

Teen to Teen

Teen to Teen

Responding to Peers in Crisis

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This training manual for peer responders was originally developed in the Archdiocese of Baltimore as a resource for the Samaritan Project. The Samaritan Project is an ongoing response to at-risk youth in the archdiocese by way of trained and supervised peer responders. The project team of professional youth and young adult ministers who designed and piloted the training sessions in the manual include:

- Bob McCarty
- Ted Miles
- Kevin Moser
- Helene Murtha
- Ruthann Wickless

The biblical inspiration for the project is the account of Jesus' words in Luke 10:36-37: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

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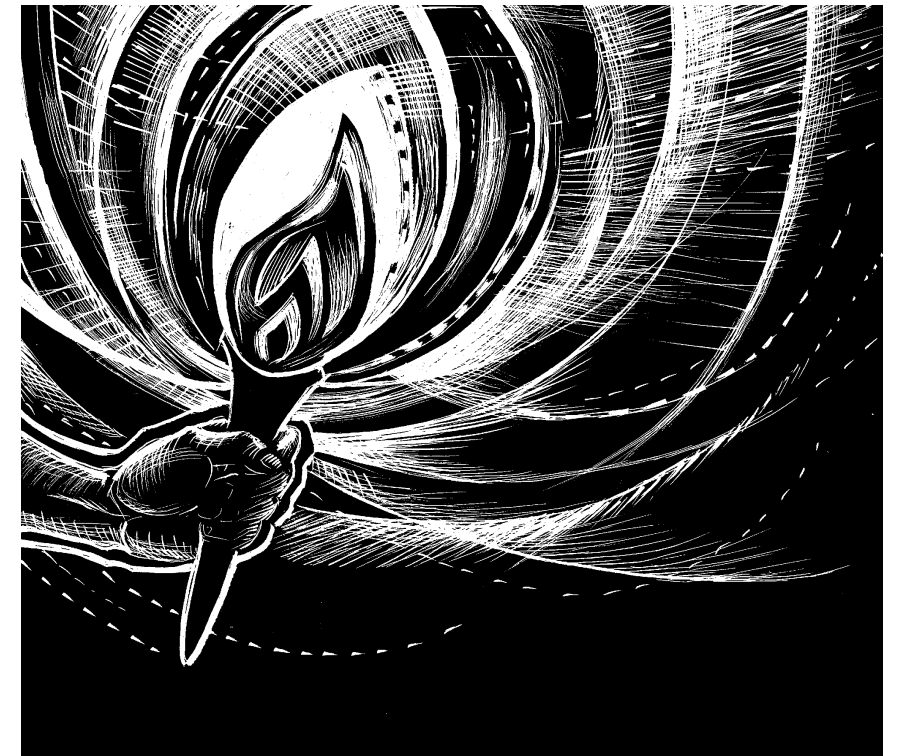
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Introduction



In Catholic youth ministry, and across our society in general, awareness is growing of the many harmful and dangerous situations that young people face. Many young people are unable to meet their basic needs, have poor coping skills, and lack an adequate support system. The term *at risk* is commonly used to describe young people who, in these circumstances, often turn to destructive behaviors such as alcohol abuse, substance abuse, unhealthy sexual relationships, and eating disorders. Running away, truancy, and other

delinquent activities are common. Depression and suicide rates among these teens are increasing. And many of these young people are the victims, or even the perpetrators, of violence and abuse.

On the other hand, if proper guidance and support are available to at-risk young people, the crises that they experience can be opportunities for new growth, fresh insights, and even a deepening of faith. We can take a cue from Jesus as to the priority and positive results of ministry to people in crisis. He responded to people's physical, emotional, and relational hurts and pains. Often the personal crises associated with people's experiences served as the start of a relationship with Jesus as well as entry points for the healing power of God. Our ministry likewise needs to be one that responds to young people in crisis and provides them with the help and support needed not only to survive the crisis but to transform the crisis into an opportunity for growth.

In our pastoral response to the needs and concerns of young people in crisis, we should acknowledge that in many instances, other young people are the first to know when their peers are hurting or are in high-risk situations. Thus, our ministry to young people at risk needs to enlist the help of other young people and provide them with the knowledge and the skills needed to respond to their hurting peers. *Teen to Teen* is a peer responding training program designed to provide that knowledge and those skills.

