

Fostering Friendships During Recovery: How Peer Support Aids Healing

Recovery can feel deeply personal, but it doesn't have to feel lonely. For many adolescent girls, healing becomes more manageable when they're surrounded by peers who understand what it's like to face emotional challenges, rebuild trust, and learn healthier ways to cope.

At Imperial Healing House, we create opportunities for students to form safe, supportive connections while receiving structured clinical care. Through our [residential treatment program](#) and [day treatment program](#), girls can participate in therapy, academics, recreation, wellness activities, and everyday routines alongside peers who are also working toward meaningful change.

These friendships aren't intended to replace professional treatment. Instead, positive peer relationships can reinforce the lessons students learn in therapy and give them a supportive setting in which to practice communication, accountability, empathy, and healthy boundaries.

Why Peer Support Matters During Adolescent Recovery

Teenagers are naturally influenced by their social environments. They often look to their peers for acceptance, understanding, reassurance, and a sense of belonging.

When a young person is struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, emotional dysregulation, or relationship difficulties, social situations may become a major source of stress. Some girls withdraw because they're afraid of being judged. Others may become involved in friendships that reinforce unhealthy behaviors or leave them feeling more isolated.

A structured treatment environment offers a different kind of peer experience. Students can connect with others while receiving guidance from trained professionals who help maintain safety, consistency, and appropriate expectations.

Healthy peer support can remind students that they aren't the only ones working through difficult emotions. It may also help them recognize that asking for help is a sign of strength rather than weakness.

At Imperial Healing House, peer interaction is part of a broader treatment plan. We create a setting where students can learn from one another without placing responsibility for recovery on their friends.

Shared Experiences Can Reduce Feelings of Isolation

Emotional struggles can make adolescent girls feel separated from their families, classmates, and communities. They may believe that no one understands what they're experiencing or that their challenges make them fundamentally different from everyone else.

Meeting peers who have faced similar emotions can soften that sense of isolation. Students don't need to have identical backgrounds to relate to one another. They may connect through shared feelings such as fear, loneliness, uncertainty, frustration, or the desire to move forward.

This recognition can be powerful. A student may begin to understand that she isn't defined by her hardest experiences. She's part of a community where other young people are also learning, growing, and rebuilding.

Our approach to [trauma-focused therapy](#) helps students explore difficult experiences in a clinically supported setting. Positive peer connections can complement that work by creating everyday moments of acceptance and belonging.

Friendships Create Opportunities to Practice Trust

Trust doesn't always return quickly after it has been damaged. Adolescents who have experienced trauma, bullying, unstable relationships, or repeated disappointment may protect themselves by avoiding closeness.

Others may want connection but struggle to identify which relationships are safe.

Within a structured treatment community, students can practice trust gradually. They may begin by participating in a group discussion, completing a shared task, eating a meal with others, or joining a recreational activity.

These small interactions can help students experience relationships differently. They learn that trust can be built through consistency, respect, honesty, and appropriate boundaries.

Our staff members support this process by helping students recognize healthy behaviors and address conflict when it occurs. The goal isn't to force friendships. It's to create conditions where respectful connections can grow naturally.

Positive Peers Can Encourage Healthy Choices

Peer influence is often discussed as a risk, but it can also become a source of encouragement.

A student may feel more willing to participate when she sees another girl engage honestly in group therapy. She may try a new coping strategy after watching a peer use it successfully. She may become more hopeful when she notices someone else making progress after a difficult period.

These examples can make recovery feel more realistic. Students see that emotional growth doesn't require perfection. It involves practicing new skills, making mistakes, accepting feedback, and continuing to move forward.

Through [dialectical behavioral therapy](#), students can develop skills related to emotional regulation, distress tolerance, mindfulness, and relationships. Peer interactions then give them meaningful opportunities to apply those skills in daily life.

Supportive Relationships Strengthen Communication Skills

Healthy friendships require communication. Students need to express their needs, listen to other perspectives, manage disagreements, and respect limits.

These skills can be especially difficult for adolescents who have learned to avoid conflict, react impulsively, shut down emotionally, or expect rejection.

Our therapeutic environment allows communication challenges to be addressed as they happen. Staff members can help students slow down, identify what they're feeling, and choose a more constructive response.

Everyday interactions become opportunities for growth. A misunderstanding at lunch, frustration during a group activity, or disagreement over shared responsibilities can be handled with support rather than ignored or allowed to escalate.

Our [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) services can help students identify thought patterns that affect their emotions and behaviors. This work may help them approach peer relationships with greater awareness and flexibility.

Peer Support Helps Students Develop Empathy

Recovery involves learning to understand personal emotions, but it also includes recognizing that other people may have different needs, reactions, and experiences.

Living and learning alongside peers can help students develop empathy. They practice listening without immediately offering advice. They learn that another person's emotions can be valid even when they don't fully understand them.

Students may also discover that offering encouragement can strengthen their own sense of purpose. A kind word, an invitation to join an activity, or a moment of patient listening can make a real difference within the community.

Empathy does not mean taking responsibility for someone else's healing. We help students understand that they can care about their peers while maintaining healthy emotional boundaries.

Group Activities Make Connection Feel More Natural

Not every friendship begins during a serious conversation. Many relationships grow through shared experiences.

Creative projects, recreational activities, meals, wellness routines, schoolwork, and community responsibilities give students natural ways to interact. These experiences can reduce the pressure of direct social engagement while helping girls discover common interests.

Our [expressive arts therapy](#) may include creative forms of communication that allow students to explore emotions beyond traditional conversation.

