



Peer Support Networks and Mentoring Systems

From Individual Care to Collective Healing

What We'll Explore Today

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Understanding Peer Support

What it means and why it matters for students facing displacement or loss

03

Three Essential Elements

Training, supervision, and accessibility as foundations

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Peer-Led Support Circles

Group spaces for sharing, validating, and connecting

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Building Community Together

When students support each other, they don't just survive—they build community

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Why Peer Support Matters

Research-based evidence on reducing loneliness and emotional distress

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The Buddy System Model

One-on-one peer mentoring that builds trust through small acts of care

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The University's Role

How institutions can sustain and support peer networks

From Individual to Collective Care

Last Lecture

We explored **compassionate communication**
–learning how to listen and respond with empathy
in one-on-one interactions.



Today's Focus

We move from **individual care to collective care**
–understanding how peer support and mentoring
systems help students heal and grow together.



The Power of "We"

When we expand our circle of care from individual relationships to
community networks, we create something powerful:



Shared Strength



Collective Growth



Mutual Hope

What is Peer Support?



Students Helping Students

Peer support means **students helping students**—a reciprocal relationship where those with shared experiences offer understanding, encouragement, and practical assistance to one another.

Built on Three Pillars

Equality – No hierarchy, just mutual respect

 **Shared Experience** – "I've been there too"

 **Empathy** – Genuine understanding and care



For Ukrainian Students

For university students who have faced **displacement or loss**, peer connections can be one of the most powerful sources of:



Strength



Hope



Belonging



Safety

Why Peer Support Matters

Psychological Benefits

Research in psychology shows that **feeling understood by peers** has profound effects on mental health:

Reduces **loneliness** and isolation

Decreases feelings of **shame**

Lowers **emotional distress**

The Power of "Getting It"

Talking to someone who **"gets it"**—who has faced similar fears or changes—can **normalize emotions** and make healing feel more possible.

Research Findings

92%

of students perceive peer mentoring interventions **positively**



84%

believe it contributes to their **overall wellbeing**



84%

of buddy pairs met **at least three times**, building meaningful connections



Source: Emergency Medicine Peer Mentoring Study, 2022

Restoring Agency Through Connection

What is Agency?



Agency is the sense that, despite loss, one can still **contribute and support others**. It's the belief that your actions matter and that you have the power to make a difference.

How Peer Support Restores Agency



Being There for

Others

When you support a peer, you realize your experience has value



Recognizing

Strength

Peers reflect back the resilience they see in you



Shared Purpose

Contributing to a community gives meaning to your journey



Growth Through

Giving

Helping others becomes part of your own healing



Post-Traumatic Growth

Research on **post-traumatic growth** shows that people who survive trauma can experience:

- ★ A new sense of personal strength
- ★ Stronger connections to others
- ★ Greater appreciation for life
- ★ Recognition of new possibilities

Three Essential Elements

A well-structured peer support system requires these foundational components:



O1 Training

Students receive **basic guidance** on essential skills to provide safe, effective support:



Active Listening – Hearing without judgment



Confidentiality – Protecting privacy and trust



Warning Signs – Recognizing when professional help is needed



Together, these elements create a safe container where peer support can flourish without becoming overwhelming or risky for anyone involved.



O2 Supervision

A **professional** oversees the group to ensure safety and ethical conduct:



Counselor – Mental health professional guidance



Trained Tutor – Academic staff with peer support expertise



Safety Net – Ensuring no one falls through the cracks



O3 Accessibility

Meetings and gatherings are **easy to join** and promoted as safe spaces:



Online Options – Virtual meetings for flexibility



In-Person – Face-to-face connection opportunities






Inclusive Spaces – Welcoming all students

The Buddy System

One-on-one peer mentoring that builds trust through small acts of care


How It Works

Each newly arrived or grieving student is **paired with a peer mentor**—someone trained to offer:

-  **Guidance** – Navigating university life and resources
-  **Check-ins** – Regular, caring conversations
-  **Companionship** – Simply being there

Small Acts, Big Trust

These relationships often start with **small, human gestures**:

-  Studying together
-  Sharing meals
-  "How are you coping this week?"

Small acts of care build big trust.

Research Outcomes

 **Meeting Frequency**
of buddy pairs met at least three times during the program

 **Positive Perception**
of students perceived the intervention positively

 **Wellbeing Impact**
believed it contributed to their overall wellbeing




Source: Buddy System Study, Emergency Medicine, 2022

Peer-Led Support Circles

Creating safe spaces for sharing, validating, and connecting

What Are Support Circles?

Students meet **regularly** in a facilitated group setting to:

-  **Share experiences** – In a confidential, supportive environment
-  **Use creative reflection** – Journaling, art, music, storytelling
-  **Discuss coping strategies** – What works, what doesn't

The Goal

Not to analyze or counsel, but to:


Listen


Validate


Connect

Activities That Foster Resilience

Circles can integrate **light activities** to promote calm and connection:



Mindfulness

Breathing exercises, meditation



Music

Listening, sharing songs



Storytelling

Personal narratives, metaphors



Creative Arts

Drawing, writing, movement

“These activities help students access calm, build resilience, and discover new ways of expressing and processing their experiences.”

The University's Critical Role

How institutions sustain and nurture peer support networks

Key Responsibilities

Universities play a **crucial role** in sustaining peer networks through:



Trained Coordinator

A dedicated staff member to oversee programs



Meeting Spaces

Comfortable, accessible rooms for gatherings



Recognition

Certificates, volunteer credits, acknowledgment

The Balance

The best systems are **student-driven but institutionally supported**. This balance ensures programs remain authentic and responsive to student needs while having the resources and structure to be sustainable.

Why Institutional Support Matters



Sustainability

Ensures programs don't depend on one person's energy



Credibility

University backing increases trust and participation



Integration

Connects peer support to broader campus services



Quality Assurance

Maintains standards through training and supervision

Building Community, Not Just Surviving

When students support each other, they don't just **survive**—they **build** community.

Peer support networks remind every participant that:

 Healing is collective

 Hope is shared

 Strength is mutual

 Connection is healing

No one heals alone.

Together, we are stronger.



Looking Ahead

Next Lecture: Integrated Care

We will focus on the **role of academic staff and university services** in crisis response—and how educators can coordinate with peer systems to ensure **integrated care**.



Academic Staff

Their role in crisis response



University Services

Counseling, health, support



Coordination

Working with peer systems

Peer support is just one piece of the puzzle. True healing happens when all parts of the university community work together—students, staff, and services—in a coordinated, compassionate response.



Thank you for being part of this journey toward collective healing.

