

The CIT Coordinators' Guide to the Peer and Family Perspective Panel

*A guide to support presenters affected by mental health conditions
who share their story during your law enforcement training*

Introduction

Including people with lived experience (people with mental illness, their family members or caregivers) is an important part of any successful Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program. One way that people with lived experience may be involved in CIT is as a presenter during law enforcement training. Peers and family members often share their stories as part of CIT training to help officers better understand the perspectives of the individuals and families they encounter when responding to a crisis. These stories provide insight into what might be happening inside the mind of a person in crisis and why they may react in certain ways – helping to create greater understanding to help officers keep everyone safe. In addition, these stories offer the perspective that, while mental illness can be serious and chronic, recovery is possible and officers' actions can save a life and set an individual on the path to recovery.

"Following this presentation, I plan to treat people like I or a family member would want to be treated in a crisis situation."

—Officer, Virginia

"I appreciate everyone sharing their personal stories. I am not only better informed and equipped to interact with someone with mental illness, but I am also very touched and inspired."

—Officer, New Mexico

This guide will help you prepare to include a lived experience presentation in your CIT training and how to support your guest speaker, including steps to take before, during and after the presentation. Additional resources are provided in an appendix at the end of the guide.

Including a Peer and Family Perspective Presentation in Your Training

Many law enforcement trainings that address interactions with people with mental illness include a panel of peers and family members who share their personal experience with mental illness. This is an opportunity for law enforcement to hear stories that often include details about barriers to accessing treatment and services, interactions someone may have had with law enforcement in their community, and feelings about the stigma of mental illness. The goal is to have the officers gain a better understanding of what it is like to live with a mental illness or to have a family member living with a serious mental illness.

A panel should be made up of both peers and family members. Having both of these perspectives is important since many officers will interface with both when responding to a mental health crisis. The panel should also have at least two to five panelists. Experiences with mental illness will be different and you want the officers to have insight to these different experiences so that it can break their personal stigmas about mental illness.

Where you place this module in your training will depend on the availability of panelists in your community. What is important is that you give your officers the opportunity to hear from the people who are most impacted by their response during a mental health crisis. For some officers, it may be their only opportunity to engage with a person who lives with a mental illness outside of a crisis situation.

For additional guidance about the modules included in CIT officer training and where to best include the peer and family presentation, see resources from [CIT International](#) and the [University of Memphis CIT Center](#).

Before Your CIT Training

Find someone with lived experience to present during your training

NAMI provides training and resources to people with lived experience that helps them share their story in front of a variety of audiences, including law enforcement. The *NAMI Sharing Your Story with Law Enforcement* training prepares speakers to effectively share their stories in a way that will speak to the questions and realities of law enforcement audiences.

Contact your local NAMI affiliate to inquire about a peer or family member to speak during your training at nami.org/local. NAMI is located in more than 600 communities across the country, and most NAMI affiliates have a program coordinator who can help connect you to a speaker for your training. If there is not a NAMI in your community, contact the NAMI State Organization in your state, which will be able to connect you to an individual or another mental health organization in your area.

Engage with your presenter

Presenting in front of an audience, especially a new one, can be stressful for anyone. Before your training occurs, take proactive steps to make your presenter feel prepared, welcome and comfortable. This will build confidence in your presenter and help ensure that things go smoothly the day of their presentation.

At least one week before the presentation, reach out to your presenter. Thank them for giving their time to this presentation and provide them with the logistics for the day of their presentation, including:

- Training location
- Options for getting to and from the training, including public transportation and parking on site
- Day and time they should arrive at the training location, adding time if they will have to go through security
- Information about security measures at the training location, including whether they will have to sign in, show identification or go through metal detectors

Additionally, ask what else you can do to be supportive, including whether you can do anything during their presentation to help reduce any stress and anxiety.

During the Lived Experience Presentation

On the day of the presentation, continue to offer yourself up as a support and ally to your presenter. You are an important part of their success and can help them if they are anxious or if they are struggling to engage the audience. Below are a few suggestions on how to support someone during their lived experience presentation.

Setting the tone

Depending on whether the officers in your community are voluntarily attending the CIT training or are required to participate, the mood of the audience may vary. You can help set the tone for someone to share their story. At the beginning of the training day, let the officers in the audience know that there will be a guest presenter and that they will have an opportunity to ask questions.

