

Youth MOVE National

Code of Ethics for Youth Peer Providers

2019

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Acknowledgements and Contact Information:

This document was informed by and references documents by:

- National Afterschool Association
- International Association of Peer Support (iNAPS)
- Nebraska Mental Health Board
- National Association of Social Workers
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- Caitlin Baird
- Rae LaBrie
- Michelle Vance
- Damie Jackson-Diopp
- Josiah Reyes
- Shelby McDaniel
- Cynthia Harris
- Crystal Jones
- Kippi Clausen
- Noelle Richardson

Definitions:

Youth Peer Provider - a person who uses their lived experience within the child serving systems, and skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in behavioral health settings to promote mind-body recovery and resiliency for young adults of transition age.

Youth Peer Support (YPS) - Peer support is based on a mutual connection among two people who establish a relationship based on shared experiences (Mead 2013). Youth Peer Support is peer support offered by a Youth Peer Provider with shared lived experience and is tailored to the developmental and personally identified needs and goals? of young adults.

Lived Experience - The personal reality of having received services as a child, youth, or young adult (including but not limited to mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and/or special education) or currently or formerly living with a mental health or substance abuse diagnosis.

Young Adult - A term used in communities to bridge the communication and labeling gap between adults and youth

Youth - Used here and throughout Youth MOVE National Standards for Youth Peer Support as an adjective to describe the culture, services, and needs of young people with lived experience.

Youth Peer Support Services - Youth Peer Support that is offered as a formal, billable mental health service.

Youth Peer Support Programs - Youth Peer Support that is offered or occurs as an informal or non-billable program.

Introduction:

Youth Peer Support is a carefully nuanced and vital role within the behavioral service array. As a relationship that is not purely friendship, but is built upon a foundation of mutuality and shared lived experience, ethics and boundaries for youth peer providers may look different than they do for a clinical support provider, such as a therapist or care coordinator. It is in these differences there is value added to a young adult's care team. However, as there is still a power dynamic between a youth peer provider and a young adult receiving services, where the youth peer provider holds more power than a young adult, ethics are an essential tool and guide for behavior, expectations, and professional development in the emerging workforce.

A Note on Mental Models

Mental models are deeply ingrained ways of categorizing, storing, and processing information. They are informed by an individual's day to day experience, formal education, and interactions with other people. Mental models, including the generalizations and assumptions that make up these frameworks, influence behavior, decisions, and interactions with the world around us.

Everyone has their own mental model that informs how they interpret the world around them. Understanding one's own mental models about certain people, places, or phenomena can enable an individual to stop, pause, and make a decision based on what is actually happening in a given moment rather than based on assumptions of what is happening.

In peer support, and especially within youth peer support, it is essential that youth peer providers are able to identify their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs about others so that they are able to acknowledge their limitations when providing support to young adults. If a youth peer provider is unable to acknowledge their own assumptions about a young adult's identities or lived experience, they may be unable to provide truly supportive, mutual peer support.

Ethics vs. Boundaries:

Ethics are:

- Standards and expectations for a role or field
- About safety and preventing conflicts of interest
- Collectively established
- Core to the role
- Inclusive of community or field of practice's values

Boundaries are:

- Personally established by individuals
- Flexible depending on situations and persons involved
- About self care and respect
- Negotiable

A Note on Mandated Reporting

At this level, this document cannot advise on any one state's mental health licensing requirements, state laws regarding mandated reporting, or medicaid contract language. Youth peer providers should rely on their organization's guidance and any county or state laws on mandated reporting.

Framework and Assumptions:

Assumptions I, II, and III adapted from [NAA Code of Ethics](#)

Assumption I – Ethical dilemmas will occur.

Assumption II - The manner in which ethical situations are handled has a direct impact on the individuals involved.

Assumption III – Ethical dilemmas are not simple. Often the best ethical course of action to take is not obvious. One important value may contradict another. It is our professional responsibility to work with those involved to find the most ethical action to take. Above all we will bring NO harm to any youth or young adult. We will participate in practices that respect and do not discriminate against any youth or young adult by denying benefits, giving special advantages or excluding from program activities on the basis of his or her race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, language, ability or their status, or family beliefs.

Assumption IV: Youth Peer Providers are able to maintain ethics and professionalism in the field, when supported and held to standards specific to Youth Peer Providers as experts and sharers of their own lived experience.

Core Values of Youth Peer Support:¹

The following core values are at the heart of a positive relationship between a young adult and a youth peer support provider; they serve as a guide for youth peer support delivery within the organization. Application of these core values occurs at the individual, peer relationship, and organizational level.

