

ETHICS & INTEGRITY FOR PEER ENTREPRENEURS

Integrating Peer Support Ethics, SAMHSA Standards & Ethical Decision-Making

Purpose of This Document

This resource is designed to support individuals with lived experience—especially peer support workers and peer entrepreneurs—in navigating ethical decision-making across employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, and community-based work.

Ethics are framed as:

- A practice, not a checklist
- A tool for trust, sustainability, and recovery protection
- A shared responsibility between individuals, organizations, and communities

FOUNDATIONAL ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

Peer Support Worker Ethics (Core Principles)

Across state and national peer codes, common ethical foundations include:

- Mutuality & Shared Power
Relationships are non-hierarchical and grounded in respect.
- Voluntary Participation & Choice
Individuals are never coerced or pressured.
- Role Clarity & Boundaries
Clear distinction between peer support, clinical services, and other roles.
- Lived Experience with Integrity
Lived experience is shared intentionally, not exploited.
- Confidentiality & Trust
Information is protected and shared only with consent or clear necessity.
- Recovery-Oriented Practice
Hope, self-determination, and wellness are central.

SAMHSA Model Standards of Peer Support

The SAMHSA Model Standards emphasize that peer work should be:

1. Person-Centered & Recovery-Oriented
 - Services support self-direction and autonomy
 - Recovery is non-linear and self-defined
2. Trauma-Informed
 - Avoids re-traumatization

- Recognizes power dynamics and emotional safety
- 3. Culturally Responsive & Humble
 - Honors culture, identity, and community context
 - Commits to ongoing self-reflection and learning
- 4. Ethical & Accountable
 - Practices transparency
 - Maintains appropriate boundaries
 - Seeks supervision, consultation, or support
- 5. Strengths-Based
 - Focuses on assets, not deficits
 - Rejects saviorism or fixing

Ethics in Peer Entrepreneurship: Key Considerations

Peer entrepreneurs often navigate multiple roles simultaneously—peer, facilitator, consultant, business owner, community member—which introduces unique ethical complexity.

Common Ethical Risk Areas

- Blurred boundaries between peer relationships and paid services
- Dual relationships in small or tight-knit communities
- Financial pressure influencing decision-making
- Over-disclosure of personal trauma for credibility or marketing
- Working beyond scope due to demand or need

Ethical challenges are not failures—they are signals to pause and reflect.

INTEGRATED ETHICS TOOL: THE PEER ENTREPRENEUR ETHICS CHECK

Use this tool before launching a service, making a decision, or responding to an ethical concern.

Step 1: Clarify the Situation

- What decision or action am I considering?
- What role am I in right now? (peer, entrepreneur, facilitator, etc.)

Step 2: Identify Impact

Ask:

- Who could be impacted—directly or indirectly?
- Who holds power in this situation?
- Who benefits? Who may carry risk or harm?

Step 3: Ethics Alignment Check

Reflect honestly:

- Does this align with peer support values (mutuality, choice, recovery)?
- Does this honor role clarity and appropriate boundaries?
- Is participation truly voluntary and informed?
- Am I acting from integrity rather than fear or financial pressure?
- Would I feel comfortable explaining this decision openly?

Step 4: Cultural Humility Lens

Ask:

- Am I centering my perspective over community voices?
- Am I assuming rather than asking?
- Is there reciprocity, not extraction?
- Do I need consultation from someone with lived or cultural expertise?

Step 5: Sustainability & Recovery Check

Reflect:

- Does this support or strain my recovery?
- What boundaries are needed to do this ethically?
- Is this decision sustainable long-term?

Step 6: Accountability & Support

- Who can I consult before moving forward?
- What documentation, clarity, or agreements are needed?
- If harm occurs, how will I acknowledge and repair it?

Ethical Red Flags (Pause & Seek Support)

- Feeling pressured to say yes
- Blurred personal/professional roles
- Fear of losing income if boundaries are set
- Guilt-driven decision-making
- Isolation or secrecy

These are signals, not shame points.

Ethical Commitments for Peer Entrepreneurs

“I commit to practicing entrepreneurship that honors my recovery, my community, and my integrity. I will seek support when ethical questions arise and remain accountable for my impact.”