



## **Module Three**

# **Storytelling and Support Systems**

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### **Facilitator**

- Ideally the person or persons in this role will already have had facilitator experience. This could be a club or student organization president or executive board member, a residence hall advisor, a peer-to-peer advocate or counselor, a staff counselor, or professor. If none of these are readily available, please contact us and we will provide guidance and assistance on next steps.

### **Time Needed**

- Lecture, Discussion, and Improv Exercises: 35 mins
- Question and Answer: 10 mins

### **Audio Visual Needs**

- PowerPoint slides have been provided for you in advance
- A projector (a projector on a cart or a projector hanging from the ceiling)
- Projector screen (collapsible or hanging from the ceiling)
- In the event you don't have access to a computer or projector; a blackboard or whiteboard works, as does a flip chart.

**Learning Objectives...** or outcomes that show what participants will have learned as a result of attending this training.

## **Objectives for Module 3: Storytelling and Support Systems**

Main objective 1) Storytelling can be cathartic for you and can encourage others to share. It can also normalize taboo topics like mental health and can encourage help seeking behavior.

Main objective 2) Everybody has a story and everybody has something to teach the world.

Speak up, speak out, and speak often.

Sub-objectives:

- How cultivating a support system can benefit one's mental health
- Why support systems are important and who and what can be used as a support system
- Different modes and methodologies of storytelling
- Why telling our story can be cathartic and how it can help others
- How storytelling normalizes the conversation around mental health

## **Suggested Follow Up**

- Reading and Review Group Discussion Questions: 15 mins
- Personal Additions to Mental Health First Aid Kit™
- Exercise: Asking for Help in Difficult Times (self-directed or in a group)
- Exercise: Your Life as a Fairytale (writing, practice with telling one's own story)

## **Handouts**

- Storytelling Tips for Writers
- Developing Social Support

- i'Mpossible Story on The Importance of Storytelling and Group Discussion Questions

## Other Materials Needed

- Intake forms (handed out 2 weeks prior) – available as a printed form or via Survey Monkey
- Exit forms (handed out 6 weeks after) – available as a printed form or via Survey Monkey

*We realize it can be difficult to have people fill out one or both of these forms, so: have anyone who is absolutely committed to attending (your e-board, your dorm mates etc.) to fill these out; and/or offer and advertise that anyone who fills out both forms will be entered into a raffle to win a gift card or special prize. Gathering this data is important so you know and so we know how effective this programming is and what we can improve upon.*

### FACILITATOR NOTE:

At some point near the beginning of the session, it's important to make sure attendees know they have equity in the session. Something like: "This is a big group discussion and I'm helping guide it along. It's important that it's not only a lecture because everyone here is an expert (in something) and when experts get together, they are greater than the sum of their parts." This breaks down walls and builds trust and will enhance knowledge retention.

## Opening-Introduction to Facilitator *You* 😊 - Option I (5mins)



Slide 1 – Title of talk (Have this ready during setup, before you begin speaking)

I/we are here to talk mental health



*Fun stuff about facilitator and why you're here.* Topical Info on location. Your professional background.



Slide 2: Funny/fun picture of facilitator as a kid/teen/apropos to audience you're speaking to.

- Facilitator's story with mental health/illness. Tie into Why Mental Health is important and particularly important to you/facilitator. Mention coping



skills, but really your lack thereof before you got help. Learned how to cope and found different tools that worked. ... made a conscious decision to develop a support system—a series of safety nets, where when one strand may not be the savior but when all are employed at the same time, they all work together to catch me. But to be able to do that, I had to tell my story.

Slide 3: (Thesis statement)

Thesis: A support system and telling your story are both crucial building blocks to mental health and wellness.