When you introduce the presenter(s) express gratitude for their participation. Share with the audience that the presentation is often listed as one of the most impactful parts of CIT training in officer evaluations, leaving a lasting impact on other officers who have participated in this module in the past. Not only will this set the tone for the officers in the room, it will also signal to your presenter that you are excited about their presentation and are there to support them.

Supporting your presenter

Presenters with lived experience are so effective because their story often includes one or more interactions with law enforcement or other parts of the justice system when they experienced a crisis. However, these interactions may also have resulted in some residual trauma for your presenter and presenting to an audience of law enforcement officers could trigger an emotional response. But don't be deterred from including someone with these experiences; often their stories can have some of the greatest impact. Prepare to support your presenter in a situation where telling their story might cause some emotional distress. Part of supporting your presenter includes being able to identify if someone is being triggered, whether they can handle the level of stress they are experiencing and when it is important for you to step in. All of this is part of providing support.

Just because someone is showing emotion during their presentation does not mean that your presenter can't or shouldn't present. Many NAMI trained presenters have the skills to recognize when they are experiencing increased anxiety, stress or emotion, and have gained skills to manage those responses. However, if the presenter appears to be struggling to manage on their own, or if their physical or emotional response is preventing them from continuing the presentation, it might be time to step in and help.

What is a trigger? A "trigger" is something that causes an emotional response, usually due to a traumatic event that has occurred in someone's past. Being triggered can happen when remembering a traumatic experience, like sharing that experience in a presentation. Someone who has been triggered might exhibit the following physical symptoms:

- Turning red
- Excess sweating
- Rapid breathing or hyperventilation
- Trembling
- Freezing or inability to speak

The following steps are recommended when intervening:

1. First, address the presenter and ask them if they are ok.
2. Suggest that you pause the presentation and step out of the training area.
3. Let the audience know that you are going to take a short break. If there is another presenter that will be sharing their story during the training, have them begin their presentation.
4. Ask the individual how you can be helpful. Sometimes they might have exercises that they use to help calm themselves.
5. If they don't offer any ways that you can help, ask if it would be ok to guide them in breathing or grounding exercises. Let them know that these might help them relax. You can use the breathing and grounding exercises found in Appendix B of this guide.
6. If they have not calmed down, ask if there is a friend or family member you can call. You can also offer to call the NAMI program coordinator who might be able to provide additional support.

How do I know if someone is showing symptoms of their illness?

Symptoms of mental illness can be different for everyone, and they can respond in different ways. However, there are a few signs that might alert you that someone is experiencing symptoms. The person might express hallucinations or delusions, act jumpy, talk rapidly, or be irritable. Just because someone is exhibiting these symptoms doesn't mean that there is a crisis or that they cannot present. It is important that you work with your presenter to determine if they feel up to the task of presenting on the day of the presentation.

NAMI works hard to identify effective speakers who are active in their wellness and prepared to share their story with your audience. But the reality of mental illness is that someone can experience symptoms unexpectedly, even if they are active in their wellness. Like supporting your presenter when they are triggered, if someone shows signs of their illness and it is preventing them from being an effective speaker, follow the same steps above to support them.

Helping to facilitate Q&A

Your presenter will be prepared to facilitate a question and answer segment after they share their story. This question and answer (Q&A) segment is an important part of the lived experience module in CIT training because it gives the audience an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the presenter's experience.

However, the officers in your audience might initially feel uncomfortable asking questions and may need to be nudged into engaging in conversation. You can help initiate this process by asking some starter questions. Your presenter may also come prepared with a few prompts or questions. But, if not, here are a few questions you could ask to help get things started:

- *What did you hear today that would change the way you perceive or interact with a person with mental illness?*

- *What are some of the greatest challenges you face when interacting with someone who has symptoms of serious mental illness?*
- *Were there any parts of the presenter(s) story(ies) that you can connect to the other information you have learned so far in the CIT training?*

After the Presentation

After the presentation, thank your presenter. For many people with lived experience, telling their story can be a big personal success. Letting them know the impact of their story and providing them with some positive feedback is important to their growth as a public speaker.

A week or more after the training, make it a point to follow up with the presenter. Reach out to ask how they feel about their presentation and if they have any questions for you. If you have received the results of your training survey, provide them with the following:

- General numbers from the surveys including the number of officers who attended
- Constructive feedback from the surveys
- Additional constructive feedback from your observations

CIT lived experience presenters take the job of sharing their story with law enforcement seriously and want to get better and grow as a public speaker. Hearing feedback from their presentations will help them improve. Sending feedback and evaluation information to the local NAMI program coordinator will also help track NAMI's impact and can help with grant reporting to expand the ability of NAMI to offer more programs in the community.

