

# Intentional Trauma Informed Peer Support: An Alternative Approach



Shery Mead, 2006

# In Intentional Peer Support We...



- Explore the whole context of people's lives (race, culture, class, gender, etc)
- Are present through witnessing rather than assessing and evaluating
- Challenge each other out of 'doing what's been done to us'
- Determine where the real problems lie



Intentional relationships that support both of us in:

- Re- defining
- Re- remembering
- and Reclaiming

Who and how we want to be in community.

**"You're weird, bad, crazy..you  
deserved it, It's your  
fault"...etc**

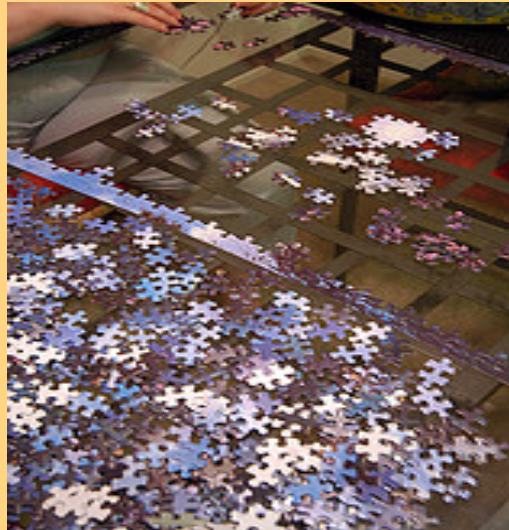
**I learn to "act as if"**

**I seek help for  
my problem**

**I wonder what  
my problem is**

**You say that you  
like me**

**The pressure of  
secrecy builds**



**"You wouldn't like me  
if you really knew  
me."**

**I feel split in two**

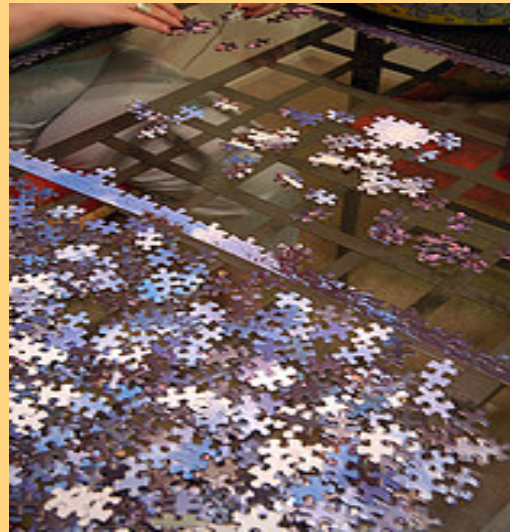
**I come to you for help**

**I figure you're  
the expert**

**You give me a  
diagnosis**

**You wonder if I  
should be  
hospitalized**

**You determine  
treatment based on  
my "symptoms"**



**I call you when I feel  
like my symptoms are  
"out of control"**

**I start defining my  
experiences as  
symptoms**

**You ask me how I'm  
managing my symptoms**

**I come to you for help**

**I figure you're  
the expert...**

**We get to know  
each other.**

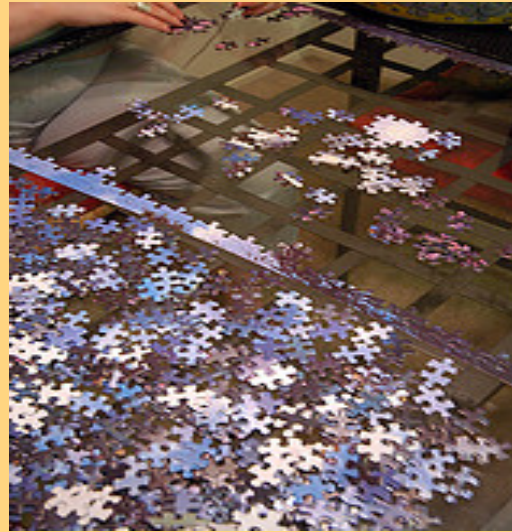
**You suggest  
that I take a  
PRN**

**We feel like we're  
"equals..." Until**

**You ask you if I'm  
feeling safe**

**I am having a hard time...**

**You worry that you'll  
say the wrong thing.**



**I come to you for help**

**We're both the experts**

**We listen to each other**

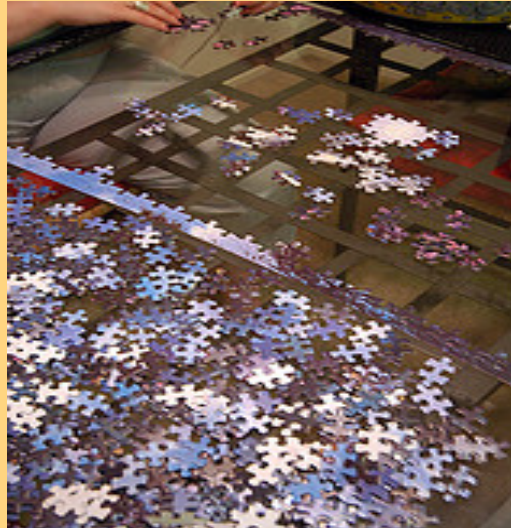
**We talk about what works for us both**

**We learn a lot about each other**

**We negotiate power, conflict and safety**

**One of us has a hard time**

**We struggle with our fear**





Think of and describe a relationship that has really inspired you to move out of your comfort zone.

What were the unique qualities of the relationship?

Think of and describe a relationship in which you inspired someone else to move out of their comfort zone.

What were the unique qualities of the relationship?



# The Tasks of Peer Support



1. Connection
2. To help each other understand how we've come to know what we know
