

# Peer Educators on the College Campus

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to

1. Explain to others the role of college students serving as peer educators.
2. List several helping positions on college campuses that are staffed by peer educators.
3. Describe how your personal experience has demonstrated important principles of a helpful relationship.
4. Understand and be able to employ an active process model of learning that includes three elements—sensing, personalizing, and acting.
5. Explain the importance of role modeling within the helping role.
6. Define how the terms *peer educator*, *role model*, *mentor*, and *professional* may have similarities and differences.

### **The Case of Joe Freshman**

Joe Freshman arrives on campus the summer before his enrollment and an ambassador gives him a tour of the facilities and a general overview of what it is like to be a student here. Joe also stops by the Financial Aid office to find out about his application for funding and talks with a financial advisor, who answers his questions. Later, he moves

into the residence hall where his resident assistant helps him get set up with residence life. Joe enrolls and takes a First Year Experience Orientation class, where he meets in a weekly seminar with a recitation leader. Part of the Orientation class assignment is to complete a career online assessment; a career specialist helps interpret his results. At mid-term, needing help with his college algebra, Joe makes an appointment with a tutor. Joe is determined to avoid the “freshmen 15,” so he signs up for a personal trainer at the campus recreation center. If he needs health advice he has access to a SHAC (student health advisor), a SHAPE (sexual health awareness peer educator), or a SNAC (student nutrition peer educator). And, heaven forbid, if Joe has a problem and is accused of breaking the academic honesty code, resulting in an appearance before a student judiciary, he would be assigned a HIPE (Honor and Integrity Peer Educator) and may be told to complete an ABC (Assessment for Behavior Change) with a peer mentor.

Joe still needs to complete his first semester and he already has had contact with at least thirteen peer educators on campus. The potential for Joe is that he will meet at least twice as many fellow students serving in peer educator roles before he leaves campus. His first vocabulary word in college is *ubiquitous*, as in “peer educators are ubiquitous.” Peers in trained support roles will be a very big part of his education!

This story about Joe might be hypothetical, but the examples of peer educators in this paragraph are authentic. The use of peer educators in the college environment has grown substantially over the past two decades. The involvement of undergraduates in

peer assistance roles on college campuses has been identified in more than 75 percent of all higher education institutions (Brack, Millard, & Shah, 2008; Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993). On today's college campuses, peer educators are involved in providing a wide range of supportive service activities. These services, cutting across a variety of peer educator roles, include providing information, explaining policies and procedures, orienting new students, making referrals, offering specific help strategies for problem-related counseling issues, implementing social and educational programs, enforcing rules, providing academic advising, facilitating community development, offering tutoring, helping with financial management, performing diversity training, and providing crisis intervention services.

Peer educators are valuable for an academic institution because they are experienced with the campus, they are economical to the budget, they can relate to the situations of fellow students, and they are effective. The student serving as a peer educator also benefits; the peer educator learns new skills, gains relevant practice experience, and contributes to the community. For some, it will last a year or two, and for others, it will initiate new career objectives and lifelong personal change. In either case, we believe you will find the peer educator role to be both challenging and rewarding. If you take up one of the many peer educator positions open on modern college campuses, you will have the opportunity to make positive and, in some cases, significant differences in the lives of other students. We believe you will find the personal rewards of serving as a peer educator substantial—and the responsibilities as well. In short, we believe this training program and your subsequent experience as a helping person will have a very powerful impact on your own life, allowing you to explore and extend yourself to make the most of your own best qualities.

---

**Reflection Point 1.1:** You, as a Peer Helper

---

Describe why you have chosen to pursue a peer educator position on your campus.

What personal characteristics do you possess that indicate that you are, or can be, a helping person?

