

Creating a common understanding for the term "recovery" and common language to talk about recovery is very important in the transformation of the behavioral health system.

# **Session 2**

## **Five Stages in the Recovery Process: Overview**

presents some common images and language for discussing recovery  
and introduces five basic stages in the recovery process  
that seem to speak to most people with recovery experience.

## Story told by Patricia Deegan

1 - At a recent conference that brought together persons with diverse disabilities, I had the pleasure of talking with a man who was paraplegic. We shared our stories of recovery.

2 - At a young age we had both experienced a catastrophic shattering of our world, hopes and dreams. He had broken his neck and was paralyzed, and I was diagnosed as being schizophrenic. We recalled the impact of those first days following the onset of our disabilities. He was an athlete and dreamed of becoming a professional in the sports world. I was a high school athlete and had applied to college to become a gym teacher. Just days earlier we knew ourselves as young people with exciting futures, and then everything collapsed around us. As teenagers, we were told that we had an incurable malady and that we would be "sick" or "disabled" for the rest of our lives. We were told if we continued with recommended treatments and therapies, we could learn to "adjust" and "cope" from day to day.

3 - Needless to say, we didn't believe our doctors and social workers. In fact, we adamantly denied and raged against these bleak prophesies for our lives. We felt it was all just a mistake, a bad dream, a temporary setback in our lives. We just knew that in a week or two, things would get back to normal again. We felt our teenage

world was still there, just waiting for us to return to it. Our denial was an important stage in our recovery. It was a normal reaction to an overwhelming situation. It was our way of surviving those first awful months.

4 - The weeks passed us by, but we did not get better. It became harder and harder to believe we would ever be the same again. What initially had seemed like a fleeting bad dream transformed into a deepening nightmare from which we could not awake. We felt like ships floating on a black sea with no course or bearings. We found ourselves drifting farther and farther away from the young, carefree people we had been. He lay horizontal and in traction while his friends selected to play ball at very prestigious colleges. I stood drugged and still in the hallways of a mental hospital while my classmates went off to their first year of college.

5 - We experienced time a betrayer. Time did not heal us. Our pasts deserted us, and we could not return to who we had been. Our futures appeared to be barren, lifeless places in which no dream could be planted and grow into a reality. As for the present, it was a numbing succession of meaningless days and nights in a world in which we had no place, no use, and no reason to be. Boredom and wish fullness became our only refuge.

6 - Our denial gave way to despair and anguish. We both gave up. Giving up was a solution for us. It numbed the pain of our despair because we stopped asking, "why and how will I go on?" Giving up meant that for 14 years he sat in rooms of institutions gazing at soap operas, watching others live their lives. For months I sat in a chair in my family's living room, smoking cigarettes and waiting until it was 8:00 PM so I could go back to bed. At this time even the simplest tasks were overwhelming.

I remember being asked to come into the kitchen to help knead some bread dough. I got up, went into the kitchen, and looked at the dough for what seemed an eternity. Then I walked back to my chair and wept. The task seemed overwhelming to me. Later I learned the reason for this: when one lives without hope (when one has given up) the willingness to "do" is paralyzed as well.

7 - All of us who have experienced catastrophic illness and disability know this experience of anguish and despair. It is living in darkness without hope, without a past or a future. It is self-pity. It is hatred of everything that is good and life giving. It is rage turned inward. It is a wound with no mouth, a wound that is so deep that no cry can emanate from it. Anguish is a death from which there appears to be no resurrection. It is inertia that paralyzes the will to do and to accomplish because there is no hope. It is being truly disabled, not by disease or injury, but by despair. This part of the recovery process is a dark night in which even God was felt to have abandoned us. For some of us this dark night lasts moments, days, or months. For others of us it lasts for years. For others, the despair and anguish may never go away.

