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## The Content of Peer Helping Program

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### Abstract

With the study, which is a collection of the overall literature, the aim is to explain the concept of peer helping and its content. It is also our aim to enlighten people who are interested in the topic about where and how peer helping programs might be used. Peer helping concept consists of the idea that peers advise each other spontaneously and while doing this, active listening, problem solving skills, mental health and human development knowledge are naturally used. Peer helping is a system of counseling in which peers who are at the same age and status might help each other (Birol, 2005). The study aims to provide sufficient knowledge for the ones who are in the arena about what and how to establish a qualified peer helping program and of its principles. Additionally, how to choose peer helpers and the methods are partly discussed. It is known that the election of peer helpers has various applications. One way is applying for it voluntarily (Baginsky, 2004), second is being a nominee by others (Cartwright 2005), third is choosing a selective course (Myrick ve Folk:1991), fourth is interviews (Birol;2005) or applying some tests. The interview method has its own standards and also in the study the characteristics of peer helpers are examined as they have to be qualified and able to conduct the counseling sessions in an appropriate way. The study also mentions about the aim of peer helping. It presents us a brief information about the relation between peer helping and preventional guidance. Peer helping is a useful method for it is used in various fields and it facilitates people who work in the arena to reach many individuals at schools or other educational institutions.

**Keywords:** Peer Helping, Peer Helping Programs, Preventional Guidance

## Introduction

Peer helping derives from the idea that peers spontaneously grant their opinions about what should be done when their friend is in need (Cowie, 2000). It is the counseling of the people who are at the same age and status, and who own the same knowledge. It could also be stated that while peer counseling, active listening, problem solving, human development and mental health knowledge are utilized. Peer helping is both a philosophy and a method. It has been used in various situations and found to be very beneficial since the late 1960s (Brown, 1974; Huolston & Smith, 2009, Salovey, 1996; Turner, 1999). It is also mentioned that peer helping is supposed to be a bridge in the arena (Dorosin, D., D'andrea, V. & Jacks, R, 1996). In the literature, various terms or jargon refer to peer helping. These are peer helper, peer counselor, peer tutor, peer facilitator, peer support worker, peer assistant and peer trainer. Aladag (2007) defines peer helping as 'the role of the peers during the lifetime development' since children appeal to their friends for their problems or when in need (Geldard & Patton, 2007). Peer helping could be more beneficial and effective when peers are more cooperative, care each other more, lend assistance as quickly as possible, and support moral values as well. It could be in vain if peer helping obtains a hierarchical structure in mutual relations (Cowie and Sharp, 1996).

Another definition for peer helping comes from Baginsky (2004) and Rider (2000). According to Baginsky (2004), peer helping is an aid with positive effects to self-esteem when children face difficulties and when they endeavor to solve their problems. In order to increase to find the solutions to the problems the individuals face in a secure and satisfactory ways, the applications in the arena are improved especially in Canada and America at the beginning of 1970s. In Europe, it was mostly applied in educational arena in the middle of 1980s. Afterwards it expanded all over the World (Cartwright, 2005).

Peer helping programs are appealing to those in the international arena, who are willing to use the knowledge and the skills the peers obtain (Houlston, C., Smith, P., & Jessel, J, 2009; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Although the effect of peer helping programs increases, the lack of knowledge and the prejudices of the parents and the professionals lead misjudgements (Hatcher, 1995). Some believe that mental health services should be provided only by professionals (Kurpius, 2002). Since many people need support in mental health, peer helping programs might be really supportive and useful in traditional mental health services (Varenhorst, 1974). Moreover, the peer helping program facilitates the decrease of the problems for people in obtaining the services which are provided by mental health practices.

## Discussion

Young people naturally are highly supportive to each other. Listening to each other, peers decrease their stress and the pain they own and they share similar feelings. However, in most of the cases peers lack true knowledge and right methods about supporting the ones who suffer from mental health problems. With the help of the

peer help program, young people are acknowledged about the subject (Turner, 1999). As a result, students who are in need of peer support might immediately get assistance. Peer problems might be solved without getting bigger. Misleading the students might be prevented. On this bases, peer helping might provide a functional use in order to prevent problems (Hatcher, S., Walsh, L., Reynolds, M., Sullivan, J., 1995). Peer helping is thought to be beneficial in three ways. First, it helps solve the problems before they become complicated. Second, it provides support and information in the cases with the help of the peer counselor and the last is its assistance in supporting the students in crisis and following them (Rosenroll & Dey, 1990).