Peer Responders

To properly characterize this type of peer ministry, the term *peer responding* or *responder* is preferable to *peer counseling* or *counselor*. The use of the term *counseling* implies a level of expertise and competence that is not appropriate to young people or even to most adults involved in youth ministry, unless they have had formal education and training in counseling. In order to avoid any misinterpretations or false expectations about the desired outcomes of peer responder ministry, this manual uses the terms *responding* and *responder* and asks the program coordinator and leaders to do the same.

Overview of the Program

Three sets of skills are integral to ministering to young people in crisis: recognition, response, and referral. In addition to these three *r*'s, the peer responder program provides information on primary critical issues that today's young people must confront. And although the primary purpose of the program is enabling young people to respond to peers who are experiencing a crisis, the program also benefits the responders by enhancing their ability to deal with their own crises.

- Objectives** The peer responder program has the following objectives:
- to enable participants to recognize distress signals and signs of a crisis
 - to help participants respond to their peers when a crisis occurs
 - to enable participants to make referrals when the situation warrants
 - to provide participants with information on critical issues that today's young people face

Program Design The program consists of seven training sessions. Each session takes over two hours. The first two sessions are foundational to the program and should be conducted in sequence. The other five sessions do not have to be presented in the order given in this manual. Note though that session 3 includes the anatomy of a crisis, which is helpful for the following sessions, and session 7 includes an end-of-program segment. But even these two segments can be moved, for example, to accommodate the schedules of resource persons who are serving as session leaders.

The sessions could be held during an afternoon or evening for seven consecutive weeks, or combined in a weekend format. Schools might choose to integrate the program into the regular school schedule.

Program Elements The following description of the program's elements provides a comprehensive picture of the program and can serve as a check-point for you in the development of your program.

Program coordinator. The person who implements the program, supervises it, and serves as the adviser and key support person for the participants

Program staff. The person or persons who lead the training sessions and those who present input. The program, as designed, presumes that a parish or school staff person will lead the sessions, but the use of session leaders other than parish or school staff is also possible. If more than one session leader is used, the coordinator must take extra care to ensure continuity and appropriate sequencing in the overall program.

Leaders and presenters should consider themselves colearners with the participants, be willing to listen to the participants, and encourage the participants to share their experiences.

Participants. The program is designed primarily for young people in the tenth through twelfth grades. Younger participants could be involved at the discretion of the program coordinator.

Application. An application process is strongly suggested for entrance into the program. The process should require the applicants to provide recommendations for their participation from reliable people who know them. This underscores the seriousness of the program. Sample applications and recommendation forms are included at the end of this introduction.

Group size. This program uses many role-plays and group discussions and thus works best with groups of eight to twenty participants. With smaller or larger groups, some adjustments may be needed.

Building community. Building community among the participants is crucial to the success of the program. How well the participants know one another ahead of time will determine the amount of time needed for this.

Binders. Each of the participants should be given a three-ring binder at the beginning of the program for keeping notes, doing journal writing, and storing handouts.

Materials. Each session involves the use of handouts provided in this manual and other printed materials, all of which should be three-hole punched for insertion into the participants' binders.

Facilities. A comfortable setting in which everyone can hear and see clearly is most conducive to learning. Round tables are ideal for discussion and sharing. Using newsprint, chalkboards, or overhead projectors is encouraged.

Resources. Along with the specific resources provided in this manual, the program coordinator should collect telephone numbers for national hotlines, local social service agencies, and other community resources needed for making referrals.

Assessment survey. The participants should fill out handout C, "Peer Responder Assessment Survey," before beginning the program, perhaps as part of a program orientation. Or if time allows, the survey could be incorporated into the first session. The participants should take the assessment survey again at the program's conclusion, either as part of the last session or as a follow-up to the program. An answer key is provided so that the participants can measure their progress. The survey and the answer key are located at the end of this introduction.

Recognition certificate. At the completion of the program, the parish or school should publicly recognize the participants' achievement by awarding them a certificate at a parish liturgy, school assembly, or other appropriate occasion. A sample certificate is included at the end of this introduction.

The term *recognition* is more appropriate than *commissioning* because commissioning implies that the participant is now acting as an "agent" of the school or parish, which makes the parish or school legally liable if the young person says or does something that constitutes a liability.

