

## Peer Support Specialist Times

*“Recovery and healing happen in relationship.” - PSL for the 21st Century*

### Moving Together: How Peer Support Specialists Can Encourage Exercise for Better Health

By Theresa Mast



People living with serious mental health conditions often face more than just emotional and psychological challenges. They're also at higher risk for physical health issues. As a matter of fact, many people experience shorter life expectancies, in large part because of preventable chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. So how can we help? **Movement and exercise can play a powerful role in changing that story**—and peer support specialists are in a unique position to help make it happen.

As peers, we bring something special to the table: lived experience and relatability. That connection can make all the difference when it comes to encouraging healthy habits like physical activity. But the truth is that starting (and sticking with) exercise isn't always easy, especially when someone is dealing with low energy, medication side effects, or lack of motivation.

**That's where small, supportive steps come in.**

First, we meet people where they are. Exercise doesn't have to mean hitting the gym or running miles. It can be as simple as a short walk, stretching, dancing to

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music, or even light household activities. Re-framing movement as something flexible and doable can reduce pressure and make it feel more accessible.

We can also lead by example. Inviting a person we serve to join us for a walk or a simple activity can turn exercise into a shared experience rather than a chore. It builds relationship and connection while also promoting health – literally reciprocal benefits!

**Even something like “Want to take a quick walk and chat?” can open the door.**

Also important is helping people connect movement to how they feel, not just physically, but emotionally. Many people feel improved mood, decreased stress, and even better sleep when they move more. If we are spending time with them reflecting on these benefits together, it can help build internal motivation over time.

Sometimes we might find that the people we serve share barriers to exercise/movement. Things like time, self-consciousness, fatigue, etc., are some of the possible reasons that people may express difficulties with exercise. **We can help by gently**

**and non-judgmentally exploring those barriers and validating their concerns with reflective listening and relating with empathy.** As they are comfortable doing so, we can support them with developing small SMART goals with action plans to empower them to find what works.

Don't forget to celebrate! There is a great opportunity to share strengths when people tell us about small wins. It could be a five minute walk, trying a new form of movement, or dancing to their favorite song. Whatever it is, acknowledging efforts empowers and motivates people to keep doing what they're doing.

Last but certainly not least, it's important that we empower people by focusing on choice and autonomy. **Peer support is about walking alongside someone, as they guide their own process.** Asking open-ended questions, sharing our own experiences, and supporting self-determination helps people feel in control of their wellness journey.

At the end of the day, movement is about more than physical health - it's about improving quality of life. As peer support specialists, we have the opportunity to inspire, and model healthy habits in a way that feels genuine and achievable. **One step at a time, those small moments of movement can lead to meaningful, lasting change.**

## CMPSS Specialization Training for Parent, Caregiver, Family Member Peers-Supporting Family Resilience

40 hours [32 CES available upon request]

The “Supporting Family Resilience” course is a fun, skill-based, and highly interactive workshop for individuals providing specialized peer-to-peer family member and caregiver support services.



## CMPSS Specialization Training for Justice Involved Peers—Recovery, Resilience, and Reintegration

40 hours

This dynamic 40-hour, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how to provide person-centered support to individuals with justice involvement experiences.



## Part One: Being Seen vs. Being Watched—Why the Difference Matters

By Lori Ashcraft, Ph.D., ITE



This column explores an essential element of *Recovery Medicine*—the kind of healing that complements and extends beyond what pills alone can offer. While prescribed medications play an important role on our campuses, they are only one piece of a much larger puzzle. **Recovery is also shaped by human experiences: connection, dignity, and the felt sense of being understood.** In this article, we explore the healing impact of being truly *seen* as who we are, rather than merely being *watched*, monitored, or assessed.

