

4. self-determination



This module examines how peer support workers can use the principle of self-determination to contribute to an environment where people trust their own inner wisdom.

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EXIT the module

1. welcome



welcome to
WHERE WE ARE AT
self-determination

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 **4. self-determination** is to familiarize you with one of the foundational values of peer support.

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 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 [reflection 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.



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69.4 KB

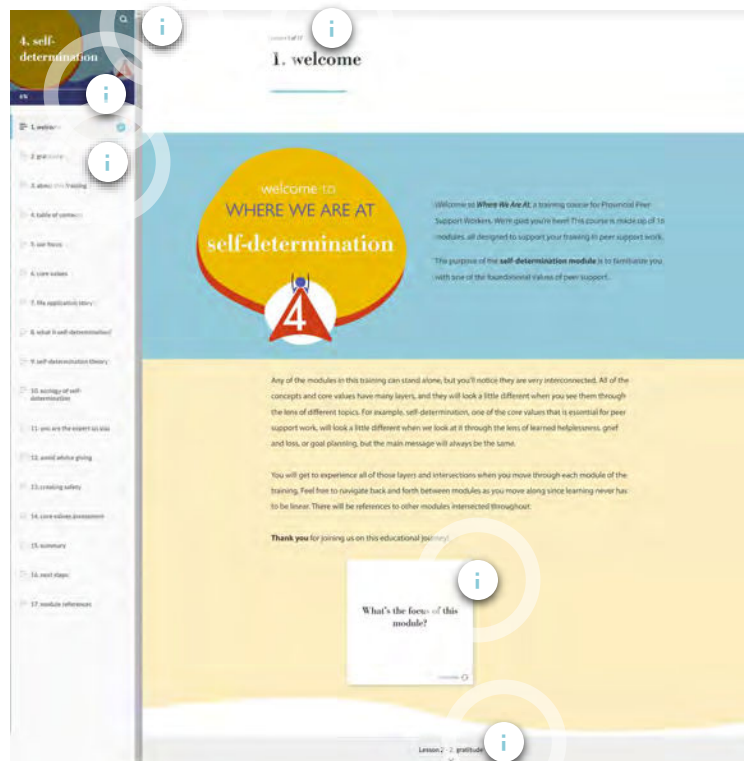


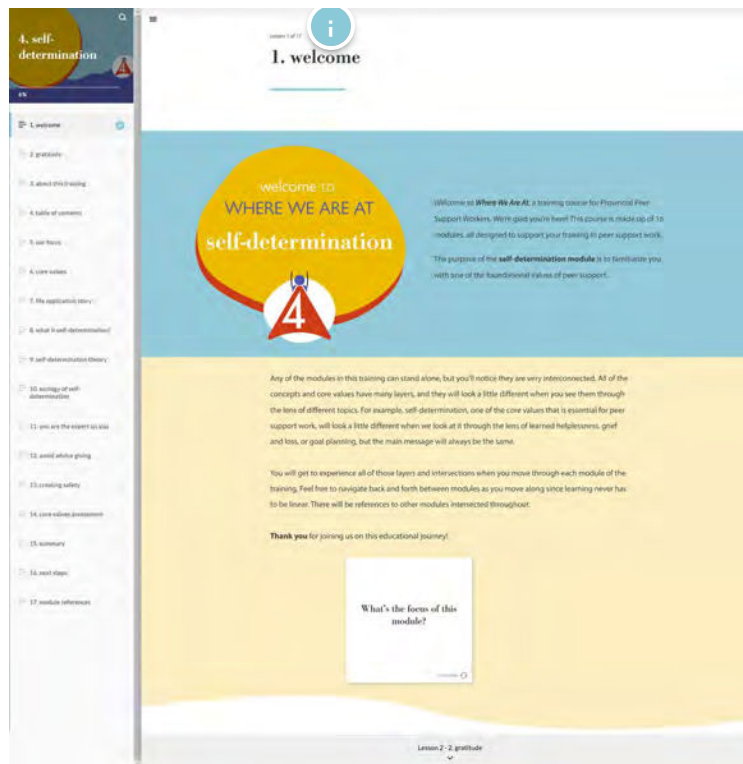
3. about this training

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 17

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 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.

life application story —

A scenario about self-determination.

what is self-determination? —

Defines self-determination from a variety of perspectives.

self-determination theory

Explores different topics around the theory of self-determination, including:

- Role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
- Three basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness
- How feedback affects self-determination

ecology of self-determination

Looks at the meaning of ecology, the differences between ecology and environment and how peer support fosters an ecology of self-determination.

you are the expert on you

Proposes the idea that each person holds the keys to their own growth.

avoiding advice-giving

Emphasizes a shift in thinking away from “helping” towards “supporting.” This means questioning the urge to give advice.

creating safety

5. our focus

What's the focus of this module?

Self-determination is a value strongly supported in the mental health and substance use system, yet it's one that's not always fully explained. Self-determination is one of the foundational values of peer support.

We'll look at what self-determination is, the theory of self-determination, and how peer support workers can avoid simply giving advice and instead support the creation of an ecology where people can begin to trust their own inner wisdom. An ecology that encourages self-determination means that people are able to tap into their intrinsic motivation, grow and thrive.

1 of 1

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



Define self-determination and why it's an essential part of peer support services



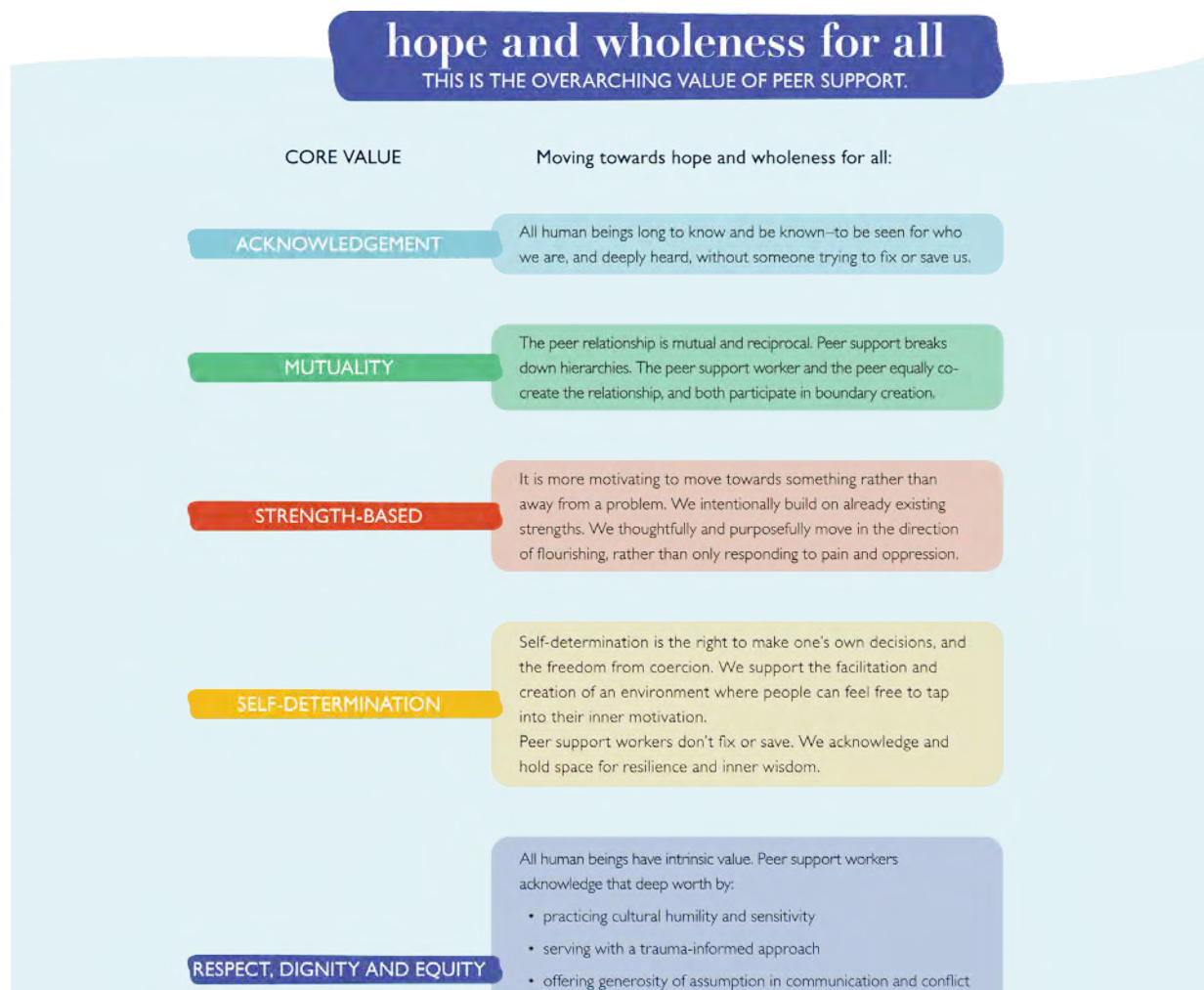
Describe self-determination theory, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as the conditions needed for self-determination to grow.



