

Poetry as a Tool for Recovery:



an easy-to-use
guide in
eight sessions

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce Lisa DeVuono's *Poetry as a Tool for Recovery: An Easy-to-Use Guide in Eight Sessions*. This guide is the culmination of many years of work facilitating Poetry in Recovery workshops for adults with serious psychiatric diagnoses. In fall 2003, Lisa approached me with a project she had in mind as part of her training in Poetry Therapy. Lisa is very familiar with my work in the "Clubhouse model" approach to recovery and rehabilitation; and I have followed Lisa's work in creative arts coaching for many years.

In the Clubhouse model of rehabilitation we use a variety of strategies to assist people on their recovery journey, such as, the opportunity to perform meaningful work, social activities, outreach, employment placement, education, and wellness programs. It was in the general area of the "wellness" component that we found common ground.

Lisa also expressed a deep appreciation for the mission and goals of the Clubhouse model, in particular our desire to move people from a place of "illness" to a place of "wellness" and to promote member leadership and empowerment. It was her understanding and appreciation of these core Clubhouse model values that led to the creation of this guide which would provide the tools to empower others—members, volunteers and staff—to facilitate the Poetry in Recovery workshops themselves or "side by side."

The goal of the Poetry in Recovery workshop is to facilitate the personal journey of individuals recovering from serious mental illness. Participants learn the value of having one's voice and feelings validated. They also learn the value of listening carefully, without judgment; to take risks; to build supportive relationships; to learn compassion for self and others; to be playful; to be grateful; and above all, to be hopeful.

The Poetry in Recovery sessions were truly extraordinary. Lisa was able to engage all participants, who were quite diverse in their diagnoses, skills, and abilities. During these sessions, something occurred, which all of us in rehabilitation hope for every day, and that is, that whatever we do, whatever technique or intervention we use, ultimately we hope that the diagnoses melt away and that we are left simply with *people*, with their unique experience, voice, struggles, triumphs, and journey.

It is Lisa's desire that this guide be widely disseminated and used by many in a variety of centers for healing and rehabilitation. It is easily adaptable to many settings. I hope that you will use and share this guide with others so that they may experience the healing power of poetry in recovery.

~ Lu Mauro, Director, Wellspring Clubhouse, Sellersville, PA

Introduction

Creating a Peer Training Manual for Facilitating a Poetry and Recovery Series

This manual grew out of my experience in facilitating poetry sessions at several Clubhouses in Pennsylvania over the past seven years. When the program was completed, some members showed interest in continuing with reading poems and writing, and have asked for guidance and suggestions and it seemed that the next step was to compile lesson plans so that anyone could have easy access to them, either for themselves or in a peer group.

The training manual utilizes poetry to enhance information and skills needed for wellness and recovery. Because it supports the Clubhouse philosophy that treats the day as a work-ordered day the program encourages members to learn new skills, teach and mentor to others. It also empowers individuals to find healthier approaches to handling psychiatric and emotional crises.

Although it is designed as an eight week program, each lesson plan can stand on its own. Sessions explore themes through the use of quotes, poems, discussion questions, writing activities, and sharing. Included in the manual are the poems, handouts, and step-by step procedures for facilitating each session. Topics cover an introduction to poetry as a tool for wellness, listening and communication, making choices and goal-setting, navigating obstacles and conflict, managing relapse and forgiveness, developing compassion and empathy, optimizing change, cultivating gratitude, and a final wrap-up session for ongoing self-care.

Selected poems are based not only on their thematic content but on accessibility—meaning that anyone can find at least one idea in the poem that they can relate to. By focusing on the poem as a catalyst for dialogue, participants will find connections and relevance to their own lives and within a safe group setting, explore ideas about recovery and wellness. The interactive components with an emphasis on creativity give individuals an opportunity to explore positive ways of self-learning, as well as offering generous support to their peers. It is through these interactions with the poem, and each other, that learning and new skills can be acquired.

Poetry and writing teach us to listen in a fresh way. Because it employs metaphor, it helps us to get unstuck from our everyday habits and patterns and helps us to explore unknown territory and take new risks. By focusing the work on the poem as a tool for recovery, not on the person as patient, the experience creates a level playing field, giving all participants an opportunity to have an opinion about something in the poem that has stirred them.

We can transfer these learning experiences to our lives. This shift in consciousness creates a place for a deeper conversation out of which emerges a sense of community, belonging, connection, and hope—all important tools on the road to recovery and wellness.

This is not an academic manual to prepare folks for publishing their poems; it's a tool to assist in recovery and to celebrate the power in asserting one's voice. While this seems to be a stretch, and a leap of faith, you will be amazed at how reading and discussing poems, writing, and speaking one's truth in community matters a great deal. Over and over again, I witnessed the courage and grace of individuals who began with timidity and ended with strength. I have been honored to be part of that journey.