Follow-up. Once the training program is completed, the leader(s) should gather the participants on a regular basis to offer them support, allow them to share experiences and concerns, and provide them with any needed additional training.

Description of the Sessions

The seven sessions of the peer responder program provide training in the basic skills of peer responding and information on specific issues.

Session 1: Role description and critical issues. Introduces the participants to key principles in responding to others and examines the issues of confidentiality and referral

Session 2: Communication skills. Teaches skills for effective verbal and nonverbal communication and their use in responding to others

Session 3: Depression and suicide. Describes the anatomy of a crisis and offers information on recognizing and responding to depression and suicidal behavior

Session 4: Drugs and alcohol. Provides information on the causes and effects of alcohol and drug use and teaches the participants to recognize the signs of substance abuse

Session 5: Sexuality and relationships. Examines the meaning of sexuality, suggests guidelines for Christian decision making concerning dating, and offers information on related issues

Session 6: Loss and grief. Describes the phases of the grieving process and provides strategies for supporting peers who are grieving

Session 7: Abuse and violence. Describes the effects of abuse and violence in young people's relationships and families, identifies the signs of abusive relationships, and offers skill training for responding to peers in abusive situations

Session Format

All the sessions in this manual have the following common elements:

Welcome. The session leader greets the participants as a group at the beginning of each session.

Opening prayer. The session leader leads the opening prayer at the first session and then asks participants to volunteer to lead the prayer at subsequent sessions.

Review. With the exception of the first session, the session leader will ask the participants to recall what they learned in the previous session and to provide a review of key points.

Presentations. The sessions are not designed as lectures but as learning activities incorporating role-playing, discussion, sharing, and handouts. This manual includes detailed directions and resources for leading each session.

Role-plays. Each session includes role-plays that reinforce the communication skills learned in session 2 and applies these skills to the specific issue presented in the session. If time is limited, priority should be given to the role-plays, even if some other content is not covered.

Journal writing. Journal writing is an effective way to gather and preserve personal insights and feelings experienced during the training sessions. No set times are scheduled for journal writing, although each session includes a reminder to consider allowing several minutes at the end of the closing prayer for journal writing. The leader will need to discern those special moments when journal writing is likely to be most fruitful.

Closing prayer. Each session includes a closing prayer, but the session leader may choose to adapt or substitute the prayer when it is appropriate.

Checklist Before turning to the detailed sessions of the peer responder training program, use the following checklist as a summary and review of the steps to be taken by the program coordinator before holding the first session.

- Determine the session schedule and sequence.
- Select session leader(s) and presenter(s).
- Reserve the facilities needed for the program.
- Determine and implement appropriate publicity.
- Prepare application and recommendation materials.
- Purchase a three-ring binder for each participant.
- Photocopy the handouts for session 1.
- Photocopy handout C, "Peer Responder Assessment Survey."
- Collect phone numbers for local resources and hotlines.
- Arrange for any desired refreshments for the sessions.

Bibliography of Program Resources

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Moore, Joseph. *Helping Skills for the Nonprofessional Counselor*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1992.

Olson, G. Keith. *Counseling Teenagers: The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding and Helping Adolescents*. Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1984.

Reed, Sharon, ed. *Access Guides to Youth Ministry: Pastoral Care*. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993.

Rowatt, G. Wade, Jr. *Pastoral Care with Adolescents in Crisis*. Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1989.

National Hotlines

Boys Town National Hotline: 800-448-3000. A 24-hour crisis hotline for teenagers.

Covenant House: 800-999-9999. A 24-hour crisis hotline for teenagers and adults.

Peer Responder Program Application

The peer responder program provides young people with the training and basic skills needed for responding to their peers in crisis situations. To apply for training in this program, please provide the following information:

Name: _____ Current grade: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home phone: _____

Parish: _____ School: _____

1. Why are you applying to participate in this peer responder training program?

2. Describe some of the gifts and talents that you could bring to this program.

3. What do you see as the greatest need of young people today?

_____ (signature)

_____ (date)

Peer Responder

Program Recommendation Form

The peer responder program provides young people with the training and basic skills needed for responding to their peers in crisis situations.