Create environments where people you will support can access their own inner self-determination, thereby dismantling the need for and practice of advice-giving.

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 Rachel and Devon.

version one

Rachel had just started working in a peer support role. She was excited to support her peer, Devon, as someone living with a mental health diagnosis. She had worked in the mental health field for quite some time, and knew a lot of good tools and strategies for staying well. Shortly after introducing themselves, Rachel asked Devon how his mental health was doing.

"I haven't really been sleeping much lately," said Devon.

"What have you been doing before bed?" Rachel replied.

"Well, I usually play video games until really late. And then I can't get to sleep, so I just keep playing."

"Hmm. Yeah that doesn't sound very healthy, does it? Having good sleep hygiene practice is really important. You really should turn off all screens at least an hour before bed."

Rachel noticed that Devon seemed to shut down, and the conversation stopped abruptly. She tried to get him to talk more about what was bothering him, but he was pretty quiet for the rest of the visit. At the end of their time together, Rachel felt satisfied that she had at least given Devon some good suggestions to take home.

Let's try this again, and this time we will consider self-determination.

Rachel was looking forward to meeting up with her peer, Devon. Based on her previous occupation, she knew that she might struggle with not giving advice, and reminded herself that each person has the tools within themselves to stay healthy and well. After chatting for some time about how their weeks were going, Devon opened up about his struggle with sleep.

"I'm really having a hard time getting out of bed. I've been staying up really late playing video games or watching movies, and then I sleep in and waste half the day."

Rachel listened and found herself wanting to step in and make a few suggestions. She realized what she was doing, and let herself sit with her own discomfort around not being able to fix the situation and help Devon right away. Instead, she decided to trust that he had the knowledge he needed to find a way through the situation.

"Mmm. Sounds like it's a tough cycle to get out of. Sometimes I stream hours of TV when I know there are other things I should be doing. It makes me feel good for a bit, and then I start stressing out even more."

"Yeah. It's like... I just get really overwhelmed sometimes. And that stuff is fun and an escape I guess. I know there are things I need to do, and not doing them makes me more anxious and depressed," said Devon.

Again, Rachel had a lot of suggestions floating through her mind, but she kept them to herself. "What would help you start doing some of those things that you need to do?"

Devon thinks for a while. "I really don't know. I just feel so tired and unmotivated a lot of the time."

Rachel knew from her own experience making choices that impacted her health in a negative way, that often she knew what to do and just flat out ignored it for instant gratification. She always regretted her decision later.

Rachel thought for a bit about how she could reframe her question differently so Devon could tap into some of his inner wisdom. "What do you think is your biggest contributor to feeling so tired and unmotivated?"

"I'm pretty sure it's because I stay up until almost 2 am every night," Devon said.

"I get that. I feel that way on the nights I binge TV shows. I enjoy it in the moment, but it makes me feel gross the next day. Is there something you can do to support yourself to go to bed earlier?" Rachel said.

"HMMMMM..." Devon said. "Well, I guess I could set a guideline for myself that I can't play a game unless I've done one thing that I need to do in my day. That would help me relax a bit, so I don't feel so guilty in the morning. Maybe setting a timer would help me not lose track of time."

"That sounds like an amazing idea! I need to come up with a plan like that to be mindful of my TV watching!"

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



Can you relate to Rachel in this scenario? Have you found yourself wanting to give lots of advice to someone else?

1 of 2

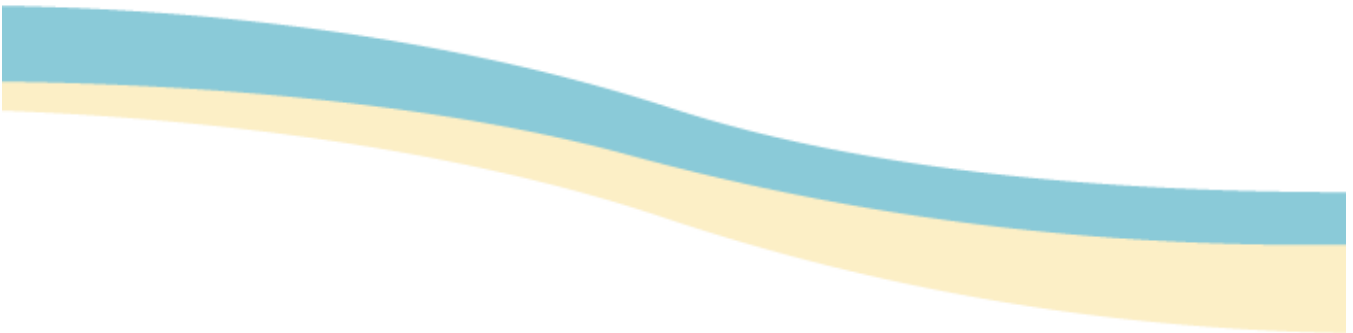


Have you been in the position of



Devon in the first scenario, where someone has offered advice but it doesn't feel good? Have you had someone give you advice that feels prescriptive and makes you feel unheard?

2 of 2



8. what is self-determination?

Self-determination is one of the core values of peer support.

self-determination

Self-determination is the right to make one's own decisions and have freedom from coercion.

We support the facilitation and creation of an environment where people can feel free to tap into their inner motivation.

1 of 1

Self-determination is a term that is used often in this work, but there are still misconceptions about what it means and how it impacts our work.

Self-determination means every person has the following rights and abilities:

- ☐ To choose what they want and need for themselves
- ☐ To free themselves from coercion, or from having other people make their life decisions
- ☐ To be the driver of their own life instead of always being the passenger
- ☐ To believe everyone has an inner expert (even if they have barriers and can't tap into their own wisdom at the moment)

Sometimes people who receive mental health and substance use services find their self-determination taken away by the very system meant to support them. However, because of a move to recovery-oriented practices, this is shifting. Most agencies understand the role self-determination plays in recovery. This is supported by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC).

This excerpt is from the MHCC's Guidelines for Recovery-Oriented Practice:



"Recovery-oriented care respects people as partners in all decisions that affect their mental health and emphasizes the importance of autonomy, self-determination, and self-management. In recovery-oriented practice, the insight and expertise derived from "lived experience" is valued, and practitioners work alongside the person to co-design service plans, encourage problem-solving, and provide choices, rather than taking unilateral action to "fix" the problem or the person." (MHCC, 2015, pg. 27)

Note that although this quote only speaks of mental health, the MHCC mandate has grown and fully includes substance use in their scope of service.

Facilitating self-determination doesn't always move from a high-level philosophy to an actual practice that plays out in the daily actions of practitioners.

Many people receiving services struggle to gain autonomy, self-determination and self-management while receiving services. As peer support workers, we are supporting people and making an impact towards changing the system itself. That's why it's essential as a peer support worker to understand this core value.

