



## Tip Sheet: Integrating and Elevating Peers in Crisis Center Contact Work

Peers with lived experience bring invaluable perspectives to crisis center work, offering authenticity, empathy, and understanding to those in distress. Their contributions often bridge gaps in trust and relatability, enhancing the effectiveness of crisis intervention. However, leveraging lived experience requires thoughtful integration to ensure that peers are supported, boundaries are respected, and interactions remain focused on the help seeker. This tip sheet provides guidance on integrating peers into crisis center work and offers actionable strategies for counselors to navigate self-disclosure.

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### Best Practices for Supporting Peers with Lived Experience

#### Organizational Strategies

**1. Inclusive Training and Policies:**

- Provide comprehensive training on self-disclosure, emphasizing when and how it can be used safely and effectively.
- Develop clear policies that balance the value of lived experience with the importance of professional boundaries.

**2. Create a Supportive Environment:**

- Offer regular supervision and peer mentorship programs.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the unique contributions of peers in team meetings and evaluations.

**3. Foster Professional Development:**

- Provide opportunities for skill-building, including crisis de-escalation and cultural competency.
- Encourage peers to take on leadership roles within the organization.

**4. Address Burnout and Resilience:**

- Implement wellness initiatives to support the mental health of all staff, particularly peers who may be reliving difficult experiences.
- Ensure access to debriefing sessions and voluntary counseling services after challenging interactions.
  - ✓ Honor the commitment staff make to their work by providing such access, even though it may trigger their traumatic memories.
  - ✓ Consider offering confidential debriefing with a clinical staff member at centers providing in-house clinical counseling services. This option may serve as an addition to or an alternative for traditional debriefing methods, such as speaking with a 988 shift supervisor or engaging with an EAP.

## Tips for Crisis Counselors with Lived Experience

### Considerations Before Self-Disclosing

While sharing personal experiences can be impactful, it is important to note that, as a general practice, crisis counselors do not self-disclose. This approach ensures the focus remains entirely on the help seeker's needs and experiences. If you feel compelled to share, reflect on the following questions:

- **Purpose:** Will sharing aid the help seeker move toward safety or understanding?
- **Relevance:** Is your experience aligned with the help seeker's situation?
- **Timing:** Have you established rapport, and is the timing appropriate?
- **Impact:** Can you phrase your disclosure in a way that keeps the focus on the help seeker?

### Instead of saying

*"I've been through hard times too; you'll get over this."*

### Try

<i>"Many people in similar situations have found it helpful to focus on small, positive steps. What do you think might work for you?"</i>	<i>"Muchas personas en situaciones similares han encontrado útil enfocarse en pasos pequeños y positivos. ¿Qué cree que podría funcionar para usted?"</i>
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### Or

<i>"I understand this feels overwhelming right now. Let's talk about what we can do to help you feel safe."</i>	<i>"Entiendo que esto se sienta abrumador en este momento. Hablemos sobre cómo podemos ayudarlo a sentirse seguro/a."</i>
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### What to Do If You Feel Like Self-Disclosing

1. Pause and assess your motivation. Ask yourself:
  - Am I sharing to help the help seeker or to meet a personal need?
  - Can I offer empathy without sharing details about my own experience?
2. Redirect the focus:



<i>"I generally don't share personal details, but I'm here to help you find what works best for you."</i>	<i>"Por lo general, no comparto detalles personales, pero estoy aquí para ayudarle a encontrar lo que mejor funcione para usted."</i>
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3. Use neutral phrasing:

<i>"Some people who've gone through similar experiences have found this approach helpful. Would you like to explore that?"</i>	<i>"Algunas personas que han pasado por experiencias similares han encontrado útil este enfoque. ¿Le gustaría explorarlo?"</i>
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### Redirection and Refocusing Strategies

When self-disclosure does not go as intended or when the help seeker becomes fixated, use these techniques:

#### Redirect Focus to the Contact

<i>"Let's talk more about how you're feeling and what might help you today."</i>	<i>"Hablemos más sobre cómo se siente y qué podría ayudarle hoy."</i>
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#### Apologize and Refocus

<i>"It seems like I may have shifted the focus to me. Let's refocus on your experience."</i>	<i>"Parece que quizá cambié el enfoque hacia mí. Regresemos a su experiencia."</i>
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### References

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (n.d.). *Self-Disclosure on the crisis line*. Vibrant Network Resource Center. <https://networkresourcecenter.org/display/practiceguide/Active+Engagement+and+Collaborative+Relationships?preview=/181207073/188153946/Self-Disclosure%20on%20the%20Crisis%20Line.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n.d.). *Peer support services in crisis care*. SAMHSA Advisory. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep22-06-04-001.pdf>