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF PEER EDUCATION**

The use of undergraduates in helping roles on college and university campuses has a long and rich history. Students in residence halls have served as resident assistants, proctors, hall counselors, and advisers since the early 1900s (Powell, Pyler, Dickerson, & McClellan, 1969). Student tutors have been assisting their peers as a direct way to provide academic assistance since the colonial period of American history (Materniak, 1984). In the 1950s, a peer mentoring program, as a didactic education strategy, was implemented at the University of Nebraska. The success of this program led to the expansion of peer educating as a mechanism for improving retention and academic success (Sawyer, Pinciario, & Bedwell, 1997; Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

During the past twenty years some significant changes have occurred in the use of peer educators. First, as we have already noted, there has been a proliferation in the use of peer educators into nearly every aspect of college academic and student service. Second, along with increase in the number of roles for peer educators comes broader use of multiple delivery methods. In addition to traditional one-on-one contact, there has been an increase in peer educators' involvement with organizational strategies, classroom and group programs, and Web sites and electronic communication. Finally, in the past decade more activist forms of peer movements have begun in response to issues of harassment, violence, and other trauma on campus. Such counter movements to

---

**Exercise 1.1:** Peer Educators on Your Campus

---

Identify the types of peer educator roles on your campus.

In these roles, what types of strategies are used for providing assistance: one-to-one contact, working with groups or organizations, online or electronic medium, or some combinations of all of these?

make the campus safer and more responsive as a community were due, at least in part, to an increase of shootings and acts of terror (Birchard, 2009). Peer educators are now playing a significant leadership role in campaigns to provide support groups, nonviolence, and better safety procedures for reducing trauma, connecting students to service, and developing more supportive campus communities.

Although peer educator involvement is possible in nearly every student service and academic department, our intent in this book is not to cover the job description and content information for all the ways peer educators may serve on a college campus. Instead, we focus on the basic skills for working effectively as a peer helper, no matter the specific capacity. This book is titled *Students Helping Students*, and in a broad sense that is exactly the purpose of this book: to provide preparation, skill training, helpful resources, and thoughtful discussion for students working as peer educators. We intend this book to be both a primer for preparation and a handbook of resources for those in the

wide range of service roles and responsibilities mentioned in the paragraphs above.

The first step in this training process is to define key terms and concepts that will be used throughout the book.

## DEFINITIONS

You have already seen that many terms seem synonymous with “peer educator.” To name a few: peer counselor, ambassador, student coach, peer mentor, student assistant, class recitation facilitator, tutor, resident assistant, and orientation leader. Each of these descriptive names reflects the various nuances and characteristics of the roles and responsibilities taken on by the peer educator. *Peer educator* is a comprehensive and generally unifying term that encompasses the many other descriptive terms just given. Peer educators are students who have been selected, trained, and designated by a campus authority to offer educational services to their peers. These services are intentionally designed to assist peers toward attainment of educational goals. The following questions clarify further the concept of students helping students as peer educators.

### ***What Is Meant by Students Helping Students?***

Who is the student who helps and who is the student recipient of help? Are these upper class or more advanced students assisting younger and more novice students? Does this include graduate students? The defining characteristic of a helper is someone who is in some ways more knowing, more experienced, and more capable in a designated area of service than the people being helped. But class status, age, or years of experience is not as important as the *effectiveness* of the peer educator in providing service. For example, those who are motivated and capable of providing

service might make more effective peer educators than those with higher status or more experience but less motivation to help. Most importantly, effectiveness can be enhanced through preparation and training. This book is designed to provide you with knowledge, skills, and personal awareness to prepare and enhance your effectiveness as a peer educator.

### ***What Is Helping?***

Along with *helping*, terms such as *facilitating*, *mentoring*, *advising*, *instructing*, *education*, *aiding*, *assisting*, *leading*, and *counseling* are used. These terms convey the specific function of a peer educator. But in truth, there are many shades of difference between the student helping with orientation, the student as a tutor, the student as mentor for achieving an outcome, or the student as an advisor. One basic characteristic of a peer educator is that of *provider*. A *provider* may offer a service of a specific nature; this can be information, support, or facilitating action such as decision making or task accomplishment in the best interest of another person. A helping relationship implies that there is *value added* as a result of the encounter. The peer educator is a *helper*.

### ***How Is a Peer Educator Different from a Professional Helper?***

A professional differs from a peer educator in level of training, preparation, experience, and by job designation. The professional must be qualified by meeting standards of competence and training established by the institution, the discipline, or other authority. Their titles such as counselor, professor, dean, adviser, or director denote both the status and level of responsibility. One important aspect of your training as a peer educator will be to learn where the level of your competence to assist others ends and where the knowledge and skills of the professional must take over

to provide the optimal learning experience for another student. We cover the importance of personal boundaries and knowing limits of peer service as well as the skills and knowledge necessary for making appropriate referrals and ethical behaviors in Chapters Nine and Ten.