Acknowledgments

I thank many people for their ongoing support in writing this manual. In particular, to those **Clubhouse members and directors** for their openness and curiosity in embarking on this creative experiment together, for sharing their ideas, and for their trust in me as facilitator;

To **Lu Mauro, Director of Wellspring Clubhouse**, for her expertise in all matters in mental health, and Clubhouse philosophy, and for her editorial eye;

To **John Fox and the Institute for Poetic Medicine**, for their mentorship, support and belief in the idea that a guide would be an important and relevant contribution to the poetry therapy field, and beneficial for mental health practitioners, the Clubhouse community, and for individuals everywhere working with their own recovery process.

Session 1: Using Poetry as a Tool for Recovery

Description: This lesson plan introduces the connection between poetry and wellness. It highlights the difference between reading poetry critically, vs. using the poem as a catalyst for self-understanding, an essential tool towards recovery. This poem speaks directly to reinventing oneself.

Objectives:

- Read poems and select those lines that hold individual relevance
- Understand how poems can be helpful in describing feelings
- Participate in conversation with others about broad themes of recovery
- Describe one life re-invention

Poem Used: "Valentine for Ernest Mann" by Naomi Shihab Nye

Handouts: Copies of the poem and quotes; copies of the "Poetry for Recovery" and "Eight Week Outline" handouts.

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" newsprint for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Ask participants to introduce themselves with their name and one word that describes them. Review "Group Rules", and add suggestions from group. Hang on wall at each session.
2. Facilitate a brainstorm/discussion on the word "poetry." Invite one person to scribe on a newsprint sheet the shared ideas from the group. Hang on the wall.
3. Distribute and discuss the "Eight Week Outline" and the "Poetry for Recovery" handouts. Describe the difference between responding to poems as a catalyst for recovery, and learning about the "craft" of writing poems. Answer any questions.
4. Pass out the quotes about poetry and have each person read one. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
5. Read the poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann" by Naomi Shihab Nye
6. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
7. Use "Discussion Questions" as a guide.
8. Invite participants to write using the "Suggested Writing Prompts."
9. Share writing.
10. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing one thing they learned today.

Discussion Questions:

- How might poems hide?
- Do you have a favorite hiding place?
- What have you re-invented in your own life?

Suggested Writing Prompts:

- Choose a favorite line or verse and have it be the first line of your poem
- Write about a person you like
- Write about something that's beautiful or ugly to you

Group Rules

(This can be written on a newsprint sheet ahead of time and taped to the wall during each session as a reminder to the group.)

- Confidentiality
- Respect for each other's point of view

Eight Week Outline

Using Poetry as a Tool for Recovery

Listening to Self and Others

Understanding, Self-Compassion and Showing Empathy

Making it Real with Healthy Choices

Overcoming Obstacles, Generating Forgiveness

Riding the Waves of Change: Creating Hope and Transformation

Moment to Moment: Being in Gratitude

Practicing Self-Care

Poetry for Recovery

(Write the following five points on a newsprint sheet and discuss with participants; hang on the wall next to "Group Rules" newsprint at every session.)

1. Poetry for recovery is a process that is similar to other art and music therapy in that it focuses on the whole person's well-being
2. In this context, poetry is an interpretive process, where individuals are looking for meaning for their own lives—not necessarily what the author intended in the poem
3. Cultivates an environment of generous support with a non-critique format that focuses not on craft and technique, but on how poems and words can offer healing.
4. Uses metaphor and imagination providing us with a new way to look at the world
5. Wellness tool that is easily portable

Recovery Quotes

.....
Poetry is the music of the soul, and, above all, of great and feeling souls. ~ Voltaire

.....
Poetry is finer and more philosophical than history; for poetry expresses the universal, and history only the particular. ~ Aristotle

.....
Poetry is boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words. ~ Paul Engle

.....
There's no money in poetry, but then there's no poetry in money, either. ~ Robert Graves

.....
A poem is never finished, only abandoned. ~ Paul Valery

.....
Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand. ~ Plato

.....
There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in. ~ Leonard Cohen

.....
Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary. ~ Kahlil Gibran

.....
Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted. ~ Shelley

.....
A poem begins with a lump in the throat. ~ Robert Frost

.....
Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. ~ Shelley

.....
It is the job of poetry to clean up our word-clogged reality by creating silences around things.
~ Stephen Mallarme

.....
Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason. ~ Novalis

.....
The poet doesn't invent. He listens. ~ Jean Cocteau

.....
Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. ~ T.S. Eliot, Dante, 1920