_____ has applied for the peer responder program. The staff would appreciate your appraisal of the applicant.

Your name: _____ Job title: _____

Relationship to applicant: _____

1. I have known the applicant for _____ (length of time).

2. Please evaluate the applicant in the following areas:
5 = Excellent 4 = Very Good 3 = Good 2 = Fair 1 = Can't Assess
___ Motivation ___ Self-expression ___ Dependability ___ Maturity

3. Please comment on the applicant's strengths and weaknesses:

4. Any additional comments:

Thank you for your appraisal!

(signature)

(date)

Peer Responder Assessment Survey

Name: _____

Imagine that you are talking with a friend. Your friend has a problem and tells you about it. Three responses to each problem are given below. Place a check mark next to the response that is closest to what you would say to your friend. Mark the first response that comes to your mind.

1. "I've had it. My grades are the pits. My parents don't care about my problems—it seems I'm always one step behind. They are always teasing me. Nobody cares! Nobody cares! I don't know why I haven't taken a blade to my wrists. It sure would be easier."

Responses

- ___ "Things are never as bad as they seem. You really have to look on the bright side."
- ___ "You're upset about a lot of things. Would it help to talk about it?"
- ___ "Suicide isn't the answer to your problems."

2. "I can't believe my best friend was killed in that accident. We were talking only an hour before it happened. We had so many plans together. It just doesn't make sense that she had to die."

Responses

- ___ "It must be hard for you to make any sense out of this tragedy."
- ___ "So when did all this happen?"
- ___ "Oh yeah, the same thing happened to me."



3. "Beer tastes gross, and I know it's not good for me. But most of my friends are drinking, and we like the effect. So I drink, too."

Responses

- _____ "What have your friends that aren't drinking said about your drinking?"
 _____ "Even so, you should not be drinking. You admitted it wasn't good for you."
 _____ "It sounds like you really don't want to be drinking."

4. "My new friends are really cool, but my parents don't like them. My parents think they are a bad influence and won't let me go out with them. They really don't know my friends, though."

Responses

- _____ "So what's the deal with your friends?"
 _____ "You sound frustrated that your parents won't give your friends a chance."
 _____ "Yeah, I hate it when my parents tell me what to do."

5. "My boyfriend is pressuring me to have sex. I'm just not ready for that. I don't even know if I trust him completely."

Responses

- _____ "Sounds like you're having some doubts about this relationship."
 _____ "Well, if he can't respect your feelings, drop him."
 _____ "You really have to tell him how you feel."

6. "I've got to get away from home. I'm too scared to go back there. Every night it's the same thing with my father. I need some help."

Responses

- _____ "You're right. Why don't you come and stay at my place?"
 _____ "You sound really upset. Have you thought about what options you have?"
 _____ "If it's really that bad, why not just leave?"

Please read each statement and write *T* in the blank if you think it is *true* and *F* in the blank if you think it is *false*.

- ___ 1. As a peer responder, my main concern is to give good advice.
 ___ 2. The suicidal person generally gives warning signals before attempting suicide.
 ___ 3. It usually takes three months to get over a death or a broken relationship.
 ___ 4. Those who use drugs or alcohol only affect themselves.
 ___ 5. Having sex is a sign of maturity in a relationship.
 ___ 6. Many children who are abused may grow up to abuse their own children.

How important would you rate each of these ways a peer responder might act?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
1. Give advice				
2. Listen				
3. Intervene in an emergency situation				
4. Advocate for the hurting person				
5. Extend realistic hope				
6. Express and receive honest emotions				
7. Provide solutions				
8. Refer to a professional				
9. Guide the problem-solving process				
10. Counsel				

Answers to "Peer Responder Assessment Survey"

Scoring

For the six multiple-choice questions, the most correct answer is worth 3 points, the next best, 2 points, and the least, 1 point. Each answer is marked with the appropriate point value. The "most correct" answer is the one that uses a reflective listening approach and avoids quick solutions or giving advice.

The six true-false questions receive 1 point for each correct answer.

The ten skill questions receive 1 point for each "correct" or "fairly correct" answer. Questions 1, 7, and 10 are "somewhat important" or "not important." The rest are "very important" or "important."

Total score: 34 points possible

Imagine that you are talking with a friend. Your friend has a problem and tells you about it. Three responses to each problem are given below. Place a check mark next to the response that is closest to what you would say to your friends. Mark the first response that comes to your mind.