---

**Reflection Point 1.2:** Peer Educator versus Professional Responsibilities

---

What are the primary differences between the type of assistance you are going to provide to other students and the assistance given to students in your sponsoring agency by your professional counterparts?

## **WHY ARE PEER EDUCATORS EFFECTIVE?**

### ***What the Research Says***

There are several reasons peer educators produce positive results in assisting student success for a variety of outcomes. One explanation may be that the peer educator is slightly ahead in experience and awareness of what a student seeking help may be going through but not so removed as to seem unable to identify and understand his or her situation (Lockspeiser, O'Sullivan, Teherani, & Muller, 2008). Illustrating this idea, one student noted that relating with her peer educator was like “being able to relate to someone who has been through similar experience but still understands and won’t judge me for needing input on what may seem unimportant.” Indeed, sensitive topics such as dating relationships, health and sexuality, or personal finances may be discussed without the embarrassment of talking to a “more” adult figure (Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Sawyer et al., 1997). That students feel more compatible with a peer educator who has similar learning styles and who approaches the world from a similar generational perspective is exemplified in the Beloit College Mindset List, a yearly publishing of the events that have



occurred and affected the lives of a contemporary cohort of students (see <http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>). The world events, the newest technologies, popular entertainers, sports events, movies, music, well-known public figures, major political and social issues, wars, economic trends, fads and fashions, and even the popular lingo are ways that mark the times and frequently separate the generations. The underlying concept is that students seek advice from and are influenced by the expectations, attitudes, and behaviors of their peer group. Peer influence in many situations may be stronger than that of adults such as teachers, parents, and other experts (Mellanby, Rees, & Tripp, 2000).

Peer educators have been demonstrated to be effective helpers when provided systematic training in interpersonal communication and relationship skills (Carkhuff, 1969; Daniels & Ivey, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Though effective human relations skills are useful in helping students with specific levels of need to explore and resolve questions of information, resource, support, and normal developmental transitions, they do not replace the more in-depth exploration of emotional, mental, or behavioral concerns that require expertise of a professional. A peer educator can be trained to meet some needs, but some needs require additional support.

### ***What Experience Has Taught You About Helping***

All of us have received emotional support, insight, or help resolving a problem situation from family, friends, teachers, counselors, or even strangers. Take time to acknowledge and understand what you already know about helping based upon life experience that has provided positive results.

Experiential learning results from the happenstance of moving through life. Instead of learning exclusively from the theory-based lessons of a book or class, you can also look at how

---

**Exercise 1.2:** Brief Moments That Make a Difference

---

Think over the past several days about the many little encounters you may have had—some with friends, some with family, but others maybe with people you hardly know: the clerk in a store, the person sitting behind you in a class, the individual who gave you directions when you were lost, or the instructor who made a special comment on your essay. Note the context of the encounter, what happened, and why it was meaningful to you. What was it about the quality of the interaction and the way the person responded to you that made it significant? Write down a short description of the encounter. No matter how short-lived in time the encounter actually was, make your description a brief story noting the action and the attitude, the situation, and the resulting impact upon you.

What was it about the encounter that made it meaningful, helpful, or created the positive impression? If you are learning with a group, individual members may share these reflections and explanations of the helpful encounter.

What can you take from this meaningful moment as a lesson for being helpful?

life experience has provided you with an important template for the *helping moment*. Perhaps you learned something about helping as a result of seeking out a person when a need was present. Or in many cases a meaningful event happened that seemed random, serendipitous, and unplanned, but it nonetheless provided you with extremely useful information, emotional support, and encouragement—it added to your well-being and made your day. The best way to tap this type of learning is to ask you to reflect on these moments directly and to share similar experiences with a group that you may be training with. Illustrations can also be shared by other peer educators. Exercise 1.2 can be done individually but it is more beneficial when the activity and discussion can be shared with a group.

## **Discussion**

The following are examples from other classes of peer educators.

