



Peers in Practice: Supporting Parents with Mental Health Issues

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Managing one's own recovery can be challenging enough at times, but the additional challenges of parenting can be daunting, even for those who have no mental health diagnosis. Studies of individuals with mental health issues have shown a large number of parents report difficulties managing both their own mental illness and the challenges of parenting. Certified Peer Specialists can play a unique role in supporting clients with the needs and challenges of parenting. Peer specialists are trained and encouraged to be open with their clients about their own behavioral health challenges and can use their own parenting experience to provide support.

Ways peer specialists can support clients with parenting needs:

- Help strengthen their parenting skills by sharing personal experiences, providing access to parenting resources, and listening to concerns.
- Reminding clients that one's role as a parent may be motivation to continue in one's personal recovery; this dedication to self may also be a role model for children.
- Use role modeling and role play exercises to practice communication techniques, establishing healthy discipline, and identifying appropriate boundaries for children.
- Help & support in the areas of discipline, boundaries, & effective communication, including through role modeling & role play exercises.
- Supporting clients with their own personal emotional and physical health, emphasizing how self-care is an essential part of good parenting.
- Help, educate, and support ways clients can help their child cope with stress, school, and peer pressure.
- Children have active schedules! Peers can support the parent's involvement in diverse activities in the community, including school, religion, sports, clubs, and other important areas of participation.
- Provide other resources and support such as NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and other organizations and groups that can support them with both parenting and their own personal recovery.
- Most importantly! Assure them that they are not alone. And as a peer specialist, you are there for them to help and support them as parents, as well as with their own personal recovery.