



## **PREGNANCY & SUBSTANCE USE: A PEER'S ROLE**

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**Module 1.2: Tools, Ethics, and Boundaries**

### Activity: Clarifying Healthy Boundaries

Read the following situations and consider where peer support can be helpful, what boundaries may be needed, and if the situation might be best addressed by another professional (e.g., social workers, healthcare providers, administrators).



**PREGNANCY, POSTPARTUM,  
& EARLY PARENTING**

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Peer Support for Families Impacted by Substance Use



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## Module 1.2: Tools, Ethics, and Boundaries

Situation	Is this a good opportunity to offer peer support?				May not be part of the peer role	Not part of the peer role	Decision	
	Allows for intentional use of peer's lived experience	Builds rapport/ helps the peer learn about the participant	Encourages participant connection to a new perspective or resources	Peer tools (e.g. MI) could be helpful	Is another team member better suited for this task?	Does this conflict with peer values, principles, or ethics?		
<b>Pregnancy</b>								
A participant expresses fear about having a C-Section due to a prior traumatic experience								Use trauma-informed listening, validate fears, and offer support in discussing options with providers.
A participant wants to create a birth plan but feels unsure what to include								Share examples, co-create the plan collaboratively, and support self-advocacy.
A participant discloses substance use and is afraid of child welfare involvement								Hold space without judgment, offer harm reduction resources, and ensure plan of safe care is updated. Encourage discussing with a safe healthcare provider that can connect to services.



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Situation	Is this a good opportunity to offer peer support?				May not be part of the peer role	Not part of the peer role	Decision	Notes on potential ways to offer support while staying within the peer role
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<b>Labor and Birth</b>								
The hospital restricts who can be in the room, and staff refuse to acknowledge the doula's role.								Understand hospital visitor guidelines. Usually, peers are considered staff and do not count as visitors. Remind the participant of their rights. Gently advocate if it is wise to do so. Think about if advocacy may negatively impact their care. Weigh all the options.
The birthing person is in pain and unsure if they want an epidural.								Offer grounding techniques, discuss options without advising, and remind them they can change their mind anytime.
A nurse pressures the participant to move forward with interventions without full explanation.								Encourage the participant to ask questions, support informed decision-making, and follow their lead.





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<b>Postpartum</b>								
A crying participant says she is a "bad mom".								Use affirming language, explore support systems, and normalize emotional fluctuations.
The participant is struggling with lactation and feeling pressure to breastfeed.								Share your own experiences (if helpful), affirm their choice, and offer referrals to lactation or formula support.
The baby is in NICU and the parent feels disconnected.								Help process grief or guilt, offer presence at NICU, and suggest bonding strategies (voice recordings, scent cloths, etc.). Advocate for visitation, assessing the risks and benefits. Understand the rights of parents in the healthcare setting.



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<b>Navigating Systems</b>								
The participant asks the peer to speak to child welfare for them.								Discuss limits of your role, offer to attend the meeting as support (if allowed), and support self-advocacy.
The probation officer demands updates about the participants' behavior from the peer.								Maintain confidentiality, explain peer role boundaries, refer the officer to appropriate contacts. Inform the participant. If they decide to sign a release of information, clarify what can and cannot be shared.
The participant needs assistance with WIC, housing, or transportation.								Support completing forms and connecting with case workers. To be listed as a reference, they will need a release of information, clarifying what you can and cannot discuss. When making referrals, be sure to offer support.





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<b>Professional Practice</b>								
A participant begins calling and texting frequently at all hours.								Reflect on boundaries in supervision, co-create a communication agreement, and ensure crisis contacts are available.
Another team member refers to you as "just a peer" in front of a participant.								Address the incident in supervision, assess advocacy options, and rebuild confidence in your role.

*This table has been adapted for pregnant and postpartum scenarios from an exercise in: Phillips, K., Harrison, J., Jabalee, C. (2019). Supervising Peer Workers: A Toolkit for Implementing and Supporting Successful Peer Staff Roles in Mainstream Mental Health and Addiction Organizations. Kitchener, ON: Centre for Excellence in Peer Support, CMHA Waterloo Wellington.*



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