

Core Competency 1: The Concepts of Hope, Recovery, and Wellness

Session Topics:

1. What is a Peer Support Specialist
2. Recovery
3. Available Treatment Options Across the Lifespan and Impact
4. Techniques that can be used when working with a peer with substance use challenges
5. Wellness - 8 Dimensions of Wellness

Session Objectives:

- Define what a Peer Support Specialist is and identify aspects/qualifications.
- Identify best practices of Peer Support Specialists.
- Recognize the role of mutuality, peer self-disclosure, and peer listening in peer support.
- Learn the basics of The Helper Therapy Principle.
- Understand how hope and recovery complement each other and how recovery is a lifelong journey.
- Understand the recovery model and other approaches to recovery.
- Learn about the harm reduction model.
- Identify available treatment options and impacts of substance abuse across the lifespan.
- Identify techniques that can be used when working with a peer with substance use challenges.
- Give examples of the intersectionality of the 8 Dimensions of Wellness and how they manifest in our lives as peer advocates.

## Topic 1: What is a Peer Support Specialist?

Painted Brain defines a Peer Support Specialist as a person with lived experience with mental illness or substance abuse who uses that experience to promote recovery.

The following are aspects/qualifications of a Peer Support Specialist:

- Able to self-disclose mental illnesses in a way that builds resilience and focuses on and is beneficial to the peer engaging in services. When appropriate, use self-disclosure to validate the individual's lived experience to promote hope, resiliency, and coping strategies.
- Willing to provide assistance and support to others similarly impacted by mental illnesses or substance use.

A Peer Support Specialist is someone who can offer support and tools that help the peer in recovery with coping strategies that support life experiences and mental illnesses. This support differs from traditional mental health services. Peer Support Specialists do not diagnose or provide prescriptions, and they offer peer support and ideas for coping with mental illness and walking the road to recovery. Peer Support Specialists provide consensual individualized, ongoing guidance, coaching, and support to ensure self-determination for peers. The principle of non-coercion is essential to recovery. It encourages those engaging in services to make their own decisions, even when the peer engaging in services is under mandated treatment.

Peer support is a practice that allows peers to emotionally assist each other and learn from one another on their road to healing and recovery. Peer support is a relationship of equals. Before you can begin to build skills for speaking out and taking action for yourself or others, you need to understand and educate yourself to identify how your characteristics interact with advocacy that

promotes hope & recovery. If you are like most of us, when you come upon troubling times, experience distressing symptoms, or need to make some life changes, you look outside for answers. And you will find that many people will be delighted to direct you, make decisions, and take action on your behalf. If you overlook your inner guidance as a source of wisdom, your course of action may be less helpful.

#### Peer Support Staff:

- Leverage their lived experience to assist others in recovery.
- Openly share their recovery stories.
- They can identify that recovery begins with self-advocacy, which allows them to make educated decisions about the choices they want for their wellness and recovery, thus describing and understanding the process that promoted their recovery.
- Use self-disclosure to reduce power differentials and create a peer-to-peer relationship that benefits mental health recovery.
- Provide non-clinical strengths-based support.
- Provide a safe and supportive work environment for peers.
- Acknowledge the need to understand a peer's unique life experiences, perceptions, and worldviews to deliver effective peer support services.
- Engage in advocacy, resource linkages, sharing experience, community and relationship building, group facilitation, skill-building, mentoring, and goal setting.
- Provide tools and/or knowledge that helps their self-driven perspective to find interests or resources that support their wellbeing.
- Identify peers' needs for resources in all aspects of treatment, recovery, and wellness, including transitions in care that support their wellness recovery goals.

- Visit community resources with peers to assist them in becoming familiar with potential opportunities, as appropriate.
- Encompass a range of facilitation techniques using digital learning skills and training interaction.

Peer Support Specialist: An Individual who is 18 years of age or older, who has self-identified as having lived experience with the process of recovery from mental illness, substance use disorder, or both, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent or family member of the consumer, and who has received Certification under a County Peer Support Specialist Certification Program. <sup>1</sup>

Mutuality:

The concept of peer support would not be possible without practicing mutuality. Peer Support Specialists understand that they are not in a position of power or authority but serve to offer support while learning from their peers.

