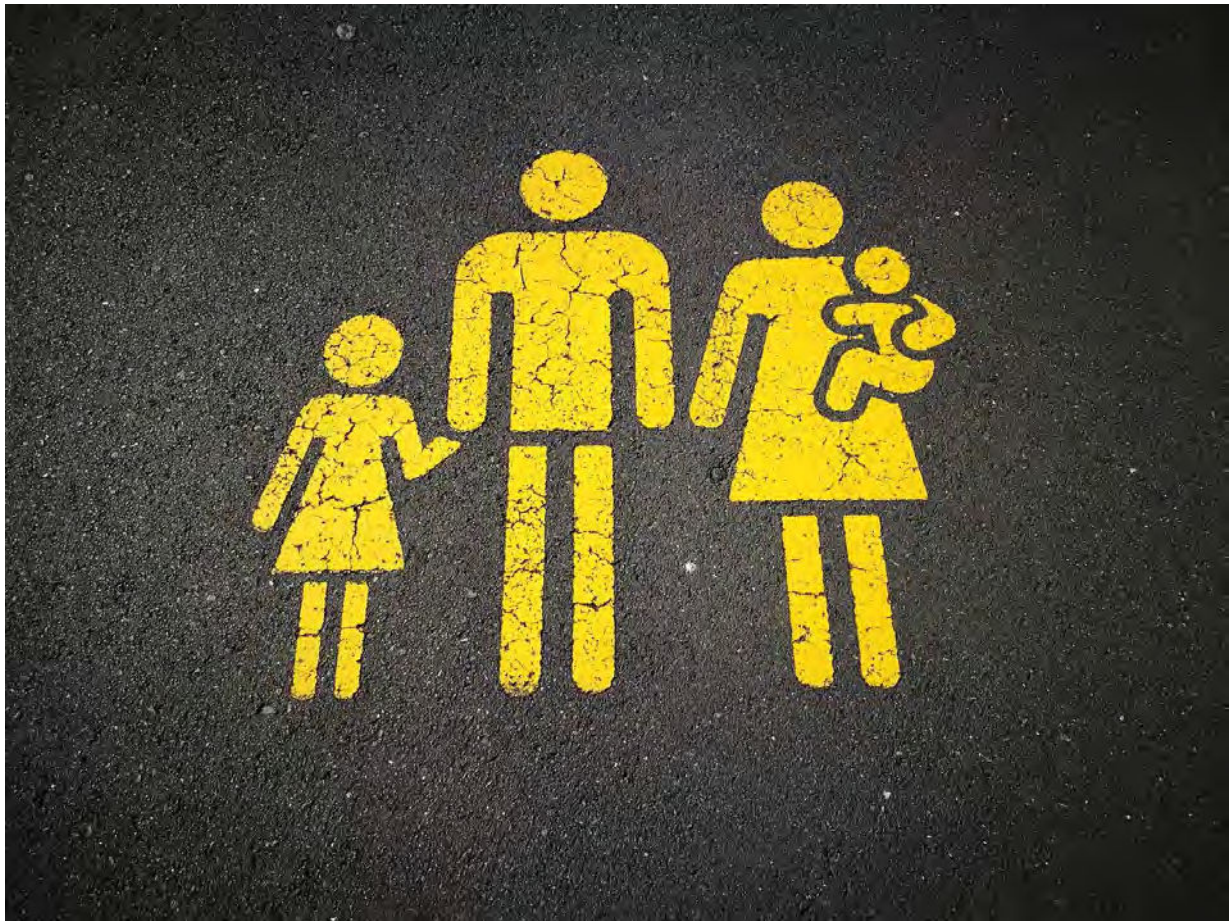
FMHA

A **family peer support worker** (also known as a family peer supporter) who has lived experience offers their own perspectives and can support the building of more empowering, recovery-oriented relationships between family members and their loved ones, as well as for family members themselves.

Let's pause for a moment to examine what we mean by family in this context.

CONTINUE

what constitutes a family?



At first it seems pretty straightforward what we mean when we say “family.” If you ask someone, they may name the “Standard North American Family (SNAF)” as their definition – a married mother and father with kids where the father is usually the breadwinner and the mother is the main caregiver and ‘household manager.’ As we know, in reality, this is **not** what most families look like. This is just one version of the ‘nuclear family.’ If we see family as only people who are blood-related, then we’re excluding the many different family structures out there that include step-parents, adopted children, in-laws, LGBTQ2+ family structures, children conceived through a donor or born by a surrogate and the many other types of families out there.

In her book *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* anthropologist Kath Weston (1991) talks about “chosen families,” meaning the kinship and relationships formed between members of the LGBTQ2+ community who’ve been rejected by their families of origin – because of their sexuality or gender identity – and their close friends. Chosen family became an incredibly important support system for gay men in the 1980s during the AIDS epidemic, for example, because many of these men were stigmatized and ostracized by their families of origin.



“Chosen families” aren’t just found in the LGBTQ2+ community though. Weston mentions that “chosen families” include “friends, partners and ex-partners, biological and non-biological children, and others who provide kinship support.” Family is what we choose it to be. Many of us have non-nuclear, non-blood related families or kinships that’ve formed because of who may live closer to us or who we choose to spend time with over our families of origin for whatever reason. We may also have several different families in our lifetime, and even several families at once if we choose.

CONTINUE

an indigenous perspective on family

In most Canadian Indigenous cultures, much like “chosen families,” family goes beyond a traditional nuclear family living together in one household. Families are made up of “extensive networks of strong, connective kinship” (Talaga, 2019) and can include entire communities, often with lineage connecting via common ancestors. Relationships are defined differently than in colonial structures; for example, anyone older than you is seen as your aunt, uncle, grandmother or grandfather and cousins are usually your brothers and sisters. There are, of course, variations depending on tradition and cultural practice.



Photo credit: Nisga'a Lisims Government / Gary Fiegehen

“The law of kinship says you are related somehow to everyone and everything in the human world, the spiritual world, the animal world, and the natural or plant world. It’s a strongly collective way of looking at the world that is apparent even in the most casual interactions.”

Carolyn Camilleri

In your work as a family peer support worker, remember that it’s your responsibility (as well as that of any host organization) to be knowledgeable about the background of the family of the person you’re supporting as well as how they define family. The burden should not be on the person you’re supporting to have to explain their cultural practices or family structure to you.

“In truth a family is what you make it. It is made strong, not by number of heads counted at the dinner table, but by the rituals you help family members create, by the memories you share, by the commitment of time, caring, and love you show to one another, and by the hopes for the future you have as individuals and as a unit.”