The following core values of youth peer support should be embedded within the organizational philosophy:

1. Young adults are valued as experts based on their lived experiences.
2. Young adults, in partnership with supportive adults, are the drivers of care and determiners of goals and needs.
3. Youth peer support services are hope-filled, empowering, healing, and based in mutuality.

Youth peer support is:

1. Grounded in strengths-based relationships.
2. Trauma informed.

¹ Youth MOVE National, *Standards for Youth Peer Support*. 2019.

3. Based in mind-body recovery and resiliency.
4. Culturally responsive, inclusive of youth culture, and appropriate for those in transition.
5. Based on the connections in positive peer relationships.

Principles of Youth Peer Support: ²

The following represent the foundational principles of youth peer support.

Youth peer support is:

1. Voluntary, accessible, versatile, and responsive to a young adult's needs.
2. Grounded in physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual well-being.
3. Offered through a developmentally appropriate framework.
4. Provided by well informed, competent, and supported peers.
5. Made available through collaboration and continuity of care that supports the successful transition from child service systems to adulthood.

Code of Ethics for Youth Peer Support Providers

Ethical Responsibilities to Self

Youth Peer Providers will:

- Maintain their own wellness, resiliency, and/or recovery in order to provide high quality peer services to young adults. When they are not able to maintain their own mental, behavioral, or emotional health so that it affects their work they will immediately speak with the appropriate agency staff (Human Resources, Supervisor, etc.) in order to develop and execute a plan to promote and maintain their own safety, wellness, stability, and/or recovery.
- Recognize when their wellbeing is jeopardizing their professional work, and recognize when their professional work is jeopardizing their wellbeing.
- Follow expectations and laws regarding mandatory reporting policies in their own state, county, and organization.
- Be prepared to handle situations that cause discomfort.
- Understand their supervisor's role and responsibilities in order to effectively collaborate with their supervisor to solve problems, improve performance, and address concerns.
- Seek out, establish, and maintain supports to take care of their own wellness.

² Ibid.

- Be honest, transparent, and speak up about their own boundaries and limitations (including those regarding personal safety) and seek support from appropriate organizational channels to develop a plan to ensure continuity of services to all of their peers in the event they are unable to meet them.
- Be aware of their own worldviews, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, and biases. They recognize the potential impact of their backgrounds on their relationships with others and work diligently to provide culturally responsive services to all of their peers.³

Ethical Responsibilities to Young Adults Receiving Youth Peer Support

Youth Peer Providers Will:

- Follow expectations and laws regarding mandatory reporting policies in their own state, county, and organization.
- Attest that they have lived experience and have been personally impacted by behavioral health and/or trauma and are willing to self-identify their lived experiences while in the role of a youth peer support professional and when appropriate. Sharing of personal lived experience shall be used to demonstrate the use of one's strengths, and to encourage and inspire hope in those they support.⁴
- Maintain a youth driven approach throughout each peer support relationship.
- Provide clear communication and support to peers when ending a relationship with a peer and transitioning them to another youth peer provider.
- Be honest, transparent, and speak up about limitations including personal safety.
- Communicate and collaborate with young adult's parents, caregivers, or supportive adults when appropriate and with the young adult's knowledge and consent.
- Communicate and collaborate with young adult's supportive professionals when appropriate and with the young adult's prior knowledge and consent.
- Refrain entirely from sexual or romantic relationships with young adult peers they are serving. Prior to engaging in sexual or romantic relationships with former recipients of peer support services, and/or their friends, or their family members, peer support professionals must consult

³ Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, *Ethics for Peer Providers*.

⁴ Ibid.

with their supervisor to carefully evaluate potential for exploitation or harm and if it exists they shall refrain from entering into such a relationship.⁵

- Will not use relationships with those they are serving for financial gain or put the other person at risk of exploitation or harm. Peer support professionals will only accept gifts of insignificant value (under \$5.00).⁶
- Accurately represent their qualifications to the public. This includes, but is not limited to, their abilities, training, education, credentials, academic endeavors, and areas of expertise. They avoid the appearance of misrepresentation or impropriety.⁷
- Shall be familiar with laws pertaining to domestic violence, adult and child abuse and neglect, abuse and neglect mandatory reporting requirements, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records (42 CFR Part 2), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and any state or local mental health agency regulations.⁸
- Value diversity and will provide services without discrimination or preference in regards to age, ethnicity, culture, race, ability, gender, language preference, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, behavioral health condition, and/or physical limitations.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.