- A custodial worker in a residence hall offered a personal greeting and friendly smile each day to residents (who were feeling half-awake each morning) as they started off to class. This older lady, a first-generation immigrant, knew the names of nearly every resident in the hall and exuded an upbeat, positive attitude. Suddenly one day she was not there to offer her greeting, and many residents felt the strong sense of missing something very important. When it was found out that this woman had taken ill and was in the hospital, several residents rotated days to visit her in the hospital until she had recovered.
- Jayne took time out one afternoon for a ride on her bicycle and ventured down a riding path that led through an off-road park. Nearly eight miles out on the path, she ran over a rough stone and had a flat tire. Jayne had nothing to repair or pump up her tire and was left to push the bike home. About ten minutes later, another rider came by and offered to help. Even though

this guy had a small repair kit, there was difficulty, and the tire repair took nearly 30 minutes to fix. She found out when the job was done that the “good Samaritan” helper was now going to be late for his job at a local convenience store. However, he refused to accept money for helping out and only issued a “Have a good day!” as he rode off in the other direction.

- Nearly every student in these classes had brief stories to tell about recent encounters: someone making a call concerned about not seeing her friend in class; an aunt who sent a “care package” to acknowledge a little-known but important anniversary; a boss who took time to explain the importance of doing a job correctly rather than handing out the prescribed disciplinary warning; a seven-year-old boy assisting an older man down a steep staircase at a national monument as closing darkness found the man hesitant about taking a misstep.

## ***Lessons Learned***

Take this exercise to the next step, and determine what the moral of the story might be in terms of what made the encounter meaningful. What is helping? What can you learn from any experiences that stand out from the simple act in an ordinary day or an extraordinary act that made a big difference in your life? Share and develop this list with people who are training with you in a group or, if working alone, write down your ideas and compare with the following examples gathered from one of our previous classes:

Helping is

- Less about the power or prestige of the person and more about sincerity and sensitivity
- Demonstrated by a sense of attention and interest even when not requested or spoken

- Action without a sense of personal gain
- A feeling of genuine, heartfelt, and sincere response to another
- Receptive and open acceptance of another without judgment
- Acting to do the “right” thing, a morality of action
- Made through small gestures with important meaning
- Inspiring without gloating
- Listening to the heart as much as the voice

Now make your own group list and discuss how being an effective helper is also an attitude, a disposition, an act of character, a gift of kindness, and a connection to humanity. There are many ways to provide significant gestures helpful to another person. Little things given freely can mean a lot!

## **THE IMPACT ON YOU AS A PEER EDUCATOR**

You can expect that one of the most important outcomes of being a peer educator will be an enhancement of your own growth in both knowledge and personal attributes. Research suggests that college students who participate in peer education display significant improvements in leadership, gain interpersonal communication skills, increase peer-education relevant knowledge, develop higher levels of self-esteem, and create better personal health behaviors when measured on assessments before and after their peer education experience (Brack, Millard, & Shah, 2008; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Yamauchi, 1986). As you help others solve problems, your ability to resolve complex issues increases. As you demonstrate empathy and compassion for others, your sense of emotional well-being is heightened. As you work to assist others, you will find your own sense of contribution and personal esteem will grow. Among a list of positive outcomes, program administrators—that is, those in

charge of running peer educator programs—ranked the positive impact that the position had on peer educators as the most significant outcome of peer education programs (Ender & Winston, 1984).

If you are at the beginning of your training this is a good time for you to consider how this experience will affect you in significant ways such as those just mentioned. Even if you have had previous peer educator experience it is useful to reflect on how you are being affected. Having emphasized the benefits, though, we also think it important to discuss challenges; at times, you will question yourself and your ability. Most certainly this experience will provide you with opportunities for reflection. You will be likely to reflect on your decisions about relating to people, for example; you may also deliberate over choosing a career, and your experience as a peer educator may even cause you to look at your own values, ideals, and purpose.

The following reflection provides an example of the impact and change that may occur. It was written by a former student who served in several capacities as a peer educator, a student leader, and a study abroad ambassador.

Tammy came to college determined to be involved and make a difference. She became an officer in her residence hall, was elected to student senate, wrote articles for the newspaper, took a course in leadership, and spent spring break on service projects in the community. Tammy exemplifies what it means to be a peer educator.

