

# The College Years:

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How Students with Lived Experience  
Navigate Academics & Mental Health  
Management

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# Acknowledgements

The Learning & Working Center at Transitions RTC is a national effort that aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center.

Visit us at:

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# Mental Health in Higher Education

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- Roughly 1/3 of undergraduates have clinically significant symptoms of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety<sup>1</sup>
- Students with mental health conditions who attend college experience high dropout rates - one of the highest of any disability group.<sup>2</sup>
- Positive mental health is strongly correlated to academic success, retention, and ultimately vocational success, adult resiliency & Return on Investment.<sup>3</sup>





# The PASS Model

An Overview

## Peer Academic Supports for Success (PASS):

An empirically supported peer coach intervention to help students with MHC succeed academically



PHASE 1



PHASE 2



PHASE 3



PHASE 4



# Inspiration for PASS Model

- Qualitative interviews with faculty, ODS/Counseling Staff and students
- Two pre-existing college coaching models:
  1. Wright State University's Raiders on the Autism Spectrum Excelling (RASE) program for students on the Autism Spectrum
  2. Boston University's college coaching model for students with mental health conditions



# PASS Model: Core Competencies



STRUCTURE



TECHNOLOGY



EMOTIONAL AGILITY



ADVOCACY



RESILIENCY

# Making the model “hands on”

## Mental Health

- Best practices in college MH
- Myth-busting
- Practicing self-care
- Helping a student in distress

