

Recognizing and Preventing Empathic Distress

Session 9: Knowing Our Scope and Asking for Support

Purpose: Identify ways we know we are working outside the scope of our practice



FACILITATOR PREPARATION AND CONSIDERATIONS

If possible, have a couple sheets of large sticky note paper on a wall where participants can see them, and have markers ready before the session. Also, have a pack of small Post-it notes, enough for each participant to have a small stack.

Feel free to tailor this section to the specific type of Helper that attends the sessions (peer recovery specialist, community health worker, peer support specialist). The purpose of this session is to help the group think through the scope of their role and how to recognize when they are being asked to or take on responsibilities that fall outside their scope of practice. This could lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

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 overall purpose of the session series (Recognizing and Preventing Empathetic Distress) and the purpose of the session.

FACILITATOR:



Summarize: As the Helper role changes and grows into new settings with new responsibilities, a shared understanding of the scope of our role becomes more and more important. You likely learned in training that there is a distinction between the work of a Helper and that of a clinician, therapist, nurse, or doctor. Helpers do not diagnose diseases, prescribe medications, or create clinical treatment plans.

While Helpers aren't therapists, that doesn't mean the work isn't therapeutic. While they don't diagnose disease or create clinical treatment plans, Helpers might refer someone to appropriate services to figure out why they are struggling and set goals that help someone grow and learn how to live a more fulfilling life. This makes for many gray areas in a Helper's practice. How do we know when we are practicing beyond our professional scope?



Exercise (20 minutes): Complete this exercise as a large group. Give each participant a small stack of Post-it notes.

Instructions: Let's think of situations that are out of our scope of practice.

Spend 3–5 minutes in silent idea generation. Group members silently record one idea per post it note until they run out of ideas - no talking.

When everyone is finished, go around the circle asking one person to read ONE Post-it note, then move to the next person. Continue with one person sharing one Post-it until all ideas are shared.

As participants share, the facilitator places each Post-it note on a large sheet of paper (sticky note) or on a wall that everyone can see.

Once all the ideas have been shared, participants can ask for clarification or the meaning of any of the Post-its.

Ask participants if they see any themes within the Post-it notes on the wall. The facilitator moves the Post-its into clusters per the participants' instructions. Take 10 minutes to cluster the ideas by theme or topic. When all the Post-its are grouped by theme, ask the participant to create a name for each theme.



Exercise (10 minutes): Have participants move into groups of three. Provide instructions to the group.

Instructions: In your small groups, develop ways Helpers can respond to the “out-of-scope” situations. This could be a referral to another service and the steps the Helper should take, or it could be when and how to approach a supervisor for guidance and/or support. We will spend 10 minutes on this activity and then come back together as a large group.

Debrief as a large group (5 minutes):

Ask each small group to report out their ideas on how to respond to “out-of-scope” situations.



Session Debrief: Discuss ways we know when the task at hand is outside of our scope as Helpers and what steps we will take when we find ourselves here.