- "Peer support [is] a flexible approach to building mutual, healing relationships among equals, based on core values and principles." <sup>2</sup>

Peer Support Specialists assist in the supported decision-making with the understanding that the peer is the one who will decide on their treatment. Peer Support Specialists are a part of the peer's support network with the role of respecting and acknowledging their power in making life choices. Peer Support Specialists provide support, explore options, and/or provide guidance as needed. As a Peer Support Specialist, there may be times when it feels like you are doing all the work. As a reminder, you are modeling an equitable relationship of giving and receiving when

supporting peers to make their own decisions. So this is the time to revisit the purpose of seeking peer support and clarifying what they want and are willing to do.

Peer/Self-Disclosure:

Disclosure does not have to be all or nothing. Disclosing one's mental illness is a very personal, subjective decision. Looking at your feelings about mental illness before disclosing your personal information to others is essential. Not everyone needs to know about a person's struggles, but sharing your mental illness diagnosis may garner support.

Factors to consider before self-disclosing may include the following:

- Understanding your condition will help you with disclosing it to others.
- Disclose to someone you trust first.
- It is your choice when to tell and under what circumstances.
- It is essential to feel safe when self-disclosing

Many people find disclosing their mental illness, other illnesses, or personal situations beneficial to their recovery and often helpful to others. It appears that the more open an individual is and the more people share, overcoming discrimination and stigma in the greater society becomes more possible. You must brace yourself for possible negative responses from people when you disclose.

Stigma affects people daily and being vocal about mental illness, and substance use reduces that stigma. When we tell our mental health stories, we also help other people to be less afraid of their own experiences and can encourage them to seek support. Our role as Peer Support Specialists is to be open, honest, and upfront about the many ways mental illness and/or

substance use has impacted us and to be a source of support and resources for peers seeking to get started on their journey to recovery. Within the peer movement, we often use the phrase 'Honest, Open, and Proud' (HOP) in public speaking. We use this idea to guide our work and to remind us that we can be honest, open, and proud about our mental health experiences.

**Active Listening:** Active listening is listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. Active listeners ask open-ended questions to learn more. They paraphrase and summarize what the peer said to ensure they fully understood. And practice non-judgmental listening by setting aside their biases or points of view. Lastly, they demonstrate patience by focusing on the other person instead of their own thoughts.<sup>3</sup>

To practice your skills, use the following 6 techniques:<sup>4</sup>

- **Paying attention**
  - One goal of active listening and being an effective listener is to set a relaxed tone that allows the peer to think and speak. Allow "wait time" before responding. Don't cut peers off, finish their sentences, or start formulating your answer before they've finished. When actively listening, pay attention to your body language and frame of mind. Be focused on the moment, make eye contact, and operate from a place of respect as the listener.
- **Withholding judgment**
  - Active listening requires an open mind. As a listener and a leader, be open to new ideas, new perspectives, and possibilities when practicing active listening. Even when good listeners have strong views, they suspend judgment, hold criticisms, and avoid interruptions like arguing or selling their point right away.

- Reflecting

- When you're the listener, don't assume that you understand the peer correctly — or that they know you've heard them. Mirror the peers' information and emotions by periodically paraphrasing key points. Reflecting is an active listening technique that indicates that you and the peer are on the same page.
  - For example, the peer might tell you, "I am attending AA regularly, but no matter how much I tell my mom that I am going, she keeps badgering me about going."
  - To paraphrase, you could say, "I hear that you're going to AA, and your mom keeps reminding you to go."
  - If you hear, "I don't know what else to do!" Try helping the peer label their feelings: "Sounds like you're feeling pretty frustrated."

- Clarifying

- Ask questions about any ambiguous or unclear issue when engaging in active listening. As the listener, if you have doubt or confusion about what the peer has said, say something like, "Let me see if I'm clear. Are you talking about ...?" or "Wait a minute. I didn't follow you."
- Open-ended, clarifying, and probing questions are essential active listening tools that encourage the peer to do the work of self-reflection and problem solving rather than justifying or defending a position or trying to guess the "right answer."
  - Examples include: "What do you think about ...?" or "Tell me about ...?" and "Can you explain/describe a little more...?"