.....
Poets are like baseball pitchers. Both have their moments. The intervals are the tough things.
~ Robert Frost

.....
We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. ~ Dead Poet's Society

.....
Poets are like magicians, searching for magical phrases to pull rabbits out of people's souls.
~ Terri Guillemets

Valentine for Ernest Mann

*You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.
Still, I like your spirit.
Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.
So I'll tell you a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.
Once I knew a man who gave his wife
two skunks for a valentine.
He couldn't understand why she was crying.
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."
And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of skunks for centuries
crawled out and curled up at his feet.
Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.*

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Session 2: Listening to Self and Others

Description: This lesson plan introduces the connection between poetry, and listening. How we pay attention with all our senses, how we listen with non-judgment, how listening deeply helps to develop sensitivity to what matters to us, and also to others. This leads to a greater clarity of truth and expression, and better communication.

Objectives:

- Foster empathic and active listening skills
- Improve ability to concentrate

Poems Used: "To Look at Anything" by John Moffett, "Waiting in Line" by Nick Penna, "Words So Large" by Susan Windle, "When Someone Deeply Listens to You" by John Fox

Handouts: Copies of the poems and quotes; copies of the "Qualities of Listening" and "Interview Questions" handouts.

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Organize group into pairs.
2. Using the interview questions, have participants take turns interviewing each other to learn about their partners. When done, come back to the large group, and share one thing you learned about your partner. Ask the group what it was like to do the activity. Did they learn anything about listening? Which was easier...being the listener or the one listened to?
3. Review the "Qualities on Listening" handout.
4. Pass out the quotes about listening and have each member read one quote. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
5. Read the poems "Waiting in Line" and "When Someone Deeply Listens to You" and if there's time you can choose to read some of the others, or end the session with reading more poems.
6. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
7. Use "Discussion Questions" as a guide.
8. Invite participants to write using the "Suggested Writing Prompts."
9. Share writing.
10. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing something they learned today about listening.

Discussion Questions:

- How can using all of our senses help us to be better listeners?
- How do fingers and toes listen?
- How do you know when you are being listened to?
- What words best describe how you like to listen or pay attention?

Suggested Writing Prompts: Start with line "To look at anything, or to listen to anything..." or "When I am deeply listened to..." or "I listen best when..."

Qualities of Listening

1. Being present
2. Paying attention with all of our senses
3. Non-judgmental attitude
4. Asking with curiosity – tell me more about that
5. Sensitivity towards self and others
6. Openness

Interview Questions

1. What is your favorite type of music?
2. Who is your favorite singer?
3. What is your favorite hobby?
4. What is your favorite color?
5. What is your favorite food?
6. What is your favorite vacation spot?
7. Do you consider yourself to be loud or quiet in nature?

Listening Quotes

.....
Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world. ~ Cuban Proverb

.....
There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. The act of listening is in fact an act of composing. ~ John Cage

.....
Unlike seeing, where one can look away, one cannot 'hear away' but must listen ... hearing implies already belonging together in such a manner that one is claimed by what is being said.
~ Hans-Georg Gadamer

.....
Our problem is that sound is not important in our culture. We know the world from the visual, not from the other senses. I had to be taught other ways of understanding.
~ Bernie Krause, sound recordist

.....
Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering. ~ Pooh's Little Instruction Book, inspired by A. A. Milne

.....
Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listened to us are the ones we move toward, and we want to sit in their radius. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. ~ Karl Menninger

.....
Silence is our deepest nature, our home, our common ground, our peace. Silence reveals. Silence heals. ~ Gunilla Norris

.....
Listen that you may live. ~ Isaiah

.....
It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.
~ Oliver Wendall Holmes

.....
Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.
~ Winston Churchill

.....
The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. Only he who listens can speak. ~ Dag Hammarskold

.....
People don't listen to understand. They listen to reply. The collective monologue is everyone talking and no one listening. ~ Stephen Covey

.....
Everyone is God speaking. Why not be polite and listen to Him? ~ Hafiz

.....
Try to listen carefully that you might not have to speak. ~ Quaker saying

.....
I stop and taste my words before I let them pass my teeth. ~ Anonymous

Waiting in Line

*When you listen you reach
into dark corners and
pull out your wonders.
When you listen your
ideas come in and out
like they are waiting in line.
Your ears don't always listen.
It can be your brain, your
fingers, your toes.
You can listen anywhere.
Your mind might not want to go.
If you can listen you can find
answers to questions you didn't know.
If you have listened, truly
listened, you don't find you
self alone.*

~ Nick Penna

When Someone Deeply Listens to You

*When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.*

*When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.*

*When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.*

*When someone deeply listens to you,
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!*

*When someone deeply listens to you,
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.*

