

New England MIRECC Peer Education Center
Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital
200 Springs Road, Bedford, MA 01730

Part I of Peer Support Group Facilitation Skills Training Series

Training Session Role Play Activities

Role Play #1—Communicating Your Recovery Story as a Peer Support Provider:

Instructions: Recruit two training participants to act in the roles of “Mike” and “Bruce.” Have the participants first act out Scenario A and then immediately follow it with Scenario B. After both scenarios are finished, facilitate a group discussion with all of the training participants by asking them to answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities between the two scenarios in what Mike did? What are the differences between what Mike did in Scenario A and Scenario B?
2. Which of Mike’s approaches (Scenario A or Scenario B) seemed to be most helpful in engaging Bruce? Why?

Scenario A (Oversharing Your Personal Recovery Story): Mike is a peer support specialist who works in a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center. Mike provides individual mentoring to Veterans as well as facilitates two peer support recovery groups. Mike has his first mentoring session with Bruce, a Veteran who receives treatment services at the clinic. During the meeting, Mike asks Bruce what he feels hopeful about in his life. Bruce responds that he struggles with being hopeful, but he is looking forward to the weekend when he will have the opportunity to visit his brother and nephews. Mike acknowledges Bruce’s comment. Then, Mike launches into his own recovery story, noting that when he was at his lowest point he was completely cut off from his siblings and his nephews and nieces, but that with recovery, he has regained these family connections. Mike goes on and on about his strengths and how the renewed family connections have given him a sense of purpose and joy, things he could not imagine having two years ago. Bruce sits in a chair looking at Mike and remains quiet, not knowing how to respond.

Scenario B (Appropriate Use of Your Personal Recovery Story): Mike is a peer support specialist who works in a VA Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center. Mike provides individual mentoring to Veterans as well as facilitates two peer support recovery groups. Mike has his first mentoring session with Bruce, a Veteran who receives treatment services at the clinic. During the meeting, Mike asks Bruce what he

feels hopeful about in his life. Bruce responds that he struggles with being hopeful, but he is looking forward to the weekend when he will have the opportunity to visit his brother and nephews. Mike provides a nonverbal validation (ex. smiles and nods his head) in response to Bruce's comment and then asks Bruce what Bruce values about spending time with his brother and nephews. Bruce responds that his family really supports him and has seen him through thick and thin. Bruce notes that he sees his family as a strength he can rely on. Mike says he can relate and notes that recovery has provided him the opportunity to reconnect with his family in ways he never imagined. Bruce agrees with Mike's statement and states that when Bruce thinks about his family's support, he does feel more hopeful about where he is going in his life.

Role Play #2—Communication Skills:

Instructions: Recruit two training participants to act in the roles of "Sarah" and "Nick." Have the participants first act out Scenario A and then immediately follow it with Scenario B. After both scenarios are finished, facilitate a group discussion with all of the training participants by asking them to answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities between the two scenarios in what Sarah did? What are the differences between what Sarah did in Scenario A and Scenario B?
2. Which of Sarah's approaches (Scenario A or Scenario B) seemed to be most helpful in engaging Nick? Why?

Scenario A (Closed Communication): Sarah is a peer support specialist who works in a VA outpatient mental health clinic. Sarah is typing a progress note on her office computer when she hears a knock on her door. She calls "Come in" and in walks Nick, a OEF/OIF/OND Veteran, who introduces himself to Sarah and tells her he was referred to her by another Veteran who told him that Sarah could help him in navigating the VA health care system. Nick sits down across from Sarah's desk. Sarah takes out a piece of paper and a pen and tells Nick she will be asking him questions to better understand what assistance he needs. Sarah concentrates on looking at the paper on her desk and writing answers as she asks Nick questions. They have the following exchange:

Sarah: "Why are you here?"

Nick: "I'm new to this hospital and a Vet told me that you could help me figure out how to get around here and who I should talk to for things I need."

Sarah: "Which Vet told you to see me?"

Nick: "Frank R."

Sarah: “O.k. I’m going to ask you several questions to see what you need my help with.”

Nick: “O.k.”

Sarah: “Are you homeless?”

Nick: “No.”

Sarah: “Do you have a job?”

Nick: “No.”

Sarah: “Do you want a job?”

Nick: “Yes.”

Sarah: “Are you interested in going to school?”

Nick: “I don’t know. Maybe.”

The conversation continues in this way for a few more minutes with Sarah continuing to take notes and look at her paper while asking questions that Nick answers.

Scenario B (Open Communication): Sarah is a peer support specialist who works in a VA outpatient mental health clinic. Sarah is typing a progress note on her office computer when she hears a knock on her door. She gets up from her chair and opens the door to see Nick, a OEF/OIF/OND Veteran, standing in the doorway. Nick introduces himself to Sarah and tells her he was referred to her by another Veteran who told him that Sarah could help him in navigating the VA health care system. Sarah invites Nick into the office. Nick sits down across from Sarah’s desk and Sarah sits down next to him. Sarah takes out a piece of paper and a pen. She informs Nick she will be asking him questions to better understand what assistance he needs and she will take some notes to help her keep track of what Nick tells her. Sarah places the paper and pen on a clipboard on her lap. She occasionally looks at the paper and jots notes as she asks Nick questions. They have the following exchange:

Sarah: “It’s nice to meet you. What can I do for you?” (or state “What brings you to see me today?”)

Nick: “I’m new to this hospital and a Vet told me that you could help me figure out how to get around here and who I should talk to for things I need.”

Sarah: “Sure, I understand. When I first came here, I found it a little confusing to figure out where everything was and who I should talk to. I’m happy to help you if I can. What would you like to know about?”

Nick: “Well, I’m not working right now and could use some help finding a job to make some money right away. Also, I might be interested in taking some college classes and earn a degree or something. I heard I qualify for the GI bill but don’t know too much about it.”

Sarah: “The hospital has a Compensated Work Therapy Program which helps Veterans get temporary jobs as well as find permanent competitive jobs. The program also has a supported education specialist working there who helps Veterans learn about their GI bill benefits and apply for college if they are interested. I can give you the contact information for the Compensated Work Therapy Program and the supported education specialist if you would like to talk with them.”

Nick: “That would be great. I’d appreciate it.”