



FAIRCARE

Inclusion & Self-determination

MODULE 2.1

Peer-Approach and Counselling
Foundations, Attitudes, and Democratic
Significance



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A peer is a person with **relevant shared experience**. What matters is not identity, but a level of shared experience that facilitates understanding, trust, and orientation.

shared situation

lived experience

on equal footing

Definition of "Peer"





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Not automatically the same for peers:

- Diagnosis
- Opinion
- Biography

But often similar enough to:

- Understanding barriers more quickly
- Conveying hope in a credible way
- Sharing practical strategies

Definition of “Peer”





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Principles in peer relationships:

practical knowledge

encounter on equal footing

self-determination

empowerment

solidarity & volunteering

Principles of the peer approach



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Principles of the peer approach

Principles in peer relationships:

Knowledge isn't just academic

Personal experience is not regarded as an 'anecdote', but as a source of knowledge in its own right.

The aim is to enable action

Peer support does not aim to make people conform, but rather to empower them in decision-making, participation and self-advocacy.

A relationship without being patronised

Support is provided in a spirit of solidarity, on a voluntary basis and with as little hierarchy as possible.



Bildquelle: KI generiert. 2026. Dr. Julia Fischer

Dr.in Julia Fischer | Lisa Risch



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**Principles of the peer
approach**

**Peer counselling shifts the focus from
deficits to
resources and opportunities for influence.**

The aim is to enable action

Peer support does not aim to make people conform, but rather to empower them in

decision-making, participation and self-advocacy.

**A relationship without being
patronised**

Support is provided in a spirit of solidarity, on a voluntary basis and with as little hierarchy as possible.

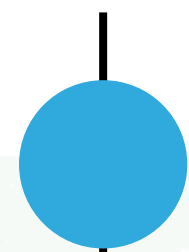


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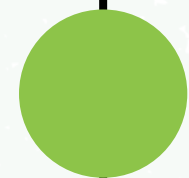
Historical background

From the welfare model to self-determination and rights



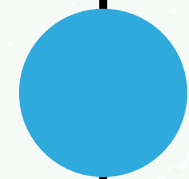
**1960s/
1970s**

Civil rights, feminist and self-help movements criticise exclusion and the denial of autonomy.



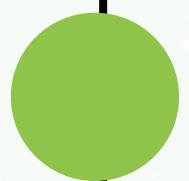
early 70s

The Independent Living Movement and the first "Centres for Independent Living" in the USA reinforce the motto: taking control of one's own life.



**1980s/
1990s**

Peer counselling is becoming a core practice in centres for independent living and in self-advocacy organisations.



today

The approach is being applied to other fields: psychiatry, addiction, youth work, education and community work.



<https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/independentliving-history/>

Historical background

HISTORICALLY, THE PEER
APPROACH HAS NOT BEEN
A NEUTRAL CONCEPT OF
SERVICE, BUT
RATHER PART OF
EMANCIPATORY
MOVEMENTS.

rights

"Centres
e motto:

n centres

and



<https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/independentliving-history/>



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The peer attitude

Don't tell people what's right,
but create space for them to make their own decisions.

Acknowledgement of experience

Personal experience may be shared, but it should be considered carefully and not treated as a universal standard.

Non-paternalism

Peer support doesn't ask, "What's the right solution?", but rather, "What do you need to be able to decide for yourself?"

Reflection, partiality, hope

A positive peer attitude reflects power, promotes participation and instils hope without downplaying problems.





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Principles of peer counselling

Peer counselling is more than just an informal conversation.

Self-Determination

The person seeking advice remains in charge of their own life.

Resource-based approach

The focus is on skills, networks, experience and opportunities.

Voluntary participation & trust

Without voluntary participation, confidentiality and respect, counselling loses its foundation.

