



Telling Your Story: Skills for Youth Peer and Family Support Workers

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Who We Are

- Family & Children's is a not-for-profit agency helping nearly 20,000 of our neighbors each year. For more than 130 years, we have worked to protect and strengthen vulnerable children, seniors, families and communities on Long Island.



Goals & Objectives

- Understand the importance of self-disclosure in Youth Peer and Family Support work
- Discuss how the strengths perspective can guide self-disclosure in youth peer and family support working relationships
- Differentiate illness vs. recovery stories
- Reflect on the importance of self care in youth peer and family support work
- Develop effective, strengths based communication skills for telling your story

Nicole's Story

- I am 27 years old and grew up on Long Island.
- In June 2015 I will be ten years hospital-free.
- I began facing challenges related to my mental health at the age of 13.
- I began to engage in self harming behaviors including self injury or “cutting”. I am also a suicide attempt survivor.
- While some of my experiences could be viewed as negative, I was able to overcome these many challenges through the support of my family and others involved in my life.
- In 2006 I graduated high school. In 2010 I graduated from college with honors and in 2012 I received a Master's degree from Columbia University.



13 year old Nicole

Gwen's Story

- I am a parent of two sons who experienced emotional difficulties during childhood and adolescence.
- My son Joshua started experiencing difficulties in school and social situations from an early age.
- I advocated for both of my sons to have access to needed supports in school.
- After this experience, I felt strongly that I would not let any other parent go through what I went through.
- I became a SEPTA president and later went on to pursue a career as a Parent Advocate at Family and Children's Association.
- My son Joshua is now 29, married and trying to make a living as a writer.

Heather's Story

- I have been the Family Support Supervisor at Family and Children's Association's HCBS Waiver Program since 2007.
- I have experiences in foster care and adoption both personally and professionally.
- I am the parent of a child with extra-ordinary issues.
- I have a Master's degree and both my FDC and FPA certifications.
- The most important initials I have however don't get printed on my resume: "MOM".

How do YOU define yourself?

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c62Aqdlzvqk>



Discussion of Video

- Did you find the speaker's story to be effective? Why or why not?
- What was most effective?
- What would you change (if anything)?

Why Youth Peer and Family Support?

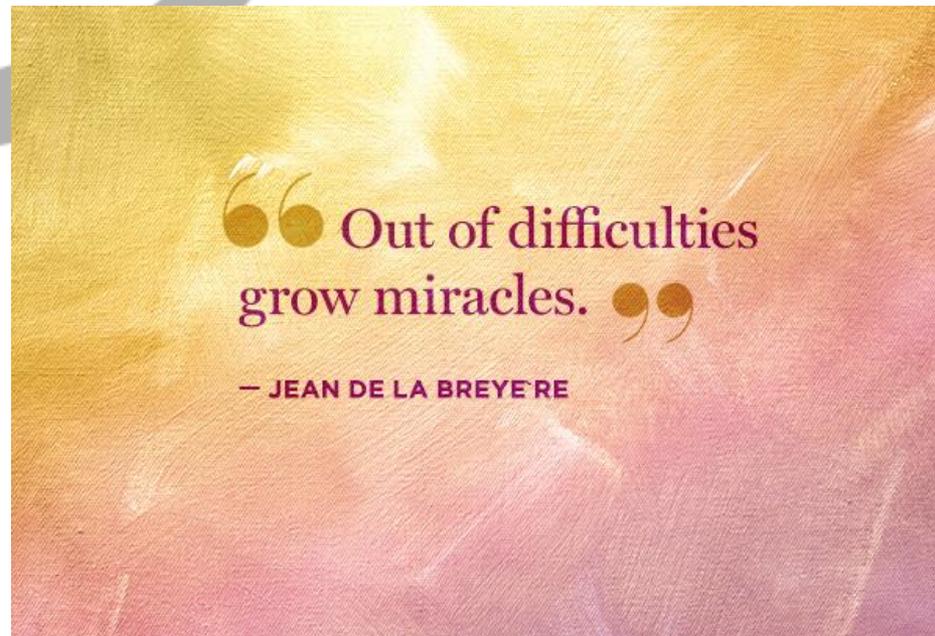
- Youth Peer and Family Support have many similarities and differences.
- For the purposes of this presentation, we are focusing on what both have in common.
- Youth Peer and Family Support Workers can enhance their work through effective storytelling and utilization of self care.

Why is self-disclosure so important?

- Self-disclosure can take many forms in youth peer and family support work.
- The purpose of self-disclosure in youth peer and family support is multifaceted:
 - Self-disclosure inspires others and builds rapport with families/youth
 - Self-disclosure can be a starting point for empowerment and advocacy within the behavioral health system.

The Strengths Perspective

- A peer recovery support services program that incorporates a strengths perspective builds on people's resiliencies and capacities rather than providing services focused primarily on correcting their deficits, disabilities, or problems.



(Source: SAMHSA, 2009)

The Strength Perspective (continued)

- Emphasize on uncovering, reaffirming, and enhancing the abilities, interests, knowledge, resources, aspirations, and hopes of individuals, families, groups, and communities.
- This approach assumes that the ability to recognize one's own strengths and identify internal and external resources enhances a person's chances of success in setting and achieving goals and in realizing his or her aspirations. (Source: SAMHSA, 2009)

The Importance of Self Care in Youth Peer & Family Support Work

- Self care is an essential part of any health and human service direct service position.
- Self care is uniquely important for youth peer and family support workers because of the nature of the work being done, particularly self disclosure.
- Know yourself. If you feel you or the person you're working with cannot respect boundaries within the context of self-disclosing, discuss with another PA/YA worker and/or supervisor and self-assess your needs.