~ John Fox

To Look at Anything

*To look at anything,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say
"I have seen spring in these
Woods," will not do --- you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves.
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves.
You must take your time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.*

~ John Moffett

Words So Large

*There are words so large
you can live in them.*

*Isn't it a comfort to know
your fear
is not the biggest thing?*

*Always, always, if you listen,
a sound will form
around your fragile life.*

*You can move and breathe
within the dark, expansive
walls of this world.*

*You can feed
on the juice of its sound.*

~ Susan Windle

Session 3: Understanding, Self-Compassion and Showing Empathy

Description: This lesson plan introduces the connection between poetry, wellness and compassion. Using images from nature, participants imagine themselves as an animal, tree, rock etc. in order to better understand themselves and others.

Objectives:

- Demonstrate the value of different perspectives
- Learn how compassion for another species helps develop self-acceptance and empathy for others

Poem Used: "Birdfoot's Grandpa" by Joseph Bruchac and "The Sun Never Says" by Hafiz

Handouts: Copies of the poems, quotes, and writing prompt handout

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall; images of animals/nature taken from magazines

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves with their name, a favorite animal and one quality about that animal that they like.
2. Facilitate a brainstorm on the words "compassion" and "empathy." Invite one member to scribe the shared ideas from the group.
3. Pass out the quotes about compassion and have each member read one. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
4. Read the poems "Birdfoot's Grandpa" by Joseph Bruchac and "The Sun Never Says" by Hafiz
5. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
6. Use discussion questions as a guide.
7. Invite participants to choose a picture and write using the prepared prompt.
8. Share writing.
9. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing something they learned today.

Discussion Questions:

- How does it feel to step into the being of the animal? The human?
- What does this animal say about you?
- What characteristics or qualities of the animal see to be the most important to your recovery?
- What are the things you would stop for in your life?
- What are the places in your life that are important to you?
- What does "saving" mean to you in your own life?
- What does "acceptance" look like for you? Can you give an example from your own life?

Compassion Quotes

.....
Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too. ~ Frederick Buechner

.....
Compassion will cure more sins than condemnation. ~ Henry Ward Beecher

.....
Compassion, in which all ethics must take root, can only attain its full breadth and depth if it embraces all living creatures and does not limit itself to mankind. ~ Albert Schweitzer

.....
For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrong-doing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed? ~ Bell Hooks

.....
Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive.
~ Dalai Lama

.....
You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive. ~ James Baldwin

.....
Let us remember...that in the end we go to poetry for one reason, so that we might more fully inhabit our lives and the world in which we live them, and that if we more fully inhabit these things, we might be less apt to destroy both. ~ Christian Winman

.....
Self-absorption in all its forms kills empathy, let alone compassion. When we focus on ourselves, our world contracts as our problems and preoccupations loom large. But when we focus on others, our world expands. Our own problems drift to the periphery of the mind and so seem smaller, and we increase our capacity for connection—or compassionate action. ~ Daniel Goleman

.....
Individuals need learning but the culture needs something else, the pulse of light on the sea, the warm urge of huddling together to keep out the cold. We need empathy, we need the eyes that still can weep.
~ Lydia Millet

.....
As we tell stories about the lives of others, we learn how to imagine what another creature might feel in response to various events. At the same time, we identify with the other creature and learn something about ourselves. ~ Martha C. Nussbaum

.....
When you are kind to someone in trouble, you hope they'll remember and be kind to someone else. And it'll become like wildfire. ~ Whoopi Goldberg

Birdfoot's Grandpa

*The old man
must have stopped our car
two dozen times to climb out
and gather into his hands
the small toads blinded
by our lights and leaping,
live drops of rain.*

*The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.*

*But leathery hands full
of wet brown life,
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass,
he just smiled and said
they have places to go to
too.*

~ Joseph Bruchac

The Sun Never Says

Even

After

All this time

The sun never says to the earth,

"You owe

Me."

Look

What happens

With a love like that,

It lights the

Whole

Sky.

~ Hafiz

Expressing Compassion and Showing Empathy Writing Prompt

The _____ (image you selected) looks like...

It sounds like...

It hungers for...

When it plays, it...

If I were _____, I would

What I want most for people to know about me is...

Session 4: Making It Real with Healthy Choices

Description: This lesson plan introduces poetry as an aid to making choices and setting goals. Poems act as a focal point for discussing how to discern what goes into right decision-making, and how to evaluate what's working or not.