It's important to note that some people might be very unwell and may not be able to make big life decisions because of their condition. In these cases, the use of self-determination is still possible but will look quite different and should be adjusted as wellness grows.

Why is it essential that peer support workers understand the importance of self-determination?



They are trying to change the system itself

☐

They are supporting people

☐

Both of these

SUBMIT



9. self-determination theory

**“In the midst of winter, I found there was,
within me, an invincible summer.”**

Albert Camus

CONTINUE

**In your role as a peer supporter, you get to be a
champion of facilitating self-determination.**

Self-determination is the innate desire to flourish that's embedded within each of us. Self-determination is essential for everyone.

When we speak about self-determination we are referring to a person's right to choose what they want and need for their life. Self-determination is about getting in the driver's seat. The alternative is when others are controlling everything. There may be a time for that kind of extra support, especially if we are very unwell and unable to make decisions for ourselves. But our goal is to 'drive' again.





Our role in peer support is to create the right conditions so that the person we're supporting can get back behind the wheel. We come alongside and are there for support, but we never fix or save someone else.

Often mental health/substance use systems don't foster self-determination.

CONTINUE

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Self-determination is the innate desire to flourish that's embedded within each of us.

Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci are the creators of self-determination theory. In their paper *Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being* (2000), they talk about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

extrinsic motivation

The root of the word extrinsic is external.

This is when people are motivated by something outside of themselves. This motivation can come from increased money or reward, general success, good grades or even fame. Punishment,

intrinsic motivation

The root of the word intrinsic is internal.

This kind of motivation is born out of purpose and meaning. People can be intrinsically motivated by their interests and beliefs, the pleasure of learning, their desire to make an impact on the worlds around them and

Let's look at an example to understand the differences here. A 2015 study done by Penn State University scientists looked at the reasons why men and women who were sensitive to the burning sensation that came from eating hot chillies still ate them. Expand the boxes to learn what they concluded.

example – extrinsic motivation —

Men were less likely to enjoy the taste of chilli peppers, but instead ate them because they provided extrinsic rewards, like being recognized for being a thrill seeker or tough guy.

example – intrinsic motivation —

Women, on the other hand, learned to enjoy the chilli burn. They were driven by the intrinsic desire to experience interesting or extreme sensations.

CONTINUE

Lasting change always comes through intrinsic motivation.

That's not to say that extrinsic motivation doesn't have its place. Often it does. We all find ourselves motivated extrinsically at times. However, that kind of motivation has limits. The scales need to tip in the direction of intrinsic motivation to make a lasting difference in our lives.

In module **1. the foundations** (lesson 15) we talked about increasing our tolerance for uncertainty. We covered some of the good parts of uncertainty, like how it opens us up to new possibilities and creativity. Choosing to intentionally step into uncertainty with curiosity also supports us to have a sense of purpose, which, in turn, increases our intrinsic motivation.

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



List five more examples of extrinsic motivation.



1 of 4



List five more examples of intrinsic motivation.

2 of 4



Consider your own motivation. When have you been motivated extrinsically? Describe. Did the change stick? If it did, can you observe some intrinsic motivation involved?

3 of 4





Counter that with a time when you were intrinsically motivated. What motivated you? Why? Did the change stick? Were there elements of external motivation present as well?

4 of 4

CONTINUE

self-determination theory – the three parts

Let's explore more about Ryan & Deci's self-determination theory.

Have you ever said, or heard someone say, "How can I motivate that person?" The answer is that you can't motivate anyone.

Anything you can do is rooted in extrinsic motivation – basically offering a reward or a punishment, and that doesn't support self-determination or real deep-seated change.

However, as facilitators of self-determination, we CAN create an ecology that supports intrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory says that humans have three basic needs – competence, autonomy and relatedness.

self-determination theory

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE THREE BASIC NEEDS:



Based on the work of Richard Ryan and Edward Deci.

CONTINUE

competence

☐

Working towards small and large goals

☐

Learning and practicing new skills

☐

Taking risks and reaching towards goals

☐

Embracing a sense of hope

Consider your own experience of competence. How has learning a new skill supported your motivation towards meeting a new goal?



CONTINUE

autonomy

☐

Having control over choices – big or small

☐

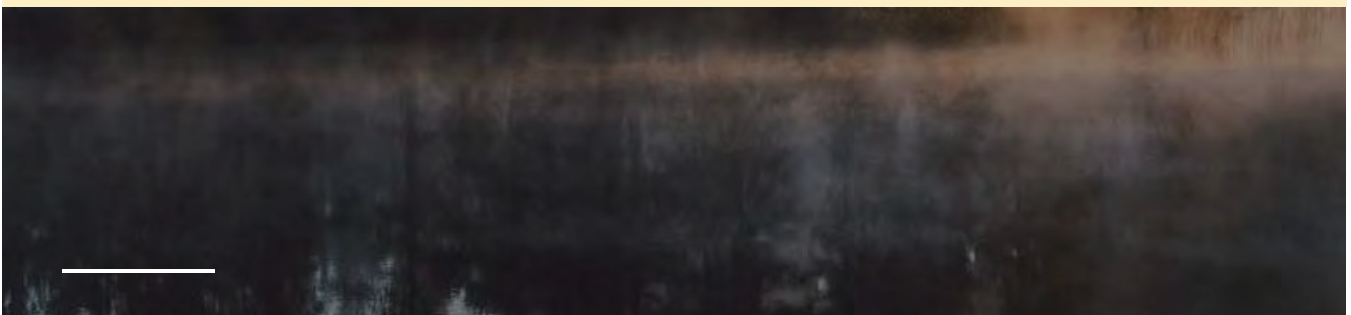
Taking personal responsibility for one's life

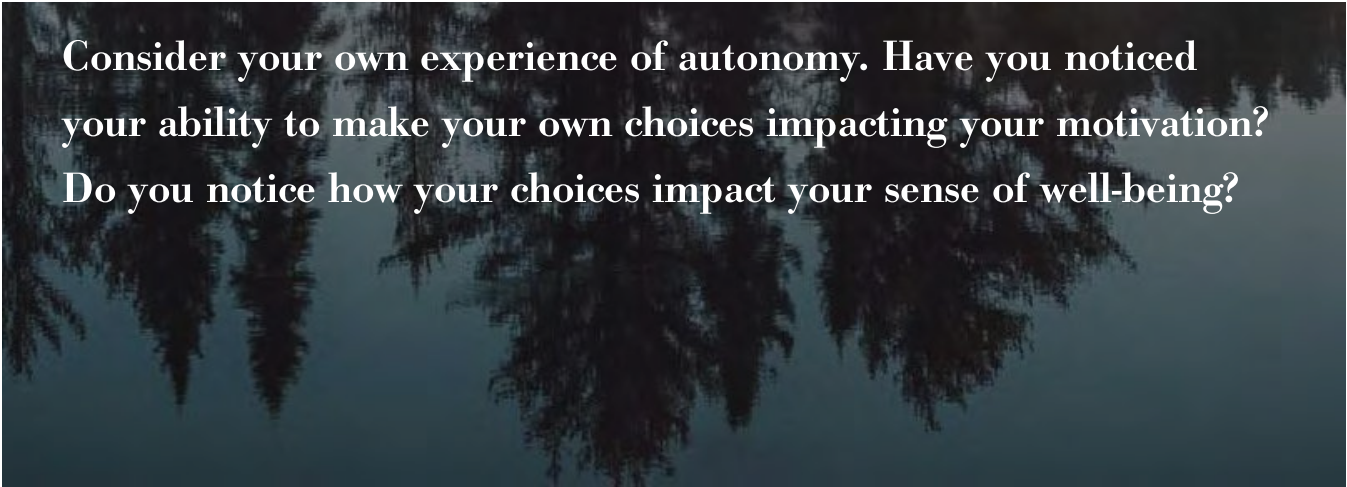
☐

Getting out of auto-pilot and being intentional

☐

Noticing what choices and actions are life-giving and supportive





Consider your own experience of autonomy. Have you noticed your ability to make your own choices impacting your motivation? Do you notice how your choices impact your sense of well-being?

