



The Role and Benefit of Peer Coaches

Peer coaching is based on the premise that young people are more likely to develop new skills and capacities if peers they like and trust advocate change. The power of peer counseling for postsecondary and career exploration, preparation, and success has been demonstrated across the nation through programs such as [Strive for Success \(S4S\)](#) in New York City. Drawing from best practices for college retention, S4S has implemented a peer-to-peer model to help students transition into and persist through the first year of college. “Student Success Leaders,” who have successfully completed one year of college, are trained to work with campus- and community-based organization staff to address obstacles to student persistence through college. S4S helps first-year college students develop the skills to:

1. Integrate onto campus
2. Use campus resources
3. Develop relationships with advisors and other key department staff on campus

Peer coaches can have similar success in high school equivalency (HSE) and other youth-serving programs. These programs, such as East Side House and Cypress Hills (co-developers of this tool), often use peer coaches to plan and assist with program events, deliver workshops on various topics (e.g., professional skills development, financial aid, résumé writing), help advise students in postsecondary and career exploration, and track student progress.

Similarities between peer coaches and students, such as closeness in age or participation in the same program (some peer coaches are program alumni), often help to build trust, communication, and mutual identification for a stronger working relationship. These shared goals and circumstances often make students more open to learning new information, knowledge, and skills from peer coaches than from other program staff.

Extensive research has shown definitively that peer programs – with a peer-led or peer-assisted component – can have statistically significant effects on students’ attitudes, norms, knowledge, behaviors, and health and achievement outcomes. Peer coaching has been shown to contribute to programs working to improve youth’s success, well-being, and even health. The positive impacts of peer coaching in an HSE program include:

- Improved school attendance
- Better grades and higher graduation rates
- Improved employment rates

Most coaching experts agree that effective peer coaching combines mentoring, guidance, reflection, problem solving, and team building.



The Special Role Peer Coaches Play in Youth-Serving Programs

Peer coaches play a unique role in HSE/youth-serving programs because they have some of the life experience and leadership skills of typical program staff, while also sharing some of the experiences and perspectives of their students.

The next section of this toolkit provides tools for where to start if you want to recruit peer coaches for your program: figuring out and documenting peer coaches' key role and responsibilities in your program and creating tools for the hiring process. The tools in the next section of this toolkit include sample peer coach and supervisor job descriptions, a job application template, an interview protocol, a job contract, and tips for supervising hired peer coaches.