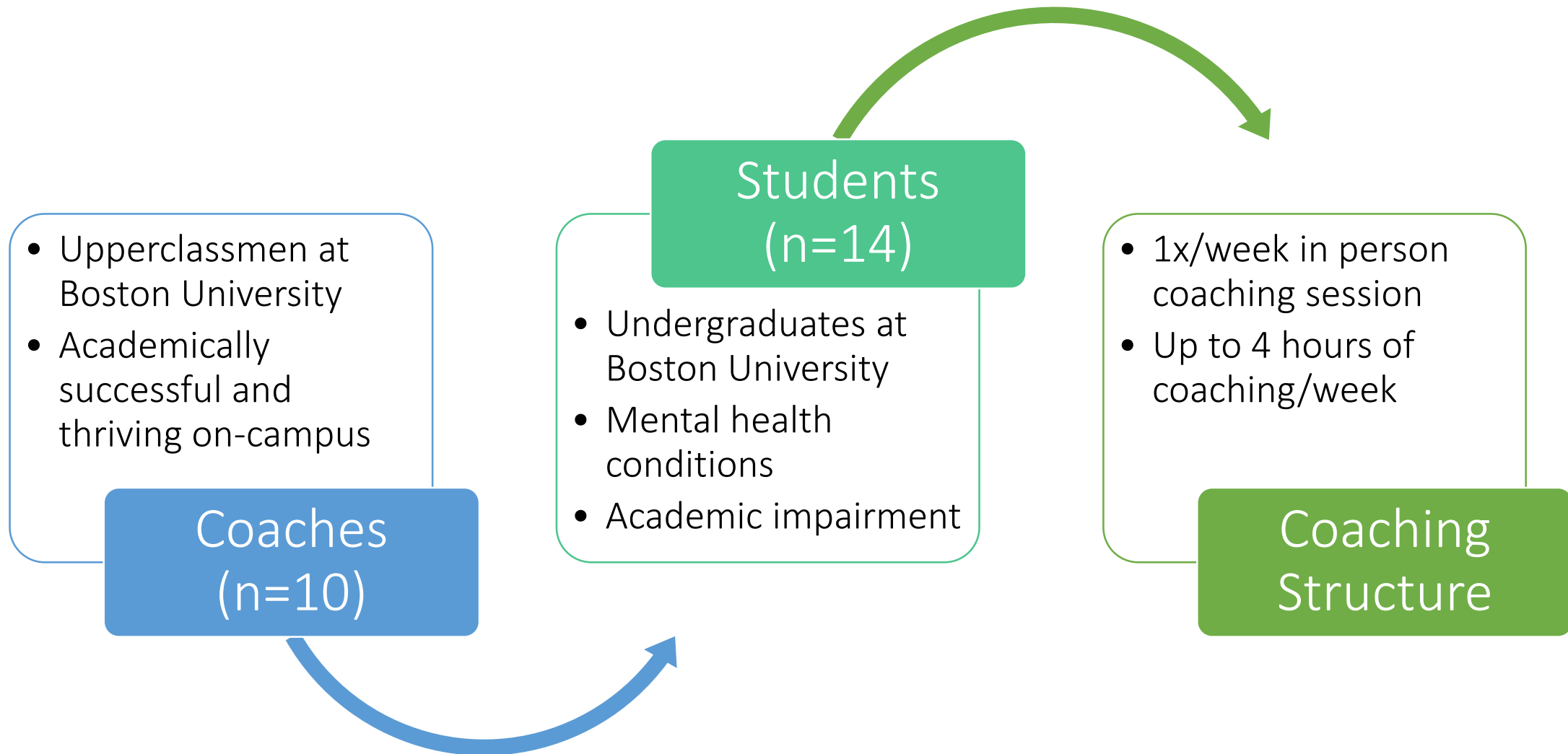
## Academic

- Coaching principles and ethics
- Building Support
- Setting goals and expectations
- Social Supports
- Prep for mid-terms





# Peer Coaching Structure





# Lessons from Feasibility Open Trial

Modifications to the PASS Intervention

# Data Sources

Peer Coach Supervision Notes

Monthly peer coach self-assessment

Student assessments of peer coaches

Student focus group

Peer coach focus groups



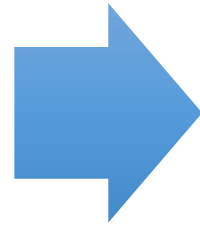
# Peer Coach/Supervisor Reflections

*“Coaches feeling stuck with students: Student is doing really well, what do they say or work on”*

*“I only used it [peer coach manual] during orientation and the first few weeks. After that, I never looked at it again.”*

# Making Manual Interactive!

Peer Coach  
Manual being  
under-utilized



3 ring binder  
with interactive  
coaching tools!

### Coaching Tool- Tapping Technology

There are *thousands* of useful apps that may assist students in areas of academics, wellness, and emotional agility. Several are listed below, but every day new apps are designed and available that are helpful.

Taking time with your student to explore and try apps that support their success at school is helpful. Going to the Google Store and Apple App Store and typing in *keywords related to the need* of the student will display many options. Take the time with your student to understand what apps they use and will be likely to use, so you can best help them choose useful technology. Many people download apps but never use them. If your student believes an app might be helpful to them, it is a good idea to use the apps together in your sessions. This has been shown to help students use the app more consistently.

#### Examples of Helpful Phone Apps by Topic

Academic	Wellness	Emotional Resilience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Color Note</li> <li>o Dragon</li> <li>o NaturallySpeaking</li> <li>o Evernote Google task</li> <li>o organizer</li> <li>o School Assistant</li> <li>o Mindjet</li> <li>o Copilot Systems</li> <li>o Alta Ipsum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Mindbody Bloom</li> <li>o Mywellness Owaves</li> <li>o Take a Break!</li> <li>o Happiness Wizard</li> <li>o DBSA Wellness</li> <li>o CALM</li> <li>o Relax Melodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o MeQuilibrium</li> <li>o Emotional</li> <li>o Resilience</li> <li>o CBT thought record</li> <li>o Pocket CBT</li> </ul>

### Coaching Tool - Reasonable Accommodations

Students who have mental health conditions may need support to do their best in school and work. The "American with Disabilities Act" (ADA) entitles students with disabilities, like mental health conditions, to get academic help through academic accommodations and other legal rights.

