



TELLING STORIES TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S HEALTH: A WOMAN-CENTRED APPROACH

This resource talks about how storytelling can help strengthen women's social supports and provide opportunities for personal development and participation.

What is woman centred story telling?

Telling our stories, including our joyful and our painful experiences can help us feel less alone, especially if we see other people with similar experiences and feelings as ours. Sharing our experiences including the things that have made it hard for us and what has helped, might be useful to other women.

A woman-centred approach to storytelling looks at how we can encourage women to share their stories and to explore new or different ways of understanding our life circumstances and experiences.

Why is storytelling important?

Storytelling helps us to explore and question factors that might influence our life experiences. These include access to income and housing, education and work opportunities, family responsibilities, social and recreational connections, experiences of discrimination, abuse and violence, and access to services and support.

Women's life experiences are rich sources of knowledge and skills. Sharing our experiences can help us to recognise and appreciate our own strengths and inner wisdom. They can also help us to provide support to other women, to generate ideas and to inform other generations.

Telling women's life stories can also help service providers to be more aware of women's experiences and how to improve services to better meet women's needs.

Ideas on doing story telling with women

There are many ways women can tell their life stories, including talking, art or craftwork workshops, music, drama or movement, a journal or diary, individual or group counselling.

Find ways for women who have experienced similar life experiences and difficulties to share stories. This may be in a new or existing support group, playgroup, via a newsletter, or Internet chat group. Explore similarities and the differences in women's stories. Identify the strengths each woman has demonstrated through her experiences both in terms of what she have gained from hardships as well as achievements and support. Share this learning and celebrate strengths and achievements.

Think of ways women's lived knowledge can be shared more broadly with other women and with service providers. This could include through brochures, media, speaking at schools or service provider agencies, service provider training, conferences and working on community committees and working groups.

Where to start

A good book to start thinking about using women's stories is *What is narrative therapy? An Easy to Read Introduction*. By Alice Morgan. Dulwich Centre Publications. Adelaide. 2000. A great way to explore women's strengths is by using *Strengths Cards* which name and picture a range of strengths.

To look at some *Strengths Cards* at Women's Health West, contact Joy on 9689 9588 or joy@whwest.org.au.

An example of woman-centred storytelling

The Young Mum's Rock! brochure was produced by young mothers for young mothers. Through workshops with an existing support group, young mothers shared their experiences including the good and the hard times.

The aim of the brochure was to present a realistic view of being a young mother and to let other young mums know that they are going through similar experiences and that there is help and support available. The young mothers have shared their knowledge and wisdom through an event for young mothers, media articles, talking to service provider agencies and students, and representation on a working group to plan a second event for mothers in Melton.

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Produced as part of the Young Mums Rock! project by Joy Free, Researcher, Women's Health West, March 2006