



THE MATERNAL, INFANT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD HOME VISITING PROGRAM

SHARING YOUR STORY

Sharing your story is a very meaningful and effective way to inspire change. Your personal experiences can educate and influence others, while building your advocacy and parent leadership experience and skills. To be effective each time you share your experiences, it's important to be strategic in the information you decide to share with others to ensure your voice is heard, while your well-being is protected.

What is Strategic Sharing?

Casey Family Programs first developed *Strategic Sharing* as a resource for people with experience in foster care to help them share their personal experiences and advocate for change in the foster care system. Strategic Sharing can be a powerful tool to help make improvements to programs and systems at the local, state, and national levels.

How we share our personal experiences can have a huge impact on how effective we are and how we feel about ourselves. We all constantly make decisions about how much we are going to share about ourselves. Strategic Sharing is an effective way of sharing our stories safely and intentionally to achieve a goal.

Prepare

As you begin to think about how to share your story in the most impactful way possible, there are several factors you should consider to ensure you and your audience benefit from the experience.

1. **Know your audience:** Learn about your Member of Congress and/or their staff. Research/google the Member or ask the person who asked you to participate in the meeting if they have any information they can share about the Member or their staff. This will help you determine what information is most important for them to hear and may help you decide what information from your story you choose to share.
2. **Know the logistics:** Be aware of the setting (physical or virtual location); the start time and what time you should be there or log in; the objective and goals of the meeting; where you are on the agenda; your co-speakers/co-presenters; and how much time is allotted for you to speak. If it is a virtual meeting, make sure you have enough lighting, a quiet area (if possible) and a good internet connection for your device.
3. **Develop your talking points:** Write your talking points down if you need to. Highlight the important points from your story. You can reiterate them at the beginning or end of your

story. Let your audience know what you think is most important for them to remember. Consider answering these questions, if applicable, in your story:

- What did you like about having a home visitor?
 - What kind of goals did your home visitor help you achieve?
 - How has Healthy Families helped you be a nurturing parent?
 - Has Healthy Families helped you to better support your child's development? If so, how?
 - How has your relationship with your child grown since starting with Healthy Families?
 - Did you receive any additional supports, resources, services or access to new resources to help your family as a result of Healthy Families America (HFA)?
 - Have you been able get more education through school, college, trainings or certificate programs?
 - Have you been able to earn more money to support yourself and family?
 - What would you tell other parents who are thinking about becoming involved in Healthy Families?
 - How do you believe your experience with HFA will change your family's lives in the future?
4. **Prepare for questions:** Ask if there will be time set aside for the Member of Congress or their staff to ask you questions. If so, determine if you think you will be comfortable answering questions. Also, ask if there will be time for you to ask questions and if you have any, have them prepared before the meeting.
5. **Protect your well-being and the well-being of others:** Sharing your story may evoke painful memories and negative emotions. Being aware of this is the first step to managing it as you prepare for the meeting. Consider these tips to help protect your well-being, and the well-being of others, when sharing a story that may be challenging for you.
- Identify your triggers – Identify the parts of your story that cause you to feel sad or angry and limit how much you share of those parts your story or omit those parts completely if that makes your feel most comfortable.
 - Set limits – Decide what you what to share and what you want to keep private. You don't have to share your entire story or every detail of it, you can choose to leave out certain parts that you are uncomfortable sharing.
 - Referring to others by name in your story – If you plan to mention individuals by name while telling your story, be sure to let them know and obtain their permission.
6. **Practice your talking points:** You don't need to write out a script or feel like you are making a speech, but you can practice what you will say on your own and in front of someone else to become more comfortable with sharing your story. Time yourself to ensure you don't go over the amount of time you have to speak. Also ask for feedback if you practice in front of someone else. Most importantly remember to set your limits and speak from the heart!

During the Meeting

Know who your support person is. It will probably be the person who asked you to participate in the meeting. Know how to let that person know if there are any issues during the meeting.

You could be asked difficult questions after sharing your story. You may feel some questions are inappropriate or answering them may make you uncomfortable. If you receive these types of questions, always remember you can decline to answer a question. Prior to the meeting, you can also discuss how to handle questions you are uncomfortable or unable to answer with your support person.

Debrief

Debriefing after you share your story is very important. It provides an opportunity for reflection and to receive feedback that you can incorporate the next time you share your story. Consider the following questions to debrief on your own and with others that were involved in the meeting:

- Were there any logistical issues?
- Were the objectives or goals of the meeting accomplished?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Did anything make you feel uncomfortable?
- What went well?
- Was there anything you'd like to improve on or do differently next time?
- Did you have enough support?

References

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