

Case Study & Ethical Dilemma Discussion Guide

Purpose

This worksheet is designed to facilitate **critical thinking and ethical decision-making** for peer support workers. It presents **diverse real-world scenarios** to help participants **navigate complex ethical dilemmas** in alignment with **best practices in adult learning and national peer support ethics guidelines (SAMHSA, NAPS, and other relevant standards).**

Instructions

- 1. Read the case study carefully and identify the ethical dilemma.
- 2. Use the guided discussion questions to analyze the situation.
- 3. Consider multiple perspectives and possible solutions.
- 4. **Discuss in pairs or small groups**, referencing peer support ethics frameworks.
- 5. **Reflect on the lessons learned** and how they apply to daily practice.

Case Study 1: Dual Relationships & Boundary Setting

Scenario 1:

You are a peer support worker in a recovery community where you previously received services. A peer you are supporting asks to spend time together outside of work hours because they feel isolated. They insist that you, as someone who understands their struggles, are the only one they trust.

Scenario 2:

A peer asks if they can borrow money from you to help cover their transportation to a recovery meeting. They insist that they will pay you back as soon as they receive their next check but seem embarrassed about asking.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the potential ethical concerns in these situations?
- How can you set professional boundaries while maintaining trust?

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- What alternatives can you offer to help the peer build a support network or meet their needs?
- How would you document and report these situations, if necessary?

Case Study 2: Confidentiality & Information Sharing

Scenario 1:

A family member of a peer you support contacts you and requests updates on their loved one's progress. The family member expresses deep concern and states that they only want to help.

Scenario 2:

A law enforcement officer calls your organization requesting information about a peer you work with, stating that they are conducting a wellness check and need details to proceed.

Discussion Questions:

- What are your legal and ethical responsibilities regarding confidentiality?
- How would you communicate boundaries to the family member or law enforcement officer while showing empathy?
- What steps can you take to encourage open communication between the peer and their family or other involved parties?
- Under what circumstances, if any, could confidentiality be breached?

Case Study 3: Peer Advocacy vs. Organizational Policies

Scenario 1:

You work for an organization that requires strict abstinence from all substances for participation in its programs. However, a peer you are supporting utilizes harm reduction strategies and has expressed that this requirement makes them feel excluded and unsupported.

Scenario 2:

A peer you support is being discharged from your program for missing multiple meetings. They express that their missed attendance was due to childcare responsibilities and financial instability, and they feel the policy does not take their situation into account.

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Discussion Questions:

- How do you balance peer-centered advocacy with organizational policies?
- What are some ways to support harm reduction strategies or advocate for policy flexibility while respecting workplace guidelines?
- How can you **facilitate discussions** between the peer and the organization to explore possible accommodations?
- How would you seek guidance or supervision in these situations?

Case Study 4: Social Media & Professionalism

Scenario 1:

A peer you work with sends you a friend request on social media. You recognize that they often post personal struggles and crises online, and you worry about the impact of seeing these posts on your professional role and boundaries.

Scenario 2:

Another peer tags you in a post sharing details about their recovery journey, thanking you for your support. While it is meant to be positive, they have shared personal details that could affect their privacy.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the **potential risks** of connecting with peers on social media?
- How can you explain your social media boundaries to peers in a respectful way?
- Are there alternative ways to stay engaged with peers outside of social media?
- What are your organization's policies on digital ethics and professional boundaries?



Case Study 5: Navigating Cultural Differences in Peer Support

Scenario 1:

A peer you are supporting shares that they feel misunderstood because of their cultural background. They feel that mainstream recovery approaches do not align with their personal and cultural beliefs, making it difficult for them to engage in services.

Scenario 2:

A peer prefers to communicate in their native language, but most available services and meetings are conducted in English. They are struggling to participate fully in the program due to language barriers.

Discussion Questions:

- How can you ensure cultural humility and responsiveness in peer support?
- What strategies can you use to validate and integrate culturally diverse recovery approaches?
- How can you advocate for more inclusive practices within your organization?
- What are resources or community partnerships that may better support this peer?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

Use the following steps to evaluate any ethical dilemma:

- 1. **Identify the ethical issue** What is the core conflict?
- 2. Review ethical guidelines What do professional standards say?
- 3. Consider the peer's rights and needs How can they be prioritized?
- 4. Explore options and consequences What are the possible actions?
- 5. **Consult with supervisors or colleagues** Who can offer guidance?
- 6. Decide and document What is the final resolution and how is it communicated?

Reflection & Application

- What was the most challenging part of these discussions?
- How does your personal lived experience influence ethical decision-making?
- What tools or support do you need to feel confident in handling ethical dilemmas in peer work?

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Additional Resources:

- SAMHSA's Peer Worker Core Competencies (2023)
- National Association of Peer Supporters (NAPS) Ethics Guidelines (2023)
- Cultural Competency in Peer Support (2023)
- Digital Ethics in Peer Support: Best Practices (2023)

This worksheet encourages **active discussion**, **self-reflection**, **and peer-led learning** to strengthen ethical decision-making in peer support. Let us know how we can further enhance it! **%**