

Disengaging from Peer Support Relationships



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VA | Defining
HEALTH CARE | **EXCELLENCE**
in the 21st Century

Learning Objectives

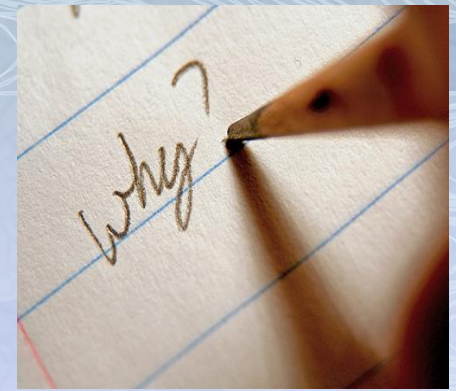
- ❑ Define disengagement and provide rationale for talking about this issue in peer support.
- ❑ Discuss phases of transition/termination.
- ❑ Two types of transition/termination:
 - Planned
 - Forced
- ❑ Identify good practices for peer support providers to use when engaging in planned and/or forced termination in individual mentoring or peer support group contexts.

What do we mean by “disengaging?”



- ❑ “Disengaging” is another word for “termination” or “transition.”
- ❑ “Termination” and “transition” are also other words for the final phase of peer support work.
- ❑ The content for this presentation was taken from the field of psychology because this topic is still an evolving one in the field of peer support and therefore does not yet have much written about it. The content for this presentation is meant to provide guidance to peer support providers. However, the model discussed is by no means the definitive way to end peer support relationships, and it may not apply to all forms of peer support relationships.

Why talk about transition in peer support?



- ❑ Joint Commission Requirement:
 - Providers of peer support services are offered training on how to disengage from peer support relationships.
- ❑ Peer support providers work in a health care system where transition and moving on from helping relationships are expected.
- ❑ Encouraging Veterans to find and use natural supports in community settings is part of our roles in working with them.



What happens when transition is not discussed?

- ❑ Veterans think services will stay the same and providers will be available forever.
- ❑ Veterans may limit their sources of social support to just the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and/or have narrow support systems in community-based settings.
- ❑ Providers have less impact on the Veteran population overall (meet with same Veterans so have limited availability to meet with new Veterans).

Phases of Peer Support Relationship

- Introductory/“Getting to Know You” Phase
- Working Phase
- Late Working Phase
- Pre-Transition Phase
- Transition Phase

(Adapted from: Joyce, A.S., Piper, W.E., & Ogrodniczuk, J.S. (2006). *Termination in psychotherapy: A psychodynamic model of processes and outcomes*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.)



Introductory Phase

- ❑ As part of the informed consent process when you begin working with Veterans, let them know that the peer support group/individual mentoring experience with you will end—ideally at a point mutually agreed upon by you and the Veterans.
- ❑ Highlight transition as an accomplishment as part of recovery.