Objectives:

- Describe a decision that worked, and identify two elements that supported it
- Learn to evaluate a good decision
- Set personal goals in recovery

Poem Used: "Autobiography in Five Easy Steps" by Portia Nelson, "Possibilities" by Wislawa Szymborska

Handouts: Copies of the poems, quotes and "Goethe" handout

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves.
2. Pass out the quotes about choices and have each member read one. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
3. Read the poems "Autobiography in Five Easy Steps" by Portia Nelson and "Possibilities" by Wislawa Szymborska.
4. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
5. Use discussion questions as a guide.
6. Invite participants to write using the suggested writing prompts.
7. Share writing.
8. End the session with each member taking turns reading lines from the "Goethe" handout.

Discussion Questions:

- What helps you to make a decision?
- What will you do differently today?

Suggested Writing Prompts:

- Create a goal for yourself that you can measure and is achievable over the next week or month
- How will you know that you completed it?
- Write a poem beginning with the line "It's possible..."

Choices Quotes

.....
It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. ~ JK Rowling

.....
When it snows, you have two choices: shovel or make snow angels.

.....
Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.

.....
If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise. ~ Robert Fritz

.....
I discovered I always have choices and sometimes it's only a choice of attitude.

.....
While we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions.
~ Covey

.....
Excellence is not a singular act, but a habit. You are what you repeatedly do. ~ Shaquille O'Neal

.....
When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that is in itself a choice. ~ William James

.....
Take care, don't fight, and remember: if you do not choose to lead, you will forever be led by others. Find what scares you, and do it. And you can make a difference, if you choose to do so.
~ J. Michael Straczynski

.....
Some choices we live not only once but a thousand times over, remembering them for the rest of our lives. ~ Richard Bach

.....
We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves.
~ Thomas Merton

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

I

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk

I fall in.

I am lost ... I am helpless.

It isn't my fault.

It takes me forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I pretend I don't see it.

I fall in again.

I can't believe I am in the same place but, it isn't my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it is there.

I still fall in ... it's a habit.

my eyes are open

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

~ Portia Nelson

Possibilities

*I prefer movies.
I prefer cats.
I prefer the oaks along the Warta.
I prefer Dickens to Dostoyevsky.
I prefer myself liking people
to myself loving mankind.
I prefer keeping a needle and thread on hand, just in case.
I prefer the color green.
I prefer not to maintain
that reason is to blame for everything.
I prefer exceptions.
I prefer to leave early.
I prefer talking to doctors about something else.
I prefer the old fine-lined illustrations.
I prefer the absurdity of writing poems
to the absurdity of not writing poems.
I prefer, where love's concerned, nonspecific anniversaries
that can be celebrated every day.
I prefer moralists
who promise me nothing.
I prefer cunning kindness to the over-trustful kind.
I prefer the earth in civvies.
I prefer conquered to conquering countries.
I prefer having some reservations.
I prefer the hell of chaos to the hell of order.
I prefer Grimms' fairy tales to the newspapers' front pages.
I prefer leaves without flowers to flowers without leaves.
I prefer dogs with uncropped tails.
I prefer light eyes, since mine are dark.
I prefer desk drawers.
I prefer many things that I haven't mentioned here
to many things I've also left unsaid.
I prefer zeroes on the loose
to those lined up behind a cipher.
I prefer the time of insects to the time of stars.
I prefer to knock on wood.
I prefer not to ask how much longer and when.
I prefer keeping in mind even the possibility
that existence has its own reason for being.*

~ Wislawa Szymborska

*I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element.
It is my personal approach that creates the climate.
It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
For all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or
de-escalated, and a person is humanized or de-humanized.*

~ Goethe

Session 5: Overcoming Obstacles, Generating Forgiveness

Description: This lesson plan introduces poems discussing obstacles, and ways to cope. Whenever we have a relapse, it is an opportunity to examine our goals, make adjustments, or amends, forgive ourselves and begin again.

Objectives:

- Support group members in expressing individual obstacles
- Discover possibilities for new perspectives on current challenges
- Acknowledge a particular struggle and formulate strategies for intervention
- Develop an “okay to fail” attitude

Poems Used: “Under One Small Star” by Wislawa Szymborska and “Mistakes” by Naomi Shihab Nye.

Handouts: Copies of the poems and quotes

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, “Group Rules” and “Poetry for Recovery” newsprints for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review “Tips for Facilitator.” Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves with their name and something about themselves that they really like.
2. Facilitate a brainstorm on the words “forgiveness” “mistake” “relapse” “obstacle”. Invite one member to scribe the shared ideas from the group.
3. Pass out the quotes about forgiveness and have each member read one. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
4. Read the selected poems “Mistakes” by Naomi Shihab Nye and “Under One Small Star” by Wislawa Szymborska.
5. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
6. Use discussion questions as a guide.
7. Invite participants to write using the prepared prompt.
8. Share writing.
9. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing something they learned today.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of your current challenges?
- What things in your life do you apologize for?
- What can we learn from mistakes or relapses?
- What interventions have worked for you?

