

Mindfulness Exercise

Check in

- Survey
- Additional Meeting?
- Ask if anything came up last week they want share
- Make the forest

Introduce Storms

- Invite participants to hold onto the beauty of the trees as they think how even beautiful trees have to face storms and winds.

“We have trees which have strong roots, beautiful leaves and fruits. As beautiful as our trees and forest are, can we say that they are free from danger?”

Develop a list of forces that are unkind to trees:

- Burning, cutting, urinating on, too much/ too little rain, lightning, aging of trees, insects/parasites

Invite the participants to think of the hazards of their lives, to acknowledge how these hazards affect them and how they have been able to respond so far.

- Rather than just talking about the problems, explore with participants the effects that these problems have on their lives;
- When the storms of life have been named and the effects of these have been thoroughly traced, you can now ask the children whether or not it is participants’ fault that such things happen to them.

The aim of this part is to talk about difficulties in ways that are not re-traumatizing. What is unique about this way of talking about “Storms of Life” is that it is a collective experience that makes it easier for people to talk freely about negative stories by *creating a sense of distance between the person’s experience and the problem*. Simultaneously, it unpacks people’s knowledge & abilities about how they have already responded and treats people as experts in life, not as victims of life. It offers participants a sense of hope.

Share

- How can participants hold on to their hopes and dreams during difficult and stormy times in their lives?
- Focus on skills, abilities, hopes and dreams of each person and the histories of these.

Reflect on other trees

- Participants read other trees and leave a comment
- Return to your tree and read what people have written
- Any surprises? Reactions? Emotions? Common Themes?
- Share parts of their tree with the group

Celebrate

- Share accomplishments
- How did reading someone else's tree impact you?
- How you will apply what you read/did in this group to other areas of your life/ future?
- If there is one thing that you won't forget from this exercise, what would it be?

Certificates

- Acknowledge the time and the energy needed to participate.
- You all should be proud
- Thank participants for taking ownership of the group and making it a successful and positive experience for all involved.

Close

- Feedback Survey

Sharing

Participants share their "Tree of Life" story with another person

Participants are then given time to reflect on their experience of telling their "Tree of Life" story to another person.

The aim of this part was to build and acknowledge "a second story" about each person's life; this second story consisted of the skills, abilities, hopes and dreams of each person and the histories of these

Reflecting on others comments about Tree

This part bears similarities to Michael White's (2007) use of outsider witnesses in his therapeutic work. Outsider witnesses can be lay people or professionals who listen as an audience – witness - the "telling" of a person's or people's story. After the story has been told, the outsider witnesses are invited to "re-tell" this person's story by talking about what they heard that they were most drawn to, what caught their attention or what captured their imagination. This process can be compared with the invitation to the "Tree of Life" participants to write on each other's trees words of appreciation and encouragement. Of course, the outsider witness practice entails more: the most important is that the therapist holds the responsibility of interviewing each outsider witness about the following: the expressions they were drawn to, the images that came to their minds as they listened, how these expressions

resonated with them and how they have been moved as a result of being present to witness these stories (White, 2007).

Storms

Having created a different place for participants to stand, a place of strength, ability and hope, the exercise then invites people to talk about some of the difficulties and challenges they may be experiencing in life.

Using the tree metaphor again, ask participants the following question:

“As beautiful as trees and forests might be, are they free from dangers and hazards?” The apparent answer is “No”! Invite the participants to think of the hazards of their lives, to acknowledge how these hazards affect them and how they have been able to respond so far.

The aim of this part is to talk about difficulties in ways that are not re-traumatizing. What is unique about this way of talking about “Storms of Life” is that it is a collective experience that makes it easier for people to talk freely about negative stories by creating a sense of distance between the person’s experience and the problem. Simultaneously, it unpacks people’s knowledge & abilities about how they have already responded and treats people as experts in life, not as victims of life. It offers participants a sense of hope.

Reconnection

The final stage of recovery involves redefining oneself in the context of meaningful relationships. When they are able to see the things that happened to them and understand that those events do not determine who they are, many people who have experienced trauma are able to gain a different perspective and meaning of the traumatic experiences. The trauma is no longer the organizing principle of their lives. It becomes part of their story, but they are not living in it or from it.

In many instances, people who have experienced trauma find a mission through which they can continue to heal and grow, such as talking to youth or peer mentoring. Successful resolution of the effects of trauma is a powerful testament to the resiliency of the human spirit.