

Interviewing Peers: Sample Questions and Possible Responses

Motivation

1. How did you decide to apply for a job as a peer advocate?
2. What brought you to this agency?
3. What are your goals?

Strong Responses:

Expresses readiness to “give back” and provide help to other HIV-positive people. Interviewee has received assistance from others in the past and would like to be able to do this with others. This may include positive experiences as a client of the organization.

Interviewee has had some experience in human services work and would now like to focus on HIV/AIDS work. This may include past volunteer experience.

HIV has changed the interviewee’s life and he/she feels committed to work within the field.

Red Flags:

Interviewee is very newly “out” with HIV status and attended one organization event before deciding to apply for this job. He/she may be very excited but clearly new in process of discussing HIV status and meeting others who are also HIV-positive.

Describes the primary reason for seeking employment as financial stress.

Seems overly identified with their own “story” or experience in working with others with HIV – may not leave space for working with clients who have very different experiences and needs.

Capacity to Help:

4. What do you think causes people to change?
5. What has helped you to make changes?
6. What do you think prevents people from receiving help?
7. What would you do if you felt concerned about a client’s safety? (e.g. suicidal feelings)

Strong Responses:

Expresses that people seem to change when they are ready to change, it cannot be forced. Some kinds of assistance may be more helpful than others in helping the process along. It’s important to avoid judging people who are not ready to change and be consistent in offering support.

Ability to reflect on their own experience and what was helpful in their movement toward positive change. Able to see how they might offer similar assistance. Shares some



understanding of obstacles to change in people's lives – substance use, domestic violence, family issues, poverty.

Expresses that if a client were in a dangerous situation they would immediately ask for management assistance and guidance to reduce likelihood of harm to client.

Red Flags:

Overly identified with their own experience in a belief that they know exactly how to get people to change based on what worked for them.

States that “a relationship with God” is the true answer to making change happen.

Does not realize that he/she may need supervisory help in assessing a potentially dangerous situation and believes that he/she can solve it independently.

Relationship to HIV:

- 8. What is your experience with HIV/AIDS?
- 9. How have you learned to live with HIV? (If + status disclosed)

Strong Responses:

Expresses comfort in discussing their own HIV status and how it has impacted their life, both in negative and positive ways.

Has insight into what others may be going through in living with HIV/AIDS and that there is a range of experiences, including around comfort levels with disclosure.

Red Flags:

Shares personal strategies for living with HIV and belief that if others follow the exact same path, they too will find health and personal well-being.

Shares strong discomfort toward discussing their status and relationship to HIV/AIDS.

Relationship to Alcohol or Drugs:

- 10. What is your stance towards alcohol? Drugs?
- 11. How would you feel about working with clients who are using drugs?
- 12. How would you feel if you had a client who relapses frequently?

Strong Responses:

Expresses an understanding of harm reduction principles and “meeting people where they are at”.

Acknowledges the difficulties of addiction – this may or may not include their own experience – and that it can be a lifelong struggle.



Shares that they may want to consult with someone who is more experienced in this area to provide best possible assistance.

Red Flags:

Expresses preference to not work with clients who are substance users, or is hesitant in working with them. May seem judgmental in answers or anxious about this population.

Only able to see an “all or nothing” answer to addiction and sobriety rather than harm reduction approach. May mention “faith in God” as answer to addiction.

Self-Awareness:

- 13. How would you describe your strengths? Weaknesses?
- 14. How would your best friend (or other) describe you?
- 15. Describe a situation where you were involved in a conflict and how you handled it.

Strong Answers:

Able to discuss this in a balanced manner, sharing both their own strengths that are helpful in peer work, and challenges where he/she may need support. Acknowledges that he/she has more to learn.

Able to share conflict experiences that show ability to manage conflict rather than being conflict avoidant. Realizes at times that they may need to consult with supervisor if conflict arises.

Red Flags:

Not able to share any areas that could be considered a weakness. Overly confident in existing knowledge and ability to solve myriad of challenging client situations.

Shares example of dealing with conflict that actually may not have been healthiest route to resolution.

Does not share any understanding of how dealing directly with conflict may be beneficial personally and professionally.

Stress Management:

- 16. What do you do to handle stress?
- 17. How do you take care of yourself?

Strong Responses:

Interviewee able to share some strategies that they actively use to alleviate stress (activities with friends, exercise, massage, movies, etc.).

Has an understanding that peer work can be quite stressful.



Red Flags:

Does not have an understanding of self-care and how it might be helpful in successful and sustainable peer work.

No awareness of how working with others with HIV/AIDS may be stressful for them personally.

Cultural Competency:

18. How would you feel about working with co-workers and peers of other cultures?
19. How would you feel about sharing your cultural background with a client?
Co-worker?
20. How would you work with someone who did not share your beliefs?

Strong Responses:

Understands that clients come from a range of cultural backgrounds and life experiences and that this is a positive aspect of the work. Has had some exposure and experience with a range of community members and ethnicities. Expresses interest in learning more about particular groups impacted within the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Understands that he/she may have more to learn about particular groups, but is open and eager to do so.

Red Flags:

Anxious or uncertain of comfort level with particular groups (ex. Formerly incarcerated, transgender, gay, substance users).

Expresses belief that “everyone is the same” and no need to learn about differences. Believes that they are completely culturally competent and would not require any ongoing education in this area.

Preferred Supervision Style:

21. How do you prefer to be supervised?
22. How will I know if you are worried or discontent about your work?
23. How do you like to receive feedback? Give feedback?
24. How would you describe your approach to organization? How would you organize paperwork?

Strong Responses:

Values supervision as a tool that is helpful in personal and professional growth and ability to excel as a peer. Able to reflect on helpful supervision techniques and styles. Able to see supervisor as a sounding board and support person, rather than simply an authority figure. Sees the value of feedback in process of professional development. Acknowledges that he/she may need supervision in client work that is new to them or presents difficult choices.

Shows some understanding of organizational skills and importance in peer work, including ability to complete paperwork. Has basic computer and report writing skills.



Red Flags:

Does not see two-way nature of supervision and potential benefit, but describes it more as a “I do what my boss says” relationship. This may indicate a lack of trust for supervisory staff and may lead to problems later.

Working with Others:

25. How best do you work—Alone, with others or both?
26. What is your style with working in groups?

Strong Responses:

Expresses an ability to work well within a group and alone at times. Enjoys different experiences and personalities within group work. Expresses some understanding of teamwork and collaboration.

Red Flags:

Strongly prefers group or alone work rather than a blend of the two – expresses either anxiety about working alone or seeing themselves as someone who works best when left alone.

HIV Status:

27. How are you private about your status?
28. How are you public about your status?
29. How have you processed your feeling around living with HIV?

Strong Responses:

Shows an appropriate understanding of the need for privacy and personal safety in disclosing their HIV status, but also is comfortable in doing so in professional settings as a peer. Has an understanding that disclosure is very personal and everyone handles it differently for different reasons. Based on personal experience, shows an understanding of the complexity and both the benefits and risks of disclosure.

Red Flags:

Expresses discomfort in disclosing their own HIV status in the workplace or feels that everyone should be “out” with their status. May be newly “out” with their own status and overly excited to take a high profile place in the organization as an HIV-positive person without consideration of long-term consequences.