Suggested Writing Prompts:

- Write a list poem with the 5 most foolish things you have ever done. Give each of the five things its own title.
- Write a poem where the beginning of every line is “I apologize . . .”
- Begin a letter to a person you want to forgive.

Mistakes and Forgiveness Quotes

.....
Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new. ~ Albert Einstein

.....
Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes. ~ Gandhi

.....
When you find your path, you must not be afraid. You need to have sufficient courage to make mistakes. Disappointment, defeat, and despair are the tools God uses to show us the way.
~ Paulo Coelho

.....
"Scars are but evidence of life," Coquette said. Evidence of choices to be learned from...evidence of wounds...wounds inflicted of mistakes...wounds we choose to allow the healing of. We likewise choose to see them, that we may not make the same mistakes again. ~ Marcia Lynn McClure

.....
Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it. ~ Salvador Dalí

.....
If people refuse to look at you in a new light and they can only see you for what you were, only see you for the mistakes you've made, if they don't realize that you are not your mistakes, then they have to go.
~ Steve Maraboli

.....
We are all mistaken sometimes; sometimes we do wrong things, things that have bad consequences. But it does not mean we are evil, or that we cannot be trusted ever afterward. ~ Alison Croggon

.....
The greatest mistake you can make in life is...to be continually fearing you will make one. ~ Hubbard

.....
I'm afraid that we all make mistakes. One of the things that defines our character is how we handle mistakes. If we lie about having made a mistake, then it can't be corrected and it festers. On the other hand, if we give up just because we made a mistake, even a big mistake, none of us would get far in life. ~ Terry Goodkind

.....
We all make mistakes, have struggles, and even regret things in our past. But you are not your mistakes, you are not your struggles, and you are here NOW with the power to shape your day and your future. ~ Steve Maraboli

.....
Never ruin an apology with an excuse. ~ Benjamin Franklin

.....
When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it. ~ Lewis B. Smedes

.....
Never apologize for showing your feelings. When you do, you are apologizing for the truth.
~ José N. Harris, MI VIDA

Under One Small Star

My apologies to chance for calling it necessity.

My apologies to necessity if I'm mistaken, after all.

Please, don't be angry, happiness, that I take you as my due.

May my dead be patient with the way my memories fade.

My apologies to time for all the world I overlook each second.

My apologies to past loves for thinking that the latest is the first.

Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.

Forgive me, open wounds, for pricking my finger.

I apologize for my record of minuets to those who cry from the depths.

I apologize to those who wait in railway stations for being asleep today at five a.m.

Pardon me, hounded hope, for laughing from time to time.

Pardon me, deserts, that I don't rush to you bearing a spoonful of water.

And you, falcon, unchanging year after year, always in the same cage,

your gaze always fixed on the same point in space,

forgive me, even if it turns out you were stuffed.

My apologies to the felled tree for the table's four legs.

My apologies to great questions for small answers.

Truth, please don't pay me much attention.

Dignity, please be magnanimous.

Bear with me, O mystery of existence, as I pluck the occasional thread from your train.

Soul, don't take offense that I've only got you now and then.

My apologies to everything that I can't be everywhere at once.

My apologies to everyone that I can't be each woman and each man.

I know I won't be justified as long as I live,

since I myself stand in my own way.

Don't bear me ill will, speech, that I borrow weighty words,

then labor heavily so that they may seem light.

~ Wislawa Szymborska

Living with Mistakes

*They won't wear boots.
They march ahead of us
Into our rooms, dripping.*

Give them a chair.

*Where they sit,
The fabric will be wet
For days.*

*We have to talk about
Everything else
In their presence.*

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Session 6: Riding the Waves of Change: Creating Hope, and Transformation

Description: This session introduces the concept of change as a wave that is ever present in our daily lives, and that our task is to learn how to ride that wave. In doing so, we can transform whatever initiates those changes into a transformational experience with hope as an anchor. Both the poems and the writing activity reflect understanding change, and using it to create something new.

Objectives:

- To learn how to adapt and be more receptive to change
- Identify positive transformation as a result of change
- Identify the source of your hope

Poem Used: "Ocean" by Juan Ramon Jimenez, "Hope" by Emily Dickinson, "The Yellow Tulip" by George Swede

Handouts: Copies of the poems and quotes.

Materials for Session: Easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, glue sticks, colored construction paper, cut up words, writing paper, pens for participants; "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Cut words up from magazines. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves with their name and one word to describe themselves.
2. Facilitate a brainstorm on the words "change" and "transformation." Invite one member to scribe the shared ideas from the group.
3. Read all three poems.
4. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
5. Use discussion questions as a guide.
6. Invite participants to create a word collage using the cut up words.
7. Share collage.
8. End the session with each member sharing something they learned today.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe a change in your life and how you weathered it.
- What gives you hope?

