

# Body&Soul

Peer Counselor's  
Handbook

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“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper  
and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”

3 John 1:2

# Introduction

Congratulations on your selection as a Peer Counselor! Your work will help members of your church improve their health by eating better.

## What Is Peer Counseling?

Peer Counseling offers one-on-one attention and support to those who have signed up to receive it. It has successfully helped members of African American churches take the first step toward good health by adding more fruits and vegetables to their diet.

In the training, you will learn four communication skills that will make it easier to talk with members of your church about eating more fruits and vegetables. These four skills are:

1. Asking open questions
2. Listening and Reflecting
3. Building motivation
4. Summarizing thoughts and plans

## Using the Peer Counselor’s Handbook

The Peer Counselor’s Handbook was designed to help you be an effective Peer Counselor. Use it with the training movie to learn and practice the communication skills

## This Handbook contains:

- Information about the four communication skills.
- All of the points made in the movie are also in your handbook. There is space for you to take notes.
- Exercises that will help you practice these communication, skills.
- Peer Counselor tools to help guide you through conversations with church members.
- Resources about the benefits of eating, more fruits and vegetables.
- Frequently asked questions about being a Peer Counselor.

### **Respecting the Privacy of Others**

Peer counseling is built on trust. Trust that the Peer Counselor is a safe person to talk to and that what is shared will remain private. Many of us are used to sharing the things we do, and the things we talk about, with family and friends. The talks your Peer Counselors have with church members must remain private except when information is shared that discloses a serious issue where outside help may be needed.

Peer counseling offers people a chance to talk freely and for some people this may allow them to share worries and pressure that you did not know they were facing. Someone may share that they don't eat fruits and vegetables anymore because they lost their job, or have too many bills as a result of a serious medical problem, or because they are depressed and not eating.

As a Peer Counselor you do not need to solve these problems but to use your peer counseling skills to obtain appropriate help:

- Use appropriate reflections about the problem (the loss of your job has left you without enough food for your family and you are worried about what to do; your loneliness is making it hard for you to eat even when you know you should)
- Ask permission to share, the disclosure with your Coordinator in order to have your Coordinator look for appropriate help (I'm really concerned and I'd like to talk to our Coordinator about this and see what help is available. Would that be all right with you?)

### **Tips for Using this Handbook**

- Look through this handbook before the training workshop. The more familiar you are with what peer counseling is, the more you will gain from the training.
- Use this handbook as a resource. It will guide you as you begin to serve as a Peer Counselor.

### **The Spirit of Peer Counseling**

- Peer Counselors use a style of communication that is open, supportive, and not judgmental.
- Peer Counselors help people create their own plans for change. They generally give no advice and don't push people into changes they are not ready to make.