1. "I've had it. My grades are the pits. My parents don't care about my problems—it seems I'm always one step behind. They are always teasing me. Nobody cares! Nobody cares! I don't know why I haven't taken a blade to my wrists. It sure would be easier."

Responses

- 1 "Things are never as bad as they seem. You really have to look on the bright side."
- 3 "You're upset about a lot of things. Would it help to talk about it?"
- 2 "Suicide isn't the answer to your problems."

2. "I can't believe my best friend was killed in that accident. We were talking only an hour before it happened. We had so many plans together. It just doesn't make sense that she had to die."

Responses

- 3 "It must be hard for you to make any sense out of this tragedy."
- 2 "So when did all this happen?"
- 1 "Oh yeah, the same thing happened to me."

3. "Beer tastes gross, and I know it's not good for me. But most of my friends are drinking, and we like the effect. So I drink, too."

Responses

- 2 "What have your friends that aren't drinking said about your drinking?"
- 1 "Even so, you should not be drinking. You admitted it wasn't good for you."
- 3 "It sounds like you really don't want to be drinking."

4. "My new friends are really cool, but my parents don't like them. My parents think they are a bad influence and won't let me go out with them. They really don't know my friends, though."

Responses

- 2 "So what's the deal with your friends?"
- 3 "You sound frustrated that your parents won't give your friends a chance."
- 1 "Yeah, I hate it when my parents tell me what to do."

5. "My boyfriend is pressuring me to have sex. I'm just not ready for that. I don't even know if I trust him completely."

Responses

- 3 "Sounds like you're having some doubts about this relationship."
- 1 "Well, if he can't respect your feelings, drop him."
- 2 "You really have to tell him how you feel."

6. "I've got to get away from home. I'm too scared to go back there. Every night it's the same thing with my father. I need some help."

Responses

- 1 "You're right. Why don't you come and stay at my place?"
- 3 "You sound really upset. Have you thought about what options you have?"
- 2 "If it's really that bad, why not just leave?"

Please read each statement and write *T* in the blank if you think it is *true* and *F* in the blank if you think it is *false*.

- F 1. As a peer responder, my main concern is to give good advice.
- T 2. The suicidal person generally gives warning signals before attempting suicide.
- F 3. It usually takes three months to get over a death or a broken relationship.
- F 4. Those who use drugs or alcohol only affect themselves.
- F 5. Having sex is a sign of maturity in a relationship.
- T 6. Many children who are abused may grow up to abuse their own children.

How important would you rate each of these ways a peer responder might act?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
1. Give advice				
2. Listen				
3. Intervene in an emergency situation				
4. Advocate for the hurting person				
5. Extend realistic hope				
6. Express and receive honest emotions				
7. Provide solutions				
8. Refer to a professional				
9. Guide the problem-solving process				
10. Counsel				

Peer Responder Recognition Certificate

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)

Name: _____ Site: _____

Leader: _____ Date: _____



1

Role Description and Critical Issues



This session introduces the participants to the peer responder training program. It explores expectations and goals, discusses confidentiality (when to keep or break a confidence), and teaches the participants how to refer peers to other helping resources. The session also examines the faith dimension of peer responding and provides a peer responder role description.

Overview

Underlying Assumptions

This session is based on the following assumptions:

- The participants need to voice their expectations in order to feel invested in the program.
- The participants need to spend time getting to know one another before moving into the serious and personal sharing of future sessions.
- At certain times, a promise of confidentiality must be broken.
- Peer responders by themselves often will not be able to provide adequate help to a struggling peer and thus must know when and how to get professional help.
- Peer responders can bring the healing love of Christ to those they seek to help.

Objectives

The participants will do the following:

- recognize ways that the peer responder program will help them meet their goals as peer responders
- begin to feel comfortable sharing ideas and beliefs with fellow participants
- learn the importance and limitations of confidentiality
- learn when and how to refer a peer to professional support services
- deepen their understanding of the faith dimension of responding to peers in crisis
- review the role description of a peer responder

Session Steps

Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)
 Hopes and Expectations (10 minutes)
 Opening Prayer (10 minutes)
 Qualities of a Peer Responder (10 minutes)
 Confidentiality (10 minutes)
 Confidentiality Role-Plays (10 minutes)
 Break (10 minutes)
 Referrals (15 minutes)
 Referral Role-Plays (10 minutes)
 The Faith Dimension of Peer Responding (15 minutes)
 Faith Dimension Role-Plays (15 minutes)
 Closing Prayer (5 minutes)
 Announcements and Departure