Suggested Writing Prompt:

- Create a collage poem.

Ocean

*I have a feeling that my boat
has struck, down there in the depths,
against a great thing.
and nothing
happens! nothing...silence...waves...*

*—nothing happens? or has everything happened,
and are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?*

~ Juan Ramon Jimenez (translated by Robert Bly)

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,*

*And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.*

*I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.*

~ Emily Dickinson

The Yellow Tulip

*For weeks
it struggled
through the hard crust
of the spring earth
and a foot
of air
Just to be
scorched
by the sun
jolted
by raindrops
blasted
by the wind
But on this gentle
May morning
as it opens
yellow petals
to the sky
Nothing else matters*

~ George Swede

Session 7: Moment to Moment: Being in Gratitude

Description: This lesson plan introduces the concept of gratitude which helps us to see the world as full and not empty. As human beings, we experience all the riches in life, but when we encounter something difficult, appreciating all that we have, the gifts we receive, and those we give is important. It is helpful to stay present, to focus on the here and now. So often we worry about the past or the future, neither of which we have control. All we have is in the here and now and appreciating the moment helps to support a full sense of well-being.

Objectives:

Cultivate a sense of appreciation, acknowledgement, and gratitude.

Poems Used: "Guest House" by Rumi, and "If You Praise a Word, It Turns into a Poem" by Catilin Weber.

Handouts: Copies of the poems, quotes, writing prompt

Materials for Session: easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves with their name and something specific they were grateful for this week.
2. Pass out the quotes about gratitude and have each member read one. Ask the group for their favorites. Discuss.
3. Read the poems "Guest House" by Rumi, and "If You Praise a Word, It Turns into a Poem" by Catilin Weber.
4. Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem encouraging them to talk about what is meaningful to them.
5. Use discussion questions as a guide.
6. Invite participants to write using the prepared prompt.
7. Share writing.
8. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing something they learned today.

Discussion Questions:

- How can we be grateful when challenges come?
- How does praising help with gratitude?

Suggested Writing Prompts:

- Write a praise poem starting with the line "praise to..."
- Write an acrostic poem using each letter of the word Gratitude as the start of each line of your poem e.g. G is for goodness, R is for repeat, A is for always, etc.

Gratitude Quotes

.....
Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom. ~ Marcel Proust

.....
To educate yourself for the feeling of gratitude means to take nothing for granted, but to always seek out and value the kind that will stand behind the action. Nothing that is done for you is a matter of course. Everything originates in a will for the good, which is directed at you. Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude. ~ Albert Schweitzer

.....
When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. ~ Mary Oliver

.....
Life is huge! Rejoice about the sun, moon, flowers, and sky. Rejoice about the food you have to eat. Rejoice about the body that houses your spirit. Rejoice about the fact that you can be a positive force in the world around you. Rejoice about the love that is around you. If you want to be happy, commit to making your life one of rejoicing. ~ Anonymous

.....
Every heart that has beat strongly and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the tradition of mankind. ~ Robert Louis Stevenson

.....
Look at the trees, look at the birds, look at the clouds, look at the stars... and if you have eyes you will be able to see that the whole existence is joyful. Everything is simply happy. Trees are happy for no reason; they are not going to become prime ministers or presidents and they are not going to become rich and they will never have any bank balance. Look at the flowers - for no reason. It is simply unbelievable how happy flowers are. ~ Osho

.....
Make it a habit to tell people thank you. To express your appreciation sincerely and without the expectation of anything in return. Truly appreciate those around you, and you'll soon find many others around you. Truly appreciate life, and you'll find that you have more of it. ~ Marston

.....
Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. ~ Melody Beattie

.....
Give thanks for a little and you will find a lot. ~ David Steindl-Rast

.....
Waking up this morning, I see the blue sky. I join my hands in thanks for the many wonders of life; for having twenty-four brand-new hours before me. ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

.....
Continuous practice, day after day, is the most appropriate way of expressing gratitude. This means that you practice continuously, without wasting a single day of your life, without using it for your own sake. Why is it so? Your life is a fortunate outcome of the continuous practice of the past. You should express your gratitude immediately. ~ Zen Master Dogen

.....
Gratitude is the state of mind of thankfulness. As it is cultivated, we experience an increase in our "sympathetic joy," our happiness at another's happiness. Just as in the cultivation of compassion, we may feel the pain of others, so we may begin to feel their joy as well. And it doesn't stop there.
~ Stephen Levine

