

## Recovery Coach Roles & Responsibilities

### **During the initial meetings with participants, recovery coaches should:**

- Explain what recovery coaching is. The statements at the beginning of this document may be helpful. You may also want to explain what recovery coaches are not: banks, taxi services, counselors, sponsors, punitive, in a position of power, medical experts, there to tell people what to do...
- Explain that, through the process of talking about how things are going, the coach and the participant will explore answers to questions about life choices, discuss recovery options, and consider what the participant wants to do; together, the coach and the participant will create a plan that will help improve the chances of succeeding in recovery.
- Explain that achieving and maintaining recovery is the participant's responsibility. The RC helps as coach and advisor, but the participant needs to demonstrate a commitment to doing his or her part. "I promise to be patient with you, but need to reserve the right to suggest that we terminate the participant-coach relationship if you are not taking responsibility and working on your recovery."
- Introduce the **Recovery Coaching Agreement form** and its concepts. Review and sign the form with participant.
- Ask questions that lead participants to consider ways they can move forward in recovery.
- Explore some reasons why we describe recovery coaching as a strengths-based approach to recovery. Use examples from the participant's life. Every person entering recovery has demonstrated commitment, determination, and/or persistence at some time in the past. Using an example of the participant's personal strength provides an excellent opportunity to introduce the concept of building on assets to create increased *recovery capital*. Building recovery capital involves developing increased self-sufficiency and competency in areas of life such as social relations, housing, employment, family relations, and the other elements included in the **Recovery Coaching Tool**.

**Use of the Recovery Coaching Tool** In some cases, coaches immediately introduce participants to the tool as a means to explore how to prioritize what to work on in recovery, as well as to collect the anonymous baseline and follow-up data that allows us to demonstrate the effectiveness of recovery coaching. Some coaches have chosen not to use the tool directly with participants due to concerns that it takes away from the peer nature of the coaching experience by introducing something that appears to make the coach an expert and not someone on equal footing with the person in recovery. In these cases, the coach helps participants discern the areas in which they should be developing self-sufficiency and uses the discussion as the basis for considering what areas of focus ought to be included in developing their recovery plan.

People using this approach have been able to complete the form by finding out the information requested during their conversations and then entering it on the form after each of the initial sessions. Others, who believe that the tool is appropriate for use with people who are new in recovery, introduce the tool and collect the information as a collaborative process—a way for both the coach and the participant to discover and consider priorities for recovery. The form specifically asks the participant for help in investigating the effectiveness of recovery coaching.

Coaches should feel free to use whichever approach they think works the best. They should make every effort to collect data for every field on the form, whichever way they choose.

- Explain that RCs expand the positive aspects of a participant's life by helping to avoid self-criticism and critical opinions. Situations will inevitably arise where hindsight demonstrates that different life choices might have been better. Considering a never-ending series of options in life and trying to pick the best one is often hard for people who are new to recovery. RCs don't tell people what to do or shame them for making bad choices. Coaches share the basis of their experience in recovery. Participants in the RC program practice planning and living in recovery. The RC's role is to help consider choices, but participants choose their own recovery path; sometimes, a participant's choice, from the RC's perspective and experience, won't seem like a good idea. Coaches should ask powerful questions, which include mention of other options that may be more appropriate; but their role is to help participants plan their own recovery, not provide advice. RCs are encouraged to ask, "How's that working for you?" later, if it is clear that negative consequences result from such choices; at that point, it is often possible to help choose another path.

### **When to Consult a Supervisor**

- **Appropriateness of Participant-Coach Match** In situations where the recovery coach initiates support work with a participant without the use of a central coordinator (person in charge of triaging), the coach needs to devote time during initial meetings to determine the appropriateness of the participant-coach match. Coaches should be open to the concept of someone else potentially being a better match and discussing the appropriateness of the match with their supervisor.
- **Frequency and Duration of Visits** The coach and the supervisor should discuss the appropriate frequency and duration of visits. On average, recovery coaching sessions are held once a week. In cases where the participant has not had the benefit of treatment and/or lacks strong community supports, it is entirely appropriate to increase the number of coaching sessions. For those waiting to enter formal treatment services, it may be appropriate to schedule up to daily visits and encourage regular use of the local recovery center until they can enter treatment services. Recovery centers are charged with managing a scarce resource and must support as many people as possible with our time and resources.
- **Review of Participant Progress** At least once every two weeks (and more often with difficult cases), the RC and the supervisor should review the progress of all participants in the coaching process. A detailed conversation about the status of fulfilling the responsibilities

outlined above should be followed by a consideration of progress in recovery and progress in the stages of change for all primary issues. This approach provides the basis for assessing the need for additional resources and/or a change in the direction of coaching. This review allows the RC to validate the approach used and the recommendations developed while working with participants. A case presentation to someone else provides an opportunity for an objective look at the situation and a chance to consider the supervisor's viewpoint.

Ad-hoc consultation and supervision for the RCs must be readily available between semi-monthly reviews.