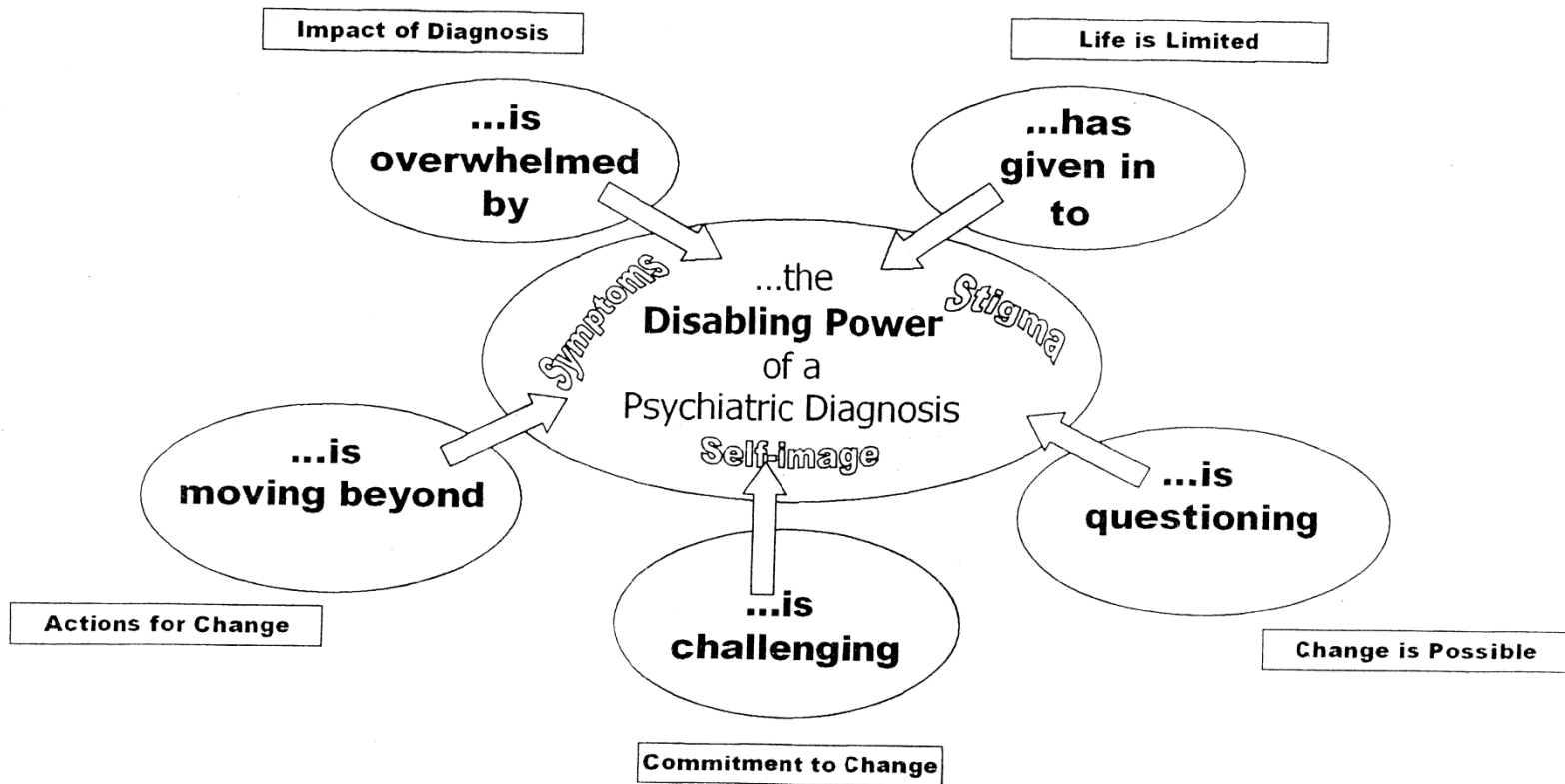
Working Phase

- ❑ Engage in peer support work with the Veteran(s).
- ❑ Be mindful of each Veteran's phase of recovery.
- ❑ Work with the Veteran(s) to:
 - Challenge negative self-talk.
 - Gain self-advocacy skills.
 - Consider the role of natural supports.
 - Gain wellness and self-management skills.



Five Stages in the Recovery Process

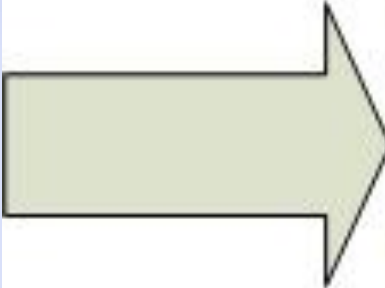
There are times when a person...



Reference: Frick, L. (2008). Presentation retrieved July 7, 2011 from <http://www.mhsip.org/SRCMHS2008/Presentation%20-%20Larry%20Fricks.pdf>

The Peer Support Transition Phase Model

Late Working Phase of Peer Support Work



- Veteran demonstrates progress in Recovery (Actions for Change)

1) Greater ability to use positive wellness skills to cope with symptoms

2) Greater capacity to access resources/supports on their own to further recovery / attainment of related goals.

(Adapted from: Joyce, A.S., Piper, W.E., & Ogrodniczuk, J.S. (2006). The process of termination. In *Termination in psychotherapy: A psychodynamic model of processes and outcomes* (p. 43). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.)

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Pre-transition Phase of Peer Support Work

- Raising the issue of ending/transitioning
- Engaging Veteran to review criteria for transition

- 1) Establish agreement that Veteran has progressed in their recovery and has attained goals along the way.
 - 2) Clarify shift in Veteran's concern toward the future and how they might/will handle life on life's terms outside the peer support relationship.
- Establishing the Veteran's "readiness" to transition

Time

Working Phase

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Transition Phase of Peer Support Work

General Objectives

- 1) Veteran develops self-management / wellness skills and increasing ability to advocate and access resources/supports for themselves.
- 2) Veteran is empowered.

Associated Tasks

- 1) Review of peer support work, Veteran's accomplishments and future goals.
- 2) Address/discuss relational meaning of transitioning, including:

- issues of loss, separation
- feelings brought up for you as peer provider.
- feelings/memories brought up for Veteran.

- 3) Reinforce Veteran's strengths and ability to practice wellness.

Outcomes

- 1) Reinforcement and consolidation of peer support process and Veteran's gains.
- 2) Veteran is prepared for maintaining healthy functioning while engaging natural supports in a community setting.

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Time

Working Phase

Transition Phase

Planned Transition

- ❑ Planned transition is agreed upon by the Veteran and peer support provider.
- ❑ The ending of the relationship usually occurs when the Veteran has achieved some or part of his/her goals and is evidencing a commitment to action in his/her recovery process.
- ❑ Planned transitions follow the Transition Phase Model discussed above.



WELL
DONE
YOU
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IT!