- When engaging in active listening, the emphasis is on asking rather than telling. It invites a thoughtful response and maintains a spirit of collaboration.
  - You might say: "What are some of the specific things you've tried?" or "How certain are you that you have the full picture of what's going on?"
- Summarizing
  - Restating key themes as the conversation proceeds confirm and solidify your grasp of the peer's point of view. It also helps you and the peer gain clarity and the next steps. Briefly summarize what you've understood while practicing active listening, and ask the peer to do the same.
    - Giving a brief restatement of core themes raised by the peer might sound like: "Let me summarize to check my understanding. "You're attending AA, although your mother continues to remind you to attend. You've tried everything you can think of to stop her from reminding you, and there's no apparent impact. Did I get that right?"
  - Restating key themes helps increase accountability.
- Sharing
  - Active listening is about understanding the peer. As you gain a clearer understanding of the peer's perspective, you can begin to introduce your ideas and suggestions that promote hope and recovery.
  - Once the situation has been discussed, you and the peer have a good picture of where things stand. From this point, the conversation can shift into problem-solving: What hasn't been tried? What don't we know? What new approaches could be taken?



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- As the listener, continue to ask questions and support, but don't decide on a solution for the peer. The peer will feel more confident and eager if they think through the options and own the solution.

*Exercise: Active Listening Role Play (see below - Activities & Role Play)*

**The Helper Therapy Principle:** This principle suggests that when an individual (the "helper") assists another person, the helper may also benefit.

**Benefits of the Helper Therapy Principle:**

- It creates opportunities for people to improve their health, mental health, and self-esteem.
- When people help others or even perceive they are helping others, they feel good about themselves in ways that improve their mental health, health, and functioning. 5

**Conflict Resolution**

More often than not, Peer Support Specialists will work with peers who come from very diverse backgrounds, individually or in groups. It's natural for disagreements to arise, and a Peer Support Specialist's job is to ensure that conflicts do not escalate. While disagreement is genuine, it isn't appropriate to tolerate disrespectful or threatening behaviors.

**How to listen to better understand one another**

**Letting everyone speak and be heard:** Allowing all people involved an opportunity to talk and share their opinion is an excellent step in starting a conversation and preventing a shouting match. Some peers speak to get the point across, others can use it as an opportunity to vent, and some need it to process their thoughts and emotions.

- Encourage active listening: Encourage peers to listen to what the others are saying and think about each other's words before taking a turn to comment or interrupt.
- Encourage empathetic listening: The meaning of empathetic listening is rooted in attentiveness, showing compassion, and being kind to others when they are speaking. Empathetic listening is built on mutual respect, showing that you are paying attention to the speaker.<sup>6</sup> Remind peers to listen to each other's words and try understanding the lived experiences, learning styles, coping strategies, upbringing, lifestyle, and culture. It is essential to show acceptance, though not necessarily agreement.

Note: See CC 10 Conflict Resolution for more information.

## Topic 2: Recovery

*Exercise: What is recovery?*

Discuss the following within the larger group:

- What does recovery mean to you? (Jamboard)

**What is recovery?:** "A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential."<sup>7</sup> Painted Brain recognizes that the use of person-first language supports recovery. Person-first language helps peers understand that they are not their mental illness. Person-first language separates the peer from their condition. For example, "that person is mentally ill" or "that person

has a mental illness." Separating a peer from illness and/or substance abuse provides hope, and hope and recovery go hand-in-hand, and the concept of hope and optimism greatly aids that recovery. Too often, peers in early recovery are not afforded hope or the belief that their lives will change for the better.

**Everyone can recover:** Unlike past beliefs about mental illness and substance abuse, peers today understand that recovery is a personal and lifelong process. The road to recovery looks different for each person, but Painted Brain strongly believes that recovery is possible for everyone.

**Recovery model (adopted by California):** California's recovery model focuses on an individual's ability to regain control of their mental health symptoms and live a fulfilled life of their choosing while living with a mental illness. The recovery model focuses on building resilience in individuals living with mental illnesses.