#### Starting a dialogue about reasonable accommodations:

- ✓ **Discuss** whether your student knows about accommodations
  - o If yes, ask if they have discussed accommodations with their professors or the Office of Disability Services
  - o If no, assist student to gain knowledge of reasonable accommodations
- ✓ If the student would like, **connect** them with the Office of Disability Services and/or their professors to discuss accommodations

#### Here is a list of reasonable accommodations to review with your student:

In the Classroom	Enrollment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Voice recorded lectures</li> <li>☐ Classmate as note-taker</li> <li>☐ Text &amp; syllabus given in advance</li> <li>☐ Class materials available on computer</li> <li>☐ Frequent feedback on classwork</li> <li>☐ Alternate formats for assignments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Reduced course load</li> <li>☐ First choice for signing up for classes to make a less stressful schedule</li> <li>☐ Incomplete given instead of failure if relapse occurs</li> <li>☐ Help with financial aid/registration forms</li> </ul>
Completing Assignments	During Exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Extended time to complete assignments without late penalties</li> <li>☐ Advance notice of assignments</li> <li>☐ Textbook available on tape</li> <li>☐ Assistive technology</li> <li>☐ Work in pairs on in-class assignments</li> <li>☐ Help with assignments during hospitalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Exams in alternate formats (written, oral, or electronic)</li> <li>☐ Extended time for test-taking</li> <li>☐ Exams given one-on-one</li> <li>☐ Breaks allowed throughout test</li> <li>☐ Testing in room with limited distractions</li> <li>☐ Allow exam to be taken in 2-3 sessions throughout the span of a few days</li> </ul>

### Coaching Tool - Building Emotional Agility

Emotional agility is a process that enables people to navigate life's ups and downs with self-acceptance, clear-sightedness, and an open mind. Emotional agility isn't about ignoring difficult emotions and thoughts. It's about facing those emotions and thoughts courageously and compassionately and moving past them to achieve one's goals and make changes.

Emotional agility is a key factor in students' lives and their success on campus. Emotional agility drives a student's relationships, classwork, health and engagement on campus. You can help students to build their capacity to acknowledge their feelings, observe them without judgment, and challenge negative thoughts.

- ☐ **Ask** in your coaching session, how they typically deal with stress and challenges.
- ☐ **Inquire** how they behave, how they feel, and what happens to them when under a lot of stress.

#### Strategies you can use to help build emotional agility:

- ☐ Share how you think, and feel to role model how to observe and face feelings and thoughts in a nonjudgmental way
- ☐ Reframe negative thoughts as barriers and encourage the student to challenge the thought by asking for evidence to back it up
- ☐ Encourage a student to observe their thoughts and emotions to see them for what they are—just thoughts, just emotions.

# Coaching Tools

# Peer Coach Reflections

*"It is hard to work on setting goals and spending face time with the student and working with them."*

*"I most worry...about what my role is in her academic life is still unsure"*

*"Not being able to get in touch with my student"*



# Setting Expectations

1. Students non-responsive to peer coaches
2. Lack of clarity about peer coach role for both students and peer coaches

Student-Peer Coach Agreement!



## Peer-Coach Student Agreement

- document to be reviewed and signed by both student and peer coach at their first coaching session
- establishes mutual expectations and commitment to the peer coaching relationship



