

Social Work AND Mental Health Recovery

Mental Health Recovery Exercises for Students

The following exercises are intended for use with social work students in either classroom or field settings. Most of the exercises were identified through a review of recovery-oriented social work syllabi, which were gathered through a call for master's level syllabi in 2010. They are reprinted here with permission of the authors. For more resources on recovery, see the CSWE website (www.cswe.org/Recovery).

1. Summary and Analysis of First-Person Account (Russell, Meath, Russell, & Auberger, 2010)
 - Read a first-person account written by a person with lived experience of mental health recovery, such as: *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (Jamison, 1997), *Scattershot: My Bipolar Family* (Lovelace, 2008), *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness* (Saks, 2007).
 - An expanded list of first-person accounts can be found in the Mental Health Recovery Bibliography and the Sample Clinical Syllabus for Mental Health Recovery; these resources are available on the CSWE website (www.cswe.org/Recovery).
 - Provide a brief 6-8 page summary of the book. Discuss the following:
 - 1) How does the author's story reflect the concepts of mental health recovery and resilience?
 - 2) What were some of the most significant strengths of the author and how were these utilized in his/her recovery?
 - 3) What were the most significant challenges that the author faced?
 - 4) What were the most important positive aspects of the mental health care that the author received?
 - 5) What natural supports were helpful in the author's recovery journey?
 - 6) What aspects of this story would you share with someone who had a similar diagnosis? Why?

7) How does this story impact you as a Social Worker?

2. Strengths Based Plan for Recovery (Mayeda, 2013)

- The student will select a client to work with for all 6 parts of this project. The client must be someone who will work with the student for three or more sessions. The client must want help with something, anything. (A mandated client who wants help with something is acceptable.) If the student is unable to select an appropriate client in the current field placement, a case is available. It is recommended that you include many quotations from the person with whom you are working.

1) *Assessment*

- Brief description of person
 - Demographics
 - What is the person requesting help with? (*This is one of the most important questions of this assignment.*)
 - Presenting symptoms
 - Identification, frequency, duration, intensity
 - Goals and Values of the Client (*not the clinician's goals and values*)

2) *Therapeutic Relationship*

- Plan for trusting relationship with this person
 - Welcoming and engagement (How was this executed?)
 - Unique and ongoing dynamics (What is unique about your work with this client?)
 - Appropriate self-disclosure (Your's with client)
 - Appropriate use of humor (Your's with client)
 - Appropriate sharing of emotions (Your's with client)
 - Sadness – tears
 - Excitement
 - Use of touching (hugging, etc.)
 - Other

3) *Shared Story of Illness*

- Contributing Factors
 - Precipitating events
 - Factors that increase stress and vulnerability
- Trauma and significant losses
- Symptoms of illness
 - Multiaxial Diagnoses (use proper format, not a paragraph)
 - Differential Diagnoses
 - Justify all diagnoses
 - Example:
 - List DSM criteria
 - How client manifests this symptom.

- Remaining questions
 - o What information are you seeking to rule out or rule in diagnoses? (Be sure to have a correct understanding of the term “Rule Out”).
- How are behaviors and symptoms obstacles to goals and values?
 - Be specific. Name goal / value and discuss impact of each.

1) Shared Plan of Recovery

- *(We know that high quality in these areas contribute to stability and increased quality of life. Use academic references to support your assertions. Be sure that you are articulating the specific plans for the future of each area. Be sure to write out all headings. In your paper, you may want to comment on past and present situations of each. However, the essence of this paper lies in planning for the increased quality of each area. Consider both very small and long term goals. Use references to assert that these areas are important in recovery.)*
- Cut and paste demographic information from Part 1.
- What does the person most want help with?
- Resources that will help to overcome illness and other obstacles. *(Heading placeholder.)*
- *(It is preferred to use all the headings, including subheadings and list all at far left margin. Use at least 4 references. May be from reading list. For each item, begin with a few assertions, with references, about how each area increases quality of life in people with mental illnesses.)*
- *It is not enough to just list history in all these areas. The student will demonstrate that he/she has had a meaningful conversation with the client about each area. It is not enough to say that client is not interested. People with mental illnesses are socialized to settle for low standards. The student will educate client about each area and the benefits of each area. Even having this educational conversation will instill hope that there can be a higher quality of life and that the client deserves this. Then, the student will walk the client through, step by step, each area and demonstrate a concrete example of moving forward for each. That said, some clients, for example may have come from abusive families and do not want to have any contact with them. Do not push in areas in which these points will cause the client any distress.*
 - Describe with as much detail as possible. *(These are areas that you and your client discuss together about the future. This is not intended to address the past. What are your client’s ideas about each of these areas?)*
 - Areas to consider
 - Physical Health
 - o Body
 - o Dental
 - Mental Health
 - o Therapist