- **The Recovery Model focuses on the following approaches to recovery:**
  - **Hope:** Hope is about believing that recovery is possible and is the foundation of the recovery process of mental health and substance abuse disorder. Recovery depends on the notion that an individual wants to get better. Hope exists if an individual is showing up to receive services.
  - **Empowerment:** Empowerment emerges from inside one's self, and it has three components, autonomy, courage, and responsibility.
    - Autonomy is the ability to make their own decisions. The tools needed to act autonomously include knowledge, self-confidence, and the availability of meaningful choices.

- Courage is the willingness to take risks, speak in one's voice, and step outside safe routines.
- Responsibility is about the peer assuming more responsibility in their lives. Full empowerment requires that they live with the consequences of their choices.
- **Meaningful role:** These roles may involve activities, relationship status, or occupation. It means living a life you're proud of, having a stable home, a healthy lifestyle, meaningful relationships, and making progress towards life goals. 8
- **Additional approaches include:** 9
  - Person-centered: Recovery is based on individuals' unique strengths, needs, preferences, experiences, and cultural backgrounds.
  - Nonlinear: Recovery isn't a step-by-step process. It is based on continuous growth, with occasional setbacks and learning from experiences.
  - Strengths-based: Recovery builds on individuals' strengths.
  - Respect: Acceptance and appreciation by society, communities, systems of care, and peers are crucial to recovery.
  - Peer support: Mutual support plays an invaluable role in recovery.

**Harm Reduction Model:** The Peer Support Specialist's role is to advocate and assist the peer in making choices about their recovery process. So the options related to substance use are harm reduction or abstinence. Both models have benefits, but the approach is different. The appropriate model will be the one that resonates and works for the peer.

Harm reduction is an approach that emphasizes engaging directly with people who use drugs to prevent overdose and infectious disease transmission, improve the physical, mental, and social well-being of those served, and offer low-threshold options for accessing substance use disorder treatment and other health care services. <sup>10</sup>

**Mental Health Services Act - Prop 63:** "It is designed to expand and transform California's behavioral health system to better serve individuals with, and at risk of, serious mental health issues, and their families." <sup>11</sup>

### Topic 3: Available Treatment Options Across the Lifespan and Impact

The most effective treatment option across the lifespan is person-centered and ensures that the individual in recovery is actively involved every step of the way. <sup>12</sup>

#### Type of treatment available:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inpatient rehab</li> <li>● Outpatient rehab</li> <li>● Detoxification</li> <li>● Sober living homes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Addiction treatment medications</li> <li>● Intervention</li> <li>● Faith-based treatment</li> </ul>
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#### Support groups:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 12 step programs</li> <li>● Alcoholics Anonymous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Al-Anon/Nar-Anon</li> <li>● Addiction Counselors</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Narcotics Anonymous</li> <li>● SMART recovery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Peer support groups</li> </ul>
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### Impacts of substance abuse across the lifespan:

A life stage perspective is necessary for developing age-appropriate strategies to address substance use disorders (SUDs) and related health conditions to produce better overall health and wellbeing. <sup>13</sup>

**Youth:** The teen and young adult years are vital to healthy cognitive function as an adult, so it is important to maintain a strict level of healthy behavior during these years. Drug abuse can impact the brain's ability to function in the short term as well as prevent proper growth and development in the long term. <sup>14</sup>

- **Substance abuse affects the youths' brain development by:** <sup>14</sup>
  - Interfering with neurotransmitters and damaging connections within the brain.
  - Reducing the ability to experience pleasure.
  - Creating problems with memory.
  - Causing missed opportunities during a period of heightened learning potential.
  - Ingraining expectations of unhealthy habits into brain circuitry.
  - Inhibiting development of perceptual abilities.

**Adults:** Adulthood has the highest associated medical condition (e.g., cancer, sexually transmitted disease, heart disease) and mental health conditions (e.g., bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, anti-social disorder). <sup>15</sup>

**Older adults:** Older adults may be more likely to experience mood disorders, lung and heart problems, or memory issues. Drugs can worsen these conditions, exacerbating the negative health consequences of substance use. Additionally, the effects of some drugs, like impaired judgment, coordination, or reaction time, can result in accidents, such as falls and motor vehicle crashes. These sorts of injuries can pose a greater risk to health with possible longer recovery time. <sup>16</sup>