Clarity on roles: student and peer coach



Communication expectations



Attendance commitment

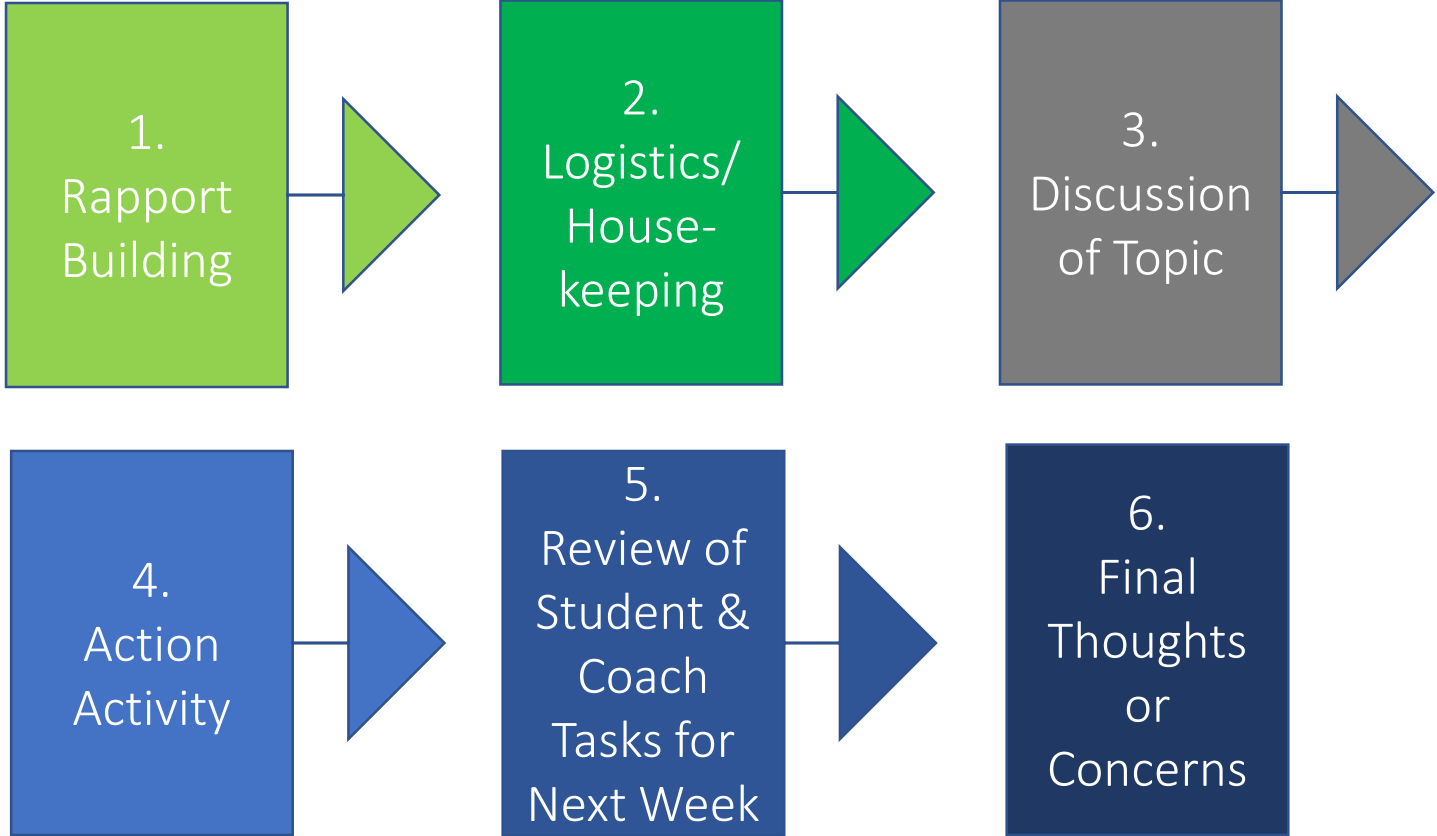
# Peer Coach Reflections

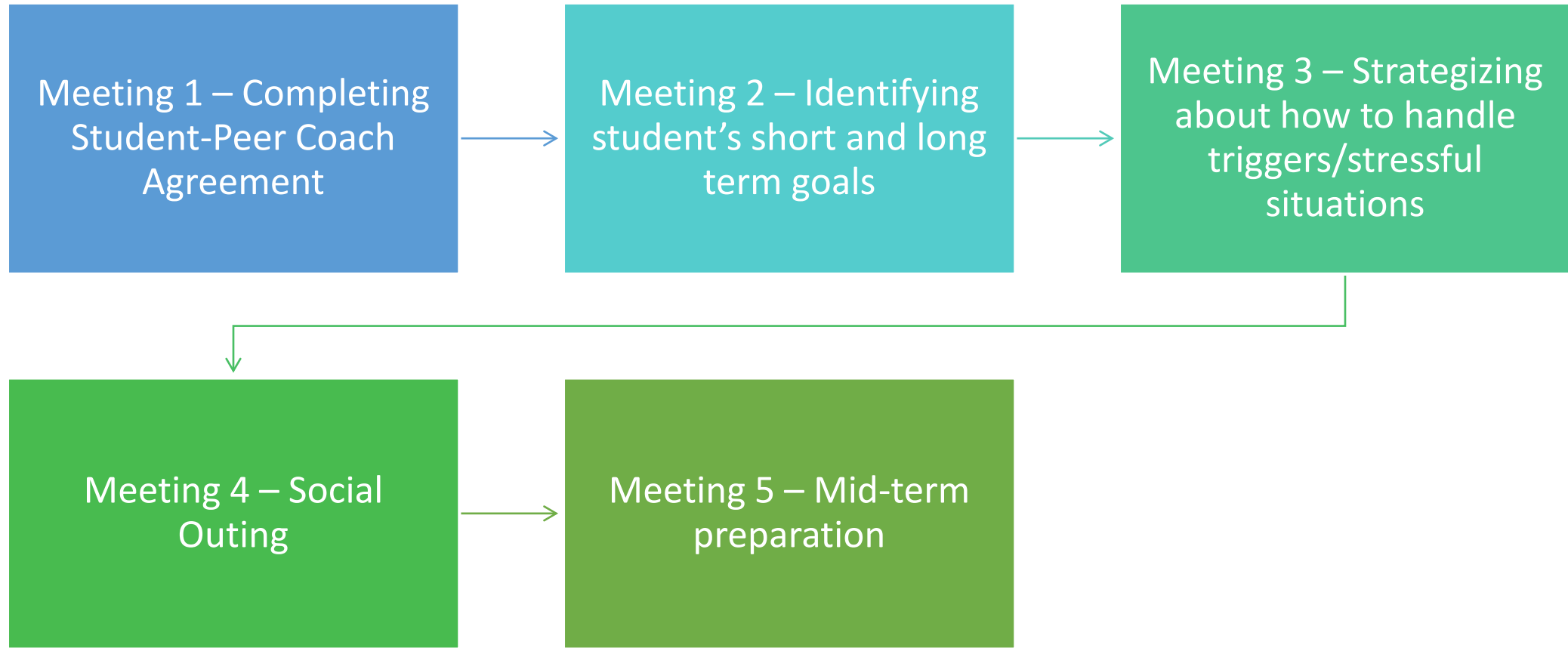
*"I most worry about the student not feeling as though my time with her is effective..."*

*"How to encourage students to guide the meetings more than having me set the agenda."*



