

## Asking others to share

You may be in a position to invite people to share their experiences. You may do this in your role as an educator, advocate, facilitator, community organizer, local leader, or mentor. When you invite someone to share their life story, consider the following ways to do this respectfully:

- Be up-front about why you are inviting someone to share their experiences. Share your purpose and your agenda.
- Provide time and space for the person to