#### **Topic 4: Techniques that can be used when working with a peer with substance use challenges**

Different approaches are more appropriate and effective for different individuals; depending on their age, type of addiction, and the factors contributing to their addiction, <sup>16</sup> there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

#### **Therapeutic techniques include:** <sup>17</sup>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</li> <li>● Dialectical Behavior Therapy</li> <li>● The Matrix Model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing</li> <li>● Motivational Therapies</li> </ul>
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#### **Interpersonal techniques include:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learn and understand the individual illness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acknowledge healthy changes.</li> <li>● Be alert for possible relapse and suicidal ideation.</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect and advocate for the individual's treatment program.</li> <li>• Support in building the individual's social support network.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice self-care and take one step at a time (Peer Support Specialist and Peer).</li> </ul>
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### Topic 5: Wellness/8 Dimensions of Wellness

Wellness is an active process of increasing awareness and actively making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life for everyone. The Peer Support Specialists helps the peer clarify their interests, goals, strengths, and any barriers to wellness they may experience. As a Peer Support Specialist, you are a part of their journey in cultivating problem-solving skills to make informed, independent decisions that increase their resiliency and ability to make successful life choices. Peer Support Specialists are individuals in recovery who may experience secondary trauma. Secondary trauma is emotional distress that results when an individual hears about another person's trauma. The Peer Support Specialist needs to practice wellness activities to support peers in their recovery.

### Trauma, Secondary Trauma or Re-traumatization Symptoms & Signs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwanted and painful memories of the event/story</li> <li>• Dreams or flashbacks of the event/story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flashbacks and nightmares</li> <li>• Anxiousness or fear</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• Trouble sleeping</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Avoidance of things that remind you of the traumatic event/story</li> <li>● Frequent emotional outbursts</li> <li>● Engaging in self-destructive and reckless behavior (such as substance abuse)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fatigue</li> <li>● Mood swings</li> <li>● Irritability</li> <li>● Social isolation and avoidance</li> <li>● Overall intense negative emotions</li> <li>● Inability to control emotions</li> <li>● Strong physical reactions to triggers</li> </ul>
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*Exercise: What is wellness:*

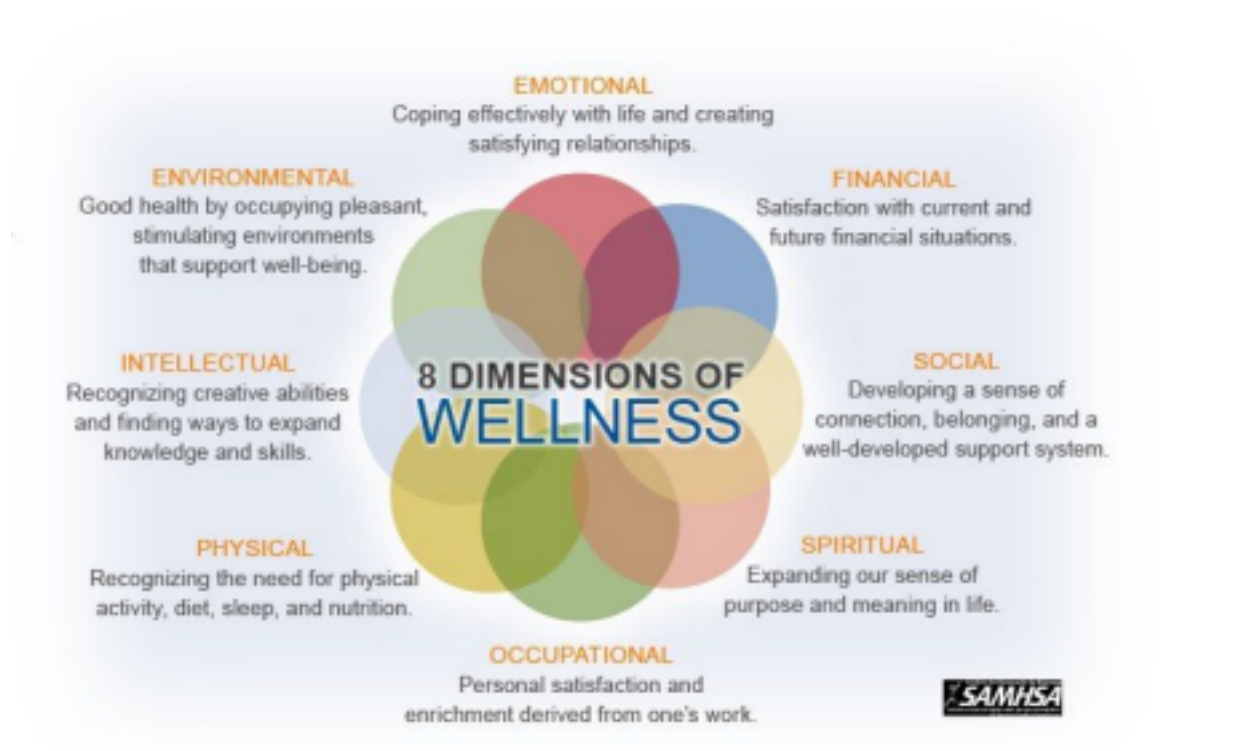
- Ask participants to share what wellness means to them.
  - What does wellness mean to you? (Jamboard)