- o Psychiatrist
- Social
 - o Friends
 - o Hobbies
- Housing
- Employment
- Family
 - o Partner
 - o Children
 - o Parents
 - o Siblings
- Education
- Other

2) Summary of Process

- Tell the story of your experience with this person in chronological time. *(Use the following headings.)*
 - Beginning
 - Middle
 - End
- Within the above headings, include the following details. *(Bold or italicize each term so as to make it obvious. Use references.)*
 - Aspects of Recovery
 - Hope
 - Empowerment
 - Self-responsibility
 - Achieving meaningful roles
 - Essential Therapeutic Skills
 - Creating a trusting relationship
 - Constructing a shared story of how the person got into trouble
 - How symptoms and behaviors creates barriers to achieving goals and how to overcome them
 - In-vivo skill building
 - Creating a healing environment
 - Therapeutic boundaries

3) Reflections of a Recovery Minded Social Workers *(Use all the headings as listed below.)*

- Tell 3 stories that I will most remember about working with this person.
- What interventions did not work?
- What resources were lacking that would have helped?
- What do I know to be true about working with people who have been diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illnesses?

3. Client History Analysis (Keefe, 2010)

- Throughout your social work career you will work with clients who have used many different mental health services. It is rare that you will see a client who has never used services, at whatever level, at some point in his/her life.
- In this paper you will explore a client's trajectory through the mental health and related social services, including your own placement agency, and examine the services that were provided to the client. You will determine the usefulness, if any, of each service to the client, and examine why the service was successful or unsuccessful. You will also consider how mental health services developed to nurture client wellbeing may simultaneously traumatize clients unless the services rendered are trauma-informed.
- Recommended length is 5-8 pages. The paper you write will have several interrelated sections:
 - 1) A thorough psychosocial client history. This will require you to interview not only the client but obviously – with appropriate consent — previous service providers as well. Include a mental health risk assessment, lethality assessment, and mental status exam.
 - 2) Presentation and analysis of each of the services. You should describe the services, and explain how each failed, helped, or may have helped the client. (Clients and service providers may have very different opinions about how helpful a particular service was.)
 - 3) Describe and discuss the public policy influences on your client's service trajectory. Relate the above information to your reading and to class discussions.
 - 4) Describe how (if at all) this analysis of your client's service history will influence the treatment you provide or arrange for this client.
 - 5) Describe how while agencies are developed to nurture client wellbeing and promote self-determination they often serve to traumatize clients in various ways. Think about a client's race, ethnicity, or other social location.
 - 6) Select a theoretical approach to use while working with this client and why you believe it is appropriate.
 - 7) How will the above information serve to help you provide services in a trauma-informed manner while also helping you to reflect on the care you provide?

4. Agency Visit and Critique (Mathiesen, 2010)

- The purpose of this assignment is for each student to gather information to document their perceptions and responses to the setting, program structure, service delivery approach, and attitudes regarding an agency that serves the seriously mentally ill population. It is also intended to serve as a useful tool in evaluating collateral resources in the community, and as an opportunity to share these resources with fellow student professionals. The critique should be about 5-6 pages in length.