When I visit our campuses, I observe staff from all disciplines engaging with guests at varying levels of authenticity. In some moments, there is a rich and genuine connection—even when the interaction centers on something seemingly mundane. In other moments, I notice staff standing at a distance, clipboards in hand, observing behavior and documenting what a guest is doing. The contrast between these approaches is striking. One invites relationship; the other creates separation. And we

### Recovery Practices for Ethics and Law for Peer Support

6 hours [6 CES available upon request]

This fun six-hour dynamic, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how the recovery movement and principles became the foundation for peer support ethical codes.

know that **authentic human connection is one of our most powerful tools in supporting recovery.**

At first glance, being *seen* and being *watched* can look similar. In both cases, someone’s eyes are on you. But the lived experience—and the impact—could not be more different.

When we are watching our guests, we are observing from the outside. The guest may experience this as evaluation, surveillance, or judgment. Most of us recognize how it feels to be watched: measured against expectations, aware that our actions may be interpreted or scored. In these moments, we often become self-conscious or guarded. We may wonder whether to perform, comply, or protect ourselves. Being watched rarely creates a sense of emotional safety—and without safety, we cannot access the inner resources necessary for growth, learning, or healing.

To be *seen*, by contrast, is inherently relational. **Being seen means that someone recognizes not only what we do, but who we are.** It involves empathy, curiosity, and genuine presence. The unspoken message is: *I notice you, and I want to understand you.* **When people feel seen, they are more likely to relax, to be authentic, and to engage from a place of trust. Safety emerges, and with it, the possibility of healing.**

This distinction matters profoundly in recovery-oriented environments. Watching maintains distance and reinforces power differences; seeing builds connection and mutual respect. Watching looks for compliance, mistakes, or outcomes; seeing looks for meaning, context, and humanity. One approach controls. The other affirms.

In Part Two of this series, we will take a deeper dive into how to recognize when we are observing instead of relating. We will also explore practical ways to shift our stance—strengthening our capacity to move from *watching* to *seeing*, and to intentionally integrate “Being Seen” skills into everyday practice as a vital form of Recovery Medicine.



**The Crestwood Recovery & Resilience Solutions (CRRS) team continues to expand training access and strengthen workforce development efforts across our programs.** Below are a few highlights from this month:

Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) Training: CMPSS training through CRRS remains active, with continued strong registration numbers. CRRS has a renewed focus on supporting individuals who want to achieve their CMPSS certification in the immediate future and to join the workforce of CMPSS to help reduce access barriers to our diverse communities.

**Updated registration guidelines have been introduced, so please stay tuned for additional information.**

One of the ongoing opportunities for all of us specific to CMPSS workforce development is to broaden the understanding that Peer Support is not a jobs program, but a bona fide Behavioral Health Care Discipline with its own scope of practice and service delivery model. We have seen an uptick of providers

who view Peer Support training as an extension of vocational services. We have seen many individuals sign up for the training but quickly learn of their own doubts about having a strong desire to do the sacred work of Peer Support Services. As we continue to address existing stigma and opportunities to educate the fuller understanding of Peer Support services, including the integration of CMPSS onto service teams, it is important that our communities advocate for the role of the professional CMPSS. **Peer Support does enhance recovery outcomes when fully trained CMPSS professionals are integrated into the system of care.**

Part of that advocacy is gaining much attraction. CRRS is honored to be presenting at several conferences within CA and elsewhere.

We are presenting at two Peer Support Specialist Conferences in Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County, California. Presentation topics include:

- Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation
- How to Share Your Recovery and Resilience Story
- Integration of Peer Support Specialists on Service Teams

We are also excited to share that the CRRS team will be presenting at PeerPocalypse in Oregon this May.

In addition, CRRS will be attending NatCon 2026 at the end of April in Denver, Colorado, where we look forward to connecting with colleagues and partners from across the behavioral health field.

Continuing Education & Advanced Skills Training: The CRRS team continues to offer Continuing Education (CE) courses in Law and Ethics, along with additional advanced skills training opportunities. Our catalog of 2-hour training sessions will continue expanding over the next six months as we work to meet the evolving needs of the workforce.

For updates and upcoming offerings, please visit: [recoveryresiliencesolutions.com](http://recoveryresiliencesolutions.com)

**- Jim Ritchie, CRRS Director of Operations**

## Viva La Evolution!

A podcast on Growth, Resilience, and Transformation



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