

Learner Manual



Health & Wellness Promotion
Session 2: Health Communication



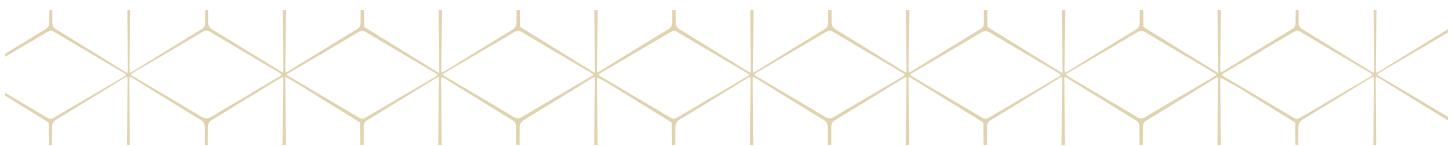


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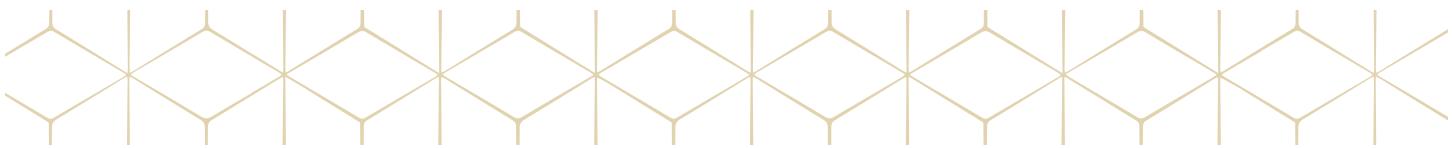
Session 2 Health Literacy Basics



Session 2 Learning Objectives

We will be focusing today on the following objectives:

- Identify strategies to overcome health communication barriers, including lack of social supports, medical jargon, technology access, and accessibility.
- Recognize positive health communication, such as active listening, OARS, and a nonjudgmental approach.
- Recognize how low health literacy negatively affects health communication.

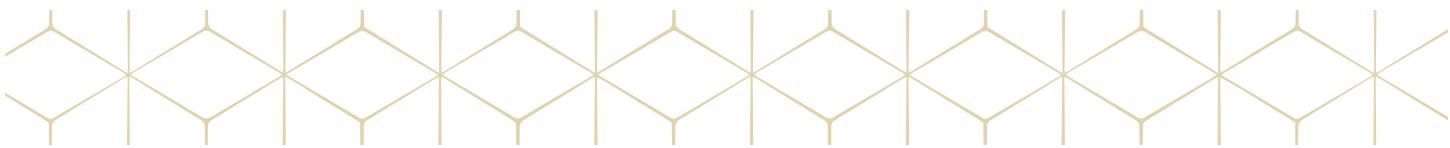


Welcome

Welcome to session two of the six-part series on Health & Wellness Promotion in Peer Support.

- Session 1: Health and Wellness Promotion
- **Session 2: Health Communication**
- Session 3: Health Literacy Basics
- Session 4: Characteristics, Competencies and Resources for PSS in Health & Wellness Promotion
- Session 5: The Peer Role in Health and Wellness
- Session 6: H & W Learning Collaborative Overview

This session focuses on Health Communication.



Support Systems

Our physical health is related to many different aspects in our lives. One area of strength for our health comes from our support systems. People who have social supports have better physical and emotional health, and they tend to live longer.

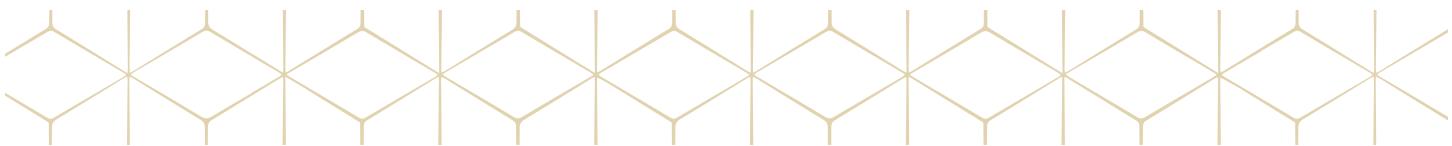
What does social support mean to you?