Marge Kennedy

It's important to remember the broader definition of family in the family peer support context. For the purposes of this training, when we talk about family members, we mean the chosen family of the loved one, not just blood family.”

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



**How do you define family?
What does family look like to you?**



Is chosen family a concept that resonates with you and your experiences with family?

2 of 5



What biases might exist for you around families and family systems, and how can you address these biases? Where might you benefit from more education around this topic?

3 of 5



What uniquely shaped families have you worked alongside before?

4 of 5



What are some of the bigger socioeconomic, cultural, environmental and/or physical impacts *you've* experienced (or not experienced) because of your family of origin?

5 of 5

CONTINUE

who are family peer supporters?

A **family peer support worker/family peer supporter** is anyone who's been through the journey of supporting a loved one who has lived with or is living with a mental health diagnosis and/or problematic substance use and shows knowledge and competency in working with family members. Family peer support workers are uniquely positioned to provide support to caregivers and family members in a way that others aren't. This is because they've 'been there' and understand personally the different struggles family members can face.

Family-based peer support often takes place in groups where empathetic understanding and first-hand knowledge are shared in a supportive manner with others who are in similar situations. It can also take place one on one. Family-based peer support workers, when compared with individual peer support workers, may need slightly different preparation and/or skills to fully understand the unique needs of caregivers. "For example, effective one on one and group family peer support involve different processes and groups in particular require unique skills to manage "group process safely."

Fundamentally, the core values and guiding principles of peer support work are still the foundations of family peer support.

How might the role of family peer support worker be different from that of an individual peer support worker? Is it any different?

9. the role of family peer support workers

“Families need the opportunity to get support from other families – to learn from the experience of other families who have had to deal with a family member who has faced their own struggles. There is a huge amount to be learned from other families as well as a huge amount of support that people can get – from other families, from that shared experience.”

Dr. David Goldbloom

Chair, Mental Health Commission of Canada



who can receive family peer support?

Any family member (whether traditional family members or chosen family members) can receive family peer support services. Some peer support programs focus only on supporting parents of young children who are living with a mental health diagnosis and substance use disorders, for example, but in B.C. we've chosen to expand that to all family members.

Family peer support work is, as we mentioned, perhaps not as widely known or funded as individual peer support work, but this gives us a meaningful opportunity to use our lived experience to provide hope – not only hope for the loved ones of family members – but also hope and support for family members as they navigate a path to their own recovery, health, wellbeing, resilience and improved quality of life.

It can be all-consuming when someone finds themselves supporting a loved one who is living with a mental health diagnosis and/or is engaged in the use of substances in a potentially harmful way. Families can experience many different challenges, and there's often little or no support available for them. Day-to-day

activities can be extremely stressful and unpredictable. Family members can experience additional challenges when they're the primary caregiver for their loved one.

All of this can have a huge health impact on the family members. They may experience anxiety, depression, and other conditions that diminish mental and physical health. Many family members have a hard time creating space for their own self-care, as they are so occupied with supporting their loved one.

This is where family peer support steps in.

“In my role, I walk alongside families, sharing pieces of my story, connecting, and offering hope. I aim to empower families to advocate for their loved ones and themselves. We meet for coffee, go for walks, and I hear about their experiences. I offer supportive listening and find resources that will work best for them.”

Kathy Shettell (Family Peer Support Worker)

CONTINUE

Peer support initiatives are able to link families who have a loved one living with a mental health diagnosis, trauma, and/or substance use disorder. Family members, or those in a person's circle of care, benefit from family peer support in a variety of ways, such as improving their understanding of the mental health system and their ability to support their loved one's recovery, as well as their ability to care for themselves.

Family peer support can also significantly reduce future harms, not just for the individual and their family or chosen support group but often for whole communities.



CONTINUE

what is the role of the family vs. the family peer support worker?

Family members who care for relatives living with a mental health diagnosis, experiencing trauma or engaged in the potentially harmful use of substances can find themselves having to take on a variety of different roles. As the FMHA explains, family members may have to act as informal “case managers” for their loved ones to identify things like treatments, housing options, arranging income assistance and other tasks, but they may also help their loved ones by

- ☐ Communicating with healthcare providers and others in the loved one’s circle of care
- ☐ Providing information on financial assistance, housing, day-to-day activities and more
- ☐ Assisting with system navigation and advocating on behalf of their loved one
- ☐ Monitoring symptoms, medication and adherence to treatment plans
- ☐ Providing crisis intervention
- ☐ Keeping records of treatments, medications and any hospitalizations
- ☐ Providing information on the context of a loved one’s life to aid professionals in understanding the loved one better

CONTINUE

question for reflection

Answer this question in your reflection journal.



Using your knowledge of peer support work and what we've discussed so far in this module, how do you think family peer support work might benefit a family member who's navigating all the different tasks listed above?

1 of 1

CONTINUE

Numerous studies have shown that having family members taking on these types of roles usually leads to tangible benefits for the loved one, including increased recovery rates, decreased involvement in criminal justice systems, decreased rates of hospitalization and relapse. It's also shown to have benefits to the healthcare system through increased savings.

Supporting a loved one through all of these different challenges and systems can be incredibly exhausting and stressful, especially as family members are often still trying to work, support other family members and take care of their own mental and physical health. Therefore, a key role of the **family peer support worker** is to walk side by side with family members to support them as they try to juggle, cope and adapt.