Determined to make college more than words on a page, she lived what she learned; she became involved and gave time and effort to provide service to others. But she also got back more than a few lines on a résumé. Her life took

on new direction. College ended and she applied for a position in the program Teach for America. The next paragraph is an excerpt from an essay she wrote about how she has experienced change.

*I have traveled to several countries, had to do the proverbial “stepping into someone else’s shoes,” and still was not prepared for what “Teaching for America” would mean. The mission, to move students two grade levels in their respective subject, is not all that Teach for America means, although it is a beautiful goal for a nation plagued by educational difficulties. In all actuality, it means ripping off your comfortable goggles. It means seeing for sure, with no protection, that life is not built into little boxes that are manageable. Instead you see that for sure, life is chaotic; that there are a myriad of ways to see that four-letter word. You see that learning about a new culture or a new language is nothing compared to learning how to be a kid again, and for sure nothing compared to being forced to truly face your own racist feelings that bubble forth from a place you never thought you had. The task of breaking down the walls of my own expectations against the realities of another life situation seemed nearly impossible. There was no magic dust to put my world into their minds and make it all right! It is frustration, anguish, and more.*

*It is when you sacrifice, when you are in pain, when you no longer want to do something that you are truly serving. And by no means is it as pretty as most would like us to believe; service is a battlefield. It is a violence upon the psyche, a violence upon the heart, a violence upon the mind that is so powerful; one does not walk away the same. If you think going into service is noble, it is. But, only after you have faced the fact that doing it removes nobility and you fully accept the title of servant can you truly serve.*

## ***Reflections on Being a Peer Educator***

Nearly every peer educator, working in their specified role, will gain skills and knowledge from their experience. However, at a very personal level you will notice an impact upon your attitudes, values, perceptions, and self-understanding. This may not seem as dramatic as Tammy's experience described above, but it is more than likely that you will undergo some very clear and personal shift that continues into the future and affects the direction of your life. You will recognize the many changes that can occur from being conscious of everyday transactions that provide some level of impact.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING MODEL**

There are three key components to training: knowledge, skills, and personal integration. In your preparation to become a peer educator you will need to work on all three areas. The chapters of this book address each of them.

Knowledge includes the major concepts that will be useful in your conceptualization and understanding of the helping function. The core knowledge base for helping others combines elements of psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and education. Specifically, this book provides some basic concepts of human development, interpersonal communication, cultural indoctrination, problem solving, group process, and leadership. However, even with a base of knowledge about any subject, you must have sufficient skills to communicate successfully and work productively with others. Some of these skills include the ability to listen, communicate accurately, show intercultural sensitivity, apply problem-solving strategies, lead groups, assess environ-



ments, and make referrals. Here you will be introduced to various strategies and methods to act successfully as a peer educator. Each chapter includes an introduction to the theory, but we emphasize how the theory applies to practice. Practice will include examples for use, “tips” to apply, and exercises to experience many of the suggestions.

Finally, the most important variable in the helping process is you! The most noteworthy ingredients of effectiveness are personal qualities, including self-awareness, accurate self-concept, confidence, commitment to others, motivation, and warmth. We emphasize that a crucial part of being a peer educator is being a role model. Throughout the book, you will be given opportunities to look at yourself and find ways to grow and improve as an example to others. These opportunities are presented in “reflection points.”

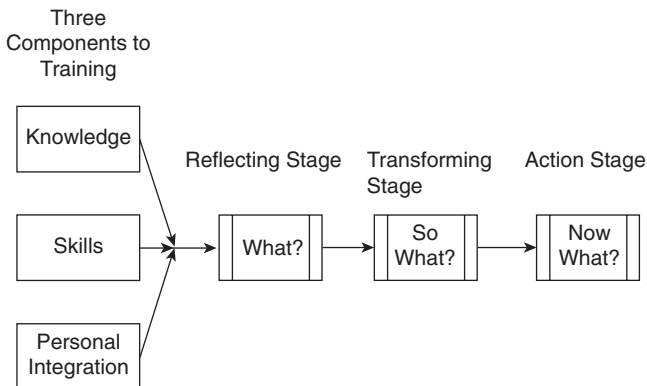
The goal of a good role model is to emulate the qualities of self-awareness, personal growth, and the ability to self-manage behavior. It should be noted, however, that being a role model does not require perfection but an openness to being genuinely human and, while making errors, a willingness to understanding and developing yourself.