.....
Another reason we turn logical with our gratitude is that it is terrifying. The wonder of a moment in which there is nothing but an upwelling of simple happiness is utterly awesome. Gratitude is so close to the bone of life, pure and true, that it instantly stops the rational mind, and all its planning and plotting. That kind of let go is fiercely threatening. I mean, where might such gratitude end?
~ Regina Sara Ryan in *Praying Dangerously*

.....
It is important not only to be grateful to others but also to be grateful for others. We need to cultivate a gratitude for others' giftedness in the same way that we appreciate a beautiful sunset or a smile from a loved one. Others always seem to have been given gifts in life that we desire, and so it's easy to be envious. Riding sidesaddle with envy is a dangerous practice: I would be happy if I had what he or she possesses. By contrast, giving thanks constantly and in all circumstances liberates us from envy.
~ Edward Hays in *The Great Escape Manual*

.....
The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live. He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything. ~ Albert Schweitzer

.....
There is a calmness to a life lived in Gratitude, a quiet joy. ~ Ralph H. Blum

.....
Let us give thanks for unknown blessings already on the way.
~ a mealtime blessing at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat center

.....
Maybe one day we'll grow weary of whining and celebrate the rain, the manna, the half-filled glass of water, the little gifts from heaven that make each day bearable. Instead of cloaking ourselves in the armor of pessimism, maybe we'll concede that we are who we are: capricious, wonderful, delicate, alive. Forgiven. ~ Mark Collins in *On the Road to Emmaus*

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

~ Rumi

If You Praise a Word, It Turns into a Poem

*Praise to this poem
for letting me write it.*

*To book titles
that give away clues.*

*Praise to the time on a watch
so I am not late.*

*To the shell
that washes upon the shore for me.*

*Praise to the fly's eye
with which he sees everything.*

*To the grass
that whistles when I blow it.*

*Praise to the mud
that makes me dirty when I play.*

*To the thunder
that warns me of a lightning flash.*

*Praise to my name
without which I'd be no one.*

*To this poem
for letting me write it.*

~ Caitlin Weber, 4th grade

Gratitude Writing Prompt

G

R

A

T

I

T

U

D

E

Session 8: Practicing Self-Care

Description: This lesson reviews the program to date and invites participants to develop their own ongoing self-care program, demonstrating that poetry and the arts support recovery.

Objectives:

- Summarize key points from the past seven weeks
- Identify support systems and additional tools for recovery
- Help group members be empowered for continued self-care

Poems Used: "My Help Is in the Mountain" by Nancy Wood, "The Way It Is" by William Stafford

Handouts: Copies of the poems and "Stone/Thread Writing Prompt"

Materials for Session: small stones or rocks, different colored thread, yarn, or ribbons; easel, markers, easel pad paper or newsprint pad, tape, writing paper, pens for participants, "Group Rules" and "Poetry for Recovery" newsprints for taping to wall; 8-Week Outline

Facilitator Prep: Review "Tips for Facilitator." Photocopy handouts. Gather materials for the session.

Suggested Approach/Steps:

1. Have each member of the group introduce themselves with their name and one word to describe themselves.
2. Facilitate a brainstorm on some of the highlights from the past sessions. Invite one member to scribe the shared ideas from the group.
3. Pass out stones and have each participant choose one. Read the poem "My Help is in the Mountain." Ask participants which lines they relate to, and facilitate a dialogue about the poem and the stone they chose. Pass out threads, have each person choose one. Read the poem "The Way It Is" Discuss the poem, and the thread they chose.
4. Use discussion questions as a guide.
5. Invite participants to write using the prepared prompt.
6. Share writing.
7. End the session with each member re-introducing themselves and sharing something that they will take with them about poetry and recovery.

Discussion Questions:

- What have you learned from each other and from your own process?
- What influenced you the most?

Suggested Writing Prompts:

- Stone /Thread writing prompt

Self-Care Writing Prompt

My stone looks and feels like...

My thread looks and feels like...

I will remember that my stone, my thread will...

*My help is in the mountain
Where I take myself to heal
The earthly wounds
That people give to me.
I find a rock with sun on it
And a Stream where the water rains gentle.
And the trees which one by one give me company
So I must stay for a long time
Until I have grown from that rock
And the stream is running through me
And I cannot tell myself from one tall tree.
Then I know that nothing touches me
Nor makes me run away.*

*My help is in the mountain
That I take away with me.
Earth cure me.
Earth receive my woe.
Rock strengthen me.
Rock receive my weakness.
Rain wash my sadness away.
Rain receive my doubt.
Sun make sweet my song.*

~ Nancy Wood

The Way It Is

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of that thread.*

~ William Stafford