



NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY | MAY 9, 2012

Community Conversation: Facilitators Handout

Overview

If you've decided to add a **Community Conversation** to your event in observance of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day—congratulations! You join more than 1,100 communities and 130 organizations throughout the country celebrating Awareness Day.

What Are the Basics of a Community Conversation?

Once you have looked through the resource materials on <http://www.samhsa.gov/children> to familiarize yourself with the concept of Community Conversations and tools available, you can use this handout as your guide to conduct your Community Conversation. Although there is much sample language in here, it is not necessarily a script that you must follow word for word.

You will want to be sure that your conversation accomplishes two goals. It should:

- Introduce the importance of children's mental health to people who have not previously been educated about these issues, using the definitions and data in the Definitions and Data handout (http://www.samhsa.gov/children/cc_data.asp). The conversation may be about trauma and resilience specifically, or it may focus more broadly on children's mental health.
- Offer attendees the opportunity to pledge a new kind of behavior, i.e., becoming a Hero of Hope, a positive and stable influence in the life of a young person.

Otherwise, you should plan your Community Conversation around what best serves your own community, keeping in mind the system of care values¹ of being youth-guided, family-driven, and linguistically and culturally competent.

Is This a Support Group?

This is not a support group. Because the focus of these conversations is on trauma and resilience, it is important to concentrate on lessons learned that can help enhance resilience, rather than the trauma experiences themselves. But be mindful that the conversation is not designed to be therapeutic; encourage your participants *not* to share personal stories. If the

¹ National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Retrieved from <http://ffcmh.org/who-we-are/>



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conversation seems to drift toward telling personal stories, gently steer it back by asking what was learned about developing resilience, and what kinds of experiences or people helped.

Discussions of trauma may bring up issues for those who have experienced the traumatic circumstances. If your conversation involves children or youth, be sure each of them has a supportive adult with them. If it appears that someone is having difficulty with discussing trauma or is actually in crisis, you can suggest that they call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)—which is staffed 24 hours for those in crisis. *The crisis line should not be used as a substitute for professional health and mental health care or consultation. If there is an immediate emergency, call 911.*

Before you hold your conversation, read through this Facilitator's Handout and print out the materials you will need.

How Do I Incorporate an Activity Into My Community Conversation?

You can use an activity to engage children while families participate in a Community Conversation, or you may use an activity as the catalyst for the conversation itself.

Examples of activities that can be a catalyst include the webcast of the national event on May 9 or the National Institute of Mental Health webcast on May 10, featuring a scientific panel that will discuss the adolescent brain. Both will feature information about children's mental health that can lead to meaningful dialogue in your own Community Conversation. A full list of activities can be found at http://www.samhsa.gov/children/communityevents_2012.asp.

Holding an Awareness Day Community Conversation

1. Welcome and Background

- Begin by welcoming your attendees.
- Explain what National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is, the key points of which are:
 - *National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day (Awareness Day) is May 9 this year. Awareness Day is a key strategy of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign. The Campaign seeks to raise awareness about the importance of children's mental health so that children and youth get help for mental health*



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- disorders with the same urgency as any other health condition and, ultimately, to reduce the impact of mental illness on America's communities.*
- *Each year, a national event in Washington, DC, complements events occurring around the country.*
 - *This year, the focus is on "Heroes of Hope" with the message that, with the help of caring adults and informed child-serving systems, young people can demonstrate resilience despite being exposed to a traumatic event.*
 - Give an overview of your event so that attendees know what to expect.

Example: *"Tonight, we're going to watch a webcast from the Awareness Day national event talking about trauma and resilience. We'll see young people talking about their Heroes of Hope and how this adult has helped them succeed in life. After this is over, I'd like to hear your reactions to what you saw."*

Example: *"Tonight, we're going to ask the young people here to draw some pictures that show what it feels like to bounce back. A (teacher/counselor/someone else) will lead them in this activity while the adults talk about how to help children and youth be resilient, especially during or after a traumatic event."*

- Help your participants develop an understanding about trauma and resilience. Use the definitions from the Definitions and Data handout (http://www.samhsa.gov/children/cc_data.asp).

2. Introduce the Concepts of Trauma and Resilience

- Use data to raise awareness.

Sample language for event for families of young children that uses data:

Let's do a show of hands.

