



Retelling the Story

Warning: *This activity is not an introductory group therapy activity or an ice breaker. Rather, this activity should be done in a group that is a safe environment for all group members and the group should be prepared to be supportive and open with one another as sensitive topics will be discussed*

Background: Sometimes group therapy is used to share, discuss, and process various personal stories and experiences that may have been traumatic or hurtful. However, for this exercise, the purpose is to retell some challenging personal experiences however doing so while ending on a positive note by emphasizing gains made in spite of these adversities.

Directions: Group members should take turns selecting a topic from the list below and then tell a story of a personal challenge based on that topic. However before telling the story, make sure of the following:

- Make sure that you are comfortable enough to share this story right now in this group. If you are not ready to share an experience, then there is no pressure to do so right now. Choose a topic and a story that you are mentally and emotionally prepared to share at this time.
- Be prepared to end your telling of the story with the positive ending including gains you have made in spite of your struggles. **An example is provided below**

Topics List:

Physical Pain	Hurt	Disappointment	Shame
Loss	Rejection	Betrayal	Regret
Illness	Injury	Bad Decision Making	Confusion
Sadness	Loneliness	Embarrassment	Fear
Failure	Poverty	Lack of Support	Injustice
Disability	Depression	Separation	Isolation
Stuck	Overwhelmed	Misfortune	Mistreatment

Example: Topic Selected: “Bad Decision Making” – *“When I was younger, I had a lot of the problems that were going on in my life at the time including.... Instead of asking for help I was angry and got into a lot of fights and I ended up surrounding myself with other kids who seemed to get into trouble. This led to some really bad decisions including.... - (Then, switch to ending on positive note) – Nowadays, however I have learned a lot from my past mistakes, and I know now to watch who I hang out with. I have learned that I can walk away from trouble, and I no longer need to fight. I now try to surround myself with people who care about me and who want to see me succeed and who are there for me when I need them”*

A few last points to review as a group before starting this activity and discussion:

- Everyone should agree to listen, pay attention, support one another without criticism or judgement. It is critically important that people listen to one another when discussing sensitive topics
- The point of this exercise is not to tell war stories “I had it worse than you did” – Everyone’s experience is unique and there should be no comparison or ranking of who had it the hardest. No one should feel afraid to be judged by their story
- The point of this exercise is not to say it was a “good thing” that certain experiences happened. Rather, the point is to focus on good things that are now being experienced in life today, **in spite of these past negative experiences.**

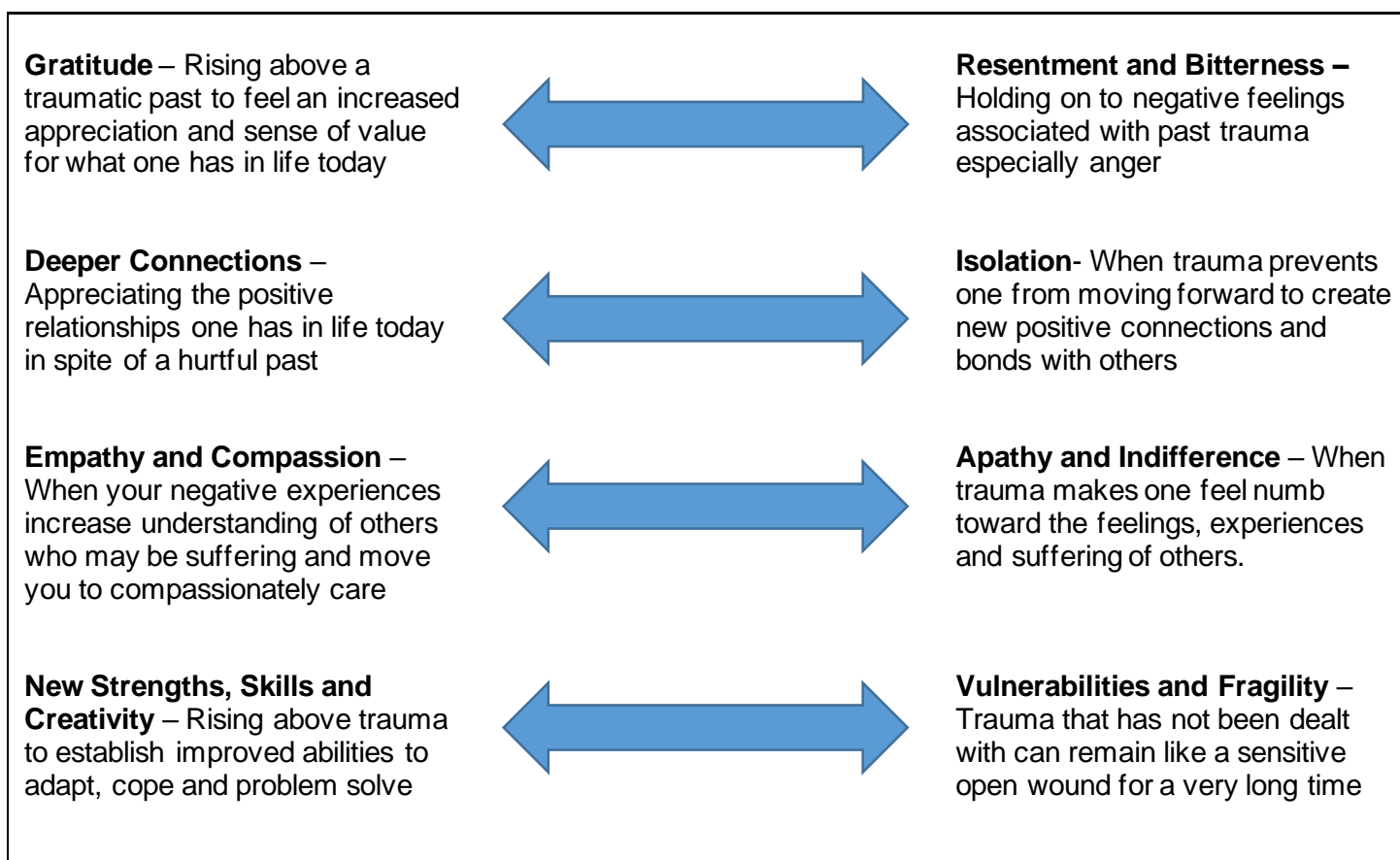


Closing Education and Discussion: Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic Growth - Posttraumatic growth (PTG) or benefit finding is positive psychological change experienced as a result of adversity and other challenges in order to rise to a higher level of functioning. (Tedeshi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (2004). Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundation and Empirical Evidence) - PTG involves resilience, adapting, resourcefulness, and meaningful personal life change

It is very unfortunate, sad and unfair that bad things happen even to good people. Exploring posttraumatic growth is about looking at the ways people bounce back from traumatic events (aka resiliency)

Some Areas of Posttraumatic Growth - Compared and Contrasted:



There is no shame if someone who has experienced trauma is taking some time to experience posttraumatic growth. It is a process which can take a lot of time and hard work, and everyone moves at their own pace. With time and consistent effort, growth can occur in spite of past trauma

Closing Discussion – *Staying on the path toward posttraumatic growth:*

Help – Who or what is helping you with trauma (treatment, informal support, etc) – What other options can you explore?

Healing and Coping – What skills and routines are helping you to get better even if it's just a little each day?

Staying Positive and Productive – What can you focus on each day to stay on a path toward resilience and growth and to get through the tough times effectively? What actions are you taking to move forward and grow?