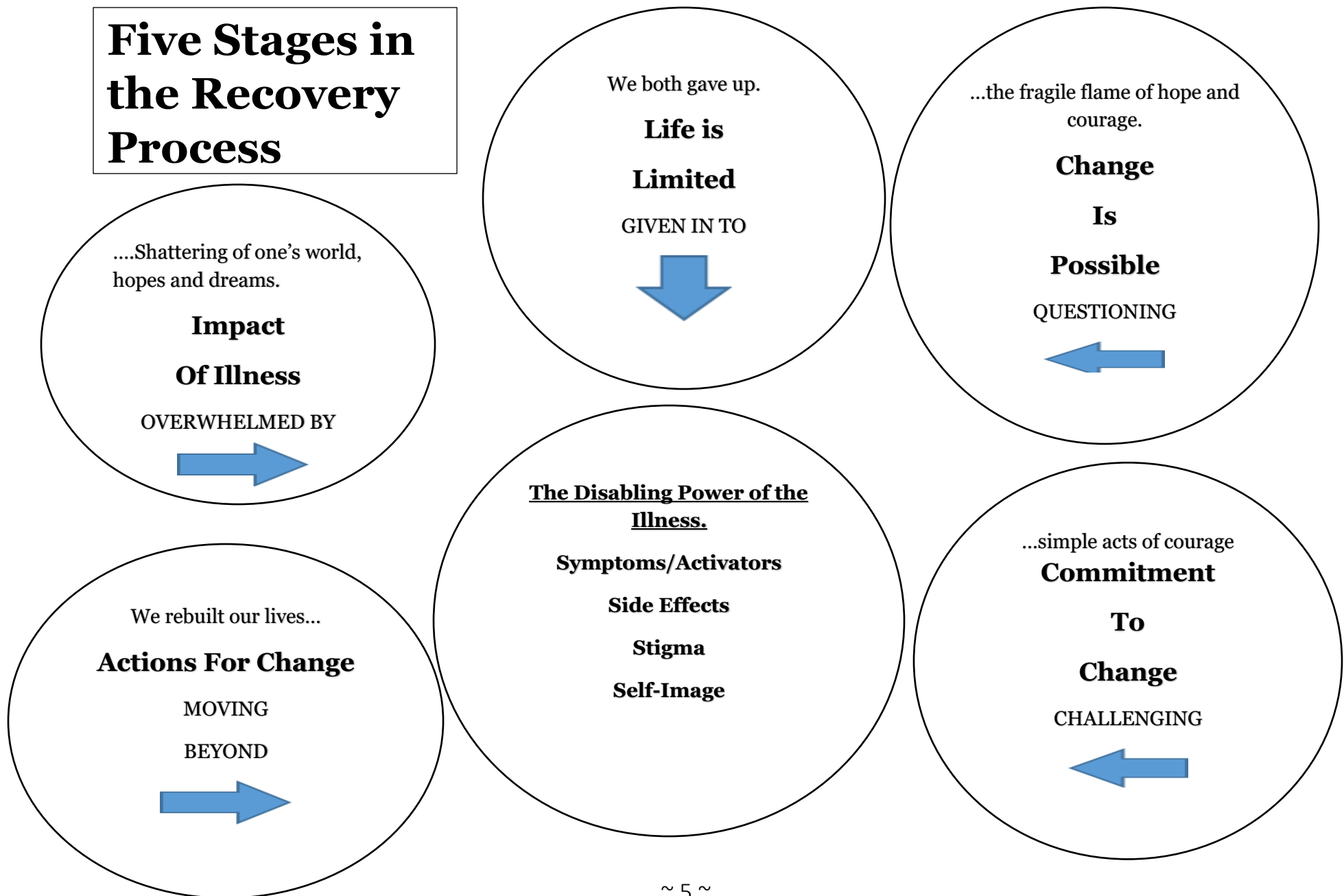
8 - Neither the paralyzed man nor I could remember a specific moment when the small and fragile flame of hope and courage illuminated the darkness of our despair. We do remember that even when we had given up, there were those who loved us and did not give up. They did not abandon us. They were powerless to change us, and they could not make us better. They could not climb this mountain for us, but they were willing to suffer with us. They did not overwhelm us with optimistic plans for our futures, but they remained hopeful despite the odds. Their love for us was like a constant invitation, calling us forth to be something more than all of this self-pity and despair. The miracle was that gradually the paralyzed man and I began to hear and respond to this loving invitation.

