

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT

Developing Your Resilience Stories Toolkit

Version 1.1

Support/
House



Centre for
Innovation in
Peer Support

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Acknowledgements

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About the Centre

The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support provides both direct service and system focused supports across Ontario. The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support team has a robust expertise in the application of the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support*.

The Centre has been recognized as a “benchmark of excellence” in peer support, and meaningful co-design and engagement of people with lived/living experience and family & caregivers.

The Centre’s Focus: Professional Peer Support

The Centre focuses on providing, and supporting the practice of *professional peer support*.

The practice of professional peer support is emotional, social and/or practical support delivered by mutual agreement by persons who self-identify as having lived/living with similar circumstances and/or challenges. Professional peer support workers have engaged in training and skill development to enhance their ability to support empowering and empathetic relationships with others in their pursuit of self-determined wellness and/or change (Hopkins & Gremmen, 2022).

Professional peer support is when those with personal lived/living experiences work or volunteer in designated roles in mainstream/traditional services while ensuring that the critical aspects of hopefulness, recovery-orientation, empowerment, non-judgmental acceptance, and trust are promoted within the peer support relationship. Professional peer support is an intentional service provided where there is an identifiable ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’ of care. Professional peer support workers uphold the fidelity of peer support, while also honouring the responsibilities of their workplace (Hopkins & Gremmen, 2022).

[For more information on professional peer support, we invite you to read *Understanding Peer Support: A Proposed Core Service in Ontario* on our Resource Hub](#)

Supporting Provincial Systems & Partners

The **Centre’s Provincial, Systems & Partner** stream works within the mental health and substance use/addictions system to support peer staff, supervisors, and organizations from the approach of the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support* with a focus on professional peer support. The Centre also supports organisations to empower people with lived experience and/or family/caregiver experience through meaningful engagement and co-design.

Our full programming is offered through our **Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub** which supports the most current, best practices in Peer Support. Through our **Virtual Learning Centre**, we offer trainings, consultation, our peer professional development webinars, and provincial communities of practice. Our **Resource Hub** is home to our toolkits, models, and resources. All of these offerings support the implementation and practice of peer support within Ontario.

We continue to evolve, listening to input from our stakeholders across the province to identify gaps and needs within the system, and using quality improvement processes to pivot, pilot, evaluate and then scale and spread new innovations in peer support.

Supporting People Engaging in Services

The **Centre's Peer Programming** stream began as a consumer survivor initiative under the name TEACH (Teach, Empower, Advocate for Community Health) in 1999. TEACH later came to be housed at Support & Housing Halton (now Support House) and continued to evolve in order to meet the needs of our community, eventually amalgamating with Support House's peer support provincial systems & partner support program, the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support.

Today, the Centre's Peer Programming utilizes its expertise from having provided peer support services for over 23 years in the Halton-Mississauga region to offer quality programs that are designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated by people with lived experience. This stream is focused on peer-led psychosocial and rehabilitative programming. Together, we build community and connection through creating safe spaces to heal and grow for people navigating mental health and substance use/addiction challenges, as well as supporters/families.

Our History

In 2014, the Mississauga Halton LHIN Mental Health & Addictions Leadership Table began discussing future funding priorities. Peer support was identified as the main priority. After consultations and research, the Mississauga Halton LHIN created the Enhancing and Sustaining Peer Support Initiative in 2015. This initiative created peer support positions, supported service coordination, and supported the training and development of these positions across the region.

Support & Housing Halton (now Support House) became the lead agency that hired and housed the Peer Support Systems Lead and the Substance Use & Provincial Systems Lead in a program that would become the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (Centre). This team worked to sustain the new peer support positions that had been funded, build infrastructure, and bridge the many stakeholders impacted by this initiative.

In January of 2020, the Centre amalgamated with Support House's direct-service-facing peer support program, TEACH. The Centre now has a direct service stream of peer support programming as well as a system and partners stream, which has grown beyond the Mississauga/Halton area to include the entire province of Ontario.

