Peer Support Volunteer Training

May 27, 2020 | 11:30 am ET

Peers for Progress
Peer Support Around the World
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
1. Introductions and Overview (Ed, 10 min)
2. Roles and Responsibilities (Ed, 15 min) [Break out]
3. Challenges Created by COVID-19 (Pat, 10 min)
4. How to Support Friends and Colleagues (Pat, 15 min) [Break out]
5. Problems and Difficult Situations (Ed, 15 min) [Break out]
6. Resources and Discussion (Samantha, 15 min)
OVERVIEW
Foster a culture of support that promotes mental health among students, faculty, and staff

Nobody is without someone to whom they can turn
A General Model

- Peer Support Volunteers
- Mutual Support Groups, Support Pods
- Pod Reps
Key Strategies

1. **No reinvented wheels**
   a. Many opportunities for support in the University, e.g., Academic Houses, buddy systems for new graduate students, or writing groups for early career faculty
   b. **Objective is to supplement and grow, not replace.**

2. **Tailoring within administrative units** – Schools, departments or other units will adjust and tailor programs to their settings, constituencies, and ongoing resources, programs, and activities.

3. **Focus on stress and distress as common experiences, not clinical entities**
   a. Availability of support is good for all of us, not only those who may qualify for a clinical diagnosis
   b. Creating support for all reduces stigma and enhances the resource for those who may be most distressed.
Objectives of the Training

1. Develop volunteers who can **promote peer support** within groups, support pods, and for individuals 1-on-1

2. Volunteers **understand what their role entails** and what they are expected to do

3. Volunteers feel **empowered to go forth and support** their friends and colleagues
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
What Peer Support Volunteers Do

1. **Be available** to those who might need someone to talk with – similar to Mental Health First Aid or Safe Zone training

2. **Reach out** to those who may be isolated or dealing with major stressors, self-identified or identified through Pods, etc.

3. **Work with Pod Reps or Others in their Departments** to organize activities or resources in the department and school

4. Help individuals **navigate available resources** within their department or organization

5. Represent and **advocate** with departmental or school leadership for the needs of those with whom they are in contact

6. **Refer** individuals to resources

7. Other activities they may identify as useful or helpful
What’s Expected of Peer Support Volunteers

- Be **available** and helpful to talk about concerns
- Be **respectful of privacy** -- **as in any relationship**
- **Respect individual differences**, including choices people make
- Be **available as reasonable** for the situation at hand and for the demands on the PSV’s time
  - **Not more than might be expected of a friend**
- **Recognize when issues are outside** of your comfort zone
- **Turn to others** as necessary: In department or unit; student services; other resources
- Collaborate through **periodic meetings** of PSVs
- NOTE WELL: PSVs are **friends with additional training**, not mental health counselors
General Strategies

- **Seek out and talk** with individual
- **Problem solve**
  - Validate and endorse feelings
  - Raise possibility of something to be done
  - Discuss, brainstorm, plan alternatives
- Discuss **follow up and further contact**
- **Rally support** among Support Pod or network of individual’s friends, colleagues
- Advise regarding **available resources**
Key Resources

- If imminent threat to themselves or others, call 911
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline (24/7): 1-800-273-TALK (8255); Spanish: 1-888-628-9454; suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Students: Campus Health (M-F, 8-5, 919-966-2281), CAPS (24/7, 919-966-3658), or Academic Coordinators (https://sph.unc.edu/students/osa/)
- Employees (Faculty & Staff): GuidanceResources (an EAP service, 24/7) 877-314-5841
- If unsure of how to handle a situation, you can contact Ed Fisher at edfisher@unc.edu, 919-360-3928
Breakout: Roles and Responsibilities

- What aspects are unclear?
- Are any parts a concern to you? Which?
- How might you suggest changing?
CHALLENGES CREATED BY COVID–19
Challenges Created by COVID-19

Meta-Stressor: *Underestimation of stress* we are all under because it is shared, ubiquitous, continuing → Unwarranted Self-Blame!!

