THE CATALYST

Top three things I learned from MHFA training

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By: Eric Gronke | Posted: March 31, 2022

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Several months ago, I had the opportunity to participate in Mental Health First Aid training for the first time. It was an eye-opening experience that really made me look inward and assess my outlook on mental health and what living with a mental illness entails.

I got the chance to write in more detail about my experience here. It made such an impact on my mindset towards mental wellness that I want to highlight my top three takeaways from the training sessions.

Language matters

We often forget the impact our own words have on those around us. The language we use can make a world of difference in terms of the stigma surrounding an individual's mental well-being.

Consider the following statements: 'They are an addict" or "They are in recovery". Sometimes small changes can make a big difference. The first phrase places a stigmatizing label on the individual while the following verbiage provides a more optimistic and inclusive tone.

We should strive to use person-centered language that avoids defining individuals by their illness.

Be confident

In many situations in life, confidence is key. This remains true when having difficult conversations surrounding someone's mental well-being.

It may be intimidating to bring up the topic of mental well-being in discussion, especially for the first time. We don't want to come off as judgmental or project our opinions onto others, assuming that something is wrong. At the same time, it's not always abundantly clear when something is wrong. The more you open yourself to leading dialogue around mental health, the more confident you will become. It may feel uncomfortable but asking questions and suggesting professional help when someone is showing signs of a mental health crisis, might just save their life.

Set boundaries

Supporting others is noble, but it should not come at the cost of your own mental well-being. It is easy to become consumed by the obligations one feels when helping someone with a mental health crisis.

It is important to set healthy boundaries for yourself to make sure your own mental well-being is not at risk. Be open about your limitations, letting others know what you can do to assist them. At the same time, it is healthy to maintain your priorities.

One example of a healthy boundary is not allowing yourself to do something for someone that they are able to do on their own. Not only does this allow the individual to maintain their independence, it also sets the expectation that they must be willing to help themselves if you are going to continue to provide support.

Keeping these lessons in mind over the last few months, I have been able to be a more supportive friend and feel more confident having open and honest conversations about my own mental health with those around me. My hope is the training can do the same for you.

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