How many of you think young children can experience traumatic stress? How many of you think children are too young to know what's going on, so they don't experience trauma the way the rest of us do? Did you know that when exposed to a traumatic event, children as



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young as 18 months^{2,3} can have serious emotional and behavioral problems later in childhood and in adulthood? More than 35 percent^{4,5} of children exposed to a single traumatic event will develop serious mental health problems.

Let me read you a few statistics about trauma and school-aged children.

SEE DEFINITIONS AND DATA HANDOUT: GENERAL TRAUMA STATISTICS

3. Continue the Conversation

- Ask your attendees a few leading questions, like:
 - *Does any of this surprise you?*
 - *Do any of these statistics change your mind about whether young people can experience trauma?*
- Use statistics that are specific to your audience (be selective; do not expect your attendees to absorb all of the statistics in the Definitions and Data Handout)

Sample language:

Let me read you some more statistics. Then let's talk about whether this information is new or surprising to you.

4. Deepening the Discussion around Trauma and Resilience

You will want to start talking about some of the signs of trauma and perhaps ask people for first-hand knowledge of lessons about resilience.

² Horton, C. (2003). Protective factors literature review. Early care and education programs and the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Center for the Study of Social Policy.

³ Mongillo, E. A., Briggs-Gowan, M., Ford, J. D., & Carter, A.S. (2009). Impact of Traumatic Life Events in a Community Sample of Toddlers. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 37, 455–468. Abstract retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19034643>

⁴ Perry, B. The Real Crisis of Katrina. National Association to Protect Children, Child Trauma Academy. Retrieved from http://vachss.com/guest_dispatches/katrina-tragedy.html

⁵ Horton, C. (2003).



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Sample language:

There are some signs that can tell us that a young person has experienced a traumatic event. What do you think are some of the signs?

We know that some of the signs are:

- *Separation anxiety or clinginess toward familiar adults such as teachers*
- *Changes in appetite*
- *Decreased interest in and/or withdrawal from friends and normal activities*
- *Over- or under-reaction to physical contact, sudden movements, and sounds*
- *Angry outbursts and/or aggression*
- *Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or fatigue*
- *Repeated recreations of the event through comments, drawings, or activity*
- *Avoidance behaviors (e.g., resisting going to places that remind them of the event)*
- *Heightened difficulty with authority, redirection, or criticism*
- *Emotional "numbing," or expressing no feelings at all about the event*

These signs don't necessarily mean a child has been through a traumatic experience, but they are something to look out for.

Let's talk about resilience.

- *Does anyone know of someone who bounced back from a traumatic event in our community?*
- *What was it that made the difference to that person?*

Let's hear from some of you.

- *What do you think resilience means?*



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- *Do you know someone who seems to define resilience? What are the characteristics of that person?*

There are some ways adults can help a young person enhance his or her resilience.⁶

- *Teach a child or young person **how to be a friend** in order to make a friend, including demonstrating empathy.*
- *Provide young people with **ways to help others**, because helping someone else can empower a young person who might otherwise feel helpless.*
- *With very young children who crave structure, **stick to a daily routine** so they know what to expect.*
- *Help a young person **relax**; too much structure can be exhausting.*
- ***Model self-care** for your child or youth. Children often do what they see those around them doing, and setting a good example of taking care of your own mental health is something that can help a child or youth deal with stressful times.*
- *Help a young person **break challenges down** into smaller, more manageable goals. Focus on what was accomplished rather than what was not.*
- *Show a child or youth how to **change how they describe themselves** or their situation. Whether it is helping a young person to see the humor in life or remembering past successes, you can help someone describe themselves in a more positive light.*
- ***Don't exaggerate the awful.** Although awful things happen, help a child or youth keep perspective by looking at the big picture, or looking beyond what has happened.*
- ***Celebrate lessons learned.** Tough times can teach young people about themselves and how to handle things differently in the future.*
- ***Accept that change happens.** You can help a young person see that change is part of life and doesn't have to be frightening.*

For a child or youth who has been through a traumatic experience, you will want to consider some additional ways to help.

⁶ American Psychological Association. Excerpted material retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx#>



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- *If you suspect abuse, you'll want to report that to the proper authorities.*
- *If the young person has experienced a traumatic event, a caring adult can help by⁷:*
 - **Maintaining usual routines** and giving advance notice to the young person of changes in routine or an event that could be unsettling.
 - Making sure the child or youth is **not being isolated**.
 - **Providing a safe place** where the young person can talk about the incident, but know that they may choose not to talk about the traumatic event.
 - **Offering choices** when appropriate to help the child or youth regain a sense of control.
 - **Being sensitive to environmental cues** that may cause a reaction (e.g., an approaching storm or the anniversary of an event).
 - Nurturing the young person's **positive self-view**.
 - **Giving simple and realistic answers** to the young person's questions about traumatic events to help clarify distortions and misconceptions.
 - **Monitoring your own reactions** to the situation, and asking for help when you are not sure how to address a child's or youth's needs.