### FACILITATOR NOTE:

Skip option 2 below and proceed to the sign: 

## Opening - Option 2 *Without facilitator story* (5-7 mins)



Slide 1 (Have this ready during setup, before you begin speaking)

- Facilitator introduces who they are, and briefly states that “we’re talking mental health,” and that “talking mental health is important ... but we’ll get to that in a little bit.” Facilitator makes sure audience knows this isn’t a traditional presentation. This is going to be a fun and interactive, and basically a big conversation. Facilitator states that the rules are pretty simple: “no one talks over anyone else, show others respect, and cell phones are on silent and put away.”



Slide 2 will be blank

- Exercise – Helping attendees get acquainted with their story and tell their story

Everyone is prompted to write a three word story about themselves in advance (keep it clean: e.g. “I am sad.” “Son of Liam.” “Tired, optimistic, two-spirit”).

Fold it up, put it in a box and facilitator will read 5-10 of them

How did it feel to hear the stories? (Disconnected, connected e.g. I felt more alone or less alone)

How did it feel to have your story told?

How did it feel to not have your story told?

Questions lead into:

Storytelling can be risky. But it can be helpful. And it can feel good. And it can help others. And it can help you develop a support system

Transition (to thesis)—All are reasons why:

Slide 3: (Thesis statement)

Thesis: A support system and telling your story are both crucial building blocks to mental health and wellness.

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### **FACILITATOR NOTE:**



You can certainly give the definition of “mental health,” but it would be great to take no more than 3 minutes and ask the question of the attendees: “who can tell me the definition of mental health.” And then call on several people and expound upon or refute (kindly) the person’s answer as to what mental health is.

Transition: Before we can move forward, we need a quick review on mental health:

Mental Health is a person’s psychological and emotional well-being.



Slide 4

Mental health can be gauged by how you respond to a bad day, how you manage a mental health condition, or how you manage a situational depression (e.g. parents got divorced and GF breaks up with you). Mental Health management helps improve quality of life: make good decisions, have healthy relationships, maintain physical health and wellbeing, and discover and grow toward your potential



Slide 5

*“After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.” - Philip Pullman*

So, what comes first the chicken or the egg? What comes first—you reaching out by telling your story or by starting with you putting together your support system.

### **FACILITATOR NOTE:**

Allow attendees to answer this question and find out what their opinions and experiences are.

It's a little bit of both. (no right way/no one-size-fits-all).

**A Support System Benefits our Mental Health** (Facilitator feel free to give brief anecdotal examples for any of the bullet points below)



#### Slide 6

Why we need a support system: We can't do everything on our own. We need other people and other places of support whether or not we are in crisis.



#### Slide 7

What a support system does: Studies have shown a healthy support system creates higher levels of well-being, decreasing feelings of loneliness and isolation, better coping skills, alleviate stress, better problem solving, a longer and healthier life; and can even reduce depression and anxiety.

### **FACILITATOR NOTE:**

This could be a good place to check in with the audience. You could list a few places of support and then ask the audience for other suggestions; or you could ask for suggestions right away and then follow up with a few of your own answers.



#### Slide 8

Who, what, when where we can have a support system: - Can be: friends, family, coworkers, crisis hotline(s), primary care physician, therapist/counselor, church congregation, clergy, pets, mentor...



#### Slide 9

Should be people, places, (or animals) who demonstrate the ability to be sympathetic, empathetic, and non-judgmental. Someone who can be depended on in hard times. Someone who will give constructive criticism and feedback.



#### Slide 10

Important to take stock of who is in your life at the moment, and who can be part of your support network. How can you reach out to them? Phone call/email/walk in etc. Also take stock of what you want your support system to look like: are there gaps that you want filled? How to reach out?

#### **FACILITATOR NOTE:**

**Feel free to give local/national resources and advice for helping attendees think outside the box when developing a support system: therapist (insurance or recommendation), no family (create family), clergy (new church) etc.; Also note if you want a friend you have to be a friend... New Activities, Meetups, etc.**

But to gain a support system, we need to share our story: who you are, how you connect with that support (clergy, therapist, cool chick in Psych class), what you're going through or what you've been through. Vulnerability is key. Anecdotal opportunity

Facilitator: This can be an important and funny moment—I get this question enough: How am I supposed to tell the girl/guy that I want to ask out, that I have bipolar. You ease into it. They're not telling you about their psoriasis either. You take time on certain things, wait for proper context and then move forward.

