

# Using the National Peer Programs Model as an Aid to Social Emotional Learning:

***Create strong leaders, responsible youth, helpful adults; reduce violence, substance abuse, disease***

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Sometimes, a nudge from a peer can send a person off in a slightly different direction – and that can make a world of difference. If you would like to see how the power peer influence can become an effective method to help others, then this workshop is for you. I

Peer programs can be effective in helping others develop social emotional learning through:

- ⊗ Peer helping
- ⊗ Tutoring
- ⊗ Conflict management
- ⊗ Mentoring
- ⊗ Prejudice reduction
- ⊗ Health educator programs
- ⊗ Other peer programs

***Through the application of type, peer programs can help not only the peer helpers but also those they service. By the end of the program, participants will understand the steps needed to implement an effective program.***

## **Learning Objectives:**

- Expand their strategies for helping other organizations learn human relations skills through a peer program approach utilizing type.
- Know the rationale for effective peer programs.
- Learn how Peer Programs can teach social emotional learning.
- Understand building blocks for a successful program.



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Books can be ordered from Routledge Taylor and Francis Group 1-800-2484724 or [www.routledgeentahealth.com](http://www.routledgeentahealth.com)

### **Youth as Resources:**

There is no denying that people are valuable resources to one another (whether for hire or as a trained volunteer helper). This has been a truism since the beginning of time. This is one of the primary tenets that peer programs are based upon. People who use the peer program model recognize that they can and want to make a difference in the lives of others. The peer helper/mentor is often in a leadership role because of his/her knowledge of a topic and training in peer helping. Both the helper and helpee receive benefit, even though the benefit is different. One provides and the other receives.

Piaget and other developmental psychologists have noted that empathy (or “perspective-taking”), one of the skills in peer programming, is one of the most critical competencies for cognitive and social development. Social emotional development is one of the most important life skills learned through an effective peer program. Young people engaged as “helping youth” develop empathy. Research shows an impressive correlation between students’ training and skills in empathetic understanding and their academic performance. Psychological development is a progressive loss of egocentrism and an increase in ability to take wider and more complex perspectives, an empathic process that takes place with peer helping (Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

The term *peer resource* is used to refer to any program that utilizes trained nonprofessional people to work with other people. Included in peer resources are such programs as peer helping, peer mentoring youth service, service learning, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, peer safety and health education, peer public health education, cross-age tutoring, peer mediation, peer leadership, self-help groups, mutual aid groups, neighborhood helpers, intergenerational programs, and volunteers in businesses, staff

outreach support (SOS) providers in adult organizations, peer counseling in police personnel and peer support to help fire, police and emergency workers deal with crisis, burnout and stress. Again, the issue is not where people come into contact with one another, but that one person helps another. The person who is the helper also receives formal training in peer helping and establishing a culture of people helping people. The commensurate training will be in accordance with the National Association of Peer Programs *Programmatic Standards* and *Programmatic Standards Rubric* (<http://www.peerprograms.org/publications/>). .

Utilizing people as resources is at the heart of positive youth development. Positive youth development's objectives are to promote bonding and social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and moral competence; to foster resilience, self determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, purpose driven lives, and belief in the future: and, finally, to provide recognition for positive behavior as well as opportunities for pro-social involvement and fostering pro-social norms.

Research shows that five basic factors promote positive social development. All youth need, one, opportunities to be actively involved with positive adults and peers, two, the skills to participate and succeed in social, school and civic settings, and three, recognition for their efforts, improvements and accomplishments. When young people are provided these three things: opportunities, skills and recognition; they develop strong connections or bonds of attachment and commitment to the families, schools and communities that provided them. The fourth important thing young people need is a feeling of being connected, bonded, to the positive people around them. Fifth, when families, schools and communities communicate clear standards for behavior to young people, those who feel bonded, emotionally connected, invested in the group, will follow those standards that promote health and success. These five factors are protective factors that promote positive development in young people. Peer Programs provides positive peers as well as helps others feel connected.

The Search Institute has identified several assets that in youth who have developed them, lead healthier lives. These assets are what effective peer programs have developed.