## ***A Process and Reflection Model***

The combination of knowledge, skills, and personal integration acquired in this training may best be accomplished through a process and reflection model of learning. Borton (1970) described this model by use of the terms “what,” “so what,” and “now what.” The Borton approach gives one a systematic strategy to use when processing new material, and it asks the learner to define the relevance of this new knowledge from a personal perspective. The definitions of the three stages follow:

1. *What?* This process concerns the sensing out of differences between your original reaction, the actual effect it has upon you, and the intended effect. For example, you could ask yourself, “What is the difference between the intended impact of the material or information and my reaction to it?”
2. *So What?* This is the transforming stage, whereby the learner must translate the new material or knowledge into personally relevant patterns of meaning. You may ask yourself, “So what value does this information have for understanding my own life or my work with others?”
3. *Now What?* This is the action stage of the process model. Here the learner must decide how to act on the knowledge and apply the alternatives identified to other situations. You may ask yourself, “Now what am I going to do with this information?”

The model for training is depicted in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1.** The Training Paradigm: A Process and Reflection Model  
SOURCE: Adapted from Borton (1970).

---

**Reflection Point 1.3:** Your Thoughts and Reactions to Training

---

Given the themes of this chapter, the “what,” “so what,” and “now what” perspective might generate the following questions:

1. What did you think your training as a peer educator would entail? Did you enter with any anxiety or uncertainty? Do you find that there were major differences between your expectations of training and the information you have covered in this chapter?
2. So what do these differences mean to you (assuming there were any)? What implications do the expectations and reality of training have for you to enter fully and enthusiastically into this training experience?
3. Now what are you going to do to work through this if there is a difference between your expectations and the actual role of a peer educator that you are now defining?

In summary, the model of training we are suggesting is similar to the form of inquiry and learning that could take place on any topic. It applies to examining oneself in relationship to becoming a more effective helper or it could apply to a class on a science topic. For example, scientific experiments constitute a continuous cycle of inquiry that follows almost exactly the same progression—observing data, building interpretations, applying the interpretations, and checking the results. It is important that you view what is known from the world outside of yourself and then reflect upon these data for how they affect your own assumptions. It is important that you are open to challenge and experience the dissonance that then can lead to understanding, possible change, and continued growth. It is critically important to keep in mind that the material you will learn in this book will ask you to look at yourself and your own functioning as a human being. You will be a role model to those you are helping. Your level of functioning will have direct impact on those with whom you

work. It is very important that you know yourself and model the attributes of building on strengths and recognizing and working on weaknesses.

## ***Training Assumptions***

This training program is based on several assumptions (adapted from Ender, Saunders-McCaffrey, & Miller, 1979) important for you and your trainer to consider as you enter the program because they will lead you to more positive and long-lasting results when you share them and act on them. If you just go through the motions of taking a class with minimal expectations, you will miss the opportunity to be a true learner whose knowledge and skills will create change and indelible impacts. Alternatively, if you are aware of and share the assumptions driving the process, you will derive maximum benefit from it.

**Learning Is an Active Process** Learning, especially skill development, is not a passive enterprise. To fully benefit from this training experience, you must be an active participant. The principle that one must demonstrate commitment to personal growth and development if change is to occur applies just as much to peer educators as to the students who may be receiving assistance.

We encourage you to be an active learner in three distinct ways. First, through the use of the “what, so what, and now what” model, you are encouraged to employ a more reflective, thoughtful, and introspective learning style as you read the training chapters. The reflective model of learning is designed to assist you with this process. Second, embedded within many of the training chapters are exercises designed to assist you in thinking about new information and applying this information to yourself, your interactions with others, and the environment around you. These exercises will be assigned by your trainer. The third method of active

learning occurs during the training sessions. Along with being thoughtful, you will take risks in your thinking, be challenged to hear and often accept thoughts different from your own, actively participate in role-plays and other simulations, and truly enjoy the acquisition of new skills through feedback and practice. The more you put yourself into this experience, the more learning will occur.