Appendix A – Checklist for the CIT Lived Experience Presentation

Before the presentation

- Contact your local NAMI Affiliate to invite speakers for the peer and family presentation portion of your CIT training (nami.org/local)
- Talk to potential presenters about your needs during training to confirm if they are a good fit
- Confirm presenters
- Contact presenters and provide logistic information, including:
 - Training location
 - Day and time of presentation
 - Security measures to expect at the training facility
- Ask your presenter how you can be supportive to your presenter before, during and after the presentation

During the presentation

- Be friendly and welcoming to your presenter
- Set the tone for the officers in your training during your introduction of the presenter
- Pay attention and step in if the presenter is in distress or needs help engaging the audience
- Help facilitate the Q&A session by asking questions of your audience, if needed

After the presentation

- Thank your presenter for sharing his/her story
- Follow up with the presenter(s) to see how they felt about the presentation
- Provide a summary of feedback from training evaluations
- Send your local NAMI program coordinator evaluation information and training numbers

Appendix B - Mindfulness and Relaxation Exercises

The following relaxation and mindfulness exercises can come in handy if your presenter needs additional support to calm themselves before, during or after their presentation.

BREATHING WITH WORDS

This technique involves relaxed breathing while concentrating on a word or a phrase. First, notice how you feel in this moment. Are your muscles tight, or are they relaxed? What are you thinking about? Are there any emotions? Next, we're going to make each part of our breath—inhaling, holding our breath, exhaling—last for four seconds.

Before we get started, you'll want to decide which word to use.

BREATHING WITH WORDS INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose a word that is relaxing for you
2. Take a deep breath, close your eyes if you want...and release it
3. Now inhale slowly to a count of 4, saying your word silently
4. Hold your breath for 4 counts, again silently saying your word
5. Slowly exhale for 4 seconds, saying your word
6. Now another series, inhale (*wait 4 seconds*), hold your breath (*wait 4 seconds*) and exhale (*wait 4 seconds*)
7. Continue breathing this way as long as you'd like

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

Diaphragmatic breathing can help us slow down, decrease our stress and think more clearly. It's how babies breathe when they are sleeping.

Why does it matter how we breathe? Because the brain relies on the oxygen we breathe to do its job. When someone is hyperventilating, often the only way they can stop this shallow, quick breathing is when someone surprises them to the point that they take a deep breath. That's when their brain gets enough oxygen to focus back on their situation and think clearly again.

To get a sense of how we respond to this breathing technique, it can be helpful to notice how we feel before and after doing it.

Take a moment to see how you are feeling in this moment. Are your muscles tight or are they relaxed? What are you thinking about? Are there any strong emotions you are feeling?

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make your environment calm
2. Get comfortable in a seated position
3. Close your eyes
4. Start by breathing normally
5. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth
6. Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly
7. Pay attention to whether your hands move as you breathe
8. Try to breathe so your belly hand moves and your chest hand does not
9. Try exaggerating your breath so your belly hand moves
10. Try this for a few deep breaths
11. Go back to your regular breathing for a minute or so
12. Slowly open your eyes

Keep in mind:

- You can try diaphragmatic breathing standing, sitting up or lying down
- Stay focused on your breath
- If your mind wanders, just gently return your focus to your breath
- When you first try this, you may want to do it for only a few times
- Regular daily practice teaches you how to calm yourself when stressed
- Slow down and be gentle with yourself, especially if you cough or feel light-headed
- If diaphragmatic breathing makes you feel anxious, stop
- If you have COPD, asthma or other breathing problems, you may want to check with your health care provider before practicing on your own

Appendix C – Example Module Survey

Thank you for listening today! Please complete the following survey to help us evaluate the effectiveness of our presentation.

1. The presenters stories were relevant to my work and helped me to understand the experience s of people living with a mental health condition.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Based on this presentation I can describe some of the symptoms related to the presenters mental illness.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Based on this presentation I can identify some of the barriers to accessing treatment and recovery services.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. The Peer and Family Perspectives Panel was an important part of this training.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Please use the space below to provide additional feedback to help us improve this presentation.