Transparency & limitations

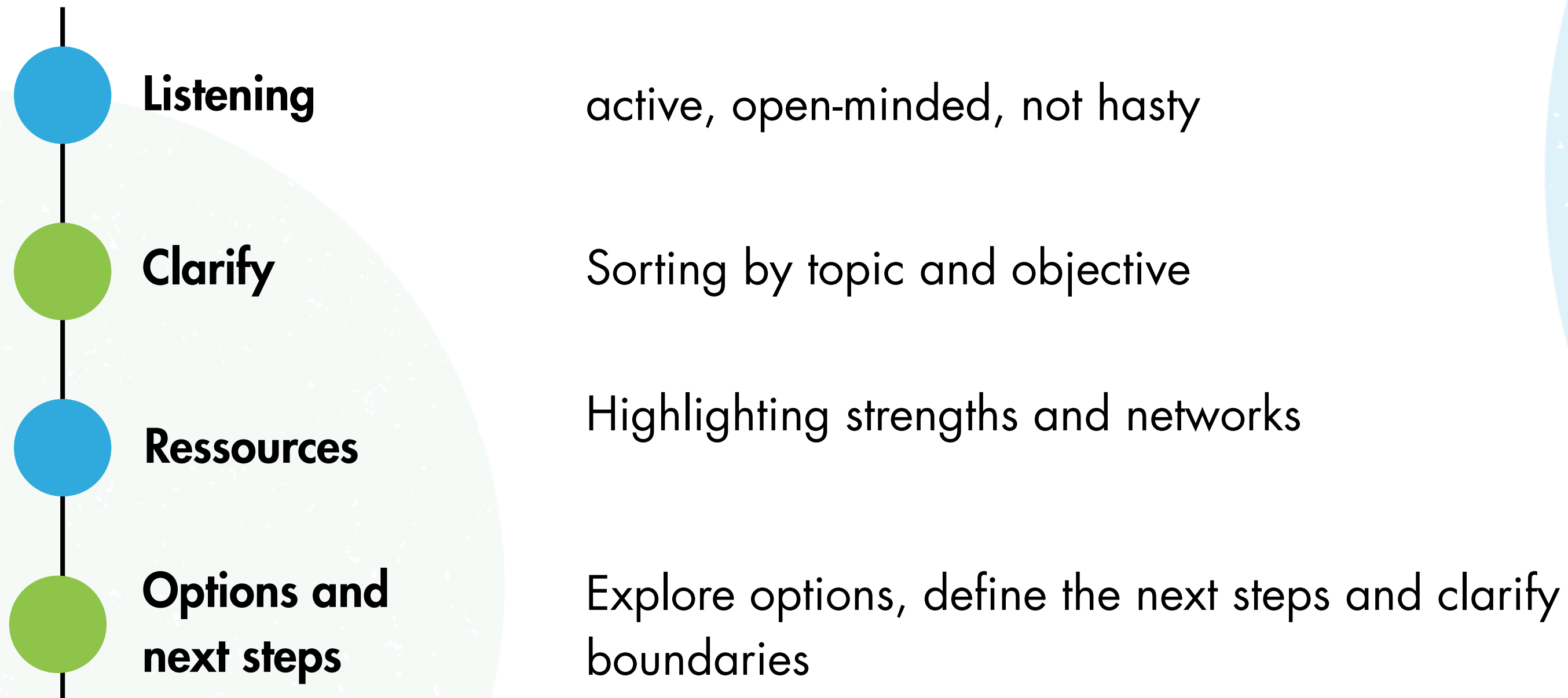
Peer counselling does not automatically replace therapy, legal assistance or the granting of benefits.



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Methodological principles

From listening to the next self-determined action





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Methodological principles

Principles in peer relationships:

Methods

active listening, asking open-ended questions, structuring the conversation, resource-oriented counselling, controlled self-disclosure

Information

Where necessary: information on rights (not legal advice!), support services, barriers, self-advocacy and access

Awareness of boundaries

Referral in the event of an acute crisis, a specialist legal issue, or if the peer support role is no longer sufficient

! Personal experience is used as a resource – not as a template for the other person.



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The peer approach in a democratic context

Not just a method – but also a contribution to participation, representation and the critique of power

Democratising knowledge

Peer work challenges the notion that only formal experts possess legitimate knowledge.

Critique of power

This approach responds to paternalistic institutions and reduces hierarchies in support, advice and advocacy.

Encourages participation

People are not merely addressed; they become active participants in shaping their own living conditions.

Visibility of marginalised perspectives

Peer-led practice brings to bear experiences from institutions, politics and the wider public that are often otherwise overlooked.



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1

Peer support means using shared experiences professionally and thoughtfully as a resource.

2

Peer counselling helps people find their way and makes them more self-reliant, without being patronised.

3

This approach is significant for democracy because it redistributes voice, knowledge and participation.

Three takeaways

