

## **Stream of Consciousness exercise**

Assisting colleagues in finding and telling their own story

You will need:

- 4 pieces of paper per person
- Pens
- Highlighters
- Stopwatch
- A power-point to display each question in turn (optional)

Time needed: 45 mins including reflective discussion.

Everyone has a story to tell. But sometimes it can be really difficult to articulate experiences that, in many cases, can be very difficult to recall and express. This exercise is one way that you can work with colleagues to write their story and should prove a useful platform to start refining their story. You can do this with a group, or if you have a stopwatch, you can do this by yourself on your lunch break or at home.

People respond to this activity in different ways, and for some cases it can prove to be an emotional experience. Make sure that you remind the group of why they are here and the power that sharing their story can have in breaking down mental health stigma and discrimination. If anyone starts becoming distressed, it is best to step outside with them. (Ideally, you would have a quiet space nearby) Listen to them without judging them, give them reassurance that it is normal to feel overwhelmed when writing about these types of experiences.

Whether we have experienced a diagnosable mental health problem or not, we have all experienced challenges in our lives that have affected us - and it can be interesting to reflect on our experiences. Let's get started!

### Explaining the activity

Explain to the group that you are going to do an exercise called a stream of consciousness exercise. Tell them that it allows us to write non-judgmentally about themselves and their experiences.

Explain that the exercise is about reflecting on some of their experiences and deciding on what's useful to share.

Tell them that you are going to ask them a series of questions that they must answer.

For this exercise: there are three rules.

- For each Question they will have 2 minutes to write and you will time them.
- They are not supposed to 'think'. Explain that you just want them to respond just by writing immediately, whatever comes into their head, even if that is 'I don't see the point of this'...etc.
- You must not take your pen off the paper until the 2 mins is up.

Reassure them that this piece of writing won't be shared. This is for them and may prove to give them some useful insight into their experiences. Some of them may wish to share and that is entirely their choice.

### Beginning of Written Exercise

#### Part A

This section is about an early experience with Stress, Anxiety, low mood or other mental health difficulties. For each question, you must write a two minute account of what you experienced.

1. Describe some thoughts and feelings that you experienced at this time
2. Did you tell anyone? Who did you tell and how did they react?
3. How did stigma affect you? Whether that is the stigma of others or the stigma you placed on yourself.
4. Describe a memory / time when you were helped (by a doctor / hospital / friend / colleague / family)

Part B

Now I want you to think about a turning point when things started getting better / Road to recovery

5. Can you pinpoint 3 things that helped? Write about what helped - was it an action, was there anyone who helped or inspired you?
6. What was that help and how did it feel?
7. Now I want you to write about your personal experience of feeling good
8. With the knowledge of what helped and who you are now, what advice would you give to your earlier self?
9. Why is tackling stigma around mental health a key workplace issue?

**End of Written Exercise**

At this point, it would be useful to get into groups and feed back to each other. How was that activity? Useful?

Ask if anyone would want to feed back the groups thoughts to the whole room?

Reflection time:

1. Ask the group to select what they would feel comfortable to share with others.
2. Ask them to highlight these areas with a pen.
3. Ask them to share these areas with a partner. The first person in the pair has 3-5 minutes to talk before the partners must swap.
4. Ask the group how it felt to share with someone else?