- **Monthly RC Meetings** The monthly meeting provides the opportunity for all RCs to share their experiences and learn from others by listening to shared experiences.
- **Agreements, Data, and Wellness Plans** RCs are expected to: 1) properly complete the Recovery Coach Agreement during the first meeting; 2) explain the elements in and complete the Recovery Coach Support Tool within the first three meetings, and follow up with use of the tool at three-month intervals; 3) ensure that the participants complete a Recovery Wellness Plan within a reasonable timeframe; 4) maintain appropriate confidentiality and record controls (locked files); 5) ensure data from the Recovery Coach Support Tool is uploaded to the Network web site; 6) review recovery wellness plans with participants on a regular basis, and support participants in helping to achieve and evolve their recovery goals.
- **Participants Have the Right to Make Choices You View as Dumb** If coaches are true to the concept of supporting people on *all* paths to recovery and personal empowerment, they must support participants in adopting any path to recovery they choose, even though the approach chosen doesn't match the coach's personal belief systems. Obviously, these are situations that should be discussed with supervisors. For example, many people have chosen to use marijuana maintenance to help give up more toxic substances. They are in the action stage of giving up Oxycodone but aren't even contemplating giving up the use of marijuana. Recovery workers must ask powerful questions, particularly about possible consequences, and suggest other options, but a coach's job is to be supportive, even when someone's course of action doesn't look too promising.
- **Participant Disclosure of Information about Violence or Potential Harm** Whenever a recovery coaching participant discloses information about threatened or actual violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and/or self harm, the RC should discuss this situation with his or her supervisor, promptly. If a coach is working with someone who threatens or reports self harm or a violent act, it is the coach's responsibility to explore the situation in more depth and attempt to find a positive resolution. Recovery support workers have discovered that the best approach for those who are in crisis and are threatening self harm is to engage them and encourage them to seek help. The coach should offer to make a call to the local Mental Health Crisis hotline for the person. Once the participant has given consent, the coach calls and hands the phone to the person in crisis, while providing encouragement. This approach has generally led to a prompt, positive resolution and is consistent with our regular approach of empowering a person to take direct responsibility for finding a recovery solution. It also avoids the obvious problems that may arise from a perceived breach of trust.

Coaches do not want to be responsible for allowing someone who has threatened physical violence to follow through on the threat and, at the same time, coaches *do* want to maintain the trusting relationship that provides the basis for ongoing peer support. In cases where someone has threatened to harm someone else and the coach feels there is an imminent risk of physical violence or murder, the coach must make it clear that this behavior is unacceptable. The coach should express discomfort with the participant's proposed actions and explain that, although recovery workers are not comfortable with disclosing facts about those they are working with, when this sort of threat occurs, the coach must first consult a supervisor and then contact the appropriate authorities. Acknowledge that maintaining silence in a situation that could lead to a catastrophic event is not consistent with modeling how a person in recovery follows his or her conscience and maintains integrity.

In recovery meetings, people regularly speak of past acts of violence, child abuse, neglect, prostitution, fraud, robbery, assault, drug dealing, and other reprehensible behaviors. The people who share these stories have the expectation that the anonymity which accompanies recovery meetings will be maintained. In most cases, their stories demonstrate that their past actions are not likely to be considered or repeated in recovery. The cathartic effect of learning that others have also had troubled pasts and gone beyond them is immense. People who are new to recovery begin to shed guilt when they learn that they are not alone. Coaches may learn that other providers have reported certain behaviors, such as child abuse or drug dealing; discussing these situations may help the people we are working with to consider the results of their actions and set recovery goals that include changing these behaviors. A coach practices acceptance and avoids being judgmental. These are clearly areas where active conversations between coaches and supervisor are important. Recovery coaching focuses on moving forward in a positive way. We work on building assets, not processing or focusing too long on past indiscretions, but we do serve vulnerable populations whose safety must be maintained. Reporting these indiscretions has the potential for undermining our ability to achieve solutions if it is not handled in a delicate manner, which is why we recommend discussing these situations with supervisors.

Vermont's recovery centers receive state grants and as a result, paid recovery workers are mandated reporters. If a mandated reporter suspects a child may have been abused or neglected, they are required by law to report their suspicions to Family Services—within 24 hours. In situations where there is clearly ongoing physical abuse or sexual abuse a recovery worker who is a mandated reporter needs to take prompt reporting responsibilities seriously. In situations where there are indications of potential abuse or neglect a coach may want to ask their local DCF workers for guidance and ask hypothetical questions. Remember, second hand and unsubstantiated information need not be reported. Many take a charitable view of those making positive progress toward becoming a better and more responsive parent in recovery. For more information:

[http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/reporting\\_child\\_abuse/mandated\\_reporters](http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/reporting_child_abuse/mandated_reporters) In situations where a coach is put in the position of having to report abuse, it is important to remind the participant that you are there to help them deal with the aftermath of their addictions and make progress toward becoming a better parent. Coaching support on issues with raising children helps to assure increasingly positive relations with DCF.