Self Care and The Peer Support Relationship

- Youth Peer and Family Support work within children's mental health care is built on pillars of self-care AND self-management, positive adapting skills and nurturance. (Source: Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, n.d.)
- Reflect on how the specific family/youth you are working with may interpret your story.
- Always understand the risks associated with disclosing certain information such as diagnoses, negative and/or positive experiences with specific providers, etc.

Self Care Self Assessment

- Is the youth/family I'm working with respecting boundaries?
- Are the particulars of the youth/family's case triggering to me?
- Can I self-disclose without experiencing re-traumatization?
- If I feel triggered, can I self disclose safely and respect the youth/family's boundaries?
- If I feel unsafe self-disclosing because of boundary issues/triggers how can I address this in supervision?

Illness vs. Recovery Stories

- As parents and youth consumers youth peer and family support workers have by definition experienced mental illness either first-hand or within their family.
- However, our stories which include our feelings, thoughts, behaviors, histories, triumphs and struggles can be communicated as either “illness oriented” or “recovery oriented”.

Benefits & Risks of Telling Your Story

Benefits:

- Education
- Positive Change Promotion
- Personal Growth & Development

Risks:

- Personal Relationships
- Professional Relationships
- Stigma
- Exposure
- Emotional Well-being.

(Source: Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, 2012)

Communication Skills: Effective Storytelling

Ask yourself:

- Does my disclosure support the family/youth in crisis?
- Is my disclosure non-judgmental, confidential, and ethical?
- Have discussed the purpose of this disclosure during mentoring and/or supervision meetings?
- Am I advocating for families/youth while empowering them to advocate for themselves?
- Is my disclosure of my own experiences empowering others without overshadowing their own experience?

(Source: Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, n.d.)

Telling Your Story & Listening

- Listen! Use active listening skills, build connections between your story and the person you are working with.
- Share your lived experience in a purposeful way, when it fits, and safely.
- Listen some more!
- Suggest possible solutions or next steps.
- Help families make informed decisions and then support them in the decisions they make.

(Source: Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, n.d.)

What have you learned about yourself and your/your child's recovery?

- What are some of the strengths you have developed and used?
- What types of supports have you developed and used?
- What are some of the things you do to remain on your path to wellness and recovery?

(Transformation Center, 2007c, p. 2)

What is the other person willing to hear?:

- What is the other person willing to hear?:
 - Use where the person is in his/her own journey to guide which part(s) of your story to share.
 - Give careful consideration to the part(s) of your story that may be helpful to the person at this time in his/her recovery.
 - Be mindful—Are you involving the person in the conversation or are you talking at him/her?
 - Use brief snippets of your recovery story when applicable.
 - Remember—The purpose of self-disclosing is to *benefit others*. The focus should not stay on *you* for long. (Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

Is the story you are relating in your past or in the present?

Ideally, your story should include what is going well in your current life.

- Are the details you are sharing relevant and relatable to the individual(s) you are helping? This is key!
- Are the brief snippets you are sharing about your personal story focused on tragedy or *transformation*?
- The positive, transformative experiences you have had should have a key place in your story. (Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

Effective Self-Disclosure

- When used appropriately, self-disclosure:
 - Creates a climate of mutuality in peer support relationships.
 - Fosters trust between youth peer and family support providers and the families/youth they are serving.
 - Instills hope that things can change—that life can get better.

The Power of Personal Stories



(Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

- One of the major “recovery tools” that youth peer and family support providers bring to mental health services is sharing their own story.
- The major reason why your story is such a powerful tool is that it is your own personal story shared just the way it happened.

Illness Stories

Focuses on the impact of diagnosis:

- Features the disabling effect of the diagnosis.
- Limits the conversation to the sharing of “war stories” related to the illness.
- Promotes the reliving of difficult times.
- Supports thinking of life as limited.
- Lends to a pervasive hopelessness—the belief that this is the way life will always be.

(Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

Illness Story Benefits & Risks

Illness Story Benefits:

- Promotes a kind of connectedness—Shows you have “been there.”
- Shows understanding about what another person is going through.
- Promotes empathy.

Illness Story Risks:

- May keep the person stuck in thinking of him/herself as being sick.
- Person hearing the illness story may believe the illness story is not as bad as his/her own story.

(Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

Recovery Stories

- Focuses on change as being possible.
- Highlights an individual's strengths.
- Promotes health and wellness.
- Features overcoming barriers.
- Supports the sharing of what has worked for you in overcoming challenges and maintaining your wellness.

Recovery Story Benefits & Risks

Recovery Story Benefits:

- Supports recovery—Change is possible.
 - Shows recovery as a process—It is non-linear.
- Promotes and instills hope.

Recovery Story *Risks*:

- May seem as if promoting that “my way” is the only way toward recovery.
- Unfair expectations; setting the bar too high (or too low).
- Focuses on the peer provider and not the person being supported.
- Your level of success may seem unattainable to someone in distress.

(Source: MIRECC, n.d.)

Effective Story Telling: What do I want to share? How do I want to share?

Handout Activity

- What were some of the early indications that you/your child were beginning to have difficulties?
- Describe yourself and your situation when you/your child were at your worst.
- What helped you move from where you were to where you are now?
- How did you accomplish this? What did you do? What did others do to help you?
- What have you had to overcome to get where you are today?

(Source: Transformation Center, 2007, p. 2)

Activity #1

- Examples of illness vs. recovery stories
 - What makes them different?
 - What makes them helpful?
 - Share!

Activity #2

- What have I learned about myself that could inspire others?
- How can I communicate this to others?
- Share!

Activity #3

- Group Role Play: When and What to Keep In/Leave Out of Your Story
- Share!

Reflections, Feedback, Questions?

Please contact us if you have any further questions.

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