Transition: But this storytelling thing. It's so important for several reasons:

### **The Importance of Talking and Telling our Story**



#### Slide 11

- Cathartic: it's a release and a relief. You can't keep things in forever. Like tears. Keeping in emotions or feelings or even anger: not healthy.

- When telling our story proper context: it leads to hope and healing. It also encourages help seeking. It normalizes the idea that it's okay to ask for help
- Create our own narrative, rather than allowing others to define us: If I frequently displayed symptoms of depression, some would define me as "crazy" or "sad" or "less than." But when I tell my story, I can let people know: I'm not always sad, not crazy, nor "less than."
- Decreases stigma around any sort of "taboo topic" and normalizes the conversation. Makes you less of an outlier. *I'm a rape survivor. I have celiac. I wear an ostomy bag.* Makes it okay to: reach out for help for any of these topics and makes you appear as human (which you are).
- Connectivity to someone else who can relate. *It's nice to connect to others who can relate. You know to a certain extent what they're going through. You can help (which increases sense of purpose). You feel like you're not alone.*

I can tell some of you are not convinced. I'm not telling my story. That's some risky business. But we're going to play a little improv game in small groups. No one on stage. No one will look silly except me. I want to demonstrate something about storytelling through this exercise. I'm not going to tell you what that is yet. I'll ask you about it after the fact.

*Facilitator follows the template for this improv to a "t" but can fill in with their own brand of poignancy/humor.*

Improv Exercise

Taking Risk and Reaching out, Telling story.

In improv, failure is ever present; many scenes, even on Saturday Night Live, don't work a lot of the time. But professional improv actors' scenes work often enough because they've learned to accept little failures on the way to larger successes. (Attendees) need to embrace risk in the same way. This can be difficult because society says be patient and wait, no matter what. But most decisions have to be made with imperfect information anyway.

Exercise: One Word Story. It's a very simple game: a few people take turns, going around to make a sentence. Each person adds one word, until the sentence is complete, then someone says "period" and it's read back. We're

going to create a fairy tale. “Once. Upon. A. Time...” No correct way to do this. Just create a story. Have fun. Be open. Questions? Go.

Facilitator asks audience questions:

- Did people notice the group was hesitant to speak out at first?
- Did you notice that members of the group (or the group as a whole) got bolder as the exercise went on?
- What do you think that means?



### Slide 12

Takeaways:

Taking risk and telling stories, helps us relate, breaks stigma, makes it easier for you and others to reach out and speak up.



### Slide 13

## Storytelling Methodology

- Therapy/group: This one can be one of the easier ones because you're in a safe space or at least supposed to be. No judgment. No fear. Some people take solace in telling complete strangers their deepest darkest secrets—and their biggest dreams too.
- Creative writing: Telling fiction based on truth. Or non-fiction. Or simply as an exercise to help you even figure out what your story is. Maybe good to have a trusted friend or therapist read it.
- Performance/artistic expression: Do a one person show. Dance. Painting.
- Keynoting: Tell your story to large groups. Get them to take action based on your story.
- Peer to peer counseling: Helping others one on one. Tell something relatable to the person you're trying to help in an effort to move them along further.

Transition: Winding down. Storytelling can be cathartic for you and can encourage others to share, to normalize taboo topics like mental health and can encourage help seeking behavior

## Conclusion

Everybody has a story and has something to teach the world. Speak up, speak out, and speak often.



### Slide 14

I want to offer a few resources:

Offer resources. Handouts. Talk about group discussion handouts:

1. Storytelling Tips for Writers
2. Developing Social Support
3. i'Mpossible Story on The Importance of Storytelling

Thank the attendees

If there's time left over, you can do additional Q&A: clarity on any concepts covered. Storytelling. Storytelling methodologies. This can be driven by the organizers or come straight from the attendees.

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