

Peer work framework



Short summary



The Mind Peer Work Framework provides an overview of the history, model and program of peer work that Mind delivers. It consolidates our current approach and provides a foundation for the continued growth and development of our peer workforce. The framework illustrates the value Mind places on a lived experience of mental ill-health as the foundation of our peer practitioner workforce. It also supports consistent practice across the organisation.

About Mind

Mind has been a leading national community managed mental health service supporting people with mental health issues, their families and carers for over 40 years. We are person-centred and focused on making a difference - with integrity, hope, creativity and innovation at the forefront of everything we do.

Mind supports cultural safety and equity by developing systems and processes that improve access, outcomes and experiences for people of different cultures, genders, sexualities, spiritualities, abilities, bodies, ages and backgrounds.

Mind has a strong commitment to supporting people to realise their human rights and gaining full citizenship using a co-design and co-production approach.

We respect and value the lived experience of people with mental ill health, their families and carers and understand this experience must inform service delivery. Peer work is a crucial aspect of our work.

How we work

Mind uses recovery oriented and trauma informed practices to help consumers build/re-build meaningful lives under the evidence-informed My Better Life[®] model, in line with the social model of health.

Each of these approaches complements Mind's model of peer work and supports a culture that values lived experience.

What is peer work?

Peer work is a unique and distinct discipline based on sharing experiences, modelling hope, empowerment and mutuality. It attracts a diverse group of people who are prepared to use their personal lived experience to inform their work, including supporting others through recovery of mental ill health.

At Mind, peer work is conducted by peer practitioners, guided by Mind's Model of Peer Work. They are required to have formal qualifications in mental health, mental health peer work, alcohol and other drugs, social work, psychology or similar.

Evidence base for peer support

Peer support is an important aspect of the way we work at Mind. Compared to other forms of support, three areas of benefit have been identified that are unique to peer support¹: These are:

- providing hope through positive self-disclosure
- role-modelling self-care and skills for negotiating daily life
- the peer relationship – a peer worker's ability to empathise directly and immediately

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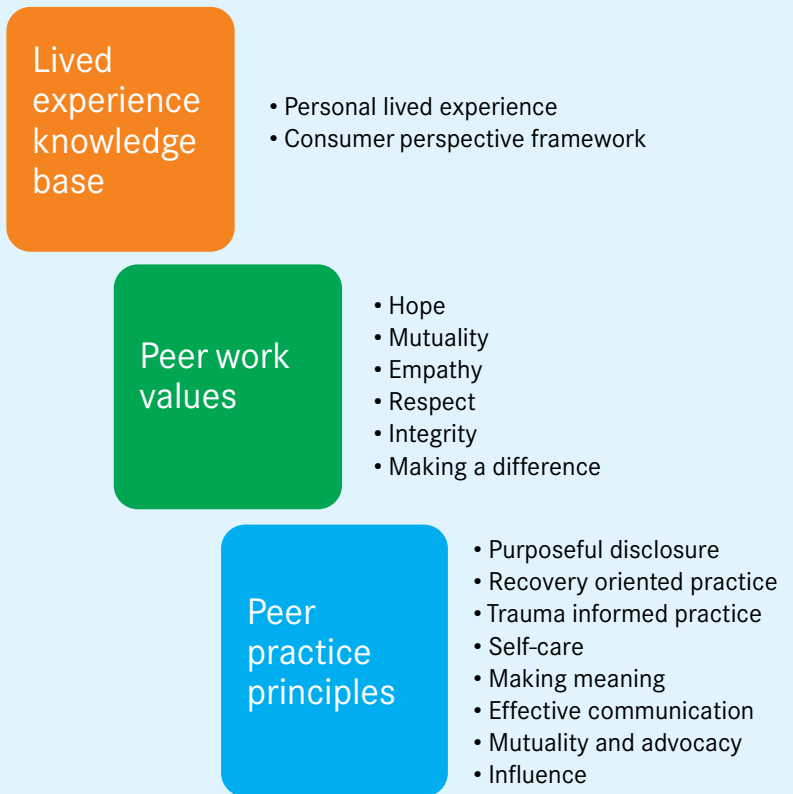
My peer practitioner is more sensitive to the nuances of how I'm feeling ... I can tell her anything and we are on the same page. - Consumer

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¹Davidson, L., Bellamy, Guy & Miller (2012). Peer Support among persons with severe mental illnesses: a review of evidence and experience. World Psychiatry 2012;11:123-128

Mind's model of peer work

Mind's Model of Peer Work is unique and establishes peer work as a discipline at Mind. It describes the knowledge base, values and practice principles that inform the way peer practitioners at Mind do their work. It has been developed to support peer practitioners across the diverse services at Mind. This model articulates the unique aspects of the peer practitioner role and how the role differs from other roles in the team. This provides role clarity for peer practitioners, managers, clients, the team and the organisation, and guides consistent practice across all services at Mind.