Materials Needed

- refreshments
- newsprint and markers
- program objectives, written on newsprint
- a copy of handout C, "Peer Responder Assessment Survey," for each participant (if not already given)
- a pen or pencil for each participant

- a three-ring binder for each participant
- a copy of handouts 1–A, “The Peer Responder,” and 1–B, “Qualities of a Peer Responder,” for each participant
- a Bible for each participant (or one for each of five small groups)

Procedure

Welcome and Introductions

(10 minutes)

Because this is the first gathering, take special care to informally welcome the participants as they arrive. Refreshments may be available to set a tone of hospitality and relaxation.

Begin the formal introduction by welcoming the young people to the program and introducing yourself. Explain why you are involved in the program. Then use a name game or another icebreaker to facilitate the participants’ introductions to one another. For example, ask everyone to take turns giving their name, school, grade level, and one reason they have chosen to participate in the peer responder program. List all the reasons in a column on a sheet of newsprint.

Hopes and Expectations

(10 minutes)

Direct the participants to recall any experience they might have had of dealing with a peer who was in a crisis. Ask them how they felt during the experience. Many will report feeling helpless and incompetent. List their feelings in a column on the same sheet of newsprint that was used during the introductions.

Next, ask the participants to name skills that would have enabled them to respond to their peers more effectively. List the desired skills in a column on the same sheet of newsprint. Now relate the three lists by suggesting that the peer responder program will provide skills that will replace feelings of helplessness and incompetence with feelings of confidence and competence. These skills will enable the participants to fulfill the reasons they gave for wanting to be in the program.

Review the overall objectives of the peer responder program with the participants. Have these written on newsprint for all to view:

- to enable participants to recognize distress signals and signs of a crisis
- to help participants respond to their peers when a crisis occurs
- to enable participants to make referrals when the situation warrants
- to provide participants with information on critical issues that today’s young people face

Compare the objectives with the list of the young people’s reasons for participating in the program and the list of skills they need to develop.

If the participants have not yet completed handout C, “Peer Responder Assessment Survey,” found at the end of the introduction, distribute it and have them complete it. If the survey is to be filled out during this session, you may have to adjust your time schedule.

Explain that the survey is an aid for assessing their current understanding of peer responding. Score the survey using the answer key provided at the end of the introduction. Distribute the three-ring binders and tell the participants to keep the survey in their binder to compare it with the results of the same survey taken again at the end of the program.

Opening Prayer

(10 minutes)

Invite one of the participants to read the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). After the story has been read, ask the participants to discern the caring qualities of the Samaritan’s behavior.

Qualities of a Peer Responder

(10 minutes)

Distribute handout 1–A, “The Peer Responder.” Tell the participants to reflect for a moment on their ideal picture of a peer responder, in light of the Samaritan story and their own personal experiences. Then instruct them to complete the handout by filling in the figure of a person with the names of the qualities and skills of an ideal peer responder. Have each person share the qualities and skills of his or her ideal peer responder, either in triads or as an entire group.

Invite the group as a whole to describe the ideal peer responder. Guide the participants toward identifying qualities of genuine care and concern for others and communication skills such as being a good listener. These qualities and skills are at the heart of peer responding.

Next, distribute handout 1–B, “Qualities of a Peer Responder.” Direct the participants to review the description of a peer responder and compare it with their description on handout 1–A. Ask them if they see any similarities or differences between the two portraits of a peer responder.

Confidentiality

(10 minutes)

Introduce the topic of confidentiality by stating that one of the skills required of an effective peer responder is knowing when to keep and when to break a confidence. Begin by eliciting from the group a definition of the word *confidentiality*. An example response is, “Anything we say will stay between us and not be shared without permission of the other person.” Ask the group how confidentiality can be established. Someone might respond, “We could make an agreement in which neither person would reveal what’s said without first telling the other person.”

Explore with the group what could happen when confidentiality is violated. Trust could be broken; the person might refuse the peer responder's help; the person may get angry, embarrassed, and possibly even do something drastic. Ask the participants how they have felt when a friend has betrayed their confidence.

