

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

**Making Effective Use of Your Personal Recovery Story in
Professional Peer Support Relationships**

Activity #3: Group Role Play—Deciding What to Share/Not Share in a Recovery Story

Instructions for Training Presenter(s):

Inform the training participants that they are going to act out the “Life Changes” peer support group in Vignette #3 that was discussed previously in Activity #2. Afterward, the participants will have the opportunity to discuss the vignette further. Have all of the training participants sit in a circle. Select two volunteers to play the roles of “Jorge” and “Melinda.” The rest of the training participants will act as members of the “Life Changes” group. Use the vignette description below to guide what “Jorge,” “Melinda,” and the peer support group members say and do during the role play. After the role play ends, use the questions below to facilitate a group discussion.

Role Play Description:

Jorge and Melinda are VHA peer specialists who work in the inpatient substance abuse treatment program at the local VHA medical center. They have agreed to co-facilitate a “Life Changes” peer support group in the program. As part of their role, it is expected that Jorge and Melinda will share part of their personal recovery stories with the Veterans in the group. During the first group meeting, Jorge tells the group members about his history of addiction and how years of physical and emotional abuse took their toll, leaving him feeling hopeless for much of his life. After Jorge finishes, Melinda tells the group members about the many ways that her life has changed since entering treatment and beginning her own recovery. Wanting to be a positive example for the group, Melinda shares details about the new apartment that she recently obtained with the help of the VA Supported Housing Program and the service connection rating that she was awarded. She also tells the group members that she will soon be going back to school to study to become a social worker, thanks to the assistance that she received from the medical center’s vocational rehabilitation services program. As Melinda continues to discuss the details of her recovery and recent life changes, some of the group members grow restless. One group member walks out of the room.

Questions for Group Discussion:

1. What may have been reasons for some of the group members' reactions (ex. restlessness; one group member leaving the room) during the meeting? For example, was the apparent agitation of the group members due to Jorge discussing how he has felt hopeless about his life and that he chose to share war stories of illness with the Veteran health care service users? Was the group members' agitation due to Melinda sharing her list of positive things that have recently been happening in her life?
2. What are some of the potential risks and benefits regarding what Jorge and Melinda chose to share about themselves and how they chose to share it with the group?
3. What could Jorge and Melinda do differently at future meetings to better meet the needs and interests of their peer support group members?

Points to Remember:

- It is important for VHA peer specialists to recognize the needs and interests of the Veteran health care service users who they are assisting.
- VHA peer specialists should only use the parts of their personal recovery stories that are relevant and relatable to the Veteran(s) who the peer specialists are assisting. The part(s) of the recovery stories that are shared should meet the needs and interests of the Veteran(s).