Making Effective Use of Your Recovery Story in Peer Support Relationships

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Learning Objectives

- Identify the importance of self-disclosure in providing peer support.
- Distinguish between illness and recovery stories.
- Define components of an *effective* recovery story.
- Outline the benefits and risks associated with sharing either an illness or recovery story.
Please think about your answers to the following questions:

- What have you learned about yourself and your recovery that could inspire others working on their recovery if you share the information?
- How would you communicate your recovery story to others?
Lived Experience as a Valuable Recovery Tool

- One of the major “recovery tools” that peer support providers bring to mental health services is sharing their own recovery story.
- The major reason why the recovery story is such a powerful tool is that it is your own personal story shared just the way it happened.
- In your peer support work, the Veterans you are supporting can be inspired by hearing the truth, hope, and possibilities implicit in your recovery story.
The Importance of Self-Disclosure in Peer Support Relationships

When used appropriately, self-disclosure:

- Creates a climate of mutuality in peer support relationships.
- Fosters trust between peer support providers and the Veterans they are serving.
- Instills hope that things can change—that life can get better.
Illness vs. Recovery

What is your story?
Focus of an *Illness* Story

- 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.
Risks and Benefits of Sharing an *Illness* Story

**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.
Focus of a *Recovery* Story

- 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.
Risks and Benefits of Sharing a *Recovery* Story

**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.
Activity #2 – Recovery Story

Illness/Recovery Story...You Decide!

Examples of Illness Stories & Recovery Stories

What makes them different?
What makes them helpful?
Components of Your Recovery Story

- What were some of the early indications that you were beginning to have difficulties?
- Describe yourself and your situation when you 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?

(Transformation Center, 2007c, p. 2)
Components of Your Recovery Story (Continued)

- What have you learned about yourself and your 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?
Effectively Communicating Your Recovery Story

What is the other person willing to hear?:

- Use where the person is in his/her own recovery journey to guide which part(s) of your story to share.
- Give careful consideration to the part(s) of your recovery 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.
One-on-one peer support interventions with Veterans

Facilitation of peer support groups

Presentations to VA clinical providers

Presentations for community organizations

Essentially....It could occur anywhere!

**Remember**: Use brief snippets and make sure what you share is relevant to your audience.
Activity #3 – Recovery Story
When and What to Keep In/Leave Out of Your Recovery Story

Group Role Play
Is the recovery story you are relating in your past or from the past? Ideally, your recovery 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 recovery story focused on tragedy or transformation? The positive, transformative experiences you have had should have a key place in your recovery story.
References


Contact Information for New England MIRECC Peer Education Center

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