Question the group as to whether there are times when confidentiality must be broken. For example, when someone threatens to hurt someone else or herself or himself, or when physical abuse has occurred. Additionally, some gray areas exist: abortion, pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse, running away, and the like. Explain that in these situations it is essential to get professional help and perhaps notify the person's parents. Also, a peer responder might need to involve a trusted adult who may be able to advocate for the hurting person.

Note that when confidentiality is broken the peer responder faces the risk that the hurting person may be angry or hate him or her. However, this is a risk peer responders must take because they are committed to preserving life. In many cases the hurting person is actually relieved that help is on the way.

Highlight the legal obligation to break confidentiality under the following circumstances:

- Someone is experiencing or has experienced sexual or other physical abuse.
- Someone may be planning to harm another.
- Someone may be planning to harm herself or himself.

Confidentiality (10 minutes) Role-Plays

If the group is small and the members are comfortable with one another, call for two volunteers to role-play a scenario in which a friend is facing a crisis situation. For example: The friend says that he or she is seriously thinking about suicide. The responder replies with something like, "I'm really concerned about you, and it scares me to hear you talk about killing yourself. I have to get help for us." Following the role-play, ask the group for feedback on the effectiveness of the communication and peer response.

Next, break the group into triads, designating a suicidal teenager, a peer responder, and an observer to watch the interaction. Direct them to role-play the same situation until it reaches a conclusion. Conduct the role-play three times, switching roles each time so that everyone in each triad gets to experience all three parts.

After the role-plays, ask the participants to relate and discuss the hurting person's reactions to the peer responder's intervention. For example, did the hurting person hate the peer responder (but at least is still alive)? Or was the hurting person relieved? (Suicidal persons usually don't really want to die and are hoping someone will stop them.)

Break (10 minutes)

Referrals (15 minutes)

Ask the group what kind of conditions make it appropriate to refer someone to a professional. Make sure that the following three conditions are considered:

- *Time.* Would a professional be able to give more time to this person?
- *Skill.* Is this issue beyond my gifts and skills?
- *Emotional state.* Are my own needs getting in the way, or am I too emotionally involved? Am I too uncomfortable with this issue? For example, it may be difficult to talk to someone about alcoholic parents if I am experiencing that situation.

Challenge the group to suggest the best way to tell someone that they need professional help. Make sure that the following considerations are raised:

- *Be tactful.* Be gentle so that the hurting person does not feel rejected.
- *Involve the person being helped.* Make sure the hurting person feels a part of the process of choosing and contacting outside help.
- *Follow up.* Stay involved and show continuing interest in the person's well-being.
- *Know the available resources.* Consider preparing a list of appropriate resources in the participants' area or discussing exactly how they can access this information.

Referral Role-Plays (10 minutes)

Gather the participants in the triads used for the earlier role-plays. Formulate a role-play scenario in which a friend is doing drugs but wants to stop. Again, have the participants switch roles so that all three have a chance to be the responder, the drug abuser, and the observer.

After the role-play, call for feedback from the group on what interventions were helpful and why. Ask if they can think of additional suggestions for deciding when and how to refer someone to a professional.

The Faith Dimension (15 minutes) of Peer Responding

If time permits, use both of the following activities. If time is short, choose one.

For the first activity, give a short presentation on Jesus as healer, sharing how his example is a blend of compassionate empathy and confident hope. Point out that his style of ministry has five qualities we can imitate:

1. *Speaking of hope with bold confidence.* The quality of hope is exemplified in the story of Lazarus in John 11:1–23, "Your brother will rise."

2. *Weeping with those who weep.* Jesus cries over Lazarus's death. He participates in the human condition of grief, loss, and suffering.
3. *Taking swift action.* Jesus alters the routine and deals quickly with the hurting one. This quality is exemplified in Mark 5:21–43, where Jesus drops everything to go to Jairus's daughter. Explain that sometimes we have to stop what we're doing in order to respond to our friends.
4. *Sharing the message of God's forgiveness.* Forgiveness is key to the healing process. In Mark 2:1–12, Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins and then heals his body.
5. *Having confidence in prayer.* Jesus believes that prayer is powerful and prayers of faithful friends have real impact. In Mark 5:35–43, the daughter of the synagogue leader dies, but Jesus says, "Do not fear, only believe." The bottom line in responding to our friends is our ability and willingness to pray for them.