CONTINUE

relatedness

☐

Connecting to others and having a sense of belonging

☐

Having the opportunity to both be cared for by others and to care for others

☐

Making use of social and community connections and support systems

Consider your own experience of relatedness. Have you noticed that when you are connected with others, you have a greater sense of motivation? Have you noticed your motivation decrease when you feel lonely and isolated?

CONTINUE

feedback and self-determination

Receiving positive feedback and encouragement is a very important part of growing self-determination. When we hear unexpected words of encouragement from people we trust, it increases our confidence, which, in turn, builds our motivation.

Many of us cringe when we hear the word “feedback” because we associate feedback with criticism. We aren’t talking about that kind of feedback. When we consider the growth of someone’s self-determination, we want that feedback to be positive. Within your role as a peer support worker, learning to give encouragement and positive feedback is necessary.

CONTINUE

Here are some tips to develop your skill of giving positive feedback and encouragement:~

1

Notice

Pay attention to the growth of the person you're working with, no matter how small it is. We may have to train our eyes to see these small moments or they will pass us by.~

2

The small steps matter a lot

When someone is struggling, little things can be very hard. Celebrating small wins is important and so encouraging. "You got out of bed, got dressed and ate! That's a big win!" Tiny steps forward make all the difference!

3

Be specific

Instead of saying, "that was awesome," or, "you're doing great," find something very specific to share with them.

For example: "The way you managed that situation was so good! I saw that you were very clear with your boundaries. I know you have shared that boundary setting is hard for you. I really saw that you were clear and firm with what was okay for you."

Or something like, "Wow, those cookies are so delicious. I love the flavour combination of cinnamon and chocolate. You really have some skills with flavour."

Be genuine

Don't make things up. If you do, people will know and it will break down the connection you've built. Trust your ability to observe real strengths. If you want to work on this skill, practice when you're watching TV shows, movies, reading books or listening to podcasts. Take note of the strengths and abilities of all the people in these stories. We can really expand our skill of seeing strengths if we pay attention.

Celebrate

Celebrate small and big wins together. Celebrating in small ways really supports the growth of self-determination. Consider mutuality in this, since it's an important aspect of peer support.

You can also model this kind of celebration. "I did something super hard today. I had to advocate for myself with my phone company, and I was avoiding it. So I'm going to treat myself to a latte today!"

A lot of us aren't great at celebrating small and big wins. Supporting someone to be able to identify their wins is really important.

Avoid being patronizing

Being patronizing sends a message that you are superior or more knowledgeable than the other person. It can make the person on the receiving end feel disrespected and belittled.

Patronizing behaviours include:

- Refusing to take someone's feelings seriously
- Treating someone like a child
- Interrupting someone and finishing their sentences
- Dismissing someone's opinion without consideration
- Talking in a condescending tone

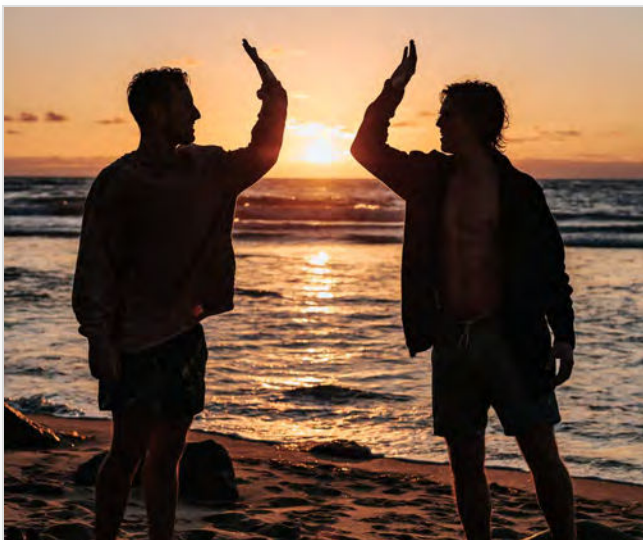
These actions and more can introduce tension, frustration and resentment into a relationship and negate any attempts at encouragement.

Continue to the reflection questions below.

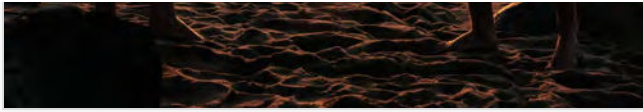
CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



How do you feel when someone encourages you? Have you noticed it making a difference in your motivation level?



1 of 3



Is giving encouragement and positive feedback something that's hard or easy for you?

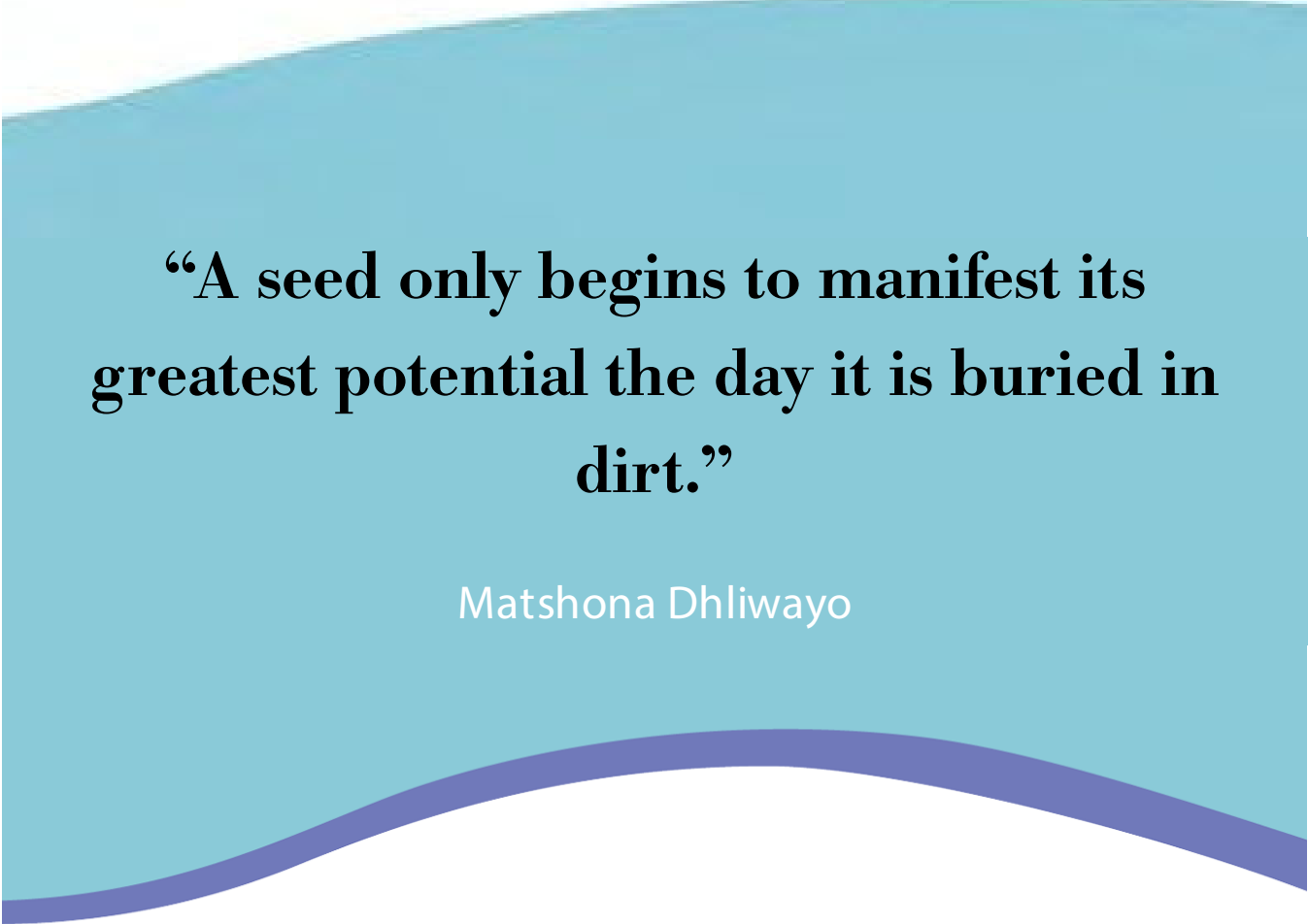
2 of 3



How can you grow your ability to give encouragement and positive feedback?