- Sudden change and future uncertainties
- Fear and anxiety
- Loneliness and feelings of isolation
- School and work stressors
- Financial stressors
- Personal stressors including exacerbation of established problems
- Health concerns regarding oneself, family, friends
- Mourning
Examples

Fear and uncertainty causing more fear
Moving classes online, grading flexibility
Concerns about loved ones being impacted by COVID directly or financially
Not being able to work, federal work-study
General loneliness and feelings of isolation
Summer plans and impacts on student finances

*Future impacts re: resume / professional development*
Taking standardized tests, application deadlines
Medical appointments being cancelled because they aren’t emergencies
PhD students concerned about research and dissertations

*Information overload and information channel overload*
Family dynamics with students moving home

*Run out of things to look forward to*
Difficulties with unreliable web access, e.g., in rural areas
Examples

Concern about furloughs and layoffs → Always maintain a public face
“Never let them see you sweat”
Fewer opportunities to vent with colleagues
Struggles to keep up with pace of work while working remotely
Being judged for Zoom etiquette / body language policing
Frustrations with technology
Early start to the 2020 fall semester - vacation time
HOW TO SUPPORT FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES
Tips for Helping Each Other

In general:

● Be kind to yourself and care for yourself
● Give yourself some slack
● Be proactive - others are open to being contacted
● You don’t have to have all the answers - The point is to connect!!
Tips for Helping Each Other

Don’t forget the obvious:

- Think about whom you haven’t heard from or who may be struggling
- Ask about families and loved ones
- Check in with those who are sick
Tips for Helping Each Other

Simple ways to help:

- **Small gestures can mean a lot – voicemails, “hello” texts, memes**
- **Make reaching out part of your daily/weekly routine**
- **Ask open-ended questions instead of closed questions**
- **Share your own experiences so others feel comfortable sharing theirs**
- **Encourage those you reach to reach out to others themselves**
Support Skills

- Active Listening
- Sensitivity and Good Judgment
- Storytelling / Strategic Disclosure
- Problem-Solving / Making a Plan
- Referral and Follow Up
Problem Solving

● Validate and endorse feelings
  ○ Active listening, empathic statements -- “I can see why that is so upsetting”

● Raise possibility of something to be done
  ○ Maybe it’s too soon to worry about ‘fixing it’ but …
  ○ “How have you thought about dealing with it?”
  ○ “How have you dealt with things like this before?”

● Discuss, brainstorm, plan alternatives
  ○ “How do you think you want to handle it?”
  ○ “What will that require?”
  ○ Pros/Cons? Help from others? What do you need to watch out for?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LISTEN</th>
<th>ASK</th>
<th>NOTICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice active listening</td>
<td>Use open-ended questions to encourage sharing</td>
<td>Recognize when individuals are experiencing serious problems or distress</td>
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<tr>
<th>FOLLOW UP</th>
<th>LEAN</th>
<th>“BE THERE”</th>
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<td>Check-in regularly to see how things are working out</td>
<td>Refer to backup if you are unsure about anything</td>
<td>One of the most powerful things is simply being there</td>
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Breakout: Tips for Helping Each Other

- What COVID-related stressors do you see as most common, of greatest concern?
- How can you and others be helpful with those?
- What are your preferred strategies?
- Additional suggestions?
PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS
Situations that Peers Might Encounter

- Individual in academic or job jeopardy
- Individual dealing with serious disease or death of family, close friend
- Individual unable to meet financial demands
- Individual unsure of resources available
- Individual withdrawn, unable to pursue daily activities, responsibilities
If Substantial Concern

- Individual seriously, persistently, or acutely distressed, hopeless, unable to complete tasks
- Refer to CAPS, EAP, hotlines, etc. -- Follow Up as appropriate
- If imminent threat to themselves or others, 911
- If appropriate -- use judgment -- contact program or departmental leadership or student services
- Use **judgment** in contacting others
  - Don’t disclose identity but get back to individual with suggestions
  - If you judge situation requires action and responsible individuals assure ability to respond with discretion, disclose identity
- **NOTE WELL:** *This is how we would deal with any colleague or friend*
- If unsure of how to handle a situation, you can contact Ed Fisher
Breakout: Dealing with Individuals’ Problems and Difficult Situations

