

Peer Counseling Course Syllabus

What you will learn in this course

PEER COUNSELING

Helping people achieve their goals is one of the most rewarding of human experiences. Peer counselors help individuals reach their goals by offering them support, encouragement, and resource information. This course explains the role of a peer counselor, teaches the observation, listening, and emphatic communication skills that counselors need, and provides basic training in conflict resolution, and group leadership. Not only will this course prepare you for working as a peer counselor, but the skills taught will enhance your ability to communicate effectively in your personal and work relationships.

Unit 1: Peer Counseling Basics

Peer counselors are compassionate guides. They apply knowledge, use specific tools, and follow certain rules to help people get past obstacles and reach their goals. One of the tools counselors use is treating others with deep respect. The rules counselors follow include setting therapeutic boundaries and keeping confidentiality with those they help. A counselor's knowledge base must include the five universal human needs of physical well-being: security, belonging, appreciation, and personal development.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Provide information or resources
- Make referrals to other types of services
- Assist with problem solving
- Help people explore their options
- Assist with conflict resolution
- Provide constructive feedback

Unit 2: Communicating Needs & Feelings

Peer counselors understand that emotions are a universal language. Emotions provide us with useful information, and they help us make decisions and connect with others. The emotions people feel reflect how well their basic needs are—or are not—being met. When counselors are familiar with the seven basic emotions and how they relate to our universal human needs, it helps them assess what a person needs to do to feel better. Because expressing emotions effectively helps individuals fulfill their own needs, it is a skill that counselors must role model and teach.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Describe the benefits of having emotions
- Explain what emotional intelligence is and why it is important

- Describe seven basic emotions, what triggers them, and how to recognize them
- Recognize signs that reveal which basic needs are not being met
- Describe what it means to take responsibility for your own emotions and feelings
- Demonstrate how to communicate feelings and needs effectively

Unit 3: Needs, Feelings & Human Behavior

Peer counselors are aware of what people have in common and what causes them to behave differently. They know human behavior is shaped by how well our basic needs are met, the temperament we are born with, the habits of early caregivers, our environment, and our understanding of emotions. Some of the behaviors people develop and habitually use are protective behaviors, designed to keep them emotionally and physically safe. Counselors recognize these protective behaviors and call them defense mechanisms. Some are very ineffective and prevent people from getting what they want or need.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Discuss the many ways our earliest caregivers influence our mental and emotional development.
- Discuss the role of temperament and early environmental influences on our mental and emotional development.
- Explain the connection between our earliest influences and the development of our individual habits of thought and behavior.
- Explain how the behavior habits acquired in childhood affect our adolescent and adult choices.
- Explain why humans have developed and use defensive behaviors.
- Begin recognizing defensive behaviors in yourself and others.

Unit 4: Listening, Questioning, Paraphrasing and Reflecting

Peer counselors use a unique set of tools to help others reach their goals. Counselors practice active listening by giving their complete attention to what someone is saying, and they respond without judgment. Facilitative questioning is used to help peers talk about feelings, explore their issues, and find solutions. Counselors employ the tools of paraphrasing and reflecting to clarify what peers have shared, convey sincere interest, and help individuals identify their needs and emotions.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Explain what it means to listen attentively, or actively, and the benefits of having this skill.
- Describe or demonstrate how counselors show their attentiveness to peers.
- Explain the purpose of facilitative questioning.
- Understand and demonstrate the use of closed- and open-ended questions.
- Define or demonstrate the counseling skill of paraphrasing.
- Define or demonstrate the counseling skill of reflecting.

Peer Counseling Midterm Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from the first four units in this course (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)

Unit 5: Feedback, Body Language, Summarizing & Assessing

Peer counselors use a unique set of tools to help others reach their goals. Counselors express their attentiveness and interest through their body language. They give feedback by sharing their observations, which enables peers to see themselves through the counselor's eyes. Counselors summarize to highlight the main points that a peer has shared. Assessments are information-gathering tools that provide an overall picture of a peer's situation. To be effective, all these tools are used with an attitude of nonjudgment.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Define feedback and explain why it is used.
- Demonstrate using feedback.
- Explain how to use a peer's body language as a therapy tool.
- Define summarizing and demonstrate its use.
- Define assessing and explain what it is used for.
- Explain what a non-judgmental attitude is and demonstrate how to practice it.

Unit 6: Conflict Resolution

Peer counselors are often called upon to negotiate a resolution to a conflict. This requires patience because each person involved feels uniquely threatened and has his or her own perception of the problem. Some individuals are competitive in conflict negotiations while others are accommodating, compromising, or avoiding. The ideal negotiation is a collaborative one, where all involved listen to each other and work for a win-win solution. Counselors need to create a negotiation environment of safety and equality, keep the discussion on topic, and know how to facilitate brainstorming. Naturally, counselors must also be prepared to manage difficulties, such as reaching a resolution impasse.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Explain how conflict is more than a disagreement, and discuss the factors that make conflict resolution difficult.
- Define and discuss the conflict styles of competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromise.
- Define collaboration and explain what makes it an ideal style of negotiation and what makes it difficult to use.
- Understand and explain how your personal biases and past conflict experiences affect you as you negotiate with others.

- Follow ground rules and guidelines, and utilize counseling skills to practice the art of conflict resolution.
- Exercise options for managing an impasse (stalemate) in the resolution process.

Unit 7: Leadership & Teamwork

Peer counselors often work within teams and may be called on to serve as team leaders. Flexible leaders know their natural leadership style and adjust it to suit the situation or problem at hand. People in the counseling field frequently enjoy collaborative leadership that focuses on maintaining good working relationships. Effective leaders know their team requires a purpose and plan, operating instructions, and a system of accountability and reward. They understand that team members thrive when appreciated, when communication is consistent, and that members develop social bonds. Leaders guide their teams through the four stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. This is accomplished by meeting the members' changing needs at each development stage.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Identify basic styles of leadership and discuss each style's strengths.
- Describe your own natural leadership style, with its strengths and weaknesses.
- Discuss the basics of collaborative leadership.
- Explain the benefits of working in teams and what the primary building blocks of successful teams are.
- Explain how a team leader encourages and facilitates effective teamwork.
- Explain the four stages teams go through as they mature.

Unit 8: Group Leadership

Peer counselors are often called upon to lead peer groups. The groups may be educational, supportive, or social. Counseling groups have many benefits, such as providing hope, information, social growth, and a sense of belonging. Leaders keep the group running according to its purpose and plan and maintain a safe, respectful group environment. They facilitate sharing and discussion and employ counseling tools to assist withdrawn, disruptive, or distressed individuals. Members are guided through the three stages of group development: orientation, groundwork, and cohesion.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Educate others regarding the benefits of participating in counseling groups.
- Describe three types of peer counseling groups and the primary focus of each type.
- Provide a general job description of a group facilitator.
- Name three group stages of development and discuss the expected behaviors of group members during each of the stages.
- Define group cohesion, and name two or more ways to facilitate group cohesion during each stage of group development.

- Identify six problems that may arise during group sessions and suggest one or two ways of addressing each one.

Peer Counseling Final Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from units five to eight in this course – the last four units. (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)

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