

Discomfort as Opportunity: Pathways Vermont's Relationship-First Practice



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OBJECTIVES & OVERVIEW

Learners will...

- Gain insight into the efficacy and sustainability of this trauma-informed approach
- Investigate the opportunities inherent in their discomfort
- Explore possibilities for growing and sustaining this practice in their work and relationships

Pathways Vermont's Values-Based Service Philosophy

- Individual choice & self-determination
- Trauma-informed relationships & services
- Harm reduction
- Peer support
- Community integration
- Respect, warmth, and compassion

Pathways Vermont's Relationship-First Practice

- **Humanity:** value lived experience and recognize each person as their own expert
- **Authenticity:** foster connection through empathy and authenticity
- **Collaboration:** center mutuality, mutual responsibility, and mutual support
- **Humility:** preserve autonomy and choice
- **Curiosity & Hope:** explore opportunities for meaning-making and transformation

WHERE'S THE FOCUS?

What's wrong with you?

*Locates social problems within
individual people*



What happened to you?

*Trauma-informed approach that
understands people are impacted
by social problems*



Why a Relationship-First Practice?

- Human services is not “us vs them”
- A relationship-first practice is truly person-centered
- Mutual relationships are trauma-informed
- Humility begets curiosity & openness

Why a Relationship-First Practice?

- Relationships are more sustainable when they work for each person involved
- Collaboration minimizes coercion
- Practicing empathy > needing to have all the “answers”

How do we value lived experience?

- Each person knows themselves best
- Each person has wisdom and insight
- Humility > competence

How do we foster connection?

- Practice empathy and non-judgment
- Be forthcoming about lived experience
- Focus on relationships

How do we center mutuality?

- Shared understanding of the relationship
- Co-creation and collaboration
- Share power and decision-making
- Minimize resentment
- We are all human beings
- Consciousness of power

How do we preserve choice?

- Autonomy
- Voice
- Share power & preserve dignity:
 - *Doing with* instead of *doing for*
 - *Being with* instead of *doing to*

How do we explore opportunities?

- Curiosity
- Embracing discomfort
- Disconnection → Reconnection
- Past harm ≠ future harm
- Destruction & creation happen in tandem
- Impermanence
- Capacity to change

Barriers & Challenges

→ Sitting with discomfort

- What are some scenarios that make you feel uncomfortable?
- How do you navigate discomfort in relationships?

Barriers & Challenges

→ Sitting with discomfort

- How do you resist treating someone as if they're fragile?
- How do you resist defining someone based on their past experiences?

Questions?

Resources & Reading

- [Tolerating Discomfort: Pathways Vermont's Relationship-First Practice](#)
- [Alexander Ferguson Speech on Shifting Narratives: The Practice of Peer Support](#)
- [Pathways Vermont: Stories of Hope](#)
- [Pathways Vermont: Stories of Home & Health](#)
- [Learn about Soteria Vermont](#)
- [Soteria Stories](#)

Thank You!

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