

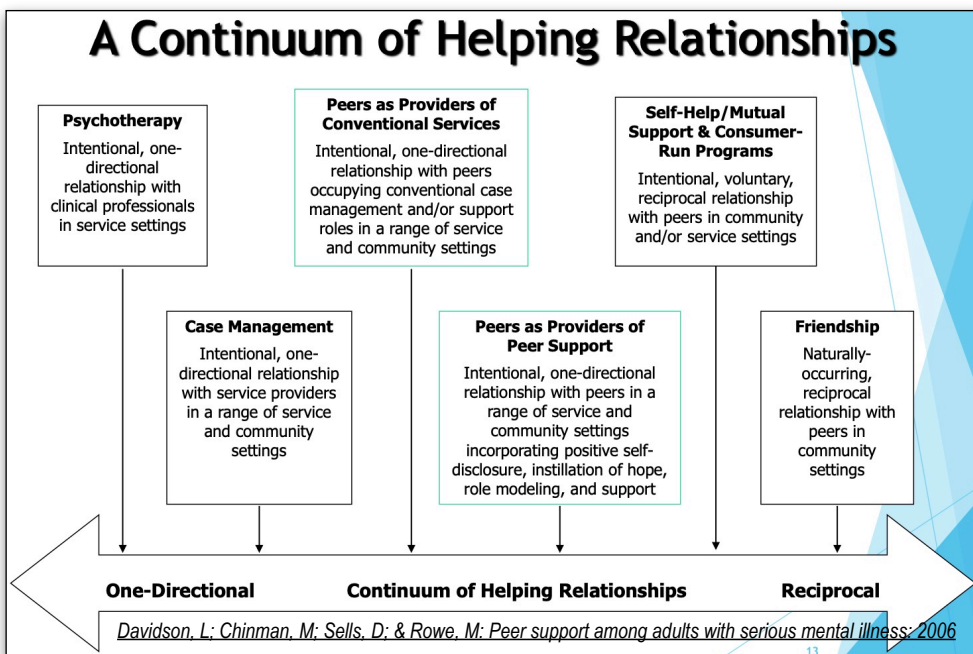
3.2b) UNDERSTAND THE PEER SUPPORTER ROLE: BOUNDARIES & ETHICS

It's tempting to ride the momentum of team-building straight into making a plan, but defining boundaries and ethics is essential before getting started. Without these guiding principles, our Peer Support train can leave the station already off track—possibly even harming our recoveries.

Peer Support Ethics. These are professional boundaries that certified Peer Supporters must follow. As previously discussed, these include privacy standards and when safety concerns mandate reporting. Other ethics include maintaining their own recovery and doing no harm. They can't control what participants do and should avoid giving unsolicited advice. This includes not being able to stop a participant from making poor decisions, even when they may endanger their own life (*outside of the specific safety standards set by law*). Peer Supporters should never depend on Participants to meet their own needs or for their own support. Without exception, Peer Supporters are prohibited from intimate relations with participants or their support network. **Any** indication of this should be reported *immediately*.

Personal Boundaries. These are lines a person sets to stay healthy and stable over time. To be effective, they must be communicated clearly and enforced consistently. Making exceptions to established boundaries will erode them to the 'exception' level thereafter. **Exceptions further erode the foundation to have boundaries at all—'exceptions' become the rule.** It may seem harsh or unnecessary—maybe its okay to cross a boundary today because of X, Y, Z? But slippery 'standards' don't last and will crumble eventually, wasting precious momentum. Peer Supporters that enforce their own boundaries well are role-modeling how to do this—its not easy. But healthy habits in all aspects of recovery **is** the recovery.

Singular Role. Perhaps the most important and consistently difficult ethical standard that Peer Supporters must follow is having just one 'role' with any participant, **even after peer support has ended.** **They can't also be sponsors, have close social ties, or become 'like a family member.'** This is even more difficult in small communities and rural areas. They can be your legal advocate, but they can't give legal advice. They can be very friendly, but they can't be friends (*that requires reciprocation, see diagram*). This will likely feel counterintuitive, and at times may be very uncomfortable and hard to understand.



Peer Supporters should never have a 'favorite' participant they support. It shows poor boundaries that may result in harming that 'favorite' peer. **Peer Support is rewarding work but designed to not be reciprocal.** It is a **professional relationship that deals with extremely personal details of our lives—our recoveries.** Peer Supporters get paid to help with things you might not tell your best friend about—which has unique benefits and specific risks and why boundaries are **essential**.

Role Drift. The Peer Support role can 'drift' over time we recover. As the peer relationship grows in length and depth, the overall goal is to shrink in necessity and become 'obsolete.' This can lead to extending support beyond what is healthy for your best independence, or falling into a 'routine' that is no longer fostering actual progress. It may drift to filling in for other areas/unfilled roles as progress is made beyond the role's definition. Having periodic progress surveys and re-evaluating goals will help keep us on track. Its a good idea to formally evaluate periodically (*especially after 2+ years*) to determine if the support has drifted beyond the goal-based best-recovery purpose and ethical boundary guidelines.