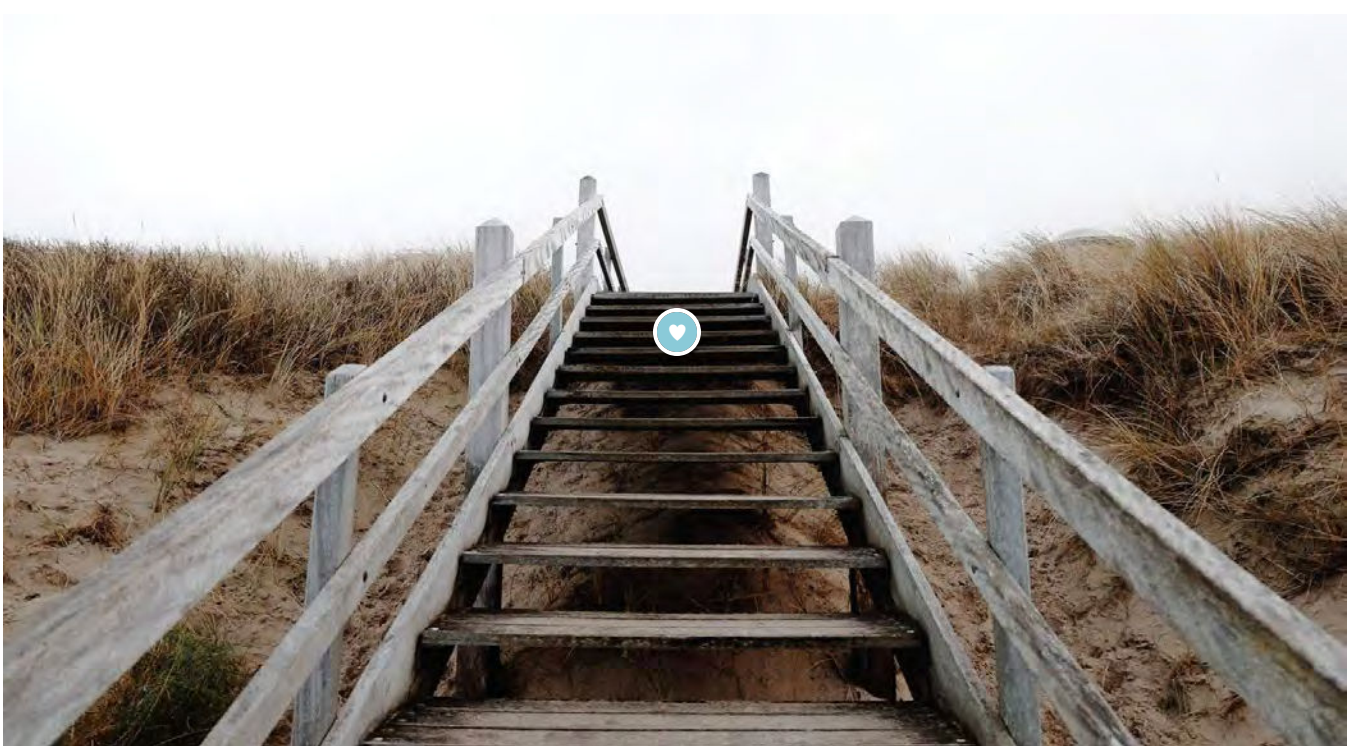
Unlike more service delivery-focused peer work, family peer support work is centred on the sharing of lived experience and using that experience to guide families towards hope and support them to build capacity.

Some of the ways family peer support workers do this is by providing:

- Support, comfort and a space for family members to vent their feelings
- Empathy for confusion and pain
- Help in finding resources and navigating the system
- Support as families move into advocacy and action
- Education on self-care
- Support for restoring balance in life

Click on the image below to learn more about some of these areas in which family peer supporters can walk alongside and support family members.





emotional support

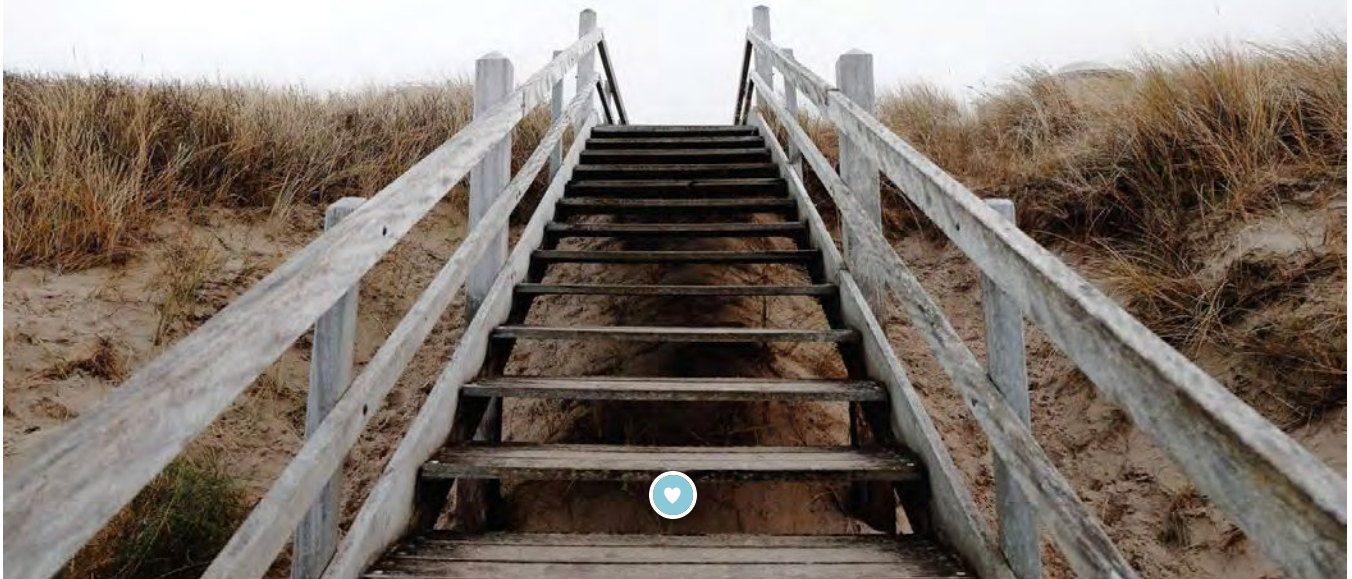
“Feelings of confusion, anxiety, stress, guilt, shame, self-blame, depression, fear, and anger are common among caregivers. These feelings generally change over time and according to the stage of the illness and cycle up and down coinciding with their family member’s condition.” – FMHA

A family peer support worker comes alongside to provide a listening ear, acknowledgement and validation to family members who are struggling. Holding space without trying to “fix” what’s going on is key. This deep emotional support goes a long way to relieving some of the stress of feeling isolated, judged and alone. Many people find it hard to find a neutral person to support them, as most friends or other family members will know their loved one and are not neutral. Having a peer supporter – someone who has also been there – listen and understand, without judgement, goes a long way.