For the second activity, divide the participants into five groups. Give each group a Bible and one of the following scriptural citations. Have one member of each small group read the passage aloud. Then invite the rest of the group to identify the quality or faith theme exemplified by Jesus that is integral to responding to others.

- *Luke 19:1–10 (Zacchaeus).* The faith theme is unconditional love. Unconditional love means loving people for who they are, not for what they do or what they own.
- *Luke 15:11–32 (the prodigal son).* The faith theme is forgiveness. Forgiveness heals relationships.
- *John 4:1–28 (the woman at the well) or John 14:15–29 (Jesus' appearance to the disciples after his Resurrection).* The faith theme is peacefulness. Being peaceful with others communicates an acceptance of them as they are and puts them at peace with themselves.
- *Mark 9:14–29 (Jesus heals a possessed boy).* The faith theme is trust or faith. Trusting in the power and love of Jesus communicates a confidence in being able to help others.
- *Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12 (the Resurrection).* The faith theme is hope. Hope makes it possible for people to change and look to the future.

Faith Dimension Role-Plays (15 minutes)

Briefly consider with the participants why it is often difficult to share our faith with others, particularly our peers. Explain that it is not easy to incorporate the faith dimension into our peer responding. We always risk coming across as preaching or as a "holy roller." This part of the session is an opportunity to practice introducing the faith dimension through storytelling and faith sharing.

Using the same triads as before, role-play one or more of the suggested role-play scenarios, with the peer responders attempting to introduce into the dialog one of the faith dimensions they discovered in the previous Bible exercise.

Suggested Role-Play Scenarios

- Someone is upset and depressed over a broken relationship.
- Someone is depressed over the death of a loved one.
- Someone thinks he or she is too terrible for anyone to love.
- Someone feels that her or his life is so screwed up that it will never get better.

After the role-plays, ask the group how difficult it is to bring in the faith message when responding to a peer in crisis. Remind the group that this skill will become easier with practice.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Tell the participants to pause for a moment and quiet their heart and mind. Offer a prayer thanking God for bringing this group together in order to respond more effectively and compassionately to those who are hurting. Ask God for the conviction to do what is right and the compassion to reach out to others.

Then direct the participants to establish a journal section in their three-ring binder and to write in it any personal insights and strong feelings they may have at this time. Explain that they should feel free to record, at any time, insights or meaningful feelings that come to mind.

Announcements and Departure

Call for a volunteer to lead the opening prayer at the next session. Direct the volunteer to prepare an opening prayer that follows this model: Begin the prayer by calling the participants to a moment of quiet to acknowledge God's presence. Then pray briefly for God's blessings on the group as they face the challenges of learning to communicate well.

Close the session with any necessary announcements and then dismiss the group.

Additional Resources

- Calderone-Stewart, Lisa-Marie. *Lights for the World: Training Youth Leaders for Peer Ministry*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995.
- Reed, Sharon, ed. *Access Guide to Youth Ministry: Pastoral Care*. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993. See chapter 11.
- Reynolds, Brian. *A Chance to Serve*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1983.
- Vaughan, Richard P. *Basic Skills for Christian Counselors: An Introduction for Pastoral Ministers*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987.

The Peer Responder

Fill in the parts of the figure below with the qualities of an ideal peer responder.



Qualities of a Peer Responder

Who Is a Peer Responder?

A peer responder is a person who cares about other people and who is willing to listen to another's thoughts, feelings, and concerns. With training in communication, decision making, and referral, peer responders promote personal growth, problem solving, and decision making through helping relationships.

Peer responders do:

- express trust, openness, comfort, and empathy
- accept people as they are
- listen, clarify, and help people see alternatives
- give support and encouragement to take positive action
- affirm people without being phony
- respect confidentiality, when appropriate
- realize that not all problems can be solved and not all people want to be helped
- work with peers who have typical "growing up" problems
- refer troubled peers to a professional counselor, community agency, campus minister, or youth minister

Peer responders do not:

- dominate, preach, tell people what to do
- judge people and try to change them
- give advice or offer solutions
- do for a person what he or she should do independently
- put people down
- gossip about what was said in working with another person
- expect all problems to be resolved quickly and easily
- work with seriously disturbed people
- attempt to provide service beyond what they are qualified to provide