3 of 3

10. ecology of self-determination



**“A seed only begins to manifest its
greatest potential the day it is buried in
dirt.”**

Matshona Dhliwayo

CONTINUE

First let's define ecology.

The following definitions of "ecology" come from Dictionary.com:

Ecology

1. The branch of biology dealing with the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms.
2. The set of relationships existing between organisms and their environment:

1 of 1

what's the difference between environment & ecology?

ENVIRONMENT

ECOLOGY

An environment is simply the static surroundings someone or something is embedded within. When we speak of "environment" we are speaking about the conditions surrounding a living thing. In your case, right now your environment might be the room you are in, including things like

- the temperature

- the colour of the walls
- the chair you are sitting in
- the computer you are working at
- the lighting
- the sounds
- the smells

Some environments are very static and have very little room for interconnection, uniqueness of self, collaboration and choice.

Consider the example of a teenager entering high school for the first time. Many of us felt like small fish in a big pond when we were that age. There were very concrete systems and rules in place. Desks were set up a certain way. Classes were run to meet the needs of the majority rather than the individual. Curriculum was offered in a way that fit with the school objectives and values in order to meet the requirements of the province. There weren't always opportunities to influence the physical environment or even the learning environment. A lot of us found ourselves in a position of having difficulty fitting in. If we found ourselves on the edge of popularity, we likely felt even less connected.

(Your high school may have looked different. Today many schools and education systems are working to change to a different approach that meets the needs of kids differently. However, many of us had challenging experiences in school.)

ENVIRONMENT

ECOLOGY

Ecology, however, is the environment plus the interconnection of YOU and all living things in that environment. An ecology is living, breathing, and interconnected. Each part of ecology has a role and importance.

Consider the ecology of the outdoors. Every living thing is interconnected and relies on other living things for survival. Look at the role honey bees play in our ecology. Bees pollinate plants. Pollination starts the growth of fruit. The sun and water nourish the plant, causing the fruit to grow. We harvest the fruit, and the fruit then nourishes us. One living thing affects another, each action has an effect on other living things. The health of the honey bee population greatly affects the health of humans.

Ecology is about a relationship:

it is the fluid, interactive interconnection
between all living things
and the environment they inhabit.

What we mean by uniqueness of self is this; a big component of interconnection is that each living thing has a unique role to play within the whole. We aren't all the same. Uniformity should never be the goal (as we covered in the person-first language section (lesson 16) of module **2. peer support & wholeness**). We are all different and our strengths and differences complement each other. Interconnection means that we join our unique gifts together and that connection creates an ecology that is wonderful and dynamic. When we each possess competency, autonomy, and relatedness (which are the three parts of self-determination theory we talked about earlier), we can begin to trust ourselves and harness our self-determination, resilience, and courage so that we can step into our unique roles in the ecology of our lives and communities.

A thriving social ecology is a community where all participants are valued for who they are. Together, they support and encourage each other. They intentionally create opportunities to honour each other's strengths and uniqueness, while guiding others in skill-building. Solitude and connection are valued and encouraged. Conflict is seen as a normal part of relationship and community living. Differences of opinion are handled in honest, direct, and respectful ways, with each person being mindful of their own judgments, biases, and assumptions.

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



Can you think of any communities similar to how they are described above? What are some things you appreciate about that community?



1 of 3



How does interconnection and self-determination show up in the community you envisioned for the previous question?

2 of 3



Can you see the ecology of peer support looking like the type of community you envisioned?

3 of 3

CONTINUE

Let's look at a simple example of ecology and environment. In the spring, many of us desire to bring plants into our outdoor spaces. If we head to the local garden store and simply buy a bunch of seeds and plants without considering the ecology of our spaces, the chances of cultivating a thriving garden are pretty slim. Planting requires us to consider environmental factors like soil quality, sunlight, temperature and watering needs, as each plant is different. It's also important for us to consider ecological needs such as the combination of plants we wish to grow and how they interact with one another. A tomato plant growing next to a lower growing plant will steal the sun as it grows taller, and the smaller plants won't grow.



It's a little mind-blowing when you consider all the potential held in a tiny little seed. It's very easy to look at a tomato seed as we plant it and think it will never amount to anything. Then as time moves forward and we tend

to it, the seed grows into a plant, and as we tend to the needs of the plant, we get to see it grow. Eventually, the plant flowers, and little green tomatoes pop out. Growing tomatoes requires patience, but, with the right care and attention, we can have a beautiful harvest at the end of summer.

CONTINUE

question for reflection

Answer this question in your reflection journal.



Have you ever felt moved by nature? Think of a time when you felt a surge of hope related to the resilience of nature. For example, a time when a nearly dead houseplant grew a new leaf. Or a forest devastated by fire began restoring itself.

What did you see? Please

1 of 1

CONTINUE

peer support, self-determination & interconnection

An ecology that values both interconnection and self-determination is a priority of peer support.

Though a lot of things that happen within your workplace are out of your hands, you can work at creating an ecology of interconnection and self-determination in everything you do within the relationships with the people you support.

Interconnection makes for a thriving peer ecology. The connections between peer support workers, those they support and any other staff bring a vital sense of community and belonging. This feeling is particularly important for those who may feel isolated or disconnected from others.

At the same time, empowering individuals with a sense of self-determination is essential. Seeds grow on their own, not because someone makes them grow. The ecology of peer support ensures individuals make choices that align with their values, beliefs and goals. This means having control over one's own life and being able to advocate for one's needs and preferences.

In his book *Deviate: The Science of Seeing Differently*, neuroscientist Beau Lotto (2017) says

"Since our ecology determines how we adapt and, in adapting, innovate; and since adapting means our brains physically change, the logical conclusion is that your ecology actually shapes your brain (and your reshaped brain results in a change in behaviours that in turn shape your environment)." (p. 83)

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.

Let's consider an example of what social ecology could look like. Pick a group of people for this scenario. It could be a peer support group, a workplace, a friend group, a community organization, a workshop, a school or anything else.



What would interconnection look like for this group?

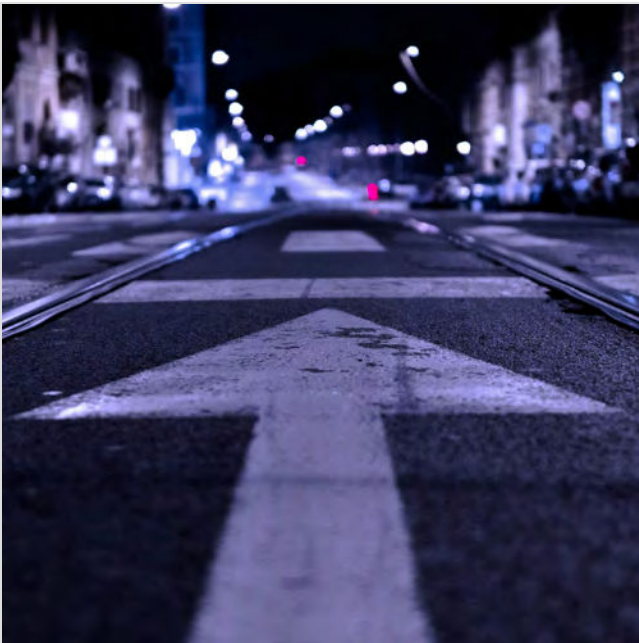


1 of 6



Would group members interact and connect with each other? What guidelines would ensure that this interaction and connection would happen?