crisis intervention

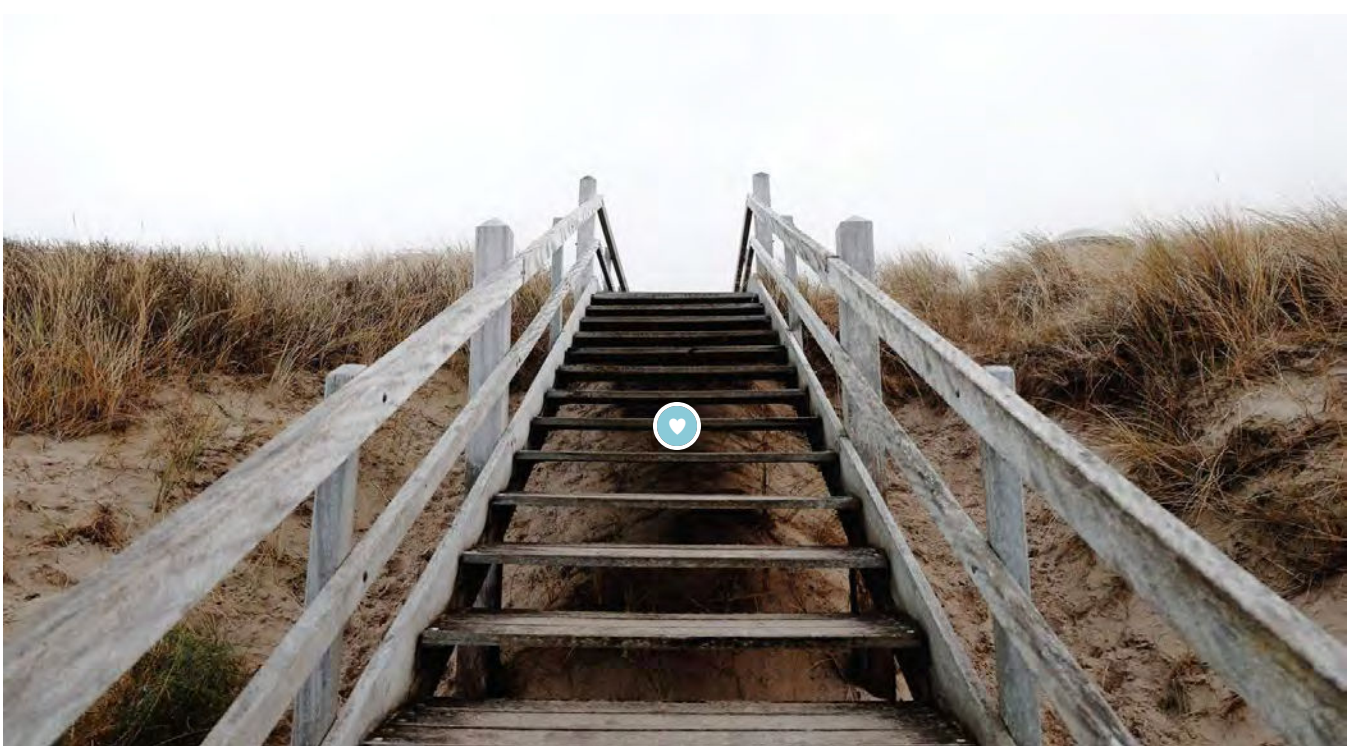
Some family members might have very few or no other supports. This can be quite different from traditional peer support. A family peer support worker may therefore find themselves having a central role in supporting the family member through a crisis. It's very important in these situations to be aware of your window of tolerance, what feels okay to you and what doesn't. Knowing outside crisis resources you can refer people to is very important.



navigating the system

“One of the most frustrating aspects of system navigation (other than limited resources) was convincing our contact that there is an actual mental health challenge and it’s not just a parenting issue.” – Hazelhurst, 2014

Health care systems are complex and have many different paths to navigate. It can be easy to get lost and fall through the cracks. There may be “gated services” that require professional referrals or that certain steps be taken first and this can be overwhelming. Loved ones may also be experiencing concurrent challenges, for example living with a mental health diagnosis as well as a substance use disorder, which are serviced by different systems. A family peer support worker who has ‘been there’ can support the family with navigating the system and learn what steps they can take to support both themselves and their loved one.




practical tools

Often, families may not know what services or supports are available, and it can be overwhelming to know where to begin. A family peer support worker can share information about self-care and other resources that will be supportive to a family member and may also have ideas and information on resources or tools that will help the loved one to build their capacity to cope, as well as their skills. This assists family members in feeling less like they're starting from scratch and alleviates some of the feelings of not knowing how to begin or where to turn.

In a later lesson, we'll look at some very concrete actions you can take as a family peer support worker to support family members.

Parent in Residence (PIR) with The FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health Moira Hazlehurst (2014) explores the value of family peer support work in her article in *Visions: BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal* and explains how important this work is:



“Families were asked if they’d had an opportunity to talk with other parents or family members in a similar situation, and if so, to say how and why this helped them. Most people said talking with others in a similar situation can help with the isolation and frustration many parents face. But they also said that peer support was crucial in getting the support they needed for their family.

‘Almost all the help, personal support and information I have ever received has come directly through peer support groups and one-on-one discussions with others dealing with the same issues. Because they have lived these experiences, they seem to care more and understand that your child/family member deserves help and services as much as anyone else.’ ”

10. psychosocial rehabilitation & the importance of family involvement



“Family mental health is holistic, multigenerational and embedded within a web of sustaining relationships with kin and community. Any change in the mental health of one person is a change in the

mental health of the entire family. Families are also part of the community; family mental health contributes to, and is keenly influenced by, community health.”

**Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality
(FORCE)**


Over the past several years, the involvement of family has begun to be recognized as an important aspect of recovery, with tangible benefits for all involved, including to the healthcare system itself. Family involvement is also something that's been valued within child and youth work. However, in adult services, family involvement is still often overlooked, and family members can feel marginalized or left out of the recovery process.

Family involvement is an important aspect of Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR). We discussed PSR in the *peer support & wholeness* module, but as a reminder, PSR is a recovery-oriented paradigm for service providers that promotes personal recovery, as well as successful community integration and quality of life for those with mental health diagnoses and substance use disorders. PSR emphasizes services and supports that are person-directed and collaborative, with a focus on the needs of each individual. At its core, PSR is about increasing a person's capacity to be “successful and satisfied in the living, working, learning and social environments of their choice” (BC PSR Advanced Practice website).



More specifically, in relation to families and family involvement, the BC PSR Advanced Practice website says that:

“PSR approaches are evidence-based best and promising practices in the key life domains of Employment, Education, Leisure, Wellness and Basic Living Skills as well as Family Involvement and Peer Support and Peer Delivered services. Because of their demonstrated effectiveness and recovery orientation, these approaches should be widely available to people living with long term mental illness and/or substance use problems.”