About Support House:

Support House is directed by our core values. They guide our agency's decisions and actions, unite our staff, define our brand, and inspire our culture. We put people first – our supports are **person directed**. We **connect and engage** and start conversations to build and maintain relationships. We focus on **health and wellness** practices to inspire our culture. All employees are required to adhere to our values-based Oath of conduct.

Meaningful Selective Disclosure

Source: (Gremmen & Hopkins, 2022).

Throughout our interactions we may tell those we support about our experiences in a way that is meaningful to them. Meaningful selective disclosure is when we share from our personal lived experiences in support of exploratory response. The purpose of sharing from our journey is to aid in the other person's self-determined exploration, not to direct people to take steps, or support themselves the same way that we have.

Meaningful selective disclosure requires us to reflect on points of connection between our experience and the experience of others. Even with differences in our journeys, we can look within ourselves and seek points of connection with emotions, impacts, and experiences of others as similar to our own.

Sharing our experiences in a way that is meaningful to the person can convey that people are not alone in their experiences and struggles, inspire hope, provide validation, and aid in their exploration of choices and options available to them, including sharing the ways that we take care of ourselves.

We share meaningfully using **Resilience Stories**. This way of sharing from our journey addresses the pain or struggle of an experience but focuses on the impact of our experiences, the learnings we've had, the actions we took and supports we found helpful. Resilience stories are brief, as the interaction is not about us, but rather to be of support to others.

We can support others without selective disclosure, but we avoid disclosing/sharing without having the purpose of conveying that people are not alone in their experiences and struggles, inspiring hope, providing validation, and/or aiding in their exploration of choices and options available to them. If the conversation becomes about our journey and experiences instead of being in service of the other person's experience we have shifted away from a supportive interaction. Skillfully and mindfully sharing from our journey requires practice, and training may be helpful.

W.A.I.T. - Why Am I Talking?

This acronym is taken from: (TED - The Empowerment Dynamic, 2017).

What will I share?

- Does my share connect with an aspect of the other person's journey?
- How much detail will I share?

What's my purpose in sharing?

- To share for exploration? To validate? To inspire?
- Is it in service of the listener(s) and not just about me?

What's the risk to others?

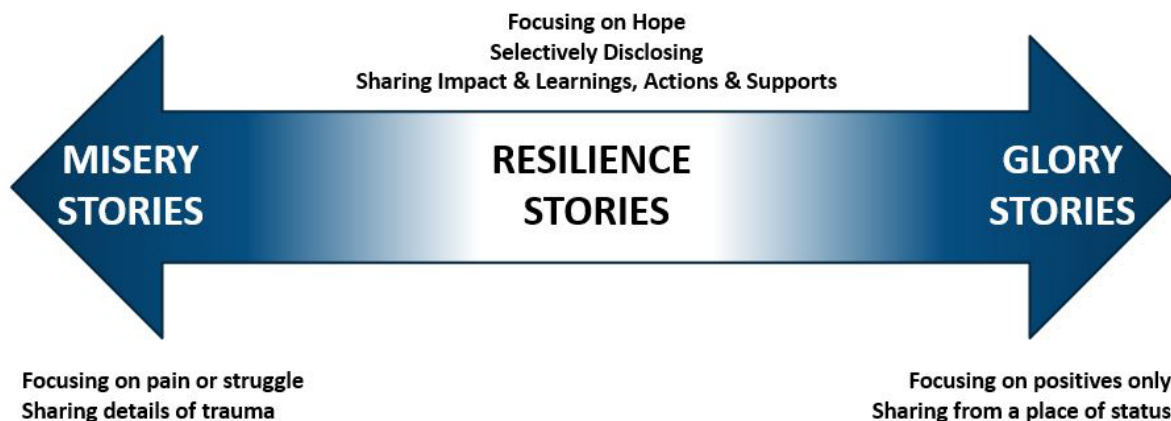
- Will this enhance or hinder the conversation?
- Will I cause harm? – shame, blame, create comparison, re-traumatize

What's the risk to myself?

- Am I ready to share?
- Will this have a negative impact on me?

The Sharing Spectrum

“The Sharing Spectrum was created by Ethan Hopkins and Alyssa Gremmen at the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (2021).