# Meeting Agenda





# Template Agendas – Activities

# Peer Coach Reflections

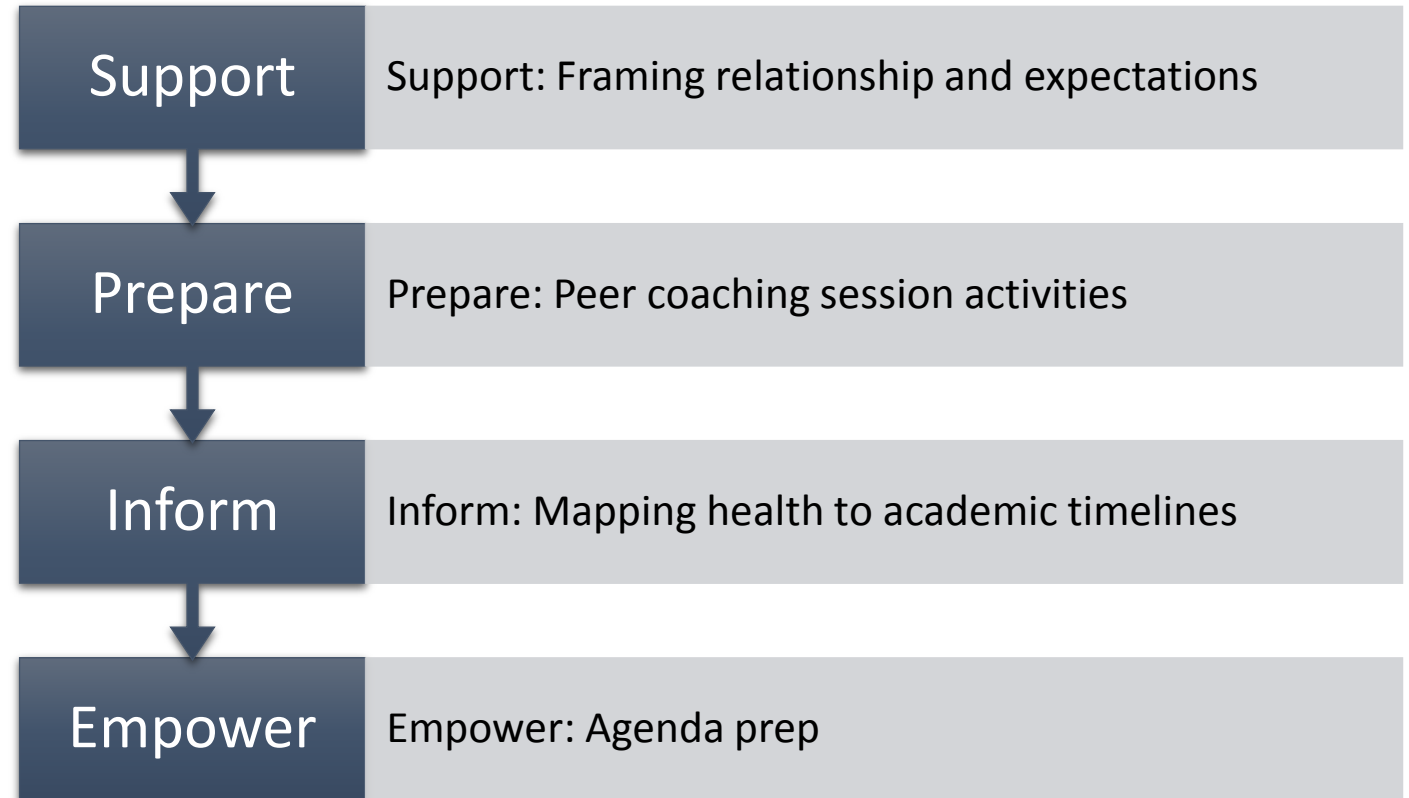
*"I need to encourage my shy student to be more active in determining what they want from our meetings and from the program overall"*

*"...how little she spoke. I anticipated the student being immediately excited to discuss what she needed"*



# Student Workbook Framework

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# Our Key Takeaways

1

Role clarity difficult to achieve – role definitions need lots of attention

2

Students need support in taking ownership over sessions with peer coach

3

Materials that involve a lot of reading and are informational in nature are not utilized, need more interactive materials





# Transitions ACR Tip Sheets

- [Tools for School: Accommodations for College Students with Mental Health Challenges](#)
- [Outside-the-Box Accommodations: Real Support for Real Students](#)
- [My Mental Health Rights on Campus](#)





## Contact us

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Or visit us at:

- <https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/>

# References

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