Forced Transition



- ❑ Transition that is forced by outside circumstances.
- ❑ Examples include:
 - Veteran leaves the program/facility earlier than expected.
 - Peer support provider leaves the facility/changes job within the facility.



Transition Tips

- ❑ Understand the transition phase process.
- ❑ Bring termination up early as part of informed consent.
- ❑ Pick a final meeting date—best to choose together, if possible.
- ❑ Encourage the Veteran to discuss his/her thoughts and feelings about ending the peer support relationship.
- ❑ As a peer support provider, be aware of your own thoughts and feelings about termination.

What are thoughts and feelings that may come up when discussing transition?

Veteran

- ❑ Sadness
- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Feelings of abandonment
- ❑ Relief
- ❑ Sense of pride and accomplishment that goals have been completed
- ❑ Gratitude

Peer Support Provider

- ❑ Sadness
- ❑ Anger (depending on reasons for relationship ending)
- ❑ Guilt
- ❑ Relief
- ❑ Sense of pride and accomplishment in how helped Veteran with goals

Importance of Supervision

- Away from their individual meetings/groups with Veterans, peer support providers should discuss their own thoughts and feelings that come up in relation to their work. Supervision can be a safe and appropriate place to have this discussion.
- Supervisors can help the peer support providers determine how to manage their thoughts and feelings in ways that support the peers' work with Veterans.
- Peer support providers should consult with their supervisors about when and how to have the discussion with Veterans about ending the peer support relationship.

Transition Tips



- ❑ Anger and anxiety are normal. Both Veterans and peer support providers may experience these feelings when discussing termination. Encourage the Veteran to express what he/she is thinking and feeling about the termination.
- ❑ Backsliding is common. Expect Veterans to express concerns/problems they expressed early on in the peer support work and claim that the work is not finished.
- ❑ Remind the Veteran of gains he/she has made.



Transition Tips

- ❑ Complete the transition face-to-face (not over phone, email, Facebook, etc.).
- ❑ Expect that the final meeting may be emotionally moving, depending on the duration and scope of the peer support relationship.
- ❑ Remind Veteran(s) that transition is not the end, but it is really the beginning of the next phase of their lives!

(Tips adapted from: Grohol, J.M. (2009). *Termination: 10 tips when ending psychotherapy*. Retrieved July 7, 2011, from <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2009/05/27/termination-10-tips-when-ending-psychotherapy>.)



**Danger
Ahead**

Examples of Transition Traps



- ❑ Peer support provider develops a social/informal relationship with the Veteran after terminating the peer support relationship.
- ❑ Peer support provider gives the Veteran the peer support provider's personal contact information and encourages the Veteran to contact the peer support provider when needed.

Examples of Transition Traps



- ❑ Peer support provider develops an AA/NA sponsorship role with a Veteran with whom the peer had a previous professional peer support relationship.
- ❑ Peer support provider avoids talking with a Veteran about termination because it “feels hard” and/or because the Veteran is not 100% cured. Remember, recovery is a journey not a cure!

Scenario #1

- ❑ James, a VA peer support specialist, has been working with Michael in individual peer mentoring for 12 months. At the beginning of the peer support relationship, James let Michael know that transition to natural supports was part of the peer support role. Michael has made many gains, securing housing through VA Supported Housing (VASH) and a competitive job with the help of VA's Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) Program. James and Michael agree that Michael still has things to work on, but they also both acknowledge that Michael has made good progress and has developed many supports and connections over the past 8 months.

- ❑ Questions for Discussion:
 - How/when should James bring up transition with Michael?
 - What stage of recovery does Michael appear to be in?
 - What should James do if Michael says he would like to continue meeting for peer support mentoring after James suggests that it might be good to talk about transitioning?

Scenario #2

- ❑ Rachel, a VA peer support volunteer, has been facilitating a recovery peer support group for Veterans for the past six months. Rachel's spouse has recently obtained a job out-of-state, so Rachel will be moving away with her family within the next two months.

- ❑ Questions for Discussion:
 - How/when should Rachel discuss this transition with her peer support group participants?
 - Besides talking with the group members, who else should Rachel talk to about the upcoming termination?

Scenario #3

- ❑ Patrick, a VA peer support specialist, has been working with Sean in individual peer mentoring for four months while Sean has been in the local VA Domiciliary Program where Patrick works. Sean will be graduating from the program in two weeks, so Patrick brings up termination with him in their meeting this week. This is the first time Patrick and Sean discuss termination. Patrick points out Sean's strengths and his accomplishments in their work together, and Patrick tells Sean he enjoyed working with him.

- ❑ Questions for Discussion:
 - What do you think Sean's reaction would be to this discussion? What do you think he would say?
 - If Patrick discussed termination early on in the peer support relationship, how would it impact this current discussion (if at all)?
 - If this was a peer support group in the Domiciliary rather than individual mentoring, what do you think would be the same about the termination discussion? What would be different?

Questions?



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