Resilience Stories

When we are connected to our experiences, we intentionally share parts of our personal lived/living experiences in a way that is meaningful to others. This means we share to support compassionate understanding, inspire hope, provide validation and support exploration of challenges and solutions.

These **Resilience Stories** address the pain or struggle of an experience but focus on the impact of our experiences, the learnings we’ve had, the actions we took and supports we found helpful. Resilience stories are brief, as the interaction is not about us, but rather to be of support to others.

Misery Stories

When we are consumed by our experiences we may overshare from our journey, rather than intentionally sharing parts of our journey that are of support to others.

These **Misery Stories** focus on pain or struggle. Sharing misery stories means we stay in sorrow and we may overshare details of experiences causing vicarious trauma or re-traumatization for ourselves and others, ultimately causing harm.

Glory Stories

When we are removed from our journey, we may be unable to meaningfully use our lived experiences when they could be of support, or share very little.

These **Glory Stories** are shared from a place of status or glorification, only focusing on positives, often accompanied by minimal vulnerability. Sharing glory stories creates shame, comparison, and they can be dismissive and prescriptive, ultimately causing harm (i.e., “You just need to work hard”).



Getting to Know our Journey

This handout has been adapted from: (Mental Health Commission of Canada).

Key Reflection Questions

Pick a few of the following questions that you would feel comfortable sharing in a peer support relationship and record your answers below.

What are some successes you have had in your life?	What was your life like before your struggles?*	What activities do you enjoy?	What factors do you think contributed to your experiences?
What effects did/does your lived experience have on your life?*	What is/was it like living with _____?	What contributed to your decision to seek support?	How did your family and friends respond? What responses were helpful/unhelpful?
What were your experiences with the health system? What was helpful/unhelpful?	What were your experiences with community services? What was helpful/unhelpful?	What were your experiences with the justice system? What was helpful/unhelpful?	What were the challenges or barriers in your journey?
What would you have done differently if you could do it over again?	What means the most to you in your journey?	What have you learned?	What is your life like now?
What signs did you have that something was becoming a problem?	What/who was helpful in supporting your journey?	What positive experiences happened in your recovery journey?	What are your coping strategies? How do you manage now?

*Work, education, relationships, activities, spirituality, childhood, attitudes and beliefs about life

Exploring our Resilience Messages

By exploring the events and feelings we have experienced, we may find areas that connect with other people's experiences. We can then explore the impact, learnings and actions to help create resilience stories to share with others. This is also a chance to identify experiences you do not want to share with others.

Part 1: Circle the experiences below that connect with your journey.

Loneliness and/or isolation	Sadness	Anger
Substance use and/or Addiction	Disability	Psychosis
Caregiving for others	Self-Harm	Grief and feelings of loss
Violence	Chronic illness	Hoarding
Confusion	Sex work	Trauma
Mental Illness	Extreme Mood Changes	Stress
Poverty	Bullying	Happiness
Harm Reduction	Self – help	Shame and guilt
Fear and Phobias	Avoidance	Experiences with Medication
Employment Challenges	Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation related challenges	Connection with the justice system and/or incarceration
Discrimination and/or Oppression (racism, sexism, etc.)	Homelessness and challenges with housing	Stigma, Prejudice, Being "Labelled"
Challenges with relationships (friends, partner, family etc)	Suicidality (thoughts and actions)	Engagement with Supportive Professionals/Groups
Engagement with Community Supports and Hospital	Being self-critical and negative self-talk	Other: _____

Things in my journey I do not want to share about...

Part 2: Choose some of the experiences you circled. And answer the following questions about those experiences. This will give you some resilience messages to include when you share with others.

What was the impact?

What were your learnings?

What actions did you take and what supports did you have?

