

# Certified Peer Specialist Code of Ethical Conduct

## Prologue

As a Certified Peer Specialist, you have distinguished yourself by becoming a unique and influential member of the mental health community. You have each accepted your mental health diagnosis as a part of who you are, not as a liability, but as your own path of challenges and successes you've had which have helped you build strength, character, and resilience. You have shared your path freely with others to foster openness and eliminate stigma. You have excelled in your recovery to such an extent that you are able to share your story as a source of hope to others and have chosen to do so as a certified professional.

The effectiveness of the Certified Peer Specialist comes from the successful integration of two distinct perspectives: the individual in recovery and the mental health professional. When working with individuals who may be scared, confused, or intimidated by the complexities of the mental health system, it is your experience as a peer that can reassure them and inspire them to continue their own path to recovery. Shared experience creates strong relationships. As a Certified Peer Specialist, however, it is your professional responsibility to guarantee that the relationship between you and your peer adheres to a clear, strong ethical code.

The Pennsylvania Certification Board (referred to herein as "the Board" or "the PCB") provides certification for Certified Peer Specialists as a way of assuring competence to peers, to the public, and to employers. The PCB is dedicated to the principle that individuals in the field of Peer Support must be held to the highest standards of ethical practice. To that end, the PCB has adopted this Code of Ethical Conduct to be applied to all professionals certified by or seeking certification by the board. Individuals are subject to this code from the date of application to the PCB by the applicant. The Code of Ethical Conduct exists for the protection of peers.

## Rules of Conduct

The following Rules of Conduct, adopted by the PCB, set forth the minimum standards of conduct which all certified professionals are expected to honor. The PCB is committed to investigate and sanction any failure to comply with an obligation or prohibition set forth in these rules and may result in disciplinary action. Ethical resolution is a critical process and all certified professionals are expected to engage in ethical decision-making that includes the evaluation of context of the situation, meaningful values, the appropriate ethical standards, is consultative in nature, and includes a credible model for ethical decision-making. The Board, through its Ethics Committee, is available and willing to act in a consultative fashion to answer any questions pertaining to ethical conduct or dilemmas faced by certified professionals.

### **Principle: Recovery First**

A certified professional shall role-model wellness and recovery and develop a support team and resources to stay in recovery.

A certified professional shall recognize the effect of impairment on professional performance and shall be willing to seek appropriate treatment for oneself. A certified professional who chooses not to seek support for any substance use disorder, psychiatric or psychological impairment, emotional distress, or

for any other physical health related adversity that interferes with their professional functioning shall be in violation of this rule. Where any such conditions exist, and impede their ability to function competently, a certified professional must request inactive status of their PCB credential for medical reasons for as long as necessary.

A certified professional shall not use any illicit substances or use any prescribed psychoactive medication in a manner that is contraindicated or not recommended by his/her prescribing professional to the extent that such use impairs his/her ability to safely and competently provide peer support services.

**Principle: Service Approach**

The certified professional shall not discontinue professional services to a peer support recipient nor shall they abandon the peer support recipient without facilitating an appropriate closure or transfer of professional services for the peer support recipient.

**Principle: Confidentiality**

A certified professional shall not reveal confidential information obtained as the result of a professional relationship, without the prior written consent from the recipient of services, except as authorized or required by state and/or federal law.

The certified professional shall not permit publication of photographs, disclosure of peer support recipient names or records, or the nature of services being provided without securing all requisite releases from the peer support recipient, parents or legal guardians of the peer support recipient, or service agencies of the peer support recipient.

**Principle: Non-Discrimination**

A certified professional may not discriminate against an individual receiving services based on race, color, creed, disability, religious affiliation, ancestry, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, age, socio-economic status, political belief, and pathway to recovery and shall observe all applicable state and/or federal statutes and regulations.

**Principle: Integrity**

As determined by PCB, once certified, a certified professional shall not be convicted for any offense related to the individual's ability to provide peer support and other behavioral health services or that reflects conduct unbecoming a certified professional.

A certified professional shall, under no circumstances:

- Engage in romantic/sexual activities or romantic/sexual conduct with individuals that have received peer support services, whether such contact is consensual or forced. This prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions or relationships. If a certified professional engages in conduct contrary to this prohibition or claims that an exception to this prohibition is warranted because of extraordinary circumstances, it is the certified professional – not the recipient of peer support services – who assumes the full burden of demonstrating that the former recipient has not been exploited, coerced, or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.

