



Activity: **Lifestories**

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INSTRUCTIONS

This higher-risk activity has a number of intended outcomes, including building a powerful sense of community among training participants.

It begins by instructing participants with the following (*make this your own*):

“Please take a few moments to think about an object or item that means a great deal to you. It should be something that represents part of your life story so far. Perhaps it is a photograph of someone close to you who is gone now; or maybe it is a book you read as a child that changed your life. Perhaps it is poem you know by heart or a piece of clothing, or a stuffed toy, or a musical instrument, or a piece of sports equipment . . . It can be anything that tells us more about who you are in the world. If you don’t have it with you, I’d like you to visualize this object and think about why its so important to you; I want you to prepare to tell us a part of your story—something deep inside that speaks to your truth.

Please think about something that is very important to you; that represents a critical aspect of who you are; something that may take you outside of your comfort zone when you share it with all of us. During the activity we will work hard to create a safe and sacred space where people can talk about their object, explaining what it represents about who they are and how they walk in the world. It is always a tremendously powerful experience.

It also requires us to:

1. **Listen from our hearts, paying attention and remaining silent throughout the activity.**
2. **Step out side of our comfort zone and share more deeply than we have in the past.**
3. **Respect ourselves and one another, honoring each other’s courage.**
4. **Honor the simple groundrules.**
5. **TRUST: The process, ourselves, and each other.**

DEBRIEFING

It is usually best not to debrief this activity immediately following the storytelling portion.

The next day, participants should be convened again in a circle (this is a much more informal gathering)—encouraging them to begin thinking about their experience. Once folks have reassembled, begin by asking for feelings about the activity itself.

A possible first question might be: During the activity, there were many thoughts and feelings running through your minds, what did you notice? What were you thinking and feeling?

Keep going with "What else? What else?"

Encourage general reactions at first. You may also ask if people were nervous or anxious going into the activity.

Then depending on how forthcoming people are, ask for them to talk about whether they were outside of their comfort zones in either telling or listening to the stories. What was that like? Was this the first time someone had talked about this part of their identity? How do they feel about having shared the story last night? How do they feel today? Prompt with statements like:

Did anyone feel ...? Find themselves ...? What about your own responses surprised you?

There is an important difference between asking participants to notice what they as individuals were thinking and feeling and to notice what was happening in the group. The facilitator will have to know when to focus attention where.

Other helpful questions and comments include:

- Sometimes when we learn something about another person our first response is "I didn't want to know that!" Did you notice yourself having these feelings?
- Are there any ways in which this experience changes your perceptions about people in the program? In relationships that you have?

What was it like talking to their teammates? What was it like having the other team members in the circle? You should make some connections here to the power of trust in relationship-building. Usually, people will feel more comfortable with their own team, having spent much more time with them.

Use the participants insights to reinforce larger points about why this community-building work is important—look to the group to help explain why this activity was useful and the implications for themselves, their teams, and their service to communities.

At the close of the discussion, participants should be reminded that this activity allowed people to share very personal parts of themselves. What was learned about each other is not appropriate for casual conversation. Ask people to please respect the confidentiality that was agreed upon in the beginning.

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