2 of 6



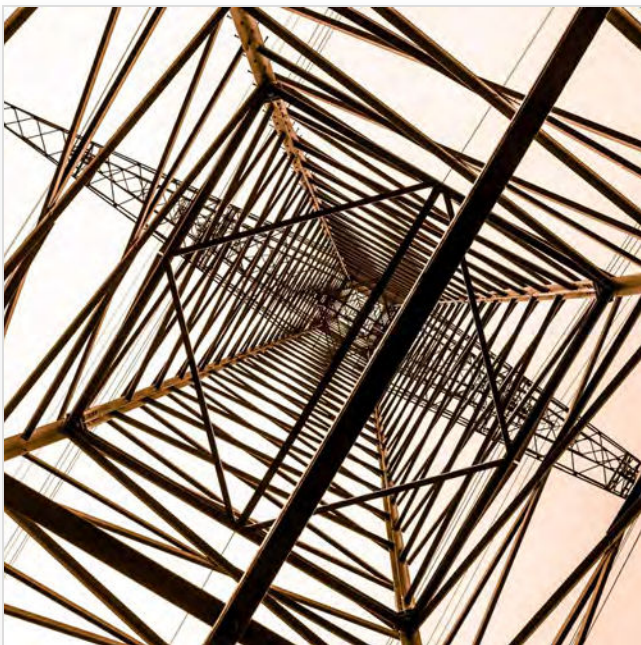
Does leadership influence this group? If so, how?

3 of 6



What values are important to creating this type of ecology? (Hint, you can look at the peer support core values for support with this question.)

4 of 6



How would group members influence the overall structure of the group?

5 of 6





Can you think of any examples of organizations or groups that serve people with a value of interconnection?

6 of 6

CONTINUE

Like the potential held in a seed, we humans also possess a deep-rooted propensity towards growth and transformation. Self-determination requires a specific ecology to flourish. We recognize that we can face many blockades that inhibit our growth. However, when the conditions are right in our lives (thanks to our ecology), we are able to harness our intrinsic motivation, find hope and a sense of purpose and move forward.

Let's look at the core values of peer support again:

- ☐ Mutuality
- ☐ Strength-based
- ☐ Self-determination
- ☐ Respect, dignity and equity
- ☐ Belonging and community



Curiosity

How can living out the specific core values above contribute to an ecology that supports self-determination? Consider intrinsic motivation and the three components of self-determination that we covered earlier in this module (competence, autonomy and relatedness).

11. you are the expert on you



Looking for others to “fix” us is a popular trend in our society. Marketers are actually taught to identify our problem, tell us all about how vexing that problem is, and then share how the product they are selling will solve all of our problems! It’s a very well used formula. Try to notice this formula the next time you see, read or listen to advertisements.

As a society, we tend to put a huge focus on problems and problem solving. The biggest lie that we’re fed is that someone else always holds the key to “fixing us.”

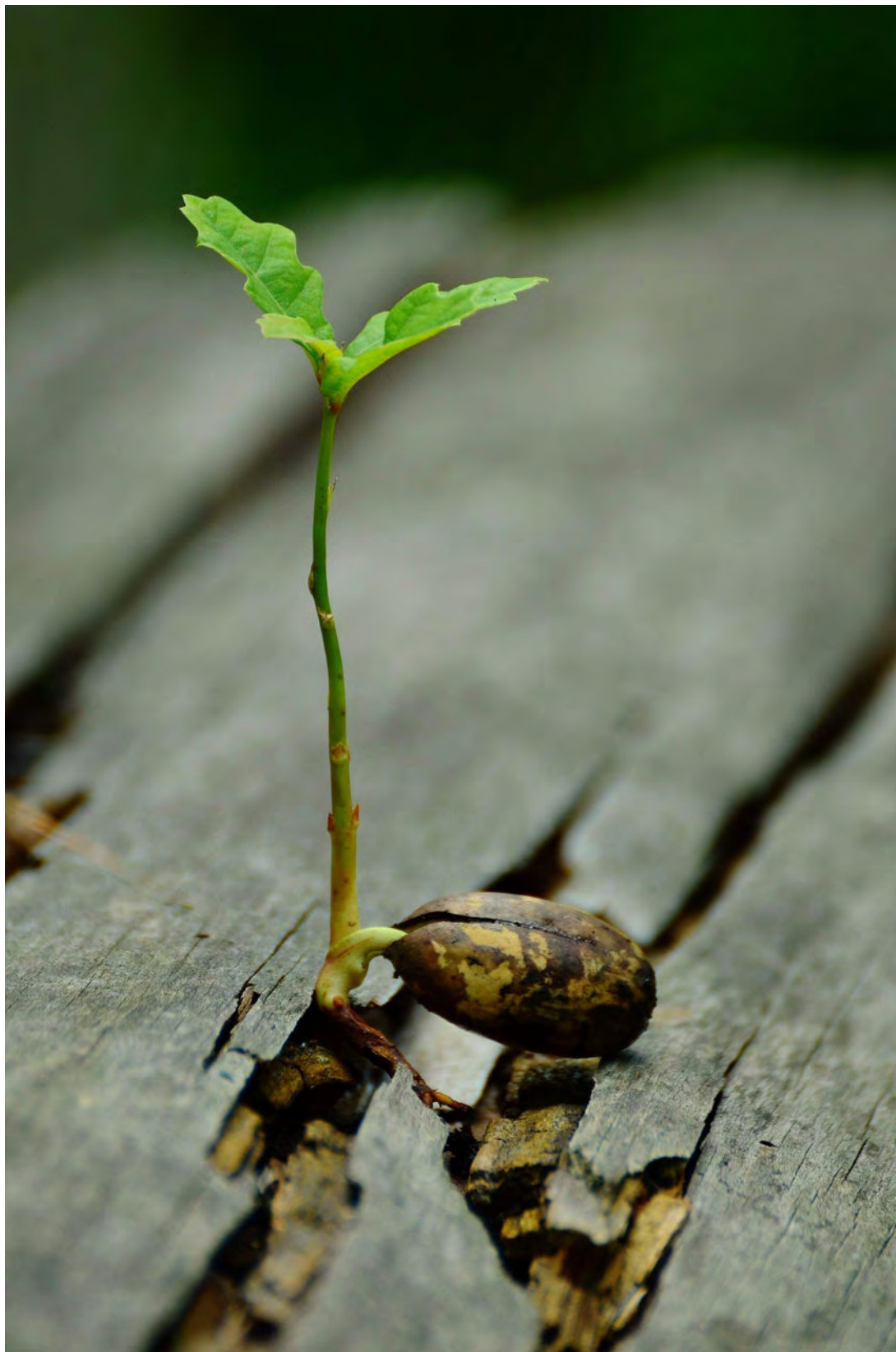
**But here is a thought: What if you are
an expert on you? What if you hold
the key to your own growth? What if
that key is embedded right within
you?**

**What if everyone you know is also an
expert on themselves?**

Would this be a paradigm shift for you? (A paradigm shift is a huge change in approach, and all the assumptions underneath that approach.)

Each human being holds a wealth of knowledge, ability, resilience and strength. It's similar to that tiny seed that will eventually become a giant oak tree!

Sometimes life is really tough. We get discouraged and overwhelmed. We might even feel despair. When we're lost, we can lose sight of who we are, what we believe and the direction we have for our lives. But that doesn't mean all those things aren't still within us waiting to be discovered.



a

The belief that every person has an inner expert can be a paradigm shift for some people.

paradigm

It's a non-negotiable belief for peer support workers.

shift

It affirms that self-determination is at the core of

Submit

determination is at the core of effective peer support work.

CONTINUE

Everyone is an _____ on themselves.

Type your answer here

SUBMIT

Which of the following is true?

☐

Peer support workers can better fix others with the same problem?



Peer support workers can pass their strength on to those they work with.



Peer support workers must believe that everyone is an expert on themselves so they can be effective.

SUBMIT



12. avoid advice giving

“When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honoured.”

Parker J. Palmer

CONTINUE

Before we dig into this section, let's consider shifting our language and mindset from "helping" to "supporting" when we are working with someone. When we come alongside and support someone, we're encouraging the growth of their self-determination rather than trying to "fix" them. Even shifting our language from using the word "help" to "support" goes a long way in creating an ecology that supports self-determination.