The people who listen to your concerns, help you problem solve, comfort you, and help you find ways to meet your needs can all be considered social support.

Social support improves our health. Social isolation and loneliness correlate to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease (OECD, 2022).

The quality of support is more important than quantity (Vandervoort, 1999). Having a few very close relationships with people who really support us when we need it is more helpful to our health than having many contacts with people who are not as close to us.

- How can a PSS help a peer? Try discussing the following questions with people you support.
- When it comes to your health, what does support look like to you?
- What does advocacy for your healthcare look like to you?
- How do you seek advice about your health concerns? How do you explore your options?
- Who would you like to talk to, or work with, when making healthcare decisions for yourself?



Activity 1: Think about your supports

When it comes to your health, what does support look like to you?

What does advocacy for your healthcare look like to you?

How do you seek advice around your health? How do you explore your options?

Who would you like to talk to, or work with, when making healthcare decisions for yourself?



OARS: Open-ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections and Summarizing

Good communication skills are very important for PSSs, and this is especially true when talking about health. Health is a very personal issue and peers can feel discouraged, insecure, afraid or angry about health conditions or past experiences with providers. Dealing with these conversations sensitively and with compassion helps to build trust. Successful techniques also include motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry and identifying the strengths of service recipients.

Active Listening

Active listening skills are needed to understand what a person is trying to say both in their words and the idea behind the words. It requires paying attention, giving the person your full attention without speaking or looking at electronic devices.

Active listening also creates an atmosphere of respect, trust, and safety between two people. Positive communication about health also requires attending to the peer's unique identity. This can include a peer's culture, language, and gender identity. Positive health communication also addresses specific needs, including difficulties in hearing and speaking.

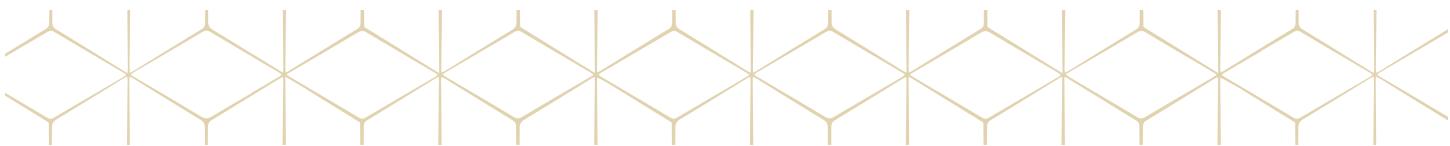
Three important components of active listening are:

Reflecting: This is used when you are trying to capture what another person is saying using your own words to make sure you understood all of the information. It is not repeating exactly what they said, which is called parroting. Parroting is not helpful because it doesn't help the person figure out if you understand what they told you.

Clarifying: Ask questions to make sure you understand what the person is talking about and to encourage them to explore the issue further.

Summarizing: Sum up what the person told you. One way to do this is to use the "you feel _____ because _____" sentence format.



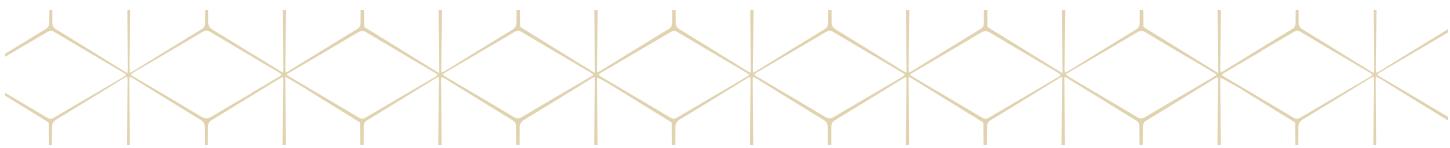


Activity 2: OARS

Review the [OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills](#), then rate your skills with OARS in the table below:

| | 1 Want to learn this skill | 2 Have some knowledge of this skill | 3 Have tried out this skill | 4 Regularly use this skill |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Using open-ended questions | | | | |
| Offering affirmations | | | | |
| Reflective listening | | | | |
| Summarizing | | | | |