With support, many children can recover quickly from the fear and anxiety caused by a traumatic experience. Others, however, may need more help over a longer period of time to recover and develop resilience needed to help them face new challenges in the future.

5. Introduce the Concept of Heroes of Hope

Sample language:

Were you aware that being supportive—and helping young people develop social skills and enhance their resilience—can lead to positive outcomes?

⁷ These tips adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Retrieved from <http://www.nctsn.org/content/helping-young-children-who-have-been-exposed-trauma-families-and-caregivers>



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Data⁸ show that among children and youth receiving services through SAMHSA grantees in Systems of Care and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, those living with the effects of trauma who connect with a supportive adult are much more likely to:

- *Show improved behavioral and emotional symptoms*
 - *Show improved academic performance*
 - *Engage less in criminal behavior*
 - *Have greater ease with building attachments*
- Ask your participants for their opinions on different ways an adult can make a difference.

Sample language:

What kinds of opportunities are there in our community where you can make a difference?

- Tell your attendees what a Hero of Hope is.

Sample language:

A Hero of Hope is a caring adult who provides a child or youth with the kind of positive, stable, long-term influence that can help develop resilience. You may not think one person can make a difference, but as we've just heard, the data shows otherwise. It is important to note that, in many cultures that focus on communities rather than individuals — such as Native American or Native Alaskan cultures — the concept of an individual Hero of Hope may not be as appropriate as crediting the community as a whole. There may be a cultural value of humility and hesitance to highlight individual leadership.

Data from SAMHSA's grantees in the Systems of Care and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network shows that connecting with supportive adults is one of the factors that helps children and youth develop resilience and recover.

⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). Promoting Recovery and Resilience for Children and Youth Involved in Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems.



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How many of you know someone who fits this definition, who is a Hero of Hope?

How many of you have been a Hero of Hope to a young person? What have you done?

6. Introduce the Hero of Hope Pledge

- Talk about some ways that people can be Heroes of Hope. If you are serving a community-based culture, talk about ways that a community can be heroic.

Sample language:

It takes a sustained relationship to help a child or youth to develop the social skills that can enhance resilience, and even small gestures can help a child who has experienced trauma. You can be a Hero for a minute, or you can be a Hero for a lifetime.

If you only have a minute:

—Offer a word of encouragement or praise to a child or youth.

If you have an hour or two:

—Coach a youth sports team

—Volunteer at an organization that provides activities or mentoring for children or youth

If you have longer:

—Resolve to be a continuing positive influence in the life of a child or youth, and touch base regularly just so they know you're there.

With help from families, friends, providers, and other Heroes of Hope, children and youth can be resilient when dealing with trauma.

- Distribute the Hero of Hope pledge form. Note that your participants are not required to sign the form if they are not comfortable doing so.
- Be sure to tell them that the information will be used only in the aggregate and no identifying information will be shared. SAMHSA will be using the information only to gauge how many people intended to become a Hero of Hope and what kinds of activities people said they would engage in.



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Sample language:

Now that you know how much of a difference a caring adult can make, I hope you'll pledge to be a Hero of Hope for a child or youth.

- **Collect the pledge forms** that have been filled out and distribute the “How to Be a Hero of Hope” handout (http://www.samhsa.gov/children/cc_howto_hero.asp).

Tips for the Facilitator

- Use open-ended questions to generate discussion:

“Did you know ...”

“What has been your experience with ...”

- **Use the resource documents** found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/children> to help with the discussion. These documents are arranged by audience; print the ones most likely to help you.
- Be sure to ask the participants if they have questions along the way.
- Using the Feedback Form (http://www.samhsa.gov/children/FeedbackForm_2012_508.pdf), **fill in the evaluation information** and email it to AwarenessDay2012@vancomm.com.

The “How to Be a Hero of Hope” handout includes the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. If you have an attendee who appears to be in crisis, provide him or her with the number—1 800-273-TALK (8255).

Please note that the Lifeline is a resource to provide support to parents or teens who need support during these conversations. It is a crisis hotline, not an information or referral line, and is not intended for small children.