9 - For 14 years the paralyzed man slouched in front of the television in the hell of his own despair and anguish. For months I sat and smoked cigarettes until it was time to collapse back into a drugged and dreamless sleep. But one day something changed for us. A tiny, fragile spark of hope appeared and promised that there could be something more than all of this darkness. This is the third phase of recovery. This is the mystery. This is the grace. This is the birth of hope called forth by the possibility of being loved. All of the polemic (verbal attack on a belief) and technology of psychiatry, psychology, social work and science cannot account for this phenomenon of hope. But those of us who have recovered know that this grace is real. We lived it. It is our shared secret.

10 - It is important to understand that for most of us recovery is not a sudden conversion experience.

Hope does not come to us as a sudden bolt of lightning that jolts us into a whole new way of being. Hope is the turning point that must quickly be followed by the willingness to act. The paralyzed man and I began in little ways with small triumphs and simple acts of courage: He shaved. he attempted to read a book, and he talked to a counselor; I rode in the car, I shopped on Wednesdays, and I talked to a friend a few minutes. He applied for benefits, he got a van and learned to drive; I took responsibility for my medications, took a part-time job, and had my own money. He went to college so he could work professionally with other disabled people; I went to school to become a psychologist so I could work with disabled people. One day at a time, with multiple setbacks, we rebuilt our lives. We rebuilt our lives on three corner stones of recovery - hope. willingness and responsible action.

# Five Stages in the Recovery Process



| Five Stages In The Recovery Process                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| Impact of Illness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Life is Limited                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Change is Possible                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Commitment to Change                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Actions for Change                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>The person is <u>overwhelmed by</u> the disabling power of the illness.</p> <p>The symptoms and the resulting behavior are the controlling experience in a person's life, and the person is often not able to function.</p> <p>Danger: the person will re-define themselves in mental illness terminology that will automatically limit their future.</p> <p>The <u>role of services</u> is to decrease the emotional distress by reducing the symptoms and communicating that there is life after diagnosis.</p> | <p>The person has <u>given in to</u> the disabling power of the illness.</p> <p>The person doesn't like their life the way it is, but believes it is the best it will ever be. They are not ready/able to make a commitment to change.</p> <p>Danger: the person will resign themselves to this life and refuse to acknowledge that there is anything they can do that will make a difference in their life.</p> <p>The <u>role of services</u> is to instill hope and a sense of possibility and to rebuild a positive self-image.</p> | <p>The person is <u>questioning</u> the disabling power of the illness.</p> <p>The person believes that there has to be more to life than they are currently experiencing and is beginning to believe that their life can be different.</p> <p>Danger: the person will be afraid to or discouraged from taking the necessary risks and remain in the 'life is limited' stage.</p> <p>The <u>role of services</u> is to help the person see that they are not so limited by the illness and in order to move on they will need to take some risks.</p> | <p>The person is <u>challenging</u> the disabling power of the illness.</p> <p>The person believes there are possibilities, but isn't sure what they are or what to do. They are willing to explore what it will take to make some changes.</p> <p>Danger: the person will not get the necessary skills, resources and supports that they need to do what they want to do and will not succeed in moving forward.</p> <p>The <u>role of services</u> is to help the person identify their strengths and needs in terms of skills, resources and supports.</p> | <p>The person is <u>moving beyond</u> the disabling power of the illness.</p> <p>The person has decided the direction that they want their life to go and is willing to take more responsibility for their decisions and actions.</p> <p>Danger: they will begin to doubt their ability to function on their own, trust their own decisions and revert back to a life lived in the system</p> <p>The <u>role of services</u> is to help the person trust in their own decision-making ability and take more and more responsibility for their life.</p> |

## **Session 2 - Review Questions — Five Stages in the Recovery Process: Overview**

1. What are five ways people often relate to the disabling power of a behavioral health disorder called "five stages in the recovery process?"