**Peer Educators Are Self-Aware** You are entering a position that will require you to encourage others to make changes in some way. This may involve acquiring knowledge, shifting behavior, developing a different way of valuing an experience, engaging in more effective group activity, or finding ways of developing greater self-responsibility. If any of these changes are to occur with the students you are assisting, the students must show some awareness of their present behavior and make some commitment to change. The same is true with you. If you are not aware of your level of functioning in the area targeted for change with the student you are helping, it will be difficult for you to model the appropriate behavior—and difficult for you to advocate a change strategy with the student seeking assistance. We will challenge you throughout this book to become more aware of who you are as a person and a student. You are encouraged to incorporate change strategies into your own life when areas of improvement are warranted. Modeling the process for others provides credibility for what you are promoting. If you are unwilling to make a personal adjustment, it will be difficult for you to challenge others to take the risks necessary to promote change in their lives. As a helping person, you must be genuine and congruent with who you are as a person and what you advocate for others when promoting healthy, self-directed, and self-responsible behavior.

**Training Takes Place in a Supportive Community** For change to occur, the support of others is usually critical. In this training

experience, you are responsible for your own learning, but you are also responsible for supporting others in their learning experience. By this, we mean you should always try to encourage fellow students to take risks in their thinking, share their ideas, and practice new skills. In other words, you should support their attempts to master this new material. There is no place in training for talking down to others, assuming an authoritative attitude or demeanor, or making critical judgments about the worthiness of others' ideas and opinions. In fact, the opposite style has been found to be most successful in training: show support for others, provide encouragement to take risks, look for the positive rather than the negative qualities in others, and give feedback in constructive ways. When all members of the training community embrace these concepts, there is a greater opportunity for mutual benefit.

**Training Requires Time, Practice, and Feedback** As you will be exposed to new content areas and be required to develop specific skills to help others, this training program should ideally occur over a series of weeks throughout a quarter or semester. You will need time to consider and reflect on new ideas, learn new ways of viewing the helping relationship, try out new ways of behaving as a peer educator, and master new skills. In some instances, to be truly effective, you will have to change your behavior or way of thinking. Long-term change does not occur overnight. It takes time to integrate new behaviors with thoughts. You cannot fully integrate new behaviors without practicing those behaviors.

**The Trainer Is Your Role Model** As you advance through this training experience, look to your trainer as your role model. Just as you will be a role model to others, the person leading this experience is a model for you and will exemplify the helping skills you

are here to learn. Everyone leads best by example. We trust that this old adage will manifest itself in your training experience.

## ***Peer Educators as Role Models***

Most people understand the folly of the parent who says, “Do as I say, not as do!” Learning is most likely to be accomplished when there is consistency between the instructional message and the behavior of the person providing that message. You will be most effective as a helping person if you provide a positive role model and thereby make it possible that you will become a significant person, a mentor, in the lives of other students.

Consider a role model who has made a difference in your life, and ask yourself the following question: Have I ever told this significant person about the important role he plays in my life? More often than not, significant others will not know that they are admired, observed, and even being emulated by you. People become role models because they are available for observation and have a special position of authority or are perceived as holding special qualities. Parents, older siblings, teachers, friends, leaders of organizations, or even those in the public limelight will often become role models. As a peer educator, you will be in a position to be a role model for other students on campus.

Your institution will entrust you with a position that carries important duties and serves in many ways as a representative of the college. Such a position engenders some immediate respect and admiration from others because you are expected to be responsible and accountable in helping other students. Thus, other students will look to your words and actions for guidance and leadership in regard to their own behavior. They may even try to emulate you in certain ways. Will the behaviors they emulate support positive qualities that show responsibility and respect, promote growth, and enhance their educational success?

For example, if you are a study skills instructor, do you practice successful classroom and study techniques in your own academic subjects? If you are a peer health educator, do you practice safe sex or abstinence? Practice responsible drinking? Balance your life with exercise and good nutrition? If you are a resident assistant, do you model respectful and cooperative community living? In summary, do you model through your values, attitudes, and behavior a lifestyle that is compatible with the goals of your peer educator role? This is an important point to ponder because you can count on the fact that students you work with will be observing your actions.