Lived experience knowledge base

A lived experience knowledge base is the combination of a peer practitioner's own personal lived experience and the knowledge gained from the broader consumer research and literature.

Lived experience is the term used to specify knowledge that is gained by personal experience, as opposed to learned via study or employment and relates to a personal experience of mental ill health and recovery. Consumer research, literature and peer networks/networking makes up the consumer perspective framework.

Historically, Mind has had a voice in contributing to the consumer perspective knowledge base through the Centre of Excellence in Peer Support, the Charter of Peer Support, the book Peer Work in Australia: A new future for mental health, and Mind Recovery College™.

Peer work values

- **hope** – maintaining a positive and optimistic outlook; valuing hope, courage and perseverance; knowing that people do recover from mental health challenges
- **mutuality** – building relationships which minimise power imbalances and build connection and trust; empathising – the ability to take the perspective of another and feel what they feel
- **respect** – considering the rights, values, beliefs and property of all people
- **integrity** – acting with honesty and accountability
- **making a difference** – working towards social justice, respect for people's rights and fostering the inclusion of consumers in community life.

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I can advocate for clients within my community and team as well as supporting them to self-advocate. I am able to provide a lived experience perspective to my work mates. I connect with clients on an equal and human level. – Peer Practitioner

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Peer practice principles

- **Purposeful disclosure** – sharing personal lived experience in a way that is both safe and appropriate. Purposeful disclosure can help the peer practitioner to build connection or establish rapport, to be with the person where they are at, to validate the other person's experiences, to reduce stigma, to inspire hope and to demonstrate empathy.
- **Recovery orientated practice** – peer practitioners use their personal lived experience of recovery when holding the hope for someone who may not have hope for themselves and incorporate their first hand perspectives to support Mind's recovery orientated practice.
- **Trauma informed practice** – by drawing on their personal lived experience peer practitioners understand the impact trauma can have on all aspects of peoples lives, and take this into account in their practice
- **Self-care** – self-care is different for everyone and includes mental, physical and spiritual health. Peer practitioners practice self-care as well as encouraging these behaviours with consumers, carers and fellow staff
- **Making meaning** – peer practitioners know that understanding experiences, behaviours, and beliefs is key to the process of recovery
- **Effective communication** – this includes being aware of body language, developing and maintaining connection, avoiding problem solving or giving advice, being curious, listening to learn, and using the same language the person is. Peer practitioners tend to use everyday language as opposed to diagnostic or clinical language as the latter can sometimes be detrimental
- **Mutuality and advocacy** – peer practitioners have unique skills in building relationships that both acknowledge and minimise power imbalances and build connection and trust based on empathy.
- **Influence** – peer practitioners draw on their lived experience knowledge base and peer work values to contribute to a positive culture within the team, and with Mind's partner organisations.

How Mind fosters an effective peer workforce

Mind has developed a unique and distinct whole-of-organisation program to support and enhance the peer workforce, which includes (but is not limited to):

- Dedicated **peer orientation**
- **Peer practitioner resources** drawing on current best practice as well as Mind's own internal evaluation processes
- A specialised **peer work program** to develop confidence and competency
- A **community of practice** to provide a platform for people to come together to reflect, share and receive peer supervision.
- **Training and resources** for staff and managers around working effectively with peer practitioners
- **Manager supervision** whereby a two-way 1:1 conversation is had on a minimum monthly basis around the peer practitioners wellbeing, growth, performance and development
- A **senior lived experience advisor** position to guide and lead implementation of the Mind Peer Work Framework

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My team are super supportive and love hearing about what we covered in the peer work program and what I got out of it. I think it also helped strengthen my own knowledge about what I had learnt. – Peer practitioner

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Mind acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the intergenerational impact of the history of invasion, dispossession and colonisation and are committed to the recognition, respect, inclusion and wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples.

Mind values the experience and contribution of people from all cultures, genders, sexualities, bodies, abilities, spiritualities, ages and backgrounds. We are committed to inclusion for all our clients, families and carers, employees and volunteers.



Registered NDIS provider

Childs, B. (2021) *Mind's peer work framework*. Mind Australia, Melbourne.
<https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/work-us/peer-work>



Help, hope and purpose

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