Skillfully Sharing

<p>Trauma & Harm</p>	<p>AVOID: Sharing details about: self-harm actions, suicide plans, violent actions, traumatic event details, drug use rituals, abuse details. Glorifying, comparing or reminiscing on these topics.</p> <p>DO: Acknowledge the experience then discuss impacts, learnings etc. and then openly share about feelings, meanings, thoughts, impacts, learning etc.</p> <p>Example: “I used to self-harm too, it helped me cope with things and gave me a sense of control, something I felt I had very little of at the time. I learned new coping strategies and slowly I was able to stop self-harming.”</p>
<p>Medication</p>	<p>AVOID: Sharing about specifics (dosages, names etc.), medical advice, encouraging or discouraging medications.</p> <p>DO: Remain neutral, medications are part of some people’s journey and work well, they may have side effects and journeys with medication are personal. We can support people to bring questions to their doctors should they want to know more about medication.</p> <p>Example: “Medication and the process of finding the medications that work or don’t work is personal, it’s about finding the best fit for you. I know for some people medication has been part of their journey and for others it has not. You have the right to be curious and ask questions about your medication process if you would like to.”</p>
<p>Other Service Providers</p>	<p>AVOID: Sharing about specific positive or negative experiences with specific service providers, Encouraging or discouraging a service.</p> <p>DO: Remain neutral. Experiences with services are personal. We can support people to explore options open to them, and explore the different offerings of a service. Be sure to support their self-determination and honour the experiences people have with different providers. We can support people to share their needs, their gratitude and their concerns with services they interact with.</p> <p>Example: I have had both positive and negative experiences with services, sometimes you find a great fit, and sometimes it does not feel great. The experience with services is personal. If it fits for you that’s great, if it does not seem to fit there are options for services we can explore.</p>

Crafting our Resilience Stories

This is an example of a resilience story. It focuses on the reframing of an experience to the story that is truly meaningful for us. Resilience stories can acknowledge the challenges and impact but focus on the learning, growth and hope of the experience.

Resilience stories consider:

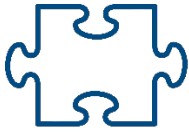
- Where are/were the opportunities?
- What was helpful?
- What did you learn?
- What did you gain?

Original Story

In 2016 I started university, enrolled in a Criminology program. The following months were awful. It felt like I was running on fumes, running from work to school, work, school and then spending any remaining time I had with the girl I had been dating for over a year. Two months into the school year my girlfriend told me she was interested in someone else – we broke up. By the end of the semester, I had nothing left, I dropped out of school. I came to be referred to as “the dropout” and “the disappointment” by family members and old friends... it wasn’t long until I started referring to myself the same way. I felt alone and ashamed.

Reframed: Resilience Story

In 2016 I started and finished my time at university. It was at a really challenging part of my journey. I went through a rough breakup, and with various mental health challenges piling up I made the decision to leave school. Family members and friends came up with a lot of names for me, “dropout” was the most common. I felt a great deal of shame. I spent three months working through my mental health challenges – journaling, going on walks and asking myself what would bring happiness to my life. I started volunteering, facilitating children’s mental health groups. It just felt right. I kept volunteering and after a year I enrolled in a Child & Youth Care program. I now recognize the essential growth and healing I did in that time and I am so grateful that I “dropped out” of university and gave myself the time I needed.



Your Resilience Story

Craft a Resilience Story! Take a situation you struggled with and reframe it – where were the opportunities, what did you learn, what was helpful, what did you gain?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's

Provincial Systems Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub for Peer Supporters & Organizations

Support House's Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's full programming is offered through our Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub which supports the most current, best practices in Peer Support.

Through our Virtual Learning Centre, we offer trainings, consultation, our Peer Professional Development Webinar Series, and provincial communities of practice. Our Resource Hub is home to our educational toolkits, documents and videos. These offerings support the practice and implementation of Peer Support within Ontario.

Products on our Resource Hub:

- ***Guiding Standards of Peer Support*** (from Mental Health Commission of Canada, Peer Support Canada & Centre for Innovation in Peer Support)
- ***The Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum***
- ***Empathetic Communication Toolkit***

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT OUR VIRTUAL LEARNING CENTRE & RESOURCE HUB](#)

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References

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Mental Health Commission of Canada. Sharing Your Personal Story: Speaker Toolkit.

TED - The Empowerment Dynamic. (2017, May 26). W.A.I.T. – Why Am I Talking? TED – The Empowerment Dynamic. <https://powerofted.com/w-a-i-t-why-am-i-talking-2/>.