As peer support workers, rather than giving someone advice, we work to help them uncover and trust their inner teacher. No fixing, no saving, no setting each other straight. Instead, with honouring the relationship at the core of our interactions, we support people to tap into their inner wisdom and find the answers within.



intersection of compassion and self-determination



When we give advice, we are always giving advice based on our own personal experiences. Our advice is rooted in our own perspective. The people we're supporting have different experiences, beliefs, values, hopes and dreams. Even when we have much in common, there are always differences



It's essential that we recognize this fact when we're tempted to give advice.

There's a time and place for concrete advice. If we go to see a lawyer for legal advice, a doctor for support with a heart condition or an accountant for tax support, we want some very concrete, firm advice.

However, when we are dealing with issues closer to the soul and heart, we need a different approach.

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.



Have you ever been sharing a problem with someone and they jump in and give you advice? How did that make you feel?



1 of 3



Have you had the experiences when you are sharing something personal with someone you trust, and rather than giving advice, they ask you questions? Did that support you with figuring out what your next steps should be? How did it make you feel?

2 of 3



Has there been a time when you asked for advice and got exactly what you needed? Who did you ask? Why was it what you needed?

3 of 3

CONTINUE

**“Near enemies can be harder to see than far enemies.
The FAR enemy of self-determination is coercion. The
NEAR enemy of self-determination is benevolent advice.”**

Stephen Pocklington, leader in the recovery movement

CONTINUE

**but what if we are directly asked for
advice?**

We get into this work because we want to make a difference. We want to “help” people, and often “helping” feels like it goes hand in hand with advice-giving.

How do we not give advice? Isn't it rude to not give it if we're asked? Doesn't it create disconnection?

These are common questions when we first learn about self-determination and advice-giving. If you're feeling this confusion, you're not alone. It can feel very hard to avoid giving advice when we're asked for it, especially when we have lots to say!

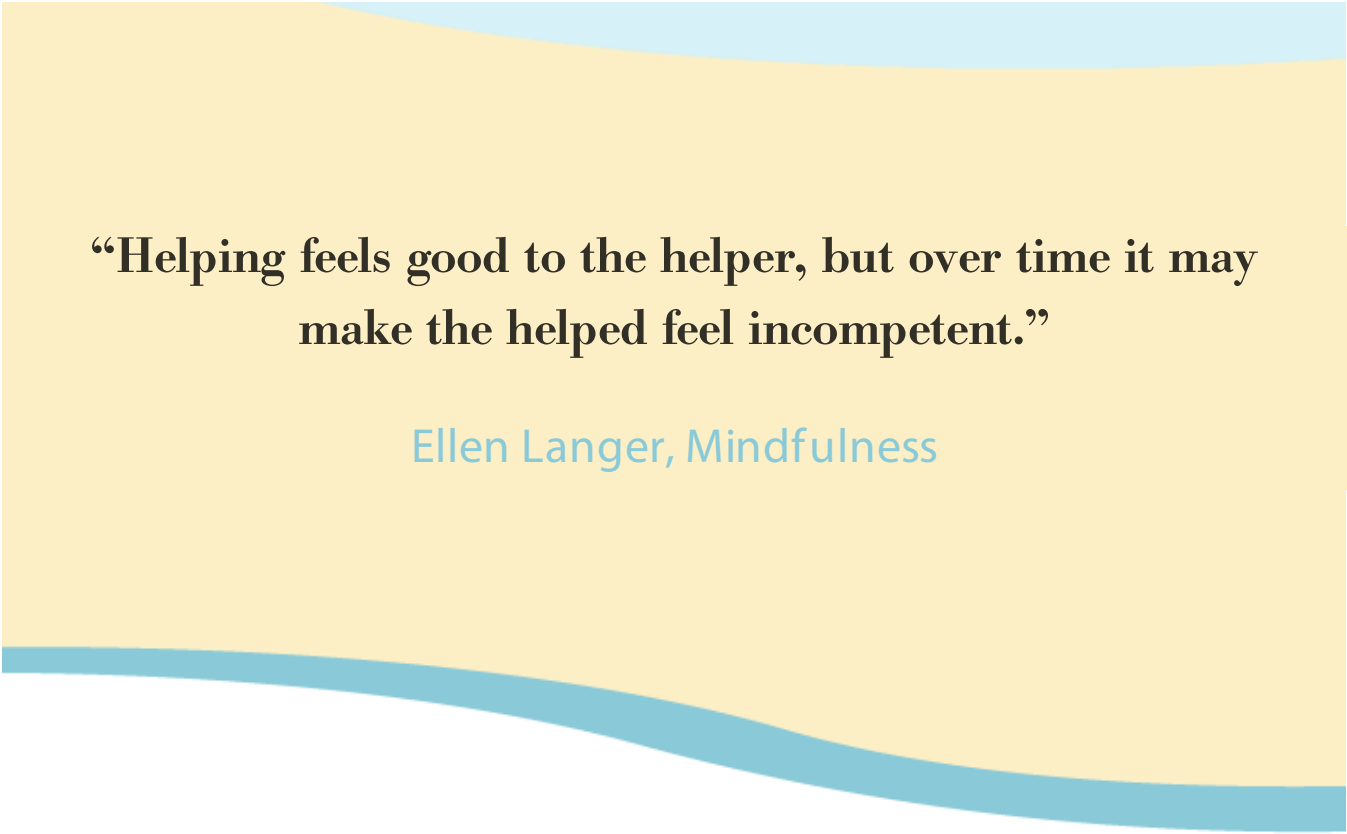
Consider again the life application story at the beginning of the module.

scenario – revisited

In the first scenario, Rachel freely gave advice to Devon. Which, by the way, was pretty accurate information she shared. There are studies that say turning your devices off an hour before bed is good sleep hygiene. However, after she spews that advice, we see Devon shut down and the back and forth dialogue ends. This is the type of benevolent advice the quote above speaks of as being the near enemy of self-determination. Rachel seems like someone who is there to help. She is close to Devon. But her well-intentioned actions end of being a detergent to his growth.

In the second scenario, Rachel holds back giving advice. Instead she asks thoughtful, intentional questions that support Devon to tap into his own inner wisdom and create a plan for himself. Because his plan was intrinsically motivated, he's more apt to follow it. In the spirit of mutuality, Rachel also shared her own struggle.

CONTINUE



**“Helping feels good to the helper, but over time it may
make the helped feel incompetent.”**

Ellen Langer, Mindfulness

We don't dismiss the inquiry for advice. We never want to do that! Instead, we skillfully and intentionally ask the right questions so the person asking for advice can process and figure out for themselves what they need.

CONTINUE

Can you recognize advice when you hear it? Read the cards below. If it sounds like advice, drag it to the box on the left. If not, drag it to the box on the right.

Advice

Don't give up what you want most for what you want now.

If you keep comparing your life to someone else's, you will never be happy.

You need to have goals in your life.

Draw from your past, don't let your past draw from you.

Take care of your health, it's the best thing you own.

Not Advice

What do you value?

Do you have any goals?

What are your strengths?

What's important to you?

what if i end up giving advice?

There may be times, after all else has been tried, when someone we're supporting still wants our advice. Or when we give advice without realizing it. That's OK. If we become too rigid, we can end up creating a division with our peer and cause undue stress on ourselves. Learning to encourage self-determination is a process and we'll get better the more we try. If we sometimes deem it necessary to give advice, that's fine, particularly when it's something we're qualified to give advice about. But this should be the exception, not the rule.

13. creating safety

We're left with the challenge of keeping the space open between us and the people we are supporting without eroding self-determination with our well-intended advice. We must sit with the discomfort that comes with not giving all the answers. We can't possibly fix anyone; it's not our role.

We're there for the relationship – the connection and support. It's important to regularly reflect on the core values of peer support, because it can be so easy to get sucked back into that "fix-it" role.

