

WORKSHOP SESSION SUMMARY
NIEHS National Trainer's Exchange
March 29, 2007
Las Vegas, NV

1. Session Title and Presenter's Contact Information

**“POST TRAUMA STRESS MANAGEMENT: A LOOK AT THE
PAINFUL AND THE POSITIVE”**

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2. Workshop Summary

This interactive session modeled an intervention for helping trauma survivors, such as Hurricane Katrina victims, to move past negative emotions relative to the losses they sustained. Participants worked through past experiences to understand how the identification of positive outcomes from disasters as well as negative outcomes can constitute a powerful means of allowing victims to move past negative consequences and embrace a more hopeful view of future prospects.

Objectives:

1. To increase participants' awareness of the wide range of emotions a person can experience after a traumatic event.
2. To provide participants with a more in-depth look at the positive emotions that are often part of the human experience after a crisis.

After a crisis, people are more aware of negative emotions. By identifying and reflecting these feelings, we can help them to become aware of positive emotions as well. There are key questions that can be utilized to help survivors become aware of emotions associated with their strength and sense of resolve. This can empower them and encourage them in their resolve to move past their sadness, grief, fear, anxiety, regret, rage, bitterness, sorrow, depression, etc. – all of which are natural responses to trauma.

3. Methods

This workshop used a facilitated group discussion to identify participants' past experiences and demonstrate techniques that can be utilized with trauma survivors to facilitate their ability to get past those events and move on in their lives. After sharing instances of traumatic experiences, the workshop presenter utilized one such experience to demonstrate how to draw out the positive outcomes associated with that experience of which the participant may not have been aware, or upon which the participant has not reflected. Participants were then directed to detail the positive as well as negative outcomes for a traumatic experience that they considered to have relevance in their lives. Discussions of these results were integrated with examples of how trainers can draw out these responses from their trainees.

Because these events and their associated emotions can block trainees in their efforts to learn new concepts and skills, these techniques can be useful to trainers within life skills training or in facilitating technical training programs. The presenter identified key issues associated with the use of this technique, and provided examples of the types of questions that can be utilized in implementing this technique.

4. Main Points

Key concepts presented and discussed were as follows:

a. Concepts related to disasters, traumas, crises:

- i. Definitions:
 1. Crisis- A decisive or crucial moment (danger/opportunity)
 2. Disaster: A grave occurrence having ruinous results
 3. Trauma- Something that severely jars the mind or emotions
 4. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) – A strong stress reaction that is intense and lasts longer than a month
- ii. Types:
 1. Individual/Personal (e. g. accident, rape, loss)
 2. Mass group experience (e. g. hurricane, terror attack, school shooting, war)
 3. Secondary traumatization (e.g. witnessing in person, on TV, or listening to someone's story)
 - 4.

b. Negative Emotions

- i. Anxiety related: anxiety, fear, shock, horror
- ii. Anger related: anger, rage, bitterness, contempt, disdain

iii. Grief related: grief, sorrow, depression, sadness, regret

(Note: Psychologists have shown that the more anger related emotions that are expressed after an event, the more likely a person to still be pre-occupied with that event years later, leading to unhappiness and an inability to form new bonds.)

c. Positive Emotions

i. courage, compassion, hope, resolve, determination, gratitude, joy, love, pride, awe, desire, humor

d. Counseling Issues

- i. Identifying and reflecting feelings are core counseling skills. (Let them talk about it. Let them know that you are hearing them. Affirm their feelings.)
- ii. People in crisis are more aware of negative emotions. After acknowledging these, we can help them by reflecting feelings of resolve to help the survivor tune into positive feelings. We can enhance those positive feelings and help them gain a sense of empowerment.
- iii. Ask questions that remind them of their strengths and sense of resolve:
How did you survive? How did you get yourself to do that?
Where did you get your courage? How did you get from then to now? What was it like to tell _____ how much they meant to you? How did it feel to finally believe that there was a way out of the crisis?