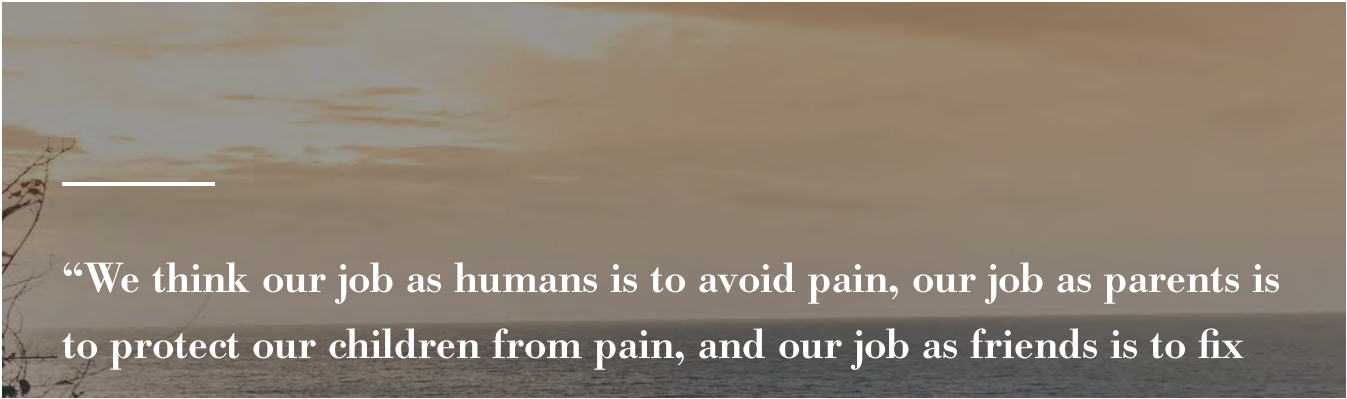
This focus on family importance within recovery-oriented systems helps pave the way for services such as family peer support. More and more, we're seeing family members included in policy-making boards and committees. It's important that family members are represented in all aspects of care within the system, including implementation.

CONTINUE

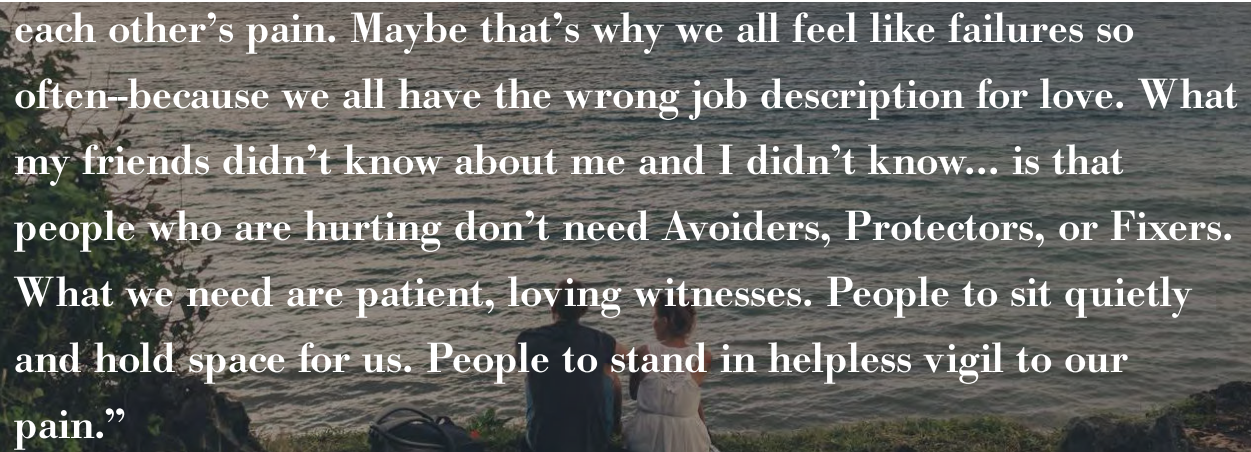
a note about confidentiality

Confidentiality can be a challenging issue for family caregivers especially when their loved one is in a phase of illness that diminishes their capacity or, in some cases, the symptom of anosognosia (a lack of insight) is ongoing.

That said, we must always respect confidentiality and people's choices as to the level of their family members' involvement in their recovery. The person being supported may not want their biological family's help for a variety of reasons. There's always a place for family, and always a need for family peer support, but the specifics will be unique to each situation.



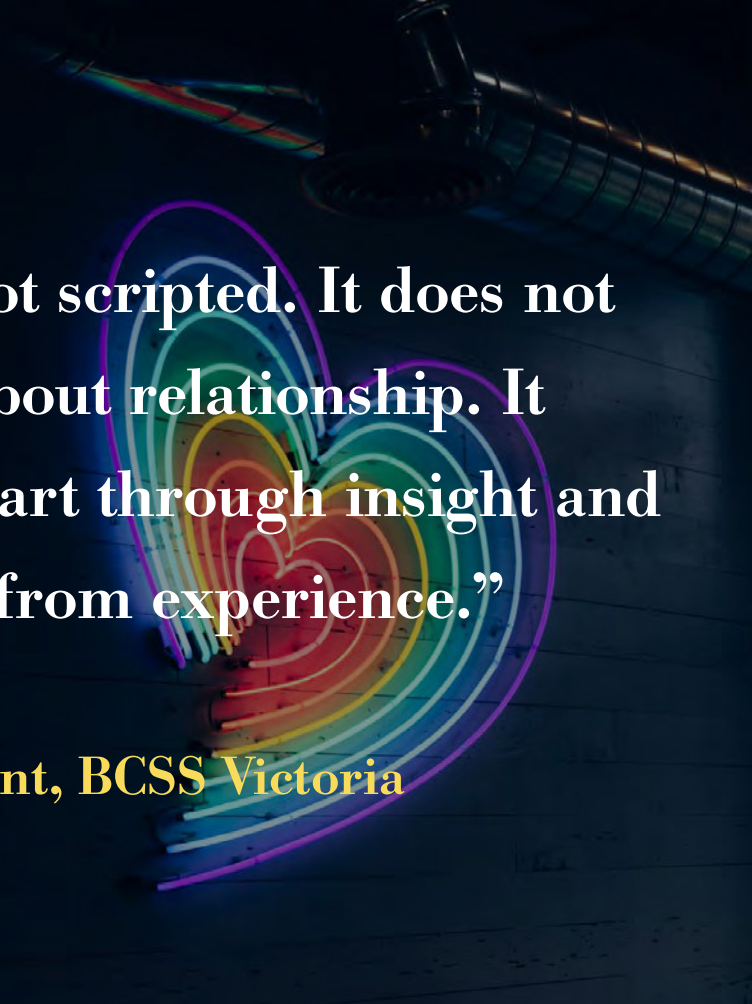
“We think our job as humans is to avoid pain, our job as parents is to protect our children from pain, and our job as friends is to fix

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a rocky, grassy shore, looking out at the ocean. The man is wearing a dark shirt and the woman is wearing a white dress. They are sitting close together, with a bag between them. The ocean is in the background, and the sky is overcast.

each other's pain. Maybe that's why we all feel like failures so often--because we all have the wrong job description for love. What my friends didn't know about me and I didn't know... is that people who are hurting don't need Avoiders, Protectors, or Fixers. What we need are patient, loving witnesses. People to sit quietly and hold space for us. People to stand in helpless vigil to our pain."

