

SHARING POWER FAQ

Q&A

Why did you develop the Sharing Power tipsheets?

Sharing power is an integral part of trauma-informed practice, but the challenge is translating the idea of sharing power into clinical practice. We began by creating resources and providing language that show providers how to validate the experience of family members and support our shared engagement.

Why did you write the tipsheet and reflection tool specifically for providers?

Most discussions of shared power and partnering focus on “educating” families about how to engage in productive partnerships. We wanted to address the provider’s role in working partnerships.

How did you think the resources would be used initially?

We anticipated individual providers would use the resources to reflect on the work they do and facilitate conversations within their agencies. We hoped that the ideas we offered—and subsequent reflections and conversations—might lead to increased comfort with a shared power approach and, ultimately, to more productive provider family partnerships.

Where and how did you use the resources the first time?

After we developed the tools, a team (family members and providers) presented them at a national conference workshop to a large mixed audience of traditional providers, family support staff, and family members/young adults. Using an experiential and role playing approach, we hoped to pilot the ideas with a live audience, host a conversation about sharing power, and identify barriers to—and supports for—this kind of practice change.

What was the reaction to the material?

Intense! We were not fully prepared for the audience members’ strong reaction to the presentation. Nor did we expect that the idea of shared power in behavioral health would elicit so many comments about privilege, historical oppression, and social power in general.

While we already recognized the relationship between cultural competency and sharing power, we were surprised by the intensity of emotional reactions and how quickly the discussions “went there.” Responses to the question of how often participants had thought about these topics ranged from “a great deal” to “not at all.”

Is there anything that particularly surprised you?

During role play activities, participants told stories of being on the “receiving end” of services during which they experienced a deeper vein of oppression. We noticed that some participants had a lot of experience with—and the language for speaking about—power differences in systems, while some seemed to have very little.

We were very pleased that, in general, the participants were enthusiastic about the ideas we presented and the prospect of putting them into practice.

Have you used this since the National Family-Focused Conference?

If so, was the experience similar? Since our initial pilot, several of us have used the Sharing Power tipsheets in various settings. We continue to find using them provocative, and we rarely have to work hard to generate conversation! We find that some participants enthusiastically embrace the tools and the ideas behind them and have led their organizations to adopt them. Still other audiences dismiss the tools, offended by the suggestion that their organizations are not already sharing power in every interaction.

Beyond your use, what else have you heard? We haven't formally evaluated the effects of this material, but we do know it has been downloaded over 1500 times in the first seven months since being made available—a high rate compared to other NCTSN tools and resources. We know that family partners within the NCTSN have been using examples of trauma-informed practice to empower consumers. We've also heard that people are adapting the tools to use in various trainings and workshops.

What else do you think would be helpful to someone wanting to use these tipsheets in their work?

While we hope people will use these tools in new and creative ways, based on our experiences, we have two recommendations:

Creating psychological safety is vital to having genuine conversations and engaging in self-reflection.

We now devote more time to establishing ground rules and finding ways to allow for the sharing of all perspectives without judgment or shaming.

Self-preparation and presenter well-being are essential.

These topics don't just provoke our audiences, but also provoke us as facilitators! Each of us holds strong convictions about sharing power, oppression, and privilege. In order to facilitate discussions and create psychological safety, we need to understand that our job is not to convince others but to promote exploration and to allow emotional intensity in such a way that encourages authentic discussion.

In our experience, we can make a difference just being prepared for strong reactions and having a sound strategy for responding.

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