

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

Introduction to Effective Communication Skills for Peer Specialists in VHA
Practice Exercise

Instructions: Choose a partner for this role play exercise. You and your partner will be take turns playing two different roles: Role A/Role B. In Role A, you are a peer specialist meeting with a Veteran for the first time. In Role B, you are a Veteran coming to meet the peer specialist for the first time with a request for the peer specialist’s assistance with an issue. In Role B, you are encouraged to be creative and generate an idea about the issue that you want to discuss as the Veteran in this exercise.

You will be given 15 minutes to act out your role (either Role A or B) in the first meeting between the Veteran and peer specialist. After 15 minutes, switch roles with your partner and act out the first meeting again in your new role (either Role A or B).

During this exercise, please practice using the different communication skills discussed during today’s training. When you are playing Role B (Veteran meeting with the peer specialist for the first time), use the Observer Assessment Chart below to note your observations of whether your partner playing Role A (peer specialist) effectively demonstrated the noted communication skills. At the end of the role play exercise, you and your partner will have the opportunity to provide each other feedback about your observations.

QUESTION	ANSWER	OBSERVATIONS
1. Did the peer specialist (PS) ask any open-ended questions?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:
2. Did the PS ask mostly closed-ended questions?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:
3. Did the PS make good eye contact with you as you spoke?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:
4. Did the PS respond in a way that demonstrated he/she really heard what you said?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:

QUESTION	ANSWER	OBSERVATIONS
5. Did the PS comment on any silence during your meeting and do/say anything that encouraged you to speak?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:
6. In your meeting with the PS, did you feel that he/she communicated well overall? If so, how? If not, why not?	YES / NO <i>(Please circle one)</i>	Examples:

Post-Exercise Questions for Discussion:

- Using today’s discussion about contextual factors influencing communication (ex. culture, family upbringing, education, etc.), what contextual factors do you believe affected what you thought, said, and did in the role play exercise? What, if anything, would you do differently next time?
- What contextual factors do you think may have influenced what the other person said and did during the role play exercise?
- What is one thing that you learned during this role play exercise that will help you to communicate effectively in your role as a VA peer specialist in the future?