We also use [experiential therapy](#) to help students learn through guided activities and real-world experiences. These moments can encourage cooperation, confidence, problem-solving, and shared accomplishment.

A student who finds it difficult to open up verbally may feel more comfortable connecting while painting, cooking, completing a project, participating in movement, or caring for an animal.

Daily Routines Help Students Build Social Confidence

Social confidence rarely develops through one major breakthrough. It grows through repeated, manageable experiences.

Greeting a peer in the morning, contributing during class, asking for help, sharing a responsibility, and participating in a group activity can all help a student feel more capable.

Our approach to [student life](#) blends therapy with structured routines, academics, recreation, wellness, and community participation. This gives students multiple settings in which to practice relationship skills.

The consistency of daily life also makes progress easier to recognize. A student who once avoided all group interaction may begin sitting with others during meals. Another may learn to express frustration calmly instead of withdrawing.

These changes may appear small from the outside, but they can represent important steps toward greater confidence and independence.

Academic Settings Can Support Healthy Collaboration

Mental health challenges often affect school performance and classroom relationships. A student may struggle to concentrate, ask questions, complete group work, or feel comfortable around classmates.

Integrated academics allow students to continue learning while receiving emotional support. Smaller educational settings may also make it easier for them to participate without feeling overwhelmed.

Our [academic support](#) helps students work toward educational goals while building routines, confidence, and practical problem-solving skills.

Peer relationships can play a positive role in this setting. Students may encourage one another, celebrate completed work, or collaborate appropriately under staff supervision.

Academic progress can become a shared source of motivation rather than another point of comparison or competition.

Healthy Boundaries Are Part of Supportive Friendship

Peer support is most beneficial when students understand boundaries.

Adolescents may enter treatment with different ideas about what friendship should look like. Some may overshare quickly because they're searching for connection. Others may feel responsible for fixing

another person's problems. Some may have trouble saying no or recognizing when a relationship feels unhealthy.

Our team helps students learn that strong relationships include both care and limits.

Healthy boundaries may involve:

- Respecting another student's privacy
- Asking before discussing sensitive topics
- Avoiding pressure or manipulation
- Recognizing when professional support is needed
- Accepting that friends may need space
- Taking responsibility for personal choices
- Refusing to participate in harmful behavior

These lessons can help students create more stable relationships during treatment and after they return home.

Family Relationships Remain an Essential Part of Healing

Peer friendships can provide meaningful support, but they are only one part of recovery.

Families continue to play an essential role in a student's emotional health, home environment, and long-term progress. That's why we integrate [family systems therapy](#) into our approach.

Family work can help parents and adolescents better understand communication patterns, expectations, conflict, and emotional needs. It also gives families a place to practice new skills with professional guidance.

As students develop healthier peer relationships, they may become better able to communicate at home. They can use the same skills of listening, accountability, emotional regulation, and boundary-setting with parents, siblings, and caregivers.

Our goal is to help students build supportive relationships across every important part of their lives.

Professional Guidance Keeps Peer Support Safe

Peer connection is valuable, but adolescents should never be expected to manage one another's mental health needs.

Our clinical and residential staff establish clear expectations for communication, safety, confidentiality, and behavior. We observe group dynamics and step in when students need help resolving conflict or maintaining boundaries.

Our multidisciplinary [meet the team](#) approach helps ensure that peer interactions remain connected to each student's individualized treatment goals.

Violet and Monty, our emotional support dogs, also contribute to the warm environment within Imperial Healing House. Their presence can offer comfort and create gentle opportunities for connection, particularly during moments when conversation feels difficult.

Professional oversight allows students to experience the benefits of community without being asked to carry responsibilities that belong to trained adults.

Friendships Can Support the Transition Beyond Treatment

One of the most important parts of treatment is preparing students for what comes next.

The social skills developed during recovery can help girls approach future friendships with greater confidence and awareness. They may become better able to recognize supportive behavior, communicate their needs, respond to conflict, and step away from unhealthy dynamics.

They also learn that belonging shouldn't require abandoning personal values or ignoring emotional safety.

Not every friendship formed during treatment will continue indefinitely. The lasting value comes from what students learn through those relationships.

They can leave with a clearer understanding of what healthy connection feels like and how to create it in school, family, community, and future treatment settings.

A Community Where Healing and Connection Can Grow

Recovery shouldn't require an adolescent to face every challenge alone. Positive peer relationships can provide encouragement, belonging, and real-life opportunities to practice the skills introduced in therapy.

At Imperial Healing House, we combine evidence-based treatment, family involvement, education, wellness, structured student life, and professionally guided peer support. Our goal is to help adolescent girls strengthen their emotional health while learning how to build relationships rooted in respect, trust, empathy, and healthy boundaries.

Families searching for adolescent residential or day treatment in Provo and Utah Valley can [contact our team](#) to learn more about our programs, admissions process, and individualized approach to care.

Related Questions

Can adolescents make friends during residential treatment?

Yes. Students may form friendships through shared routines, therapy groups, academics, recreation, and everyday activities. Staff guidance helps keep these relationships respectful, supportive, and consistent with treatment goals.

Are friendships between students supervised?

Peer interactions take place within a structured environment overseen by clinical, educational, and residential staff. The team can address conflicts, reinforce boundaries, and help students practice healthy communication.

Can peer relationships ever interfere with treatment?

They can when boundaries become unclear or students feel responsible for one another's recovery. Professional oversight helps identify unhealthy dynamics and redirect students toward appropriate support.

Do students have opportunities to connect outside of therapy groups?

Yes. Students can interact through academics, meals, recreation, wellness activities, creative projects, household routines, and other structured parts of daily life.