- 1) Each student will first choose a particular diagnostic group (1-schizophrenia, 2-bipolar disorder or major depression, or 3-co-occurring disorders) and a particular target population where there is an unmet need. The target population may be defined by an aspect of the illness (e.g., cultural issues associated with the diagnosis, or the impact on family) or a subpopulation (e.g., those diagnosed with their first episode, or older adults or adolescents), or a treatment setting (school, etc.).
- 2) The assignment requires each student to visit a local agency that focuses on psychosocial rehabilitation, gather and summarize information, and write a critique of the agency in terms of the mission, goals and model used by the program within the context of the published literature for the chosen population.
- 3) Depending upon the number of students in the class you will form teams of 2-3 students and arrange to visit a psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery center in the local area. **This is not a group assignment.** The purpose of forming the group will be to minimize the disruption to the agency by having one interview/visit scheduled per semester. Beyond the group interview/visit with the agency representative, all written work and observations will be made independently. After organizing schedules within the team, one team member should contact the person in charge, and clearly identify him/herself as a social work student. Arrange a time when all members of the team can visit the agency if possible. **NOTE: Students may not select an agency or program where they are currently interning or where they have previously served as an intern or been employed.**
- 4) During your visit, you will all be adopting the role of social workers that are learning about community resources for the seriously mentally ill. Each team member will make independent observations, and will gather material that is individually determined to be important in understanding the functioning of the agency. As you make your observations, think about the target population that you have chosen and if they would be best served in this setting and model, and what populations/problems/treatment issues would or would not be appropriately addressed. While many agencies may operate from a similar model, inquire about and describe the **unique aspects** that the individual program offers within the general model.
- 5) If possible and appropriate, tour the facility. Gather relevant documents about the agency that are available to the public and other professionals. If a tour is not

possible, include that in your report and make every effort to observe aspects of the agency that will help you to form impressions about the program. Include in your paper how you felt during your visit there – e.g., did it feel like a comfortable place to you? The goal is access multiple and distinct sources of information: your observations, the perspective of the agency representative, written materials provided by the agency.

- 6) While each student will gather different information, all students should, at a minimum, obtain the following information during the interview with an agency representative and use it in your critique.
- From the representative's perspective:
 - Description of the agency and/or program;
 - Description of the program's mission;
 - Agency definition of psychosocial rehabilitation;
 - What particular model or combination of models their program follows;
 - Perspective on the role of social workers at the agency;
 - Cultural make-up of clients and staff;
 - Impact of client's culture on interactions within program, if any;
 - What skills are important for those interested in working with the population;
 - What they feel are the major strengths of the agency;
 - What they would like to see change about the program.
 - From the student's perspective:
 - Personal reactions to setting, clients, staff
 - Observations of relevant interactions, implementation issues
 - Strengths, limitations of observations
 - From course readings and other scholarly literature:
 - Background on goals, ideals of the model used by the agency
 - EBP with the diagnostic area and target population chosen
- 7) Based the information gathered at the agency and your observations, each student will write a brief critique of the agency. A summary of the information you gathered will be placed in a table or in bullet form in an appendix. The critique will include your subjective impressions, both positive and constructive, and the perspectives provided by the agency representative. These personal accounts will be integrated with **course readings and other scholarly literature about evidence-based practices** for the diagnostic area and with the target population you have chosen, and the degree to which best practices are utilized both in principle (goals, missions, etc.) and in the implementation of the program.

5. Community Involvement (Gioia, 2012)
 - Get involved in a National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) event.
6. Adapted Version of Hearing Voices (Deegan)
 - Have your student fill out one of the agency's intake forms. At the same time they are filling it out, the field instructor talks to them or plays a recording simulating auditory hallucinations. Time how long it takes for them to fill it out.
 - After they are done, debrief with them on what the experience was like (anxiety-provoking, irritating, disconcerting...?). Explain the simulation as an empathy building activity to put them in the shoes of the client.
 - Ask the student to consider what they could do as a social worker to assist the client.
7. Second Life Simulation (University of California, Davis)
 - Use Second Life virtual registration process to "experience" entrance to a mental health agency and sign-in process first hand while experiencing hallucinations.
8. Collaborating with Peer Specialist
 - Work collaboratively with a peer specialist on a project. If a collaborative project isn't possible, have the student meet with the peer specialist to find out about their work, their approach, and how to make referrals.
9. Self-Help/Peer Support Reflection
 - Attend self-help or peer support group for a relevant issue (e.g., NAMI, Overeaters Anonymous, PFLAG, etc.) and reflect on the experience.
10. Interviewing Person in Recovery
 - Ask student to interview someone with lived experience. Over the course of the interview, student should ask questions like: How have you managed to come so far/achieve so much? Can you identify turning points? What and who was most helpful?

References

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