

The Interview

Planning an open and well thought out interview process should help ensure you appoint the best possible candidate for your new peer role. As with any recruitment, the aim is to satisfy as best you can the required competencies and values for the role.

The ADA strictly precludes questions about the nature and severity of an applicants' experiences with psychiatric diagnosis and/or treatment, but does allow questions about the candidates' ability to meet the essential functions of the role. (Under the law, employers generally cannot ask disability-related questions or require medical examinations until after an applicant has been given a conditional job offer. This is because, in the past, this information was frequently used to exclude applicants with disabilities before their ability to perform a job was evaluated; an employer cannot make any pre-employment inquiry about a disability or the nature or severity of a disability. An employer may, however, ask questions about the ability to perform specific job functions and may, with certain limitations, ask an individual with a disability to describe or demonstrate how s/he would perform these functions.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC): <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

Essentially, you want to determine the ways that a person is prepared to fulfill a job where their lived experience needs to be skillfully utilized, rather than things such as diagnosis, e.g., hospitalizations, treatment history, etc. Below are some interview questions that do not violate the ADA requirements and get to the essential functions of a peer support position.

1. Can you tell me some ways that you might use your personal lived experience to support the people you'd be working with? *(Answer should include ideas around "inspiring hope," and around connecting with people from the place of shared experience AND the tools or strategies that the person used to move to a better place.)*
2. What role has peer support had in your own recovery? *(If the person is not familiar with or has not utilized peer support, they are probably not a good candidate.)*
3. This job requires a willingness to share some pieces of your personal story when it makes sense to do so during your work. When could you see sharing your story as a part of your work here? *(Answer may include ideas around 1:1 interactions, at staff meetings or trainings when acting a change agent, etc.)*
4. *Do you have any life experiences that would make you valuable to this program?*
5. *What have you learned through your own use of services that you think would be useful to your work here?*

Below are some examples of questions you might ask to better understand the interviewees overall skillfulness in areas related to peer work:

1. How would you define the 'peer' role and how would you describe its key role or tasks. *(Should include mutuality, sharing mutual experience, non-expert role, supporting people to become self-determining; inspire hope, being a change agent, being an advocate, etc. Should NOT be about "making people better," "counseling people" etc.*
2. Part of the role of a peer support worker is to model recovery by sharing some of your own personal experiences. Would you be comfortable doing so?
3. What do you know about the concept of "recovery?" What is your personal knowledge of this and how did you come to this understanding? *(Answer should include mental health-related recovery or healing, not just 12-step substance abuse recovery. Concept described should include values of potential for everyone to recover or move forward in life.)*
4. If you were working with someone who has become resigned to the idea that his or her life will always be limited because of a psychiatric diagnosis or other challenges, how would you try to support that person? *(Answer should include sharing personal experiences, sharing mutual feelings, sharing tools and NOT telling the person that, of course, it will get better or giving them advice, "well, if you'd doyou'd have a better chance...")*
5. In many ways, the peer position is a pioneering role. What skills will you bring to the job that will allow you to advocate for people while being in partnership with other staff members? *(Answer should include using personal story to demonstrate the experience from the perspective of using services; should also include something about respectful communication to everyone; and an excellent response would include something about negotiating power and conflict)*
6. Peer Specialists are often considered to be "change agents" within organizations. How will your experiences help you to be a change agent and how would you see this happening *(Anything about being able to share experiences with staff to give them more understanding of the experience from the perspective of someone who's 'been there'; sharing alternative approaches from the self-help community that augments the work of clinicians (like WRAP), etc. If this notion is a shock to the applicant, probably not a good match. They very well may see the role as a mini-clinician and will detract from the value of the role.)*

7. Some staff here may be apprehensive about or unsupportive of peer support. How would you deal with this
8. If you were in a situation where you were called to help deescalate a situation, how would you respond in that situation?

Below are some questions you might ask to help you get a sense of someone's overall ability to be in the setting(s) involved, their dependability, etc.

1. This position will require you to work in_____ (identify settings, like inpatient, emergency room, day treatment setting, residential setting, a setting where restraints are sometimes used, etc.). How will your personal lived experience support your work in this/these settings? *(Answer should include peer strategies, even if the person's own experience didn't include the particular setting. At the other side, if someone says that their experience was very painful, that they can't think of any strategies because they don't believe in that kind of treatment, or say anything to indicate that they would be uncomfortable in the setting, it would probably be a bad match.)*
2. While working here you may be a part of some situations that disturb you or make you uncomfortable. How do you think you would handle these situations, both when they occur and after the situation has ended?
3. If you felt your job was causing an increase in your stress level, what would you do? *(Answer should include seeking supervision and NOT include anything about going to other staff in a "patient" kind of way.)*
4. Can you tell me about your history of dependability in prior positions (or, if no recent positions), in other activities in your life. *(You CAN ask this. You CAN NOT ask history of hospitalizations, history of taking medical leave, or when someone was "last sick.")*
5. Do you function better with the independence to create your own work structure, or work better with a clear structure?
6. Some people are here because they have been found not criminally responsible for serious crimes. Those crimes range from theft and arson to rape and murder. Some may have been high profile and you may have read or heard some pretty outrageous things about them in the media. What are your thoughts and feelings on working with people in this situation?
7. Can you tell me about a time you experienced a conflict with a co-worker? How did you handle it? *(Or, alternately, ask about a time they experienced a conflict with a supervisor. Do not just ask this in a 'yes' or 'no' format, as it becomes much less likely to elicit useful information.)*