---

**Reflection Point 1.4:** Being a Role Model

---

Think about being a peer educator:

What behaviors describe a successful role model in the area served by your peer educator role?

So what are the differences between those behaviors and your own behavior?

Now what are some actions you can take to become a better role model for other students?

*Tips for Being a Successful Peer Educator*

1. Cultivate a genuine desire to be part of other people's lives, help them through the tough decisions, and see them become the best they can be. Be invested for a long enough time to make a difference.
2. Respect individuals and their abilities and their right to make their own choices in their lives. Avoid bringing the attitude to the relationship that your own ways are better or that participants need to be rescued. Convey a sense of respect and equal dignity in the relationship to win the trust of those with whom you work.



3. Listen and accept different points of view. Most people can find someone who will give advice or express opinions. It is much harder to find someone who will suspend judgment and really listen. Help simply by listening, asking thoughtful (but not leading) questions, and giving participants an opportunity to explore their own thoughts with a minimum of interference. When people feel accepted, they are more likely to ask for and respond to good ideas.
4. Appreciate others' struggles and feel empathy with them without feeling pity. Even without having had the same life experiences, successful peer educators can empathize with their partners' feelings and personal problems.
5. Look for solutions and opportunities as well as barriers. Balance a realistic respect for the real and serious problems that others face with optimism for finding equally realistic solutions. You have to be able to make sense of a jumble of issues and point out sensible alternatives.
6. Stay flexible and open. Recognize that relationships take time, and take the time to get to know your partners, learn new things that are important to your partners, and even be changed by the relationship.

We explore the qualities reflected in these tips in more detail throughout later chapters. Chapter Three will help you gain understanding of cultural differences and your responses to them. Chapter Four will help you enhance your listening and empathizing skills. And Chapter Five will help you broaden your problem-solving skills and strategies. The key point of being a peer educator is to understand that it takes a real personal commitment to enter into a relationship of this nature, and this commitment should be considered carefully as a condition of taking on responsibility as a peer educator. Some thoughtful reflection will enhance your role as a peer educator.

---

**Reflection Point 1.5:** Successful Peer Education

---

Think about peer educating:

What are some of the skills and competencies necessary for developing successful peer-educating relationships?

So what are your present strengths and weaknesses in these areas?

Now what are some specific targets of your training, as outlined in this text, that will be important for you to master to be a successful peer educator for another student?

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided you with an overview of students in peer educator roles on college and university campuses. In particular, the chapter focused on the historical expansion of undergraduates' serving in helping roles, the types of positions typically filled by peer educators, and the effectiveness that can be expected in these positions. In this chapter, you have learned what a peer educator is and what a peer educator can do. We have distinguished between the types of activities more appropriate for peer educators and those best offered by professional helpers.

The chapter has also outlined the three components of a learning process: knowledge, skills, and personal integration. It described the basic assumptions of peer educator training, as well as a method you can use to think about new information and reflect upon how this can be useful to your own situation and work as a peer educator. Because we strongly believe that people serving in helping positions are role models of effective living, we challenged you in this chapter to consider your present level of effectiveness as a student role model by identifying your strengths and developing action plans to focus on areas that may need improvement.

Regardless of the specific role you will assume on your campus, remember that you are joining tens of thousands of other students serving as peer educators across the country. The ubiquitous application and subsequent outcome research has demonstrated that the use of peer educators has the potential to make a major and positive difference in the successful development and achievement of college students. Enter into this training program with a commitment to be the very best you can be. Think seriously about role modeling and the mentoring relationship. Take risks to learn and be supportive of fellow trainees. Be positive rather than negative, supportive rather than judgmental, and active rather than passive. Training is a journey to new and exciting thoughts, ideas, opinions, and skills. Enjoy the trip!

## **CHAPTER ONE: SUMMARY QUESTIONS**

1. In your own words, define the roles of students serving as peer educators on your campus.
2. What principles of healthy interactions are you able to identify based upon your experience in meaningful encounters?
3. Describe Borton's process model. What does he mean by sensing, personalizing, and acting?
4. Why are peer educators role models for other students on campus?