

New England MIRECC Peer Education Center
Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital
200 Springs Road, Bedford, MA 01730

Navigating Boundaries in VHA Peer Support Services

Vignettes for Group Discussion

Vignette #1: Peer Specialist–Peer Specialist Interaction:

Jeff is a peer specialist who begins co-facilitating a peer support group with Cindy, another peer specialist, in the local VHA medical center’s Domiciliary Program. Cindy and Jeff work well together as group co-facilitators. After a few weeks, they begin sharing information with one another about their pasts and lives outside their work at the medical center. In their conversations after their group, Jeff has flirted with Cindy and has perceived Cindy as flirting back. One day, Jeff approaches Cindy after the group to ask her out to dinner. He says that they have "a lot in common" and "work well together" and that there is "definitely chemistry" between them. As Jeff says these things, he places his arm around Cindy.

Questions about Vignette #1:

1. Is this a boundary crossing, a boundary violation, or no issue at all?
2. Based on your answer to Question #1, what do you think Jeff should do?
3. What do you think Cindy should do in this scenario?

Vignette #2: Peer Specialist–Veteran Consumer Interaction:

Sam is a peer specialist who works in a local VHA facility’s Supported Employment Program. One day, Sam is out in the community with Doug, a Veteran who Sam has been helping to look for a job. It is around lunch time and both Sam and Doug are feeling hungry. They choose to stop at a local deli to pick up sandwiches because they know they have a few more job hunting appointments in the afternoon. Doug realizes that he does not have enough money with him to buy his lunch, and he asks Sam if he can borrow the money to pay for his sandwich and drink. Sam says, “Don’t worry about it. I’ve got it covered,” and then Sam pays for both of their meals.

Questions about Vignette #2:

1. Is this a boundary crossing, a boundary violation, or no issue at all?

2. Based on your answer to Question #1, what do you think Sam should do?
3. If a Veteran you are working with asks to borrow money, what would you do?

Vignette #3: Peer Specialist–Peer Support Group Participant Interaction:

Mariam is a peer specialist who facilitates a peer support recovery group for African American Veterans at the local VHA’s psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center. The group focuses on recovery and the unique experiences of African Americans in the VA health care system. Drawing from the group members’ cultural traditions, the group decided to begin each meeting paying tribute to their ancestors with a prayer of thanksgiving and celebration. After several weeks of meeting, some of the group members discuss the importance of the group opening with a tribute/prayer, how they fell away from participating in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church years ago, and their growing sense that reconnecting with a local AME church would promote their recovery. Mariam is a longstanding member of the local AME church. Not knowing about Mariam’s affiliation with the church, the group members ask her if she attends church, and, if so, where she attends and how she likes it. Mariam tells the group about her experience with her AME church.

Questions about Vignette #3:

1. Is this a boundary crossing, a boundary violation, or no issue at all?
2. Based on your answer to Question #1, what do you think Mariam should have done when asked about her spirituality?

Vignette #4: Peer Specialist—Peer Support Group Participant Interaction:

Kyle is a peer specialist who facilitates two peer support recovery groups in the substance abuse treatment program’s aftercare program at the local VHA facility. To promote his own ongoing recovery from his history with addictions, Kyle attends Alcohol Anonymous (AA) meetings at a local community center two nights per week after work. One evening, while Kyle is attending his AA meeting, he sees Steve, who is a member of Kyle’s aftercare group at the VHA facility. Steve sees Kyle and approaches him as the AA meeting ends. Initially, Steve makes casual conversation with Kyle, commenting on how helpful the AA meeting was. As their conversation continues, Steve brings up the aftercare group that Kyle facilitates. Kyle and Steve talk about one of the

recent aftercare group meetings and decide to go to a nearby restaurant together for some dessert before calling it a night.

Questions about Vignette #4:

1. Is this a boundary crossing, a boundary violation, or no issue at all?
2. Based on your answer to Question #1, what do you think Kyle should have done?
3. Is there anything Kyle could do differently to change the chances of having similar experiences in the community with other Veterans that attend his aftercare peer support groups?