

Topics and Ideas for TSN Survivors Group:

- What is One Word that describes you (besides Trauma Survivor). Write “I Am a Trauma Survivor” in center of white board or poster board and have each group member take turns writing their one word that describes them around center word.
- Group Poem: I am ____, I feel ____, I want ____, I am _____. This is a group poem. Have each group member fill out each blank. Once everyone is ready, have group facilitator start the line: I am....and have each person say their one word or phrase around in a circle. Then Group facilitator goes to next line, “I feel ... and each person goes around circle again. Keep going until group poem is complete. Discuss the diversity and difference in the words or phrases survivors used and yet how those differences together created a unique poem. Discuss community and why having a support system of survivors, while diverse, brings unity and strength.
- Read NY Times Article, “The Art of Presence” and discussed transition from hardships to endurance to character to hope
- Communication tools with family during recovery process, Role plays using I-statement tool to discuss with family ways survivor would like to regain some independence in recovery
- Adjusting to the ‘New Normal’ and coping strategies for pushing through setbacks in recovery
- “Masks” survivors wear in recovery, Projecting you are fine when there are other feelings behind the mask, finding safe people and a safe space to be open and honest on how you are doing in recovery * Art activity, Decorate two sides of a mask before having each person share
- Thankfulness, how finding something to be thankful for, even in a dark season, can help in recovery. *Activity: Write a thank you note to one person who have helped you in recovery
- Resources to help survivors during recovery, both National and Community Resources
- Looking Back: What I Wish I Had Known about the Early Days and Weeks of Recovery”
- Changing Seasons. Seasons/Phases of Recovery: Enduring, Grief and Suffering, Depression, Reckoning, Reconciling, Normalizing, and Thriving.
- Using “Hope” in Healing and Recovery; Share and Discuss articles on “Hope” and how it changes, why it’s important in different phases
- Gaining New Perspectives in Recovery, Watching Video of Richie Parker, an engineer for Rick Hendrick Motor Sports, who adapted to life with no arms, Discussing the use of adaptive equipment to find a way to accomplish what you want to do.

Topics for Survivors Group (Continued):

- Music and the Arts in Coping with Trauma: Video of Gabby Giffords using Music Therapy in Recovery, Video of Jake Larson, who attributes music to his recovery process; Discuss Article: “Music and Trauma: The Relationship Between Personality, Music, and Coping Style”; Make a TS Group Play List of group members’ favorite song that helps them in recovery!
- Humor and Laughter in the Healing Process: Share research articles on the biological effects of laughter to reduce stress and increase pain tolerance. Invited a Trauma Survivor who also does Improv Comedy to come share funny stories with group; Invited another Trauma Survivor who is just naturally funny to share how she used humor as a coping skill to move forward through pain and loss.
- Stars and Dots: Discussing how others pass judgement on trauma survivors without knowing the whole story or situation. Discussing how strangers or family/friends can put imaginary Stars (Positive, everything is just great!) or Dots (Negative, deep judgement) on trauma survivors. Discussing how trauma survivors put stars and dots on themselves through both positive or negative self-talk throughout recovery. *Activity: Art therapy using stars and dots shapes (Based off of children’s story, You Are Special by Max Lucado.) Discuss what brings group members self-worth, based on dignity and value of each individual and apart from others’ approval/disapproval, apart from abilities/disabilities after traumatic injury
- Goal Setting and Accomplishing Goals in Recovery, Like Climbing a series of mountains within a mountain range, Adjusting to the “New Normal” after traumatic injury, Remembering that each survivor is on his or her own individual journey and not to compare oneself to another survivors’ journey, Owning and Accepting your own journey while making goals to move forward
- Discussed article and research on Gratitude and how it changes the mind’s perceptions about the world. Shared and discussed video interview of an Environmental Services worker at the hospital who was recognized for years of service and joyfulness in her everyday job. Group discussed perceptions of how this worker’s gratitude for life, for her job, etc. changed ordinary tasks into her life’s work and purpose as part of the hospital team. Reflected on how this impacts trauma survivors in their everyday tasks.
- Choosing a Word for your New Year: Group Read and discussed news article: “Choose ‘Flourish’ as Your Word for 2017”. Discussed choosing a word or phrase that describes survivors’ personal vision for this new year. Group members took turns sharing their individual word, which was added to create a TSN Group Word Cloud. The Word Cloud was e-mailed to everyone after group to keep.

