

## **Peer Support vs Professional Support**

### **What is Peer Support?**

Peer support is a supportive relationship between people with a common experience where individuals with experiential knowledge and characteristics similar to the recipient provide social-emotional support.

Peer support involves building on that shared experience to understand a peer's situation empathetically and is particularly important during times of stress, trauma or uncertainty.

### **Limitations of Peer Support**

Peer support is a complement to, rather than a replacement for, medical and mental health care.

Within the scope of peer support:

- Sharing treatment experiences and personal stories.
- Listening to concerns empathetically and without judgment.
- Strategizing, casually bonding, and finding additional resources together.

Out of scope:

- Providing professional medical opinions, diagnoses, or treatment.
- Providing professional legal and financial advice.
- Providing financial support.

### **What to do if you feel your Peer Support Partner needs “Out of Scope” Support**

Please send CLF a message so we can provide resources to your Partner or help reestablish boundaries.

- CLF Peer Support Connection Program: [support@concussionfoundation.org](mailto:support@concussionfoundation.org)
- CLF USA Peer Support Coordinator Tyler Ambrose: [tambrose@concussionfoundation.org](mailto:tambrose@concussionfoundation.org)
- CLF Canada Director of Patient Services Taya Leforte: [tleforte@concussionfoundation.org](mailto:tleforte@concussionfoundation.org).

### **What does Professional Support look like?**

Professional support is delivered by trained and licensed professionals with specific qualifications and credentials, such as physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counsellors, psychotherapists, licensed mental health counsellors, etc.

### **Differences between Peer Support & Professional Support**

<b>Peer Support</b>	<b>Professional Support</b>
Lived experience and offer support based on their own journey	Trained and licensed professional with qualifications and credentials.
No formal education or training is required.	Rigorous education and training to acquire knowledge and skills to diagnose, treat, and provide therapeutic interventions

A system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful.	Designed to diagnose, treat, and provide evidence-based interventions. Uses therapeutic techniques, medications, and medical procedures.
Focuses on similarities and can truly say “I know” and “I understand.”	Focuses on the uniqueness of a person's experience, helping them understand what it is they're going through and what it means for them, asks “why,” and aims to address the underlying causes and symptoms of a condition.

### **Similarities in Peer Support and Professional Support**

- Both may provide information and education, one-to-one support, and support for families.
- Both rely on good communication and listening skills; listen carefully and respectfully to the story and try to get to know the person and their experience.
- Both will be aware of their own values and beliefs and have a commitment to being non-judgmental.
- Both require a trusting relationship and ensure confidentiality is maintained.
- Both focus on strengthening and continuing the bond.
- Both have a commitment to supporting people as they find their own ways of coping and navigating the situation.

### **Benefits of Peer Support**

- Provides hope, acceptance, real understanding, and empathy.
- Normalizes experiences and gives guidance.
- Provides a sense of belonging to a community, which gives a sense of security, safety and acceptance, where it is safe to express real feelings.
- Reduces the sense of isolation and the sense of being the only one, leading to a shift from seeing oneself as a victim to being a survivor.
- Connecting with someone who has lived through a similar situation or is still doing so can be vital for someone struggling. Providing hope that it is possible to overcome and demonstrates the possibility of recovery.
- The information, education, shared strategies, empowerment, and hope that come from someone who has been in their shoes can help people navigate their situation, treatments and other hurdles.
- Peer support can help a person gain control over their symptoms, reduce hospitalization, offer social support and improve quality of life.
- Peer support can be an effective prevention strategy, can moderate the effects of life-challenging events and provide a sense of empowerment.

### **Reference:**

Sunderland, Kim, Mishkin, Wendy, Peer Leadership Group, Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>