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Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
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# **Workshop Wednesday:**

## **Ripples of Recovery Anti-Stigma Campaign Strategy – Empathy**

**February 19, 2025**

**Rebecca Shisler Marshall, PhD**

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If we need to end today's presentation unexpectedly, we will follow up with you using your registration information.

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Remember to ask questions using the chat feature.

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Certificates of attendance are available for today's session.

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# Mountain Plains Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Center (MP-ROTAC)

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Three-year grant

Serve Region 8 States

Center of Excellence for developing and disseminating **community-based** training and technical assistance

Focus on opioid and stimulant misuse

# Evaluation Information



[https://w1che.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9mn2KMoVuYHxkoK](https://w1che.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9mn2KMoVuYHxkoK)





<https://ripples.mprotac.org/print-toolkit-request/>





# **Workshop Wednesday:**

## **Ripples of Recovery Anti-Stigma Campaign Strategy – Empathy**

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# Ripples of Recovery Anti-Stigma Campaign Strategy - Empathy



# Rebecca Shisler Marshall, PhD, CCC-SLP



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# How to Reduce the Stigma

## Ripples of Recovery



### Empathy

Understanding the challenges and feelings of others we can help clear the barriers to support.



### Awareness

Raising awareness empowers communities to recognize the signs of addiction.



### Community

Resources and support networks for a safe environment of support.

# Empathy

The ability to see things from another's perspective and feel their emotions, while being aware that they are not one's own. -*helpguide.org*

The ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation-*Cambridge Dictionary*



# Why Empathy and Compassion Matter



## Connection

- Empathy plays a crucial role in building meaningful relationships
- Important in fostering connections
- Empathy can also help individuals better understand themselves and their emotions

## Evidence

- Positive empathy has been shown to reduce stigma significantly (Clinton & Pollini, 2021)

## Self-Compassion

- Self-compassion as a form of empathy encourages kindness to self
- Recognizing the human experience that is not individual, but a shared experience

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# Explore Empathy

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# An Example

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You are sitting on a train and a stranger about your age sits down next to you. The stranger is friendly and compliments you on your style. As you strike up a conversation, you learn that the stranger has just started a new job. As you learn more, the stranger discloses to you that they are a person who injects drugs. They tell you about how challenging it was to find employment despite their training and experience in their field. They go on to tell you that they are treated poorly in hospitals and public places and how they are often unfairly discriminated against by other members of society because of their drug use. They tell you that they are often discouraged because people do not see their accomplishments and only see their struggles.

# Reflect...

Can you think of a time when someone failed to see your accomplishments?

What differs about your situation compared to the stranger?

What would you say to the stranger to make him feel better about his current situation?

What kind of positive impact do you think your comments will have on the stranger?

How can you make a positive impact on other people like the stranger in the future?



# Increasing empathy

- Understand that substance misuse is a chronic illness or disorder
- It is a chronic, treatable illness, not a personal choice
- It is not a choice, weakness, or moral failing
- It makes long lasting changes to the brain and the body



## Pass Along the Love

We can all make a difference in reducing stigma around addiction. Remember that addiction or substance misuse is not a choice, weakness, or moral failing. Spreading awareness and support can help foster connection for those struggling. Find more recipes and resources at

[RipplesOfRecovery.org](https://RipplesOfRecovery.org)

# Increasing empathy

- Over time, these changes increase desire
- Eventually make it difficult or impossible to control the desire to use substances
- The good news is that treatment works and recovery is possible



## Pass Along the Love

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# Cultivating Empathy

- Active listening and non-judgmental communication
- Identifying and challenging biases
- Self-empathy as a pathway to empathy for others



## A Blend of Empathy and Compassion

A small gesture can make a big impact for someone struggling with substance misuse. Consider approaching addiction with an open mind and normalize in on your family, friends, and neighbors. Find more recipes and resources at

[RipplesOfRecovery.org](https://RipplesOfRecovery.org)

# Practice and Cultivate Empathy

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# Active Listening

- Be involved and give the person unconditional attention (e.g., Levitt, 2001)
- Paraphrase the speaker's message (both content and feelings) without judgement! Restate, in your own words, what you think the speaker is trying to say (e.g., Trenholm & Jensen, 2004)
- Ask questions to encourage elaboration on their beliefs or feelings (e.g., Devito, 2007)

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# Tips:

- Be fully present in the conversation
- Show interest by practicing good eye contact
- Notice (and use) non-verbal cues
  - Head nodding
  - Open body posture
- Ask open-ended questions
- Paraphrase and reflect back what has been said
- Listen for understand rather than to respond
- Withhold judgment and advice

Lisa: I'm sorry to dump this on you, but I had a fight with my sister, and we haven't spoken since. I'm upset and don't know who to talk to.

Jodie: No problem! Tell me more about what happened. *(open-ended question)*

Lisa: Well, we were arguing about what to do for our parents' anniversary. I'm still so angry.

Jodie: Oh that's tough. You sound upset that you're not speaking because of it.  
*(reflecting what was heard)*

Lisa: Yes, she just makes me so angry. She assumed I would help her plan this elaborate party — I don't have time! It's like she couldn't see things from my perspective at all.

Jodie: Wow, that's too bad. How did that make you feel? *(another open-ended question)*

Lisa: Frustrated. Angry. Maybe a bit guilty that she had all these plans, and I was the one holding them back. Finally, I told her to do it without me. But that's not right, either.

Jodie: Sounds complicated. I bet you need some time to sort out how you feel about it.  
*(withholding judgment)*

Lisa: Yes, I guess I do. Thanks for listening — I just needed to vent.

# Recognizing Stigma

- What are your current biases?



# Self-reflection questions

- Do I have stigma toward substance misuse?
- How do I react to people struggling with substance misuse?
- Would I treat someone with drug use differently than someone with any other disorder or disease (ex: cancer)?

# Walking in their shoes

Imagine yourself as someone struggling w/substance misuse

What led you to this point?

- Stress?
- Pain?
- Trauma?

How do people look at you?

- What do you hear them say?

What do you feel when seeking help?

- Shame, fear, hope?

What support would make a difference for you?

- How can empathy change interactions and support recovery

# Close to home

“One thing you never want to do is watch someone you love, who has fought so hard to beat addiction, throw everything away and sink back into a life that will most likely lead to jail or death.

You want to grab them and shake them and scream, "What are you doing?!?!" but, at some point, you realize it wouldn't make a bit of difference.

So, you sit back and watch the tragedy unfold, as if you are watching a movie. Feeling helpless to stop it, feeling like you haven't done enough to help, even though you know, only the addict can help themselves. Battling addiction is a beast for the person addicted, and for the ones who love them.”

# Loving Kindness



- Increases compassion and empathy
- Decreases opioid craving or lower odds of opioid misuse

# Loving Kindness

Let's practice



- May you be well
- May you be safe
- May you be free from suffering
- May you be happy
- May you be healthy
- May you live in joy and peace

# Recommendations

## Suggestions

01

Explore your own biases



Take an inventory of what you believe

02

Practice self-compassion



Being compassionate with yourself is the beginning of compassion for others

03

Practice empathy towards others



Walking a mile in other shoes, active listening, and compassion for ourselves as the beginning of empathy for others

04

Commit to one action to reduce stigma



What's one small step you can commit to in order to reduce the stigma?



# Questions?



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# Thank You!

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# **Ripples of Recovery Workshops:**

**Awareness – March 19, 2025**

**Community – April 30, 2025**





**Thank You for Joining Us!**

**Ripples of Recovery**

**[www.ripplesofrecovery.org](http://www.ripplesofrecovery.org)**



# Evaluation Information



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