How peer helping program ought to be conducted is a matter of mutual agreement, sharing the responsibilities and respect which constitute the basic principles of the system (Mead, S., Hilton, D. & Curtis, L., 2008). Peers advise each other before the puberty and they are able to allocate time to each other more than the professionals could do. Peers are more enthusiastic, responsive and empathetic as they lead similar lives and experiences. The point of the view of the peers facilitates a contented atmosphere for the client (Hatcher, 1995). The findings of the studies Show that peers are more preferred to teachers when counseling is taken into consideration (Erhard, 1999).

Peer helper is the person who has learned how to practically aid the individual who has a social or a personal problem and who has been trained about communicative skills. in other words, the peer helper is a person who values the others and dedicate his/her time to listen to the problems of the individuals (Sturkie & Gibson, 1989). It has to be taken into consideration that while peer helping, there are basic principles to be followed. Sturkie and Gibson (1992) states that the principles are as follows: Do not advise, do not judge, Be empathetic, not to take any responsibilities for the problems of the individuals, to focus on 'Now and Here', not to dispute orally or non-orally, comprehending the embedded meanings while listening, being affectionate and sincere, prioritise the feelings, preserving the privacy and being an important member of the care web. Peer helping program might be applied to all from the young to the old and the adolescent (Cowie, 1999). The role of the peer helper is not to solve the problem of the individual on behalf of him/her but to help them find the appropriate solution fort he individuals. Peer helpers do not advise the clients as 'you should do' or 'you should not do'. They do not comment on the situation or define the problem (Salovey, 1996). The studies show that females are more enthusiastic about peer helping than males (Baginsky, 2004: 6). It has been found that with the participation of the students in the peer helping system, counseling services at schools are said to be more effective (Hurst, 2001). It can also be stated that peer helping has positive effects on education process. However, because of its misuse in practise, negative consequences might be occasionally seen (Baginsky, 2004). At the same time, peer helping programs facilitate peer helpers to be a role-model for their peers (Hurst, 2001). While young people are working for their friends, they eventually

develop socially and learn academically. So the potentials of young people are improved during the program (Cartwright, 2005).

Peer helping programs has its start when there is a need and when the need is noticed. Also, the individuals should be eager to solve the problem (Turner, 1999). The first thing to do is having a need analysis. There are three reasons for the need analysis. Comprehending the problem is the first reason. It consists of reaching the appropriate sources and understanding the possible difficulties during the process. Including the others such as teachers, families, and the people who are in the peer support service is the second reason. The third one is supporting the students (Cowie, 2000: 49-64).

After having need analysis, the priority is to get the support of the others. The most important of all is to obtain the administrative support. Teachers and the school staff support has no less importance than the others. Another step is that students should be aware of the program in order to run the process in a healthy way. The program might be announced with the presentations or bulletins. The student factor is a salient factor in the acceptance of the program. Additionally, families should be informed about the program and its content (Myrick & Folk, 1991: 10).

In peer helping, the relationship between the peer helper and the client should be on the honesty policy. in order to succeed a healthy relation between the peer helper and the client there should be role definitions and trust before the start. Additionally, both sides should be aware of the boundaries they have (Sturkie & Gibson, 1992: 17). Peer helping programs have three- stage-standards.

The most important part in peer helping program is the election of the people who are going to be included in the program. The people who are going to be the participants of the peer program should not be defined. in some programs, while each applicants are being accepted, the others are choosen after a selection. Schools use an official form for the elections (Cowie & Sharp, 1996: 44). Peer helpers are elected in various forms at schools. It might be both voluntarily (Baginsky, 2004; Cowie, H., Naylor P., Talamelli, L., Chauhan, P., & Smith, P., 2002: 454) and the participants might be nominated by others (Cartwright, 2005) or having the course as credited (Kurpius, 2002), or selective (Myrick & Folk; 1991: 6). The nominees should be sensitive about suggestions and being organized. So, instead of using the tests in order to choose the peer helpers, it is also suggested to hold interviews and the nominees should be evaluated after the training sessions (Giddan & Austin, 1982: 13). Peer helpers might also be selected by the suggestions of the peers and the school staff, advertisements which seek fort he volenteers, using tests or holding interviews or by direct applications (Albayrak- Kaymak, D., 1998).

