

Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions

What is my role as a volunteer?

The role of the volunteer is to be a friend. Your friend has a mental health professional in their life and it is important for them to have a friend, role model and advocate. Through acceptance and encouragement the Compeer friend will increase their confidence and self-esteem. Becoming more independent in the community is a healthy outcome for the client's journey toward recovery. The volunteer should not accept the role of social worker, parent, chauffeur service, etc.— it is not healthy for either friend. Contact your Compeer coordinator if requests are made of you that you do not feel are part of your definition of a friendship.

How can I be most effective as a volunteer?

Be consistent and dependable. Your friend must learn to trust you. Try not to cancel dates or make promises you cannot keep. Make every effort to be on time for scheduled meetings or call well in advance if you are unable to make an appointment.

Keep in mind that your behavior is a role model for your friend. Exercise courtesy with your friend, especially if she/he uses inappropriate behaviors. It is important to preserve your friend's dignity through your politeness.

Is it wise to set goals for my Compeer relationship?

Discuss reasonable, achievable goals with your friend's mental health professional and Compeer volunteer coordinator at the start of the relationship. Try to make the achievement of these goals fun rather than work. It is also a good idea to re-evaluate these goals over the course of the match by discussing them with the therapist, your friend and Compeer coordinator periodically.

Whose responsibility is it to arrange meeting times and to maintain telephone contact?

It is the volunteer's responsibility to initiate meetings and telephone calls. Your friend may be inexperienced with initiating contact with others and will learn from your example. However, your friend may never be comfortable calling you. Be patient and realize this is part of your responsibility.

How do I make plans with my friend?

At your first meeting, discuss activities that you both enjoy or things you might like to try. Discuss details about how much you are willing to spend, any time restrictions you or your friend may have; what you each can afford to do; transportation, etc. It is much easier if you clarify these areas early in your relationship to avoid problems and miscommunication later on.

The Compeer commitment is at least four hours a month. We recommend you make every effort to see your friend regularly and consistently. Consider meeting every week during the first few months so that your friend can build trust in you and so that you both can build a friendship. This has been proven for volunteers to be more manageable on a weekly basis.

We also recommend that you avoid the temptation to overdo the time you spend with your friend. Keeping to a realistic and consistent time schedule, allows you to establish a bond of friendship as well as to have fun. Also, our friends' lives have been filled with

disappointment. If you had to cut back the time you previously were spent with your friend, he/she may be disappointed and feel rejected.

Handling the cost of activities

At no time is the Compeer relationship expected to be a financial hardship on anyone. We suggest that you discuss with your friend the types of activities that you both can or cannot afford. If money is a hardship for either person, we suggest you try free activities with an occasional planned “splurge” on an activity. It is acceptable to occasionally pay for a friend’s activity; however, we recommend whenever possible that the friend pays for his/her share of expenses.

Is it acceptable to give my friend gifts?

Loans or gifts of money to or from your friend are not acceptable. If your friend is experiencing financial troubles, call the Compeer staff and/or therapist.

How do I handle difficult requests by my friend or his/her family?

Feel free to say “no” to any and all unreasonable requests from your friend or his/her family. Also, if your friend’s family members ask to accompany you and your friend on outings, it is best to emphasize that the friendship is made up of just the two of you. Please feel free to contact Compeer staff or therapist, if problems arise that are difficult to resolve.

May I hire my friend and pay him/her?

Under most circumstances, hiring your friend to work for you or being hired by your friend or his/her family is not a good idea. If this possibility arises, it should be carefully discussed with the therapist and Compeer staff. However, your friend may welcome the opportunity to work on a project with you. It will make your friend feel important and needed. It is also more fun when you both work as a team in activities like preparing dinner together, washing the car, etc.

Do I need anyone’s approval for outings with my friend?

Depending on the age of your friend and his/her residence, you may very likely need to ask the permission of a parent or guardian, relative, house manager or floor nurse before departing with your friend. When you do so, be sure to indicate where you are going and when you will return. When special dress is needed for a particular activity, be sure to notify your friend and guardian in advance. Be sure to return your friend at the time you promised or call if you are delayed for any reason.

Are there any activities we should avoid?

We suggest you use good common sense before selecting an activity. Consider whether or not the activity might involve physical risk. Take every precaution for your friend’s safety. If in doubt, call your volunteer coordinator at Compeer to determine if an activity is okay.

Alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs should not be part of any outing. Alcohol interaction medications can be life-threatening and should not be taken. Alcohol should not be part of any outing or activity even if your friend is not on any medications.

Youth match outings and activities should not have alcohol present.

May I discuss my Compeer friend with my friends and family?

We hope that you will want to share with your friends the satisfaction you experience in your Compeer relationship. However, keep in mind that it is a violation of confidentiality to discuss your friend's personal problems, medications, diagnosis or family situation with others who have no need to know this information. Share the experience – please don't mention names or details.

Is it all right to include one of my own friends or family on my visits with my Compeer?

We suggest that you do not include any friends, family, etc. on your activities with your Compeer friend during the initial stages of your relationship. It will take time for the two of you to build a relationship. As the relationship matures and feels more comfortable, it is alright to include others in your activities with two precautions: do not introduce your friend as "my Compeer friend," introduce them by name as you would any other friend; also make sure that the occasional inclusion of a friend or family member during your visits does not interfere with your quality time together. You would not want your friend to feel neglected or uncomfortable.

Is it okay for me to hug my friend?

There are many cultures represented within our service area. Within these diverse cultures, ethnic backgrounds and religions there are traditions that define etiquette for interpersonal relationships. Some people may have experienced trauma and abuse. All of these factors frame the rituals of friendship. It is best to ask your friend if a hug would be acceptable to them. For some people, a hug shows friendship and encouragement. For others a simple touch may be upsetting or confusing.

Dating or sexual contact with a friend or a member of their family is prohibited in the Compeer program.

What should I do if I have a concern about my friend?

Contact the therapist and/or Compeer staff about any matter that concerns you and include the concern in your monthly report to the Volunteer Coordinator. Ignored problems tend to become bigger problems. Never assume the mental health professional or your friend is aware of the problem. Your perception of a situation may be just the impetus to bring positive results for your friend.

If you have serious concerns regarding the treatment of your friend, bring these concerns to your Volunteer Coordinator's attention before you share them with your friend. We will help to clarify the situation. There are two sides to every situation. It is also mandatory to report any cases of abusive punishment or neglect to Compeer.

What are my responsibilities as a Compeer Volunteer?

- Meet with your Compeer friend consistently, regularly and for a minimum of 4 hours a month.
- Send in monthly reports to Compeer.

- Keep in touch with the mental health professional and Compeer Coordinator, as needed.
- Contact Compeer staff immediately regarding problems or difficulty with the relationship.
- Participate in Compeer group events and activities
- Fill out the annual Compeer, Inc. survey to assist us in better serving volunteer and client needs.

You have made the awesome decision to inspire another human being through the priceless gift of friendship. By making this decision, you have participated in the Compeer process. Now it is time to enjoy your new friendship. Compeer staff is at your disposal – do not hesitate to contact us for assistance, questions or concerns.

Please don't be modest – share your successes with your Volunteer Coordinator. That is why we do what we do – for the successes, big and small. Thank you for choosing Compeer services to make a difference in someone's life through the power of friendship.