INTENTIONAL PEER SUPPORT PRINCIPLES/TASKS

IPS is different from traditional service relationships because:

* **It doesn’t start with the assumption of “a problem.” Instead people are taught to listen for how and why each of us has learned to make sense of our experiences, and then use the relationship to create new ways of seeing, thinking, and doing.**
* **IPS promotes a “trauma-informed” way of relating – instead of asking “What’s wrong” we think about “What happened?”**
* **IPS looks beyond the notion of individuals needing to change. Instead it examines our lives in the context of our relationships and communities.**
* **Peer Support relationships are viewed as partnerships that enable both parties to learn and grow rather than as one person needing to “help” another.**
* **Instead of focusing on what we need to stop or avoid doing, we focus on creating a new future.**

Intentional Peer Support is a Values-Based Practice within an Outcome-Based Service. There is no “Helper” and “Person Being Helped” in this environment. It’s a “we” and “us” environment as opposed to “I” and “you.”

Intentional Peer Support (IPS) utilizes four basic principles or tasks to accomplish its goals:

Connection … Worldview … Mutuality … Moving Toward

**Connection**

When an individual enters On the Road to Wellness, there may be something unresolved in their lives at that moment. It’s what we call a disconnect … a force that potentially separates people from themselves, their loved ones, God, and sometimes humanity. It can be an incredibly alienating force. Connection is the antidote to alienation. Connection is a sense of belonging, an awareness of feeling united to something or someone. We know it when we feel it.

Learning to connect with one’s self and with others in a healthy way is the essence of what we mean by support. Connection provides the basis for addressing and overcoming the effects of mental illness. Having healthy connections to self and others simply means that our method of communicating and relating serves to support and encourage rather than to deplete and discourage. Boundaries … direct, honest, respectful communication … and hopefulness are some of the components we use that allow for making and sustaining healthy connections.

**Worldview**

Worldview is becoming self-aware of how we have learned to think about and understand our experiences in the world around us … while at the same time being curious and taking interest in the worldview of others.

When a trusting and open relationship develops (which takes time) we gently begin to challenge the ways each of us have learned to make meaning of our experiences

**Mutuality**

It is in a relationship that is based on mutual respect and trust that we allow ourselves to “try on” new ideas and take risks to learn and grow. One person is not more important than the other because in IPS, the relationship is based on “we” or “us”.

In this mutual relationship we consider each person to have needs and expertise, thus we learn from each other. It is not a power over another, or even working to support one person in the relationship … it is “we” creating a new story that has the potential to change both person’s lives.

**Moving Toward**

In Intentional Peer Support, we do NOT ask, “What are we here to avoid or stop?” Instead, we ask, “What are we here to create”” or “What are we here to do?” We don’t practice moving away from what we don’t want … we practice the focus of what we want to move toward.

In the IPS environment, possibilities for breaking old patterns and creating new opportunities are endless.

Intentional Peer Support practices these four tasks by changing the language of fear to conversations of hope. When we are afraid we become uncomfortable and try to control situations so we feel “safe.” This kind of response leads to seeing ourselves as “helpers” (I’m here to assess and “control” your safety), which leads to an action based on a fear-based assessment and a fear-based response, which then lead to potentially unwanted and often forced treatment and hospitalization … sometimes against a person’s will.

On the Road to Wellness works purposely to engage in Hope-Based responses.

* **Hope-Based Responses see every situation as an opportunity to learn and grow**
* **Hope-based Responses are non-judgmental and avoid assumption about what peoples’ experience mean**
* **Hope-Based dialogues are created through each other’s willingness to seek out different ways of talking about their experiences**
* **In that dialogue, both people challenge beliefs and assumptions**
* **Both people take on the risk of “trying on” new ways of thinking and behaving**

Again … Intentional Peer Support is a valuable tool in the mental health system’s tool-box. It’s warm, relational, and provides the kind of support that leaves a person genuinely feeling connected.