3. To redefine help as a reciprocal process
4. To help each other move towards what we want rather than away from what we don't

# Listening from a position of “not knowing”

If we listen for illness, what we’ll hear is illness...



Ask questions that explore meaning

- Help me understand...
- I wonder...
- How did you learn...
- What makes that so...(hard, scary...)

# Pay Attention to the Told and Untold Story



- How did the person learn to think this way?
- How are these beliefs helpful?
- What are the stories we've learned to tell?
- How have those beliefs been helpful to us?

# Validation



■ Respond to feelings rather than ‘fixing it’

■ Empathize

■ Acknowledge change

# Mutuality: Redefining Help

- Keeping the needs of both people in mind
- How is this going to help both of us?
- Maintaining an expectation of learning from each other
- Don't fall into helper/helped roles

# Mutual Responsibility



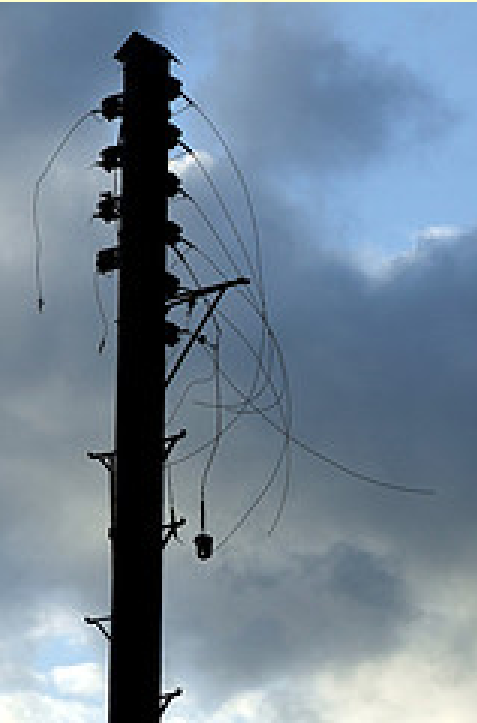
- Both people state their needs and wants
- Both people take responsibility for their own feelings
- Difficulties are negotiated
- Shared responsibility for safety/comfort
- Shared responsibility for maintaining the intentionality of the relationship
- Shared responsibility for stimulating and supporting critical learning and growth

# Moving Towards What we Want

- What do you want?
- Do your current beliefs support what you want?
- What would you have to believe to have what you want?
- What do you want to feel?
- If you were feeling that way what would you be able to do?



# Task One: Connection



Many people feel disconnected because of:

- Trauma
- Mental health diagnoses
- Poverty
- Otherness

What are the things that help you re-connect?



# Worldview



- How we've learned to see...
- Tells us what to do...
- What we get reinforces how we see...
- You need to change how you see to get something new.

# 'Help' Goes Both Ways

- Model peer support: Don't provide a service
- Re-defines help as a relationship where both people learn and grow



- We bear witness to each other's stories
- We support each other
- We respectfully challenge each other

# Supports us in Moving Toward What We Want



- Life is exciting rather than a struggle
- Our energy increases
- Relationships focus on creating rather than commiserating
- We do not understand ourselves as limited
- We begin to create dreams we never knew existed