Here are some things to keep in mind as we work to create safety:

- ☐ Be mindful about the words we choose in conversation
- ☐ Remember that all change comes from within
- ☐ Avoid giving clinical advice (especially about medications or diagnoses)
- ☐ Let go of any agendas aside from supporting others to explore their inner wisdom

Silence can be a wonderful thing. To feel safe with someone and be able to spend time together in silence is a gift.



CONTINUE

Here are some wise words from Parker J. Palmer, author of *A Hidden Wholeness* (2008)

“In the face of our deepest questions — the kind we are invited to explore in circles of trust — our habit of advising each other reveals its shadow side. If the shadow could speak its logic, I think it would say something like this: ‘If you take my advice, you will surely solve your problem. If you take my advice but fail to solve your problem, you did not try hard enough. If

you fail to take my advice, I did the best I could. So I am covered. No matter how things come out, I no longer need to worry about you or your vexing problem.’ The shadow behind the ‘fixes’ we offer for issues that we cannot fix is, ironically, the desire to hold each other at bay. It is a strategy for abandoning each other while appearing to be concerned. Perhaps this explains why one of the most common laments of our time is that ‘no one really sees me, hears me or understands me’.”

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (p. 117)

CONTINUE



“When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honoured. If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it, and my presumptuous advice will only drive your soul back into the woods. So the best service I can render when you speak to me about such a struggle is to hold you faithfully in a space where you can listen to your inner teacher.

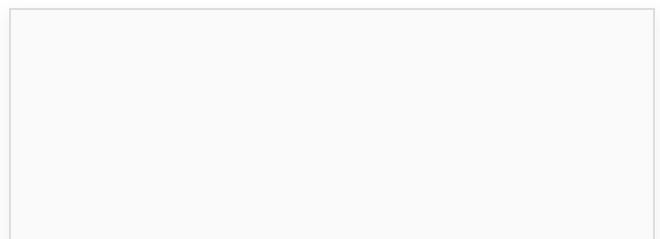
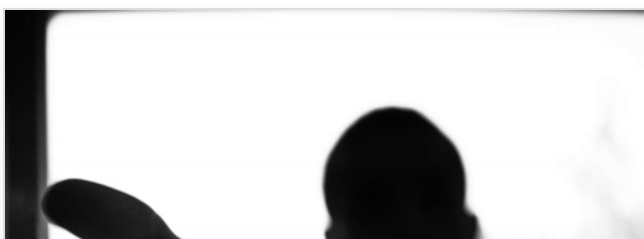
“But holding you that way takes time, energy, and patience. As the minutes tick by, with no outward sign that anything is happening for you, I start feeling anxious, useless, and foolish, and I start thinking about all the other things I have to do. Instead of keeping the space between us open for you to hear your soul, I fill it up with advice, not so much to meet your needs as to assuage my anxiety and get on with my life. Then I can disengage from you, a person with a troublesome problem, while saying to myself, ‘I tried to help’. I walk away feeling virtuous. You are left feeling unseen and unheard.”

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (p. 117–18)

CONTINUE

questions for reflection

Answer these questions in your reflection journal.





When you read Parker J. Palmer's quotes, what comes up for you?

1 of 2



As a peer support worker, it's important to build safety and trust. How will you do that? How will you sit with the discomfort of holding back on advice-giving?

2 of 2

CONTINUE



To close, let's look at an allegory that illustrates the importance of facilitating self-determination.

the cocoon and the butterfly

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly.

One day a small opening appeared; he sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole.

Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no farther.

Then the man decided to help the butterfly, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.

Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What this man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were nature's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Based on this story, which of the following is true?

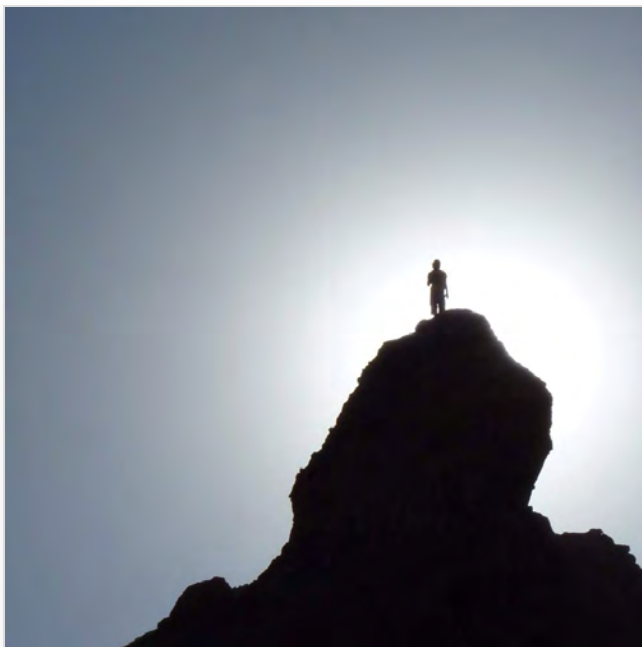
- ☐ The butterfly is helpless when it's in the cocoon
- ☐ The man is helping the butterfly by opening the cocoon
- ☐ The man's action discourages self-determination

SUBMIT

14. 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 self-determination?

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

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 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.



15. summary

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

☐

Self-determination is the right to make one's own decisions and have the freedom from coercion.

☐

The role self-determination plays in recovery is being recognized by providers who offer both mental health and substance use services. Peer support workers create the right conditions to foster self-determination.

☐

Intrinsic motivation comes from the inside; extrinsic motivation comes from the outside. Lasting change always comes through intrinsic motivation.

☐

Self-determination theory says that humans have three basic needs – competence, autonomy and relatedness.

- Competence is learning and practicing new skills.
- Autonomy is taking personal responsibility for one's life.
- Relatedness is connecting to others and having a sense of belonging.

☐

Positive feedback supports people's efforts to develop self-determination. Peer support workers need to learn to give positive feedback and encouragement in truthful ways.

☐

Understanding the ecology of self-determination requires an understanding of the words environment and ecology. Environment refers to the static surrounding someone or something is embedded within. Ecology is about that environment and its interconnectedness of all living things. These living things all have a specific role to play in relation to each other. They, therefore, must practice self-determination to fulfill the needs of their role.



Peer support must strive to foster an ecology of self-determination.



Each human being holds a wealth of knowledge, ability, resilience and strength, and holds an inner knowing of how to grow.



Peer support workers avoid giving advice. Instead, they work to help others uncover and trust their inner teacher. Advice-giving erodes self-determination.



To allow others to achieve greater levels of self-determination, peer support workers must create a safe space where people feel empowered to develop their self-determination.



16. 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.

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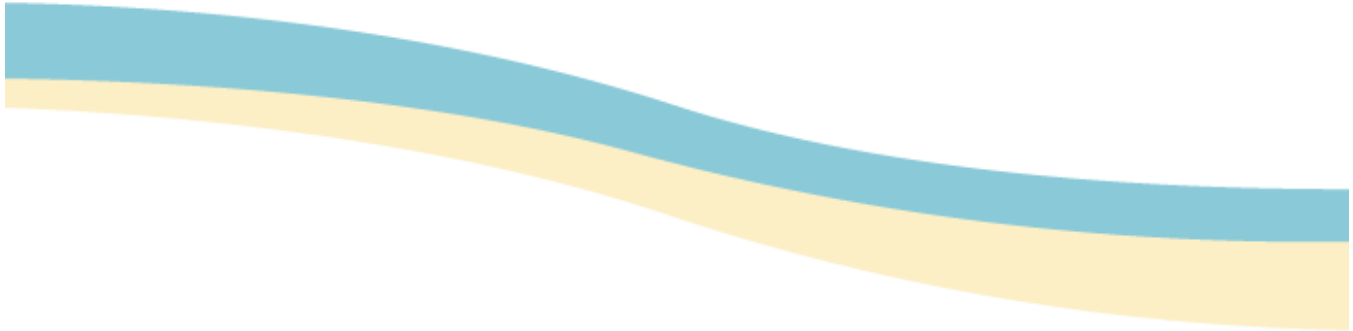
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