Trauma-Informed Peer Support webinar series

Session 3: Applying Trauma-Informed Approaches to Peer Support
September 23, 2014

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The TIPS webinar series

Session 3: September 23, 2014
• Applying Trauma-Informed Approaches to Peer Support

Archived:

Session 1: September 9, 2014: Intro to Peer Support / Trauma & its Impact / Cultural Considerations

Session 2: September 16, 2014
• Peer Support Basics / Trauma-informed Approaches
TRAUMA-INFORMED PEER SUPPORT
Effective Peer Support

Counters the impact of trauma:

- Invalidation of personal reality
- Mistrust/alienation
- Loss of power and control
- Helplessness/hopelessness
- Voicelessness
- Feeling dominated, controlled, manipulated
- Violation of personal boundaries and sense of safety
Trauma-Informed Peer Support

- Sees coping strategies, not “symptoms”
- Helps survivors make sense of how they are coping and surviving
- Creates a safe space to consider new coping strategies
Conflicting Definitions of “Safety”

- For people who use services, “safety” generally means maximizing control over their own lives.

- For providers, “safety” generally means maximizing control over the service environment and minimizing risk.
Mutuality

There are no static roles of “helper” and “helpee” ...reciprocity is the key to building natural connections.

- Shery Mead
Power Dynamics

- If we’re not alert to the use of power, peer support relationships may unintentionally recreate the power dynamics of the original trauma
- This is an issue among staff and between managers and staff too
- Being mindful of peer support principles can help address this
What gets in the way of sharing power?

- Lack of role clarity
- Struggling to manage strong emotions
- Preconceived attitudes
- Fear, discomfort, misunderstanding
What gets in the way of sharing power?

• How “safety” is defined and used

• The desire to manage others’ behavior, particularly if viewed as harmful; i.e., self-injury
What is Self-Injury?

- The intentional injuring of one’s body as a means of coping with severe emotional and/or psychic stressors.
- The primary purpose is to provide a way of coping with what feels intolerable.

- Ruta Mazelis
What are the dynamics?

• Evolves as a way to cope with trauma
• Is a response to distress, past and/or present
• Has meaning for each survivor, such as:
  – Regaining control
  – Asserting autonomy
  – Relief of emotional pain
A Shift in Thinking

FROM

Seeing the person as engaging in meaningless, frustrating, and dangerous behavior

TO

Understanding self-harm as an expression of profound pain which has meaning for the person

IT IS NOT YOUR JOB TO FIX ANYONE
Maintaining Your Integrity

• Be transparent in your relationships
• Let people you support know up front the limits of your relationship
• Don’t assume the people you work with know what peer support is: teach them, & they can offer each other peer support
PERSONAL NARRATIVES
Personal Narratives Can:

• Help organize one’s experience, help make sense of what has taken place

• Lay the groundwork for survivors to develop hope about the future

• Can also be told through talking, music, dance or movement, drumming, art, and writing
Trauma Narratives May Include...

• All or part of the traumatic events
• The impact on one’s life
• The meaning one has made out of what happened
• Beliefs about who one is and who one is capable of becoming
What Creates Distance?

- Narratives that are difficult to listen to
- Competing trauma narratives
- Telling the same narrative over and over again
- Narratives told through the language of behavior (i.e., self-injury)
- Talking about the taboo
Is Telling Necessary for Healing?

People must be supported if they choose NOT to share their experience

- Not everyone can or wants to tell
- There may be cultural constraints on self-disclosure
- It may be too painful
- It may be currently unsafe
Support Narrative Sharing

• Ask if the person wants to share their experiences
• Offer opportunities and materials to support different ways of expressing the narrative
• Listen for meaning
RECLAIMING POWER THROUGH SOCIAL ACTION
The Personal is Political

All violence focuses on the unfair distribution of power and the abuse of this power by the powerful against the helpless. The solutions to these problems are not individual solutions; they require political solutions.

- Sandra Bloom
Reclaiming Power Through Social Action

- Trauma often leaves survivors feeling both powerless and full of rage.

- Taking social action can be:
  - a positive act of healing
  - a productive way to channel anger
  - a way for survivors to reclaim a sense of purpose and personal power
Social action can include

- Organizing around a common goal
- Giving witness testimony
- Challenging injustice
Social action can include

- Working to change harmful policies & practices
- Creating supportive alternatives
Questions/
Discussion