– Glennon Doyle Melton, *Love Warrior*

11. what family peer support can look like



“Peer support is not scripted. It does not follow steps. It is about relationship. It comes from the heart through insight and knowledge gained from experience.”

**– Wendy Mishkin,
Peer Support Consultant, BCSS Victoria**

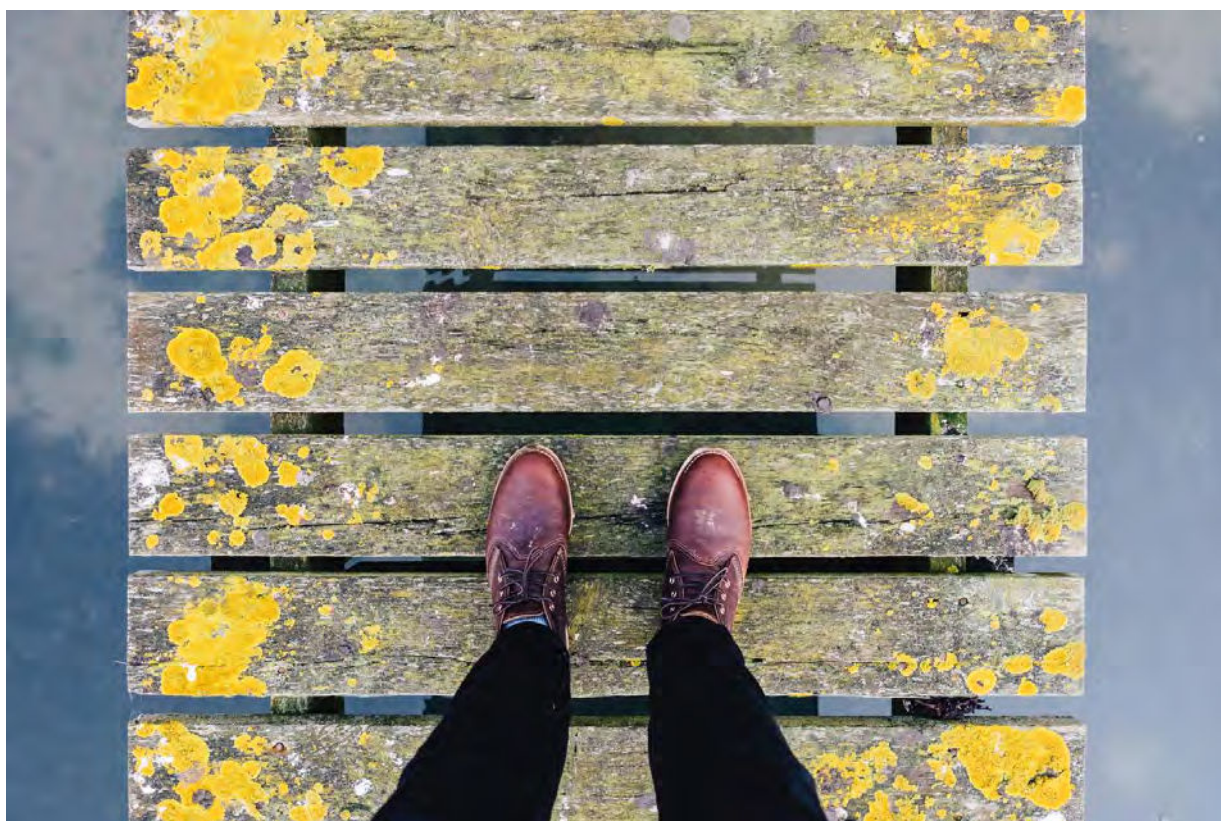
We have an opportunity to use our lived experience and our training as peer support workers to shape what family peer support can look like and address gaps in this work. In this section of the module, we'll share some ideas on how family peer support can be implemented using values of mutuality, empathy and connection.

establishing trust

As we know, peer support is about relationship and connection; family peer support work is no different in this regard as it involves establishing two-way relationships of deep trust. This work, however, can be even more complex than when supporting an individual because there are multiple players involved. A key goal of a successful family peer support relationship, though, is to support family members towards a path of wholeness and empowerment. We want family members to feel more hopeful not just for the future of their loved ones but for their own futures too.

As the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) explains, the value of this type of peer support relationship comes from that sense of connection and the shared experience of being a loved one of someone who has lived with or is living with a mental health diagnosis, is using substances in a potentially harmful way or is experiencing trauma. The messages of “Like you, someone I love and support is facing challenges” and “I’ve walked in your shoes and found a path, and I believe you can too” embody this idea.

Family peer support workers are able to acknowledge family members in a way others can’t, but just like peer support work in general, there is space to engage in a mutual, co-created relationship that encourages the inner resilience of the people being supported.



CONTINUE

using a recovery-oriented approach

“A family peer support worker will use ‘recovery’ to mean having recovered a state of wellbeing that includes a balance of hope, insight, and healthy acceptance in relation to their loved one’s challenge or illness.”

MHCC



As we've discussed in other modules, the recovery journey includes the discovery and development of hope, self-determination, resilience, purpose and belonging. The concept of recovery in family peer support work is not much different. While the loved one may be on their own path to recovery, family members also need support in their own recovery journey – whether that includes recovery from the emotional upheaval, grief and/or fatigue that can result from caring for someone else.

A family member's path to recovery can be enhanced by a better understanding of their loved one's situation and through the development of their own coping skills.

The MHCC (2016, p.13) says:

"Greater confidence, accepting the situation, and having hope for their loved one will help them to be more effective caregivers and supporters, while also helping them to sustain their own wellbeing. We refer to this as having achieved a level of readiness."