- Engage in romantic/sexual activities or romantic/sexual contact with peer support recipients' relatives or other individuals with whom peer support recipients maintain a close personal relationship. This prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions or relationships for a period of no less than two years after the recipient no longer receives services from that certified professional.
- Provide peer support services to individuals with whom they have had a prior romantic/sexual relationship. This prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions or relationships.
- Use misrepresentation in the procurement of certification or recertification or assist another in the preparation or procurement of certification or recertification through misrepresentation. The term "misrepresentation" includes, but is not limited to, the misrepresentation of professional qualifications, education, certification, accreditation, affiliations, employment experience, the plagiarism of application and recertification materials, or the falsification of references.
- Use a title designation, credential or license, firm name, letterhead, publication, term, title, or document which states or implies an ability, relationship, or qualification that does not exist and to which they are not entitled.
- Sign or issue, in their professional capacity, a document or a statement that the professional knows to contain a false or misleading statement.
- Knowingly produce, publish, create, or participate in the creation of any false, fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading advertisement.
- When participating in the writing, editing, or publication of professional papers, media resources, brochures, or books fail to act to preserve the integrity of the profession by acknowledging and documenting any materials and/or techniques or people (i.e. co-authors, researchers, etc.) used in creating their opinions/papers, books, etc.
- Initiate, develop, and/or maintain a friendship with peer support recipients and/or family members of peer support recipients. This prohibition applies to both in-person and electronic interactions or relationships for a period of no less than one year after the recipient no longer receives services from that certified professional.
- Misappropriate property from peer support recipients and/or family members of peer support recipients.
- Enter, facilitate, or maintain a financial relationship with a peer support recipient, a peer support recipients' relative, or other individual with whom the peer support recipients maintain any type of relationship.
- Promote to a peer support recipient for a certified professional's personal gain any treatment, procedure, product, or service.
- Ask for nor accept gifts or favors from peer support recipients and/or family members of peer support recipients in accordance to the policy of their agency.
- Offer, give, or receive commissions, rebates, or any other forms of remuneration for a peer support recipient referral.

- Falsify, amend, or knowingly make incorrect entries or fail to make timely essential entries into the peer support recipient record.
- Refer a peer support recipient to a person that he/she knows is not qualified by training, experience, certification, or license to perform the delegated professional responsibility.

**Principle: Scope of Practice**

A certified professional shall meet and comply with all terms, conditions, or limitations of a certification or license.

A certified professional shall not perform services outside of their area of training, expertise, competence, or scope of practice.

A certified professional shall not fail to obtain an appropriate consultation or make an appropriate referral when the peer support recipients’ problem is beyond their area of training, expertise, confidence, or scope of practice.

**Principle: Cooperation**

All certified professionals are mandated reporters per the Older Adult Protective Services Law, the Adult Protective Services Law, and the Child Protective Services Law.

A certified professional holding a certification, license, or other authorization to practice issued by any certification authority or any state, province, territory, tribe, or federal government whose certification or license becomes suspended, revoked, placed on probation, or other restriction or discipline shall promptly alert the PCB of such disciplinary action.

A certified professional shall cooperate in any investigation conducted pursuant to this Code of Ethical Conduct and shall not interfere with an investigation or a disciplinary proceeding or attempt to prevent a disciplinary proceeding or other legal action from being filed, prosecuted, or completed. Interference attempts may include but are not limited to:

- The willful misrepresentation of facts before the disciplining authority or its authorized representative;
- The use of threats or harassment against, or an inducement to, any peer support recipient or witness to prevent them from providing evidence in a disciplinary proceeding or any other legal action;
- The use of threats or harassment against, or an inducement to, any person to prevent or attempt to prevent a disciplinary proceeding or other legal action from being filed, prosecuted, or completed;
- Refusing to accept and/or respond to a letter of complaint, allowing a credential to lapse while an ethics complaint is pending, or attempting to resign a credential while an ethics complaint is pending.

Violation of this rule under these circumstances will result in the immediate and indefinite suspension of the certified professional’s credential until the ethical complaint is resolved.

A certified professional shall:

- Not make a false statement to the PCB or any other disciplinary authority;
- Promptly alert colleagues informally to potentially unethical behavior so said colleague could take corrective action;
- Report violations of professional conduct of other certified professionals to the appropriate licensing/disciplinary authority when he/she knows or should have known that another certified professional has violated ethical standards and has failed to take corrective action after informal intervention.

A certified professional shall report any uncorrected violation of the Code of Ethical Conduct within 90 days of alleged violation. Failure to report a violation may be grounds for discipline.

A certified professional with first-hand knowledge of the actions of a respondent or a complainant shall cooperate with the PCB investigation or disciplinary proceeding. Failure or an unwillingness to cooperate in the PCB investigation or disciplinary proceedings shall be grounds for disciplinary actions which may include but are not limited to a written reprimand, a time-limited suspension of a credential, or full revocation of a credential.

A certified professional shall not file a complaint or provide information to the PCB, which he/she knows or should have known, is false or misleading.

In submitting information to PCB, a certified professional shall comply with any requirements pertaining to the disclosure of peer support recipient information established by the federal or state government.