Topics for Survivors Group (Continued):

- Art therapy led by a TSN Peer Visitor, a visual about “scars” both invisible and visible scars after traumatic injury. Each person chooses a decorative piece of scrapbook paper of different designs. Then each person receives a large piece of white paper and stick glue. The group members are told the decorative paper represents each person before injury. Then the group members are told to tear their decorative paper into pieces to represent their traumatic injury. Then the group members are told to glue the pieces onto the white paper. They can choose to make a design with the torn pieces or they can put the pieces back together like a puzzle. Group members processed the idea of scars after injury, both visible and invisible. Group members discussed trying to put the pieces back together to make the same picture but couldn’t. Other group members discussed making a new design out of the pieces to create a whole new picture. People still talk about this group. It was probably a group favorite.
- Eileen’s Personal Favorite: Self-Efficacy, Albert Bandura, Social Cognitive Theory, Peer to Peer Modeling, and $E+R=O$:
Events/Experiences (out of your control) + Response/Reaction (how you gain some control back) = Outcome (whether more positive or more negative)
A trauma survivors’ response to their accident/injury is their self-efficacy and what dictates a more positive or negative recovery process. Ask survivors to think back to the worst thing that ever happened to them BEFORE their traumatic injury. (Loss of a loved one, childhood abuse, unplanned pregnancy, job loss, etc.) Ask survivors to think back to what strength or strengths they had to rely on to get through that very difficult situation. Now ask survivors how they can use that same strength that got them through their first worst life event to now help them get through this current recovery process from traumatic injury. Validate that this current recovery from traumatic injury may be much worse or not as bad as their first worst life event. What matters is that they are using strengths built from previous life event to help them currently. Discuss and share articles on self-efficacy. Discuss how Peer to Peer support within the Survivors Group or even Peer Visitation can lead to building self-efficacy by watching a model/another survivor overcome a difficult situation, which can lead to thinking that they can do it too.

Topics for Survivors Group (Continued):

- Empowering Survivors: Finding Value and Self-Worth in the Everyday: Led by TSN MSW Intern. Group members completed an ice breaker using Skittles which identified personal likes and dislikes that make them unique. While listening to soft music, group members took time filling out “I Am” personal poem that explored their individual thoughts and self-assessment. A few volunteers shared their poems with the group and discussed finding value and self-worth after trauma.
- A Survivors Journey: Past—Present—Future. Used 3 volunteers to show visual to describe past, present and future. Used “present” survivor in the middle to show distance from the past (traumatic accident) while still being able to view the past, but how the distance and perspective changed as the “present” survivor moved closer and closer to the future. The “Future” survivor kept moving ahead every time the “present” survivor took a step closer, but the “past” survivor representing the past injury stayed solid and in one place. Discussed triggers that can take a survivor back in time to the past traumatic event. Discussed distance between present, past, and future. Discussed balancing thoughts and choices for “present” survivor to either choose to face the past or choose to face the future at any given point on the journey, as both are important.

Special Speakers for Survivors Group:

- Substance Abuse after Traumatic Injury: Pitfalls to avoid and Special Speaker sharing about 12-Step Programs for survivors and for survivors with TBI
- Orthopaedic Trauma Surgeon: Discussed Opioid Addiction and Successfully Weaning off of Pain Medication under a Doctor’s Care
- Therapy Dog Visit with Owner and Group discussed how Pet Therapy can help in recovery
- Amputee/Athlete competing in international races with running blade leading to his dream of competing in the Paralympics soon! Athlete also spoke with his Prosthetist and his Orthopaedic Surgeon who both treated him medically and supported his recovery and racing.
- Orthopaedic Trauma Surgeon and a TSN Peer Visitor/Amputee who was his patient share the trauma survivor’s story and the surgeon’s story to salvage as much limb as possible for the best possible recovery.