Painted Brain utilizes SAMHSA’s 8 Dimensions of Wellness as a model for obtaining a better, balanced, and more holistic lifestyle. These needs not only look different between individuals, but also within different communities, race and ethnicity, sexuality, religion, gender, ability/disability, and much more.

**The elements of wellness include:**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emotional</li> <li>2. Social</li> <li>3. Spiritual</li> <li>4. Physical</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Intellectual</li> <li>6. Occupational</li> <li>7. Financial</li> <li>8. Environmental</li> </ol>
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## Wellness Worksheet



### 8 Dimensions of Wellness <sup>18</sup>

Peer Support Specialists share and model effective coping techniques and self-help strategies that support resilience, recovery, and wellness are identified below:

**Emotional-** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships.

- Be aware of and listen to your feelings.
- Express your feelings to people you trust.

**Environmental-** Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being while understanding your impact on the world.

- Appreciate nature and the beauty that surrounds you.
- Seek out music and other experiences that have a calming effect on your well-being.

**Financial-** Satisfaction with current and future financial situations.

- Be thoughtful and creative about your budgeting and spending.
- As needed, meet with financial professionals for guidance regarding finances.

**Intellectual-** Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.

- Research a topic that interests you and share what you learned with others.
- Find creative outlets that stimulate your mind and sense of curiosity.

**Occupational-** Personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work.

- Work toward a career in a field you are passionate about or a volunteer activity that has meaning for you.
- Communicate with your supervisor regularly and get support when needed.

**Physical-** Recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator; replace driving with walking or bicycling if possible.
- Get enough sleep—your body needs it to rejuvenate and stay well!

**Social-** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

- Make at least one social connection daily by calling, emailing, or visiting someone.
- Get active in a support group.

**Spiritual-** Expanding a sense of purpose and meaning in life

- Make time for practices that enhance your understanding of connection to self, nature, and others.
- Take time to discover what values, principles, and beliefs are most important to you.

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### Activities & Role Play

#### *Active Listening Activity*

Instructions: Work in groups of three; each participant will practice each role. Once the activity has ended, have each group report back to the larger group. Listeners will use the Evaluation Checklist of the Listener form (see below) to record responses.

**Speaker:** Talk about a problem or conflict that you are having or have had with another person (friend, family member, teacher, coworker, etc.).

**Listener:** Utilize the 6 active listening skills of paying attention, withholding judgment, reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, and sharing to explore the problem that the speaker is describing.

**Evaluator of the Listener:** Observe the discussion and evaluate the listener on their active listening skills using the list below.

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 Evaluation Check-list of the Listener

Non Verbal Skills	Evaluator Notes
Direct eye contact	
Open, relaxed body posture	
Uncrossed arms, legs	
Appropriate hand gestures	
Reinforcing nods	
Responsive facial expressions	
Appropriate tone of voice	
Appropriate volume	
Verbal Skills	Evaluator Notes
Effective and appropriate open-ended questions	
Suspended judgment	
Didn't interrupt the speaker	
Open to new ideas/possibilities	
Effective paraphrasing/reflection	
Effective and appropriate clarifying questions	
Summarized conversation	
Provided appropriate ideas and suggestions	

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