

## Having a Helpful Conversation

### **The individual is the expert in their own lives:**

- People know more about their own lives and realities than others
- People know what has worked for them in the past and what has not
- People need to remain free to make choices that may be different than the ones we would make for them
- We need to set aside our own frame of reference as much as possible to be able to explore others
- We need to strive to become experts at exploring the other person's frame of reference in order to understand the meaning that the issue has for them

### **Starting where they are at and being helpful:**

- This requires accepting where people are at, not where we think they should be
- All people have resources and knowledge of their own
- The emphasis needs to be on increasing our skill at asking questions that brings forth the knowledge and experience that is present in the stories of those we work with
- It involves asking the individual what they think would be helpful in this situation rather than what we think would be useful

### **Realities are socially constructed:**

- Beliefs, laws and social customs are created through social interaction over time
- People construct reality through the socially crafted tool of language
- Believing that many realities exist and we do not have all of the answers allows us to be more open to alternative solutions
- This enables us to listen to each other with more generosity and to learn from each other

### **The problem is the problem:**

- Problems appear less fixed and less restricting once the person is separated from the problem
- When people are able to view the relationship that they have as the problem as opposed to themselves being problematic, options for dealing with the problem become available.
- Separating the problem from the person allows their skills, abilities, competencies, interests and commitments to become more apparent. Ex. The person with schizophrenia nor schizophrenic

### **People make sense of their lives through stories:**

- There are many different sorts of stories by which we live our lives and relationships
- Peoples stories include stories about the past, present and future
- When individuals are able to share their story they are also sharing their strengths and resources

- Our job is to listen to a person's story and pull out their strengths and resources making them visible
- Be respectful when individuals are telling their story and help them to make the connection with their strengths that are in the story

### **Listen for strengths:**

- People are often distracted and discouraged by the problem with which they present, this leaves them less able to focus on their strengths and resources
- People can become problem saturated which leaves the risk of conversations focusing solely on the individuals deficits
- Asking questions that assist the individual to explore their strengths and coping strategies, rather than expecting change, enables them to feel more in charge of the situation
- Acknowledging the individuals strengths and resources enables the person to be more creative in finding potential solutions to the problem leaving no need for us to go into "fix it mode"

### **There are many truths:**

- We need to always be looking for other truths
- What are the alternative stories here?

### **Mental health promoting strategies:**

- Build on capacities and competencies
- Strengthen a sense of control
- Build resiliency and coping strategies for life's challenges
- Strengthen protective factors
- Lessen risk factors
- Build on the social determinants of health
- Build connectedness

### **Making a difference for those with a mental illness:**

- Know the facts
- Be aware of your attitudes and behaviour
- Choose your words carefully
- Educate others
- Support people with dignity and respect
- Ensure inclusiveness for everyone