Special Speakers for Survivors Group (Continued):

- Trauma Surgeon (sharing why he became a trauma surgeon and his personal story of also being a trauma survivor during his medical residency that almost ended his career as a surgeon, but led to devoting his purpose to work in trauma field)
- Trauma Surgeon (answering questions survivors and family members want to know about the most critical moments when they first arrived in the ED, explaining the “Golden Hour”, communication between first responders and the ED to prepare before the patient arrives, explaining how Trauma Systems work and why patients are taken to a level 1, 2 or 3 trauma center) Very interesting and engaging trauma surgeon led this group. People still talk about this group and this surgeon’s talk/discussion with them.
- Trauma Researcher sharing why research is important to improve patient care
- Homeopathic Provider sharing techniques for pain management
- Therapist sharing about PTSD symptoms, flashbacks/nightmares, and therapeutic treatment
- Flight RN and MedCenter Air team discuss how they transport trauma survivors by air— followed by tour of helicopter on the hospital rooftop
- Joe Swafford “Trauma Fighter”—spoke about working through depression, grief, loss, anxiety triggers, and not stigmatizing mental health needs
- ICU, step-down unit, Orthopaedic, and outpatient Trauma Nurses/RN’s: Sharing why they chose to be trauma nurses, what helps them to avoid burn out, what really motivates them to help trauma patients and families heal
- Two Mindfulness Coaches from Charlotte Meditation: Discussed benefits of mindfulness in recovery process. Led group in practicing mindfulness, deep breathing as well as Yoga and Laughter Yoga. Discussed 4 steps to achieve Peace of Mind.
- Licensed Professional Counselor: Discussed topic of “Role Transition After Trauma” and how survivors and family members can adjust and communicate about changes in roles after traumatic injury
- TSN Peer Visitor with a TBI shared his personal story during Brain Injury Awareness Month (March). Peer Visitor led the group in individual exercise to help determine “What is Working” and “What is Not Working”. Discussed how survivors with TBI work to regain self-awareness in TBI recovery and how identifying strengths and areas for growth can help in self-awareness.

Special Speakers for Survivors Group (Continued):

- ICU Nurse for over 20 years shared with group about “Self-Care” and how different types of self-care are so important to medical professionals, caregivers, and trauma survivors all impacted by trauma. Discussed secondary trauma as well. RN discussed simple techniques such as pet therapy, exercise, getting fresh air outdoors, and traveling to new environments to recharge and re-energize to avoid burnout.
- Trauma Chaplain: Discussed Faith in the Healing Journey. Shared spiritual reflections and techniques for finding purpose in pain, shared spirituality and mindfulness tools, discussed prayer and ways to discover peacefulness
- Director of Trauma Services: Shared almost 20 years of working in pre-hospital role in helicopter transport as a Respiratory Therapist to ED to ICU/inpatient role to leadership within trauma administration. Shared stories of pediatric trauma patients as well as transitioning within different roles of trauma care.
- Family Survivor Story: (Husband, Wife, and Daughter) shared pictures and survivor story. Husband and Wife shared about their MVC and being struck by an intoxicated driver. Daughter shared about first getting the critical call from the trauma center, the not knowing what the future would hold for her parents, putting her life plans on hold to become a young caregiver, and now choosing a career in social work as her parents have now moved forward in recovery and healing.

Special Activities/Group Projects for Group Members to Participate in Together to Give Back and Feel Empowered:

- Bring donated items and pack items for Family Care Bags to be given to families in the Trauma ICU or step down units (toiletries, water, granola bars, tissues, etc.)
- Make signs for National Trauma Survivors Day and have semi-professional photographer come take pictures of survivors holding signs with outdoor scenery
- Pack little bags of candy to be distributed to medical teams and families on Christmas Eve or over the holidays at the Trauma Center
- Make Holiday decorations (snowflakes, ornaments, etc.) to be used to offer to decorate trauma patients’ rooms for the holidays
- Decorating Holiday shaped Cookies or Gingerbread shapes at Holiday Party
- Sign or make cards for trauma team in Las Vegas Trauma Center after mass shooting
- Sign or make cards for Duke Life Flight team after helicopter Life Flight crashed with deaths of team members

- Sign a group sympathy card for a group member whose personal therapy dog died
- Ice Cream Sundae Bar for Trauma Awareness Month event: Invite Trauma Team to volunteer to help serve the ice cream! Take pictures of trauma surgeons serving ice cream to their trauma patients! ;0)

Shared by Eileen Flores, MSW, LCSW

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