When can you apply OARS during health conversations in your role as Peer Support Specialist?



Health Literacy

An important consideration during health conversations is health literacy, which is the ability to read, understand, and follow-up on health care treatment services (covered in Module 1). It's important to remember a few things about health literacy:

- Many people struggle to understand health information
- Fear, depression and anxiety make understanding health information harder
- Most people don't want to admit they have difficulties understanding health information

When peers struggle to understand information about their health they feel:

- Embarrassment
- Shame
- Fear
- Anger

Peers who have low health literacy often don't understand their health conditions or the health information that is offered to them by health providers. This affects their ability to understand prescriptions, which can lead to additional health problems. They also might miss out on learning about how to manage their health better.

Low health literacy makes getting care and following up with the care more difficult. There is also evidence of a double stigma of low health literacy and living with a mental health condition that prevents peers from getting adequate health care. Peers with low health literacy might:

- Experience shame about their lack of understanding and be unwilling to talk about it
- Blame themselves for not understanding
- Experience lower self-esteem and confidence in their health navigation skills
- Experience more anxiety and depression around their health

Learn More

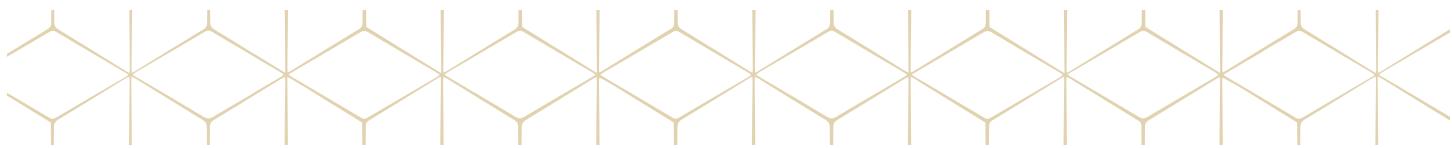
AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, Second Edition.

https://www.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/publications/files/healthlittoolkit2_4.pdf

Complete after this session:

Review and discuss health literacy using the ALL ASPECTS OF HEALTH LITERACY SCALE (AAHLS)

<https://healthliteracy.bu.edu/documents/34/AAHLS%20Tool.pdf>

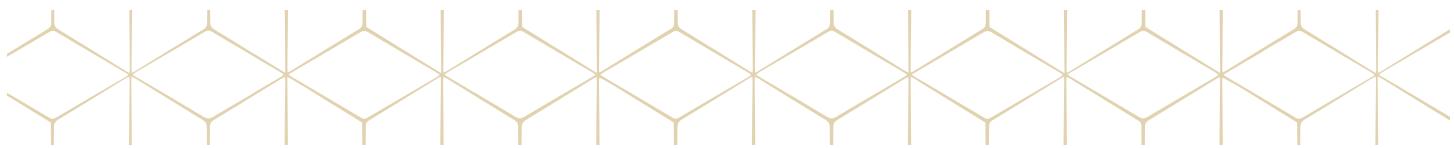


Take the AAHLS survey for yourself. Spend about 5 minutes considering the questions in your own life.

What are your perceptions about the AAHLS questions? What might be helpful as a Peer Supporter?

What might you add?

How might individual experiences such as race, culture, gender, education, sexuality, gender expression, languages spoken, experiences in the mental health system and other personal attributes shape a peer's health literacy?



Next Session:

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