The interview is generally held after the nominee has applied officially. There are some criteria to be taken into consideration for the elections of the peer helpers. The nominee is voted by a student who has participated in a project, a teacher and the school staff. The desicion of the peer helper nominee whether s/he is ready for working as a peer helper is discussed by the selection commitee (Kurpius, 2002). Peer

helpers are not chosen only from the good and the successful students. The studies show that in many schools the peer helpers consist mostly of the female students. The training in peer helping program should be appropriate for the problems to be solved. While practising, a good observation should be done and an interactive environment should be settled among all the members of the school (Baginsky, 2004). But before this, the ones who have good communicative skills, listening ability and the problem-solving skill should be elected as a peer helper (Cowie, 2000: 49).

The selection and the training of the peer helpers are very important. Peer helpers are generally trained on the basis of the need-inclined, goal-targeted and applied training. The peer support programs might be formal or informal. Peer helpers should be active listeners, have communicative and problem-solving skills as well as having a skill for solving social and emotional difficulties of the individual. S/he should be empathetic and supportive voluntarily when in need (Cowie, H., Naylor P., Talamelli, L., Chauhan, P., & Smith, P., 2002). Besides the peer helper ought not to have a similar problem which is related to the chosen subject (Turner, 1999).

The target group of the peer counseling is really comprehensive. Peer helping programs might be used for all age groups (Myrick, R., Highland, W. & Sabella, R, 1995) and for all their needs (Scott & Warner, 1974: 229). However, peer helping program is not recommended for the age groups which are smaller than the kindergarden students (Myrick & Folk, 1991: 9).

Among the student guidance services, peer helping programs have an increasingly salient role. Peer helping programs might be applied to career counseling and student activities (Giddan & Austin, 1982: 1). Peer helping might be used in the intervention of the crisis using telephones (Kalafat & Schulman, 1982), career counseling (Reardon, R., Minor, C., & Burkhart, M., 1982), academic counseling (Bonar, 1982), helping those who are addicted to drugs (Bassin, 1982; De Voults & Atienza: 1991), and women rights (Tyler, 1982). It is also used in coping with the solitude, problems caused by families (Turner, 1995) providing aid for students from different cultures (Frisz, 1999: 515), and for children from divorced parents (Sprinthall, N. & Hall, J., 1992).

In addition to these, peer helping programs might be used as a source in order to increase the success and improve oneself on social, emotional and health issues (Cartwright, 2005; Rider, 2000; Scott & Warner, 1974). Generally speaking it might be true to state that peer helping system is used for a better quality life (Cowie & Hutson, 2005). It also supports the personal and social development of the individuals (Hurst; 2001). Peer helping training takes place in every stage of the educational institutions using in general aid programs, preventive medicine, personal aid groups and well-being of individuals (Salovey, 1996). It is widely used in medicine (Brunier, G. & Graydon J., Rothman, B. Charline S. 2002), preventing AIDS (Wong & Pereira, 1996), giving up smoking (Campell, R., Starkey, F., Holliday J., Auder S. & Bloor M., 2008; Malchodi, C., Oncken C., Dormelas, E., Caramanica, L., Gregonis, E., & Curry, S.,

2003; Szilagyi, 2002), treating eating disorders and drug addiction (Zeilasko, J., Paulson, P., Nwankwo, R., Stewart, G. & Hoppe, K., 1995). Peer helping is becoming a popular system in secondary education against bullying (Boulton, 2005; Cowie & Hutson, 2005; Hurst, 2001; Houlston & Smith, 2009).

In peer helping programs it is mostly observed that there are positive effects of the application of the program on the health of the young people who are included in such programs. These are self-esteem, self-efficacy and the locus of control (Turner, 1999). It also has applications in problems such as committing suicide, self-esteem, child abuse, family problems, coping with deaths and losses, eating disorders, school problems, bullying and adolescent pregnancy (Sturkie & Gibson, 1992: 42).

At the schools which have peer helping programs, 87% of the students have reported that they are content of the peer helping services. The results illustrate that peer helping programs might be beneficial and acceptable. In the same study, the students have reported that they felt relieved when they had peer help when in need. According to these students, there are great similarities between peer helping and getting advice from friends (Cowie, H., Naylor P., Talamelli, L., Chauhan, P., & Smith, P., 2002).

Turner (1995) states that peer help plays a salient role and is a bridge in prevention. Using peer helping programs means reaching more and more students (Albayrak-Kaymak, 2008; Birol, 2011; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). Peer helping is an appropriate strategy for the preventional training. It might be used in various projects and in different roles. These projects could be directly about the school curriculum or academic topics. Also, preventional studies such as alcohol and drug addiction, homelessness, environmental pollution, risky situations and abnormal families might be included in these topics (Myrick & Folk, 1991: 22-23).

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