Interacting with the family member in a way that focuses on the family member's journey (as well as that of their loved one) towards a more hopeful, healthy and full life, rather than focusing solely on the loved one's symptoms, diagnosis or an objective set by someone other than the loved one, is a part of this process.

CONTINUE

co-creating, respecting & supporting boundaries

In module **6. understanding boundaries & what it means to co-create them**, we examined boundaries as a way to define what's okay and what's not okay in your peer support relationships. We also explored why it's important to set clear boundaries right from the beginning. The same applies to family peer support work, but there are also added layers of complexity, because you're supporting someone who's supporting someone. You need to co-create boundaries with your peer, the family member, but you may also need to support them as they learn to co-create their own boundaries with others.

For example, you may find yourself in a position where you're supporting the family member as they work on enforcing boundaries with someone else in their loved one's circle of care or someone else in their life. You may also be supporting the family member while they figure out how to balance their need to do what they feel is best in a given situation while trying to respect their loved one's boundaries.

“The principle of self-determination is equally important for family-based peer support, however it stems from the recognition that the focus of the support is the family caregiver (rather than the ill loved one). The family peer support worker helps family caregivers understand their own needs and options, so they can decide what is best for their situation. As they determine what’s right

for them, family caregivers also understand and respect their ill loved one's right for self-determination. This is often a fine balance and unique for each situation.” – Ella Amir, AMI Québec

Family members are likely collaborating with many different community partners, service providers and other stakeholders. It's important to respect the professional boundaries of all involved parties when exploring with the family member how they might interact with these other professionals as questions or concerns arise. There are also always issues of confidentiality, information sharing and other possible legal issues that may come up, particularly in settings with chosen family who may have no legal rights compared to blood relatives.

As with any peer support work, it's also important that you listen to yourself and know your own boundaries around what to share and when. Knowing when the time is right to share your lived experience in a way that's relevant, helpful and that encourages hopefulness is important, but so are your boundaries. Remember to have open and respectful conversations if boundaries are crossed.



CONTINUE

providing resources

“Research shows that families who receive education about mental illness, and help to develop coping and problem solving skills,

can help to ensure improved outcomes [for their loved ones].”

FMHA



As peer support workers, it's not our place to fix, save or rescue anyone. Rather, our commitment is to creating spaces where people can tap into their own wisdom; this is no different in family peer support work. There are times, however, when our lived experience means we may know of resources, services and supports that the family member may benefit from because we've had to navigate these, and any possible barriers to accessing

these, before. Our research and other peer support work may also have led us to learn about different support systems and how they can help. This allows us to help provide educational and informational support to family members.

Just as we would with individual peer support work, providing this type of information to family members means we're offering this as an option for consideration. We still need to respect the family member and the loved one's rights to self-determination. If we suggest resources or services that worked for us or our loved ones, this doesn't mean the family member you're supporting will agree. Even if we've 'been there, done that,' each person's journey will look different; peer support is about seeking to understand another person, rather than needing to be 'right.'



CONTINUE

biases, stigma & family peer support

As we've discussed in previous modules, we all have judgements, biases and assumptions. While doing any type of peer support work, we need to strive to recognize when these may be surfacing and learn how to question and challenge them. This is also something we can support family members to do for themselves.

setting aside our own assumptions —

When we have our own experiences with supporting a loved one who is living with a mental health diagnosis and/or has experienced or is experiencing trauma or a substance use disorder, we may have built our own assumptions and biases – whether that's around certain services, treatments or systems or due to our interactions with certain care providers or professionals. Acknowledging these biases and becoming aware of any point where these biases or assumptions may negatively impact the family member we're supporting is a key part of the family peer support worker role.

being aware of stigma, discrimination & blame —

“...social networks may desert [family members] due to stigma and discrimination, and they may be blamed for their loved one's mental illness or addiction” – FMHA

We've discussed stigma, including self-stigma, in other parts of this course, but know that many family members face “stigma by association” – the public stigma and negative beliefs about those who associate with members of a stigmatized group (in this case, the loved one the family member is supporting). Discrimination flows from stigma.

You may have experienced something similar. Family members can also face blame from other family members, service providers, the community or even their loved one, and it can be incredibly hard to navigate all of this. Family members and their loved ones may also be facing certain inequities that create further barriers and blame.

It's not your role to fix these challenges, but you can walk alongside the family member, showing compassion and acknowledging the struggles they're experiencing. This can help validate the family member's concerns and feelings in a way that helps build trust and openness in the peer support relationship.

finding support online

While many forms of support are available in face-to-face settings, it's good to keep in mind that the internet also provides many support spaces as well. In fact, online groups can be a valuable source for connection and community for families. By providing a platform for information sharing, skill-building and emotional support, these groups can help to improve the quality of family peer support services and enhance the well-being of those who provide them. Below are some of the benefits online groups can provide:



Community building: Online groups can bring together family peer support workers who may be isolated in their work or who may not have access to local support networks. These groups can provide a sense of community and belonging, which can help to reduce feelings of isolation and burnout.



Information sharing: Online groups can be used to share information and resources related to family peer support work. Members can post links to relevant articles, share their own experiences and insights and ask questions about best practices.



Skill-building: Online groups can provide opportunities for family peer support workers to develop new skills and knowledge. For example, members can participate in online training sessions, workshops or peer-to-peer coaching sessions.



Emotional support: Family peer support workers often work with families who are experiencing significant stress and may be dealing with difficult emotional issues. Online groups can provide a safe space for family peer support workers to share their own emotions and receive emotional support from others who understand the challenges of the work.



Networking: Online groups can be used for networking and building professional relationships and can lead to new collaborations and partnerships.



[Moms Stop the Harm](#) (MSTH), a Canadian advocacy group that aims to prevent overdose deaths and promote harm reduction policies related to drug use, is an example of an online support group. MSTH advocates for a public health approach to drug use, rather than a criminal justice approach, and works to reduce the stigma associated with drug use and addiction.

The organization also provides support and resources to families and individuals affected by drug use and overdose, and works to raise awareness about the risks associated with drug use and the importance of harm reduction strategies. They maintain a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and also host a YouTube channel.

CONTINUE

benefits of family peer support

Family peer support can be of benefit, whether that's directly or indirectly.

Which of the following do you think are benefits of family peer support?

Choose ALL that apply.