A significant study conducted by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, involving over 49,000 6th-12th graders across the Midwest, gives evidence why peer helping programs should be an integral part of every school, campus, and community. This systematic study of youth perspectives, values, and behavior looked at external assets of support, control, and structure and the internal assets of commitments, values, and competencies that are needed to stimulate and nurture healthy development. It also looked at the deficits, or liabilities, that can interfere with healthy development, such as hedonistic values, T.V. overexposure, drinking parties, stress, social isolation, and negative peer pressure. Each of the deficits is associated with at-risk behavior, and those students who reported the deficit also reported a significantly higher number of at-risk indicators—such as frequent alcohol use, cigarette use, attempted suicide, school absenteeism, driving and drinking, sexual activity, and bulimia—than those who did not report the deficit. The study also found that the more assets a student reported, the fewer deficits were indicated.

One of the results of the study showed that students who engage weekly in projects and programs to help others, defined as pro-social behavior, are less likely than

non-helpers to report at-risk behaviors.

The study also found that helping behavior decreased from 6th grade to 12th grade as hedonistic behavior increased. It would seem that peer helping programs do provide opportunities for youth to develop pro-social skills.

Peer Programs can help train youth in life skills that help with future employability. These life-skills include personal development, communication, decision-making/problems solving and conflict resolution/violence prevention. Involvement in a peer program gives its members the tools to provide a variety of school and community-based support services that help others learn how to more effectively communicate, make healthy decision, peacefully resolve conflicts and develop a strong sense of personal worth and connectedness to friends, school, and community.

It is common knowledge that the first person to whom someone will turn to when in trouble is a friend. The first person to notice that someone is experiencing difficulty usually is a friend. According to Johnson and Johnson, "The primary relationships in which development and socialization may take place may be with peers" . To youth, both being a friend and having friends are primary values. Consequently, failure to develop social and relationship skills is a powerful predictor of later substance abuse, delinquency, and mental health problems. Young people have tremendous influence with their peers, and trained young people who augment school support services are a cost-effective resource. Managing Conflict and working cooperatively in groups is an important skill for youth to learn.

For several reasons, peer helpers are a particularly effective means of reaching youth, particularly those whose behavior puts them at risk for the problems mentioned above. Listed below are why youth are particularly effective for the following reasons:

1. Peer helpers can have more credibility with the target audience than can adult professionals. Peers have tremendous influence over other young people.
2. Peers may have a better understanding of the concerns and the pressures facing the target group than an adult professional might. This understanding enhances their ability to engage the target group in a discussion for purposes of changing behavior or transmitting information.
3. Peer educators can be effective role models of desired behaviors.
4. Trained young people who augment school support services are cost-effective resource.
5. Peer helpers can learn lifelong skills. Once peer helpers learn to teach and model positive health behaviors, they may continue beyond the program and generalize what they learn to new situations
6. The greatest changes take place with the peer helpers/mentors themselves.

In prevention programs, peer helpers and peer leaders provide more than factual information; they teach pro-social skills, demonstrate decision-making skills, and enhance self-efficacy through role-playing and appropriate behaviors. Peer-led programs anchored in social learning theory. If schools, businesses, and communities viewed peer pressure as a way of life and saw people with peer helping training as resources, then peer pressure would move from negative to positive, rather than emphasizing the negative, as the "Just say no" campaigns tends to do.

Some of the areas that peer resources can have an impact on others they serve are reducing conflict, increasing academic skills, helping others feel connected

## **Building Blocks for a Success Peer Program**

1. Need
2. Rationale (Explain how a peer program can meet the identified need)
3. Vision of program
4. Mission of Program
5. Goals (General)
6. Objectives (Specific)
7. Planning Team (in house)
8. Support System (Advisory Committee)- Stake Holder
9. Organizational structure of the Program
10. Staffing
11. Recruitment ideas
12. Screening and Selection process- list ideas for screen and selection
13. Training of Peer Helpers
14. Supervision of the Roles and responsibilities of peers
15. Scheduling
16. Public Relations Activities
17. Budgeting/Funding
18. Facilities- Where will training take place and where will they deliver services
19. Evaluation: Process, Impact, Outcome, Cost Effectiveness

