

Recognizing and Preventing Empathic Distress

Session 6: Lending Hope for Your Own Wellness

Purpose: In this session, we will discuss how to believe in what we do. Maintaining hopefulness for ourselves, other helping professionals, and the people we serve is crucial to our collective success.



FACILITATOR PREPARATION AND CONSIDERATIONS

“Lending Hope for Your Own Wellness” may be a challenging topic. Allow silence after you pose a question. Some of the most powerful responses come when someone has had a chance to really think through how they want to respond. Remember, when you're standing in front of a room, what feels like an eternity is likely less than a minute on the clock.

Starting a Session:

- ▶ Note: Throughout this workbook we use the terms “Helper” to describe professionals working in the behavioral healthcare field, often in community-based settings, who are supporting individuals in addressing substance use, mental health, or co-occurring conditions. At times, we use the term “Helpee” to describe the individuals the Helper is working with. We chose to do this so that the lessons in the workbook can be used by a wide variety of professionals who live, work, and play in the same community of the people they serve.
- ▶ Prepare yourself for the meeting: Take some time to review and think about the session purpose. Do you have any examples or useful stories to share on the topic?
- ▶ Prepare the room for the meeting: Arrive 20-30 minutes early to arrange the room. If possible, put chairs in a circle large enough so everyone can easily find a seat. Have pens and paper available just in case someone wants to take notes.
- ▶ Start the meeting: As people arrive, be sure to make eye contact and say hello, greeting them by name if you've met before. Start the meeting on time or within 5 minutes of the designated start time. A simple “Let's get started” or “It's 5 minutes after the hour, why don't we begin the meeting” works great.
- ▶ Give introductions and information: Introduce yourself briefly, the purpose of the series (Recognizing and Preventing Empathetic Distress) and the purpose of the session.



FACILITATOR:

Discuss as a large group (8 minutes):

- ▶ What does hope mean to you and how does it show up at your work?



Summarize (5 minutes): In our work as Helpers, the people that we see over and over are the ones really struggling to get well. It's easy to see this as evidence that nothing is working, and people will stay stuck. It can erode our sense that anyone ever gets better.

Do you know:

- ▶ 3 out of 4 people who experience addiction achieve full remission
- ▶ 2 in 3 (66.5 percent or 38.8 million) adults who ever had a mental health issue considered themselves to be recovering or in recovery
- ▶ As many as 80 percent of people with diabetes have the ability to reverse their disease.

A hopeful attitude is one of optimism, anticipating and expecting positive change.

Introspection (8 minutes): Have participants reflect on the questions below:

- ▶ Do you see others working in the field as half-full or half-empty? Why?
- ▶ What makes it hard for you to hold hope?
- ▶ What else is challenging about your work?
- ▶ What about your work energizes you?

Debrief as a large group (5 minutes): Ask participants to share their responses. Reflect and respond to replies.



Summarize (8 minutes): We know that when the people we serve lack hope, we can hold it out and/or lend them some of ours.

- ▶ Your optimism influences successful outcomes.
- ▶ Your positive expectations help the people you serve find the strength to pursue change.
- ▶ Being hopeful helps YOU avoid burnout.

To hold out hope, it helps if we:

- ▶ Believe in what we're doing.
- ▶ Lend our hopefulness to the people we work with.
- ▶ Balance our hopefulness with collaboration and empathy.

Pay attention to and demonstrate:

- ▶ Warmth
- ▶ Supportiveness
- ▶ Credibility
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Positive regard

Ok, so that's what WE do. How can we systematically enhance hopefulness in our coworkers?

- ▶ Measure confidence and build self-efficacy through affirmation

Notice when people believe in others despite setbacks. "Hey, I noticed that you've been working really really hard with Jen. I know she's been having some trouble maintaining her recovery, and you've kept meeting with her and helping her find her strengths."

- ▶ Focus on your previous successes and what it took for you to make those changes.

When you or a co-worker is discouraged and losing hope, it might help to recall a time when you thought things weren't going to work out or took a longer time to work out, but eventually, it did.



Exercise (15 minutes): Have participants get into groups of 3-4. Provide instructions for the group.

Instructions: Imagine how hope feels to others. If you were to overhear a person you serve or a co-worker talking about how you helped them feel more hopeful, what would you want them to be saying? Write down your ideas and share them with the large group.



Session Debrief:

- ▶ Maintaining hope and believing that what we're doing works, improves people's lives, and helps us with compassion and empathy fatigue.
- ▶ Discuss strategies that you can use to support other Helpers in staying hopeful.
- ▶ Notice and remind Helpers of their enduring qualities and strengths.
Offer warmth, support, empathy, and positive regard to each other