☐

Helps family members build confidence and self-compassion

☐

Increases family members' awareness for the need for self-care

☐

Increases family members' feelings of empowerment to take action for themselves and their loved ones

☐

Increases financial burdens on family members

☐

Decreases family members' feelings of isolation

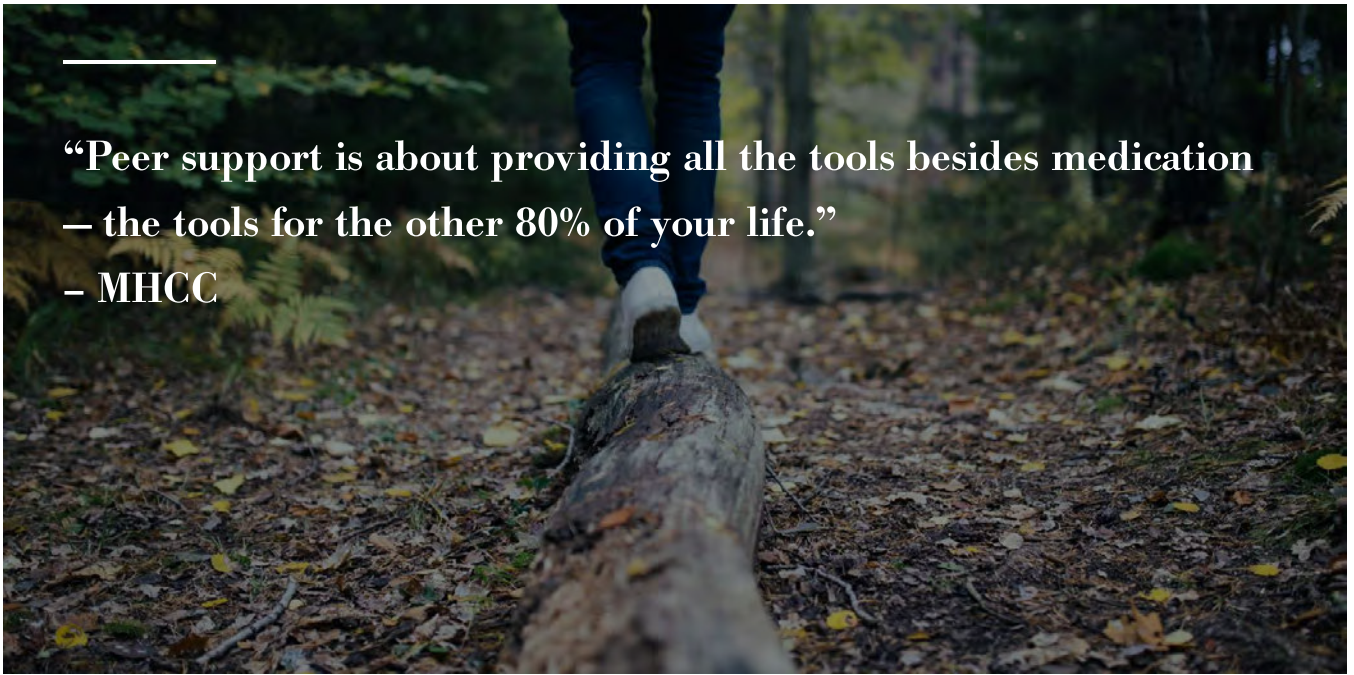
☐

Increases family members' ability to collaborate with others in the loved one's circle of care

SUBMIT



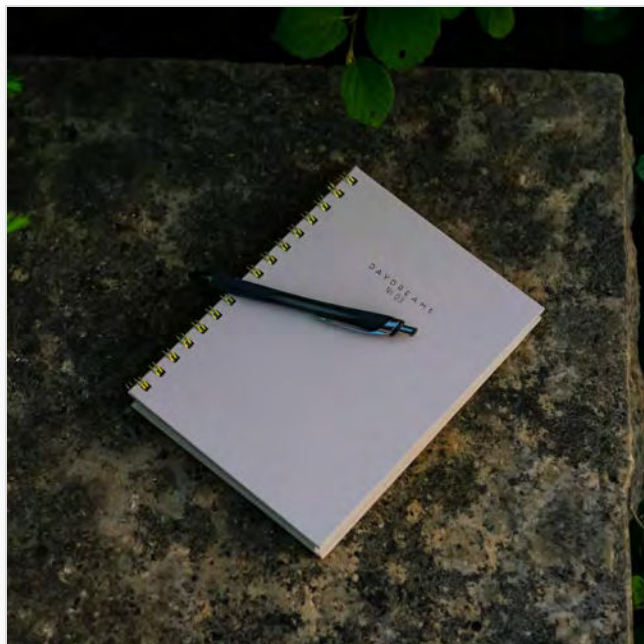
“Peer support is about providing all the tools besides medication
— the tools for the other 80% of your life.”
– MHCC



12. core values assessment

question for reflection

Answer this question in your reflection journal.



**In what ways have the core values
(see list below) intersected with the
topic of family peer support?**

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 & 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

PSWs SUGGEST: Treat PSWs as you would like to be treated and expect to be treated. Learn about them on a personal level and treat them as equals.

belonging & 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.



13. summary

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

☐

Family-based peer support is a pioneering practice that recognizes that when a loved one is living with a mental health diagnosis and/or has experienced or is experiencing trauma or a substance use disorder, this creates unique challenges for the family members of that loved one.

☐

Family peer support is a core tool to facilitating recovery and resilience building for the family as a whole, while also addressing the needs of each person involved.

☐

The concept of family is broader than that of the nuclear 'mom, dad and 2.3 children' family and can include one's chosen family.

☐

There are many tangible benefits to the involvement of family in a person's circle of care.

☐

A key role of the family peer support worker is to walk side by side with family members to support them as they try to juggle, cope and adapt with their loved one's challenges.

☐

Family peer support workers can provide emotional support as well as practical resources and ways to support family members navigate the complexities of multiple health care systems and providers.

☐

A recovery-oriented approach is as important for family members as it is for the person living with a mental health diagnosis or experiencing trauma and/or substance use disorders.

☐

We have an opportunity to shape family peer support work and bring the key values and foundations of peer support to this practice.

14. 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 visit another module of 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

Curriculum Developer and Writer: *Jenn Cusick*

Project Manager: *Jonathan Orr*

Consultant and Former Project Manager: *Corey Ranger*

Life Application Story Writer: *Robyn Thomas*

Editor: *Annie Brandner*

Graphic Designer: *Jeseye Tanner*

Peer Portraits: *Jesse Winters Photography*

Instructional Design & Development: *PathWise Solutions Inc.*



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for this module:



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EXIT the module

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Click the button to EXIT.

EXIT MODULE