- What concerns you most?
- How can you deal with that?
- General criterion: Act as a friend
  How well does this clarify?
RESOURCES
AND DISCUSSION
Resource Sharing - Highlights

- If imminent threat to themselves or others, call 911
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline (24/7): 1-800-273-TALK (8255); Spanish: 1-888-628-9454; suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Hope4NCHelpline (24/7 assistance for the public): 1-855-587-3463
- Hope4Healers Helpline (24/7 assistance for healthcare workers): 1-919-226-2002
- Students: Campus Health (M-F, 8-5, 919-966-2281), CAPS (24/7, 919-966-3658), or Academic Coordinators (https://sph.unc.edu/students/osa/)
- Employees (Faculty & Staff): GuidanceResources (an EAP service, 24/7) 877-314-5841

Ultimately, leveraging your own skills, knowing how to look for resources, and being available to help someone connect to them are most important.
Resource Sharing - COVID-19 Information

CDC (US)


WHO (Intl.)

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

North Carolina

Resource Sharing - UNC-specific

- UNC-Chapel Hill: https://www.unc.edu/coronavirus/ https://keeplearning.unc.edu/
- UNC Human Resources: https://hr.unc.edu/employees/covid19-faqs/
- Campus Health: https://studentwellness.unc.edu/

- CAPS: https://caps.unc.edu/
- CAPS 24/7 by phone: 919-966-3658
- UNC Learning Center (resources for online learning): https://learningcenter.unc.edu/
- Carolina Center for Public Service’s Resources and Opportunities related to COVID-19: https://ccps.unc.edu/coronavirus/resources-and-opportunities-related-to-covid-19/
Resource Sharing - Tangible Assistance

**Carolina Student Impact Fund**

**Carolina Graduate Student COVID-19 Impact Program**
https://gradschool.unc.edu/funding/gradschool/covidimpact.html

**Gillings School Student Emergency Relief Fund**

**211 Resource Navigation**
http://211.org/
Dial 2-1-1

**Healthcare & Navigation**
https://www.healthcare.gov/
https://www.ncnavigator.net

**Unemployment**
https://des.nc.gov/apply-unemployment

**Mutual Aid:** Facebook or Google “Mutual Aid” + Your Town
What You Can Do this Afternoon

- **Confirm willingness** to be listed as a PSV, happy to talk with individuals who may find it helpful

- **Share feedback** on this training at [go.unc.edu/psvtrainingfeedback](http://go.unc.edu/psvtrainingfeedback)

- **Contact Pod Reps** or others in your department or unit and let them know of your availability to work with them or talk with individuals

- **Send an email** to those you might want to be available to

- **Team up** with other PSVs or Pod Reps to come up with an activity that might be helpful to some folks

- **Share** any additional resources you may be aware of, e-mail samantha_luu@unc.edu
Dear Department Friends (or group or just set of individuals???)

This is a brief note to let you know that this afternoon, I completed training to be a “Peer Support Volunteer.” This is part of efforts to keep anyone from feeling isolated in the stress of COVID.

It’s nothing all that fancy, but the training did teach me some skills for helping folks find resources or talking through problems or conflicts. I’ll also want to work with others in the department to facilitate mutual support among us.

I’d be happy to chat about anything you’d like to talk about or perhaps ways we can make the department more supportive of all of us. If you’d like to get in touch, call or text at 919 XXX-XXXX or pop me an email at ricky@unc.edu. One way or another, I’ll hope to see you all soon.
Questions?

How do people want to be linked together?

● Listserv? Others?

Other Questions?????

Thank you for joining us

*Please contact us with any additional questions or thoughts*

Ed - fishere@email.unc.edu

Pat - ptang@unc.edu

Samantha - samantha_luu@unc.edu

Slides and recording will be available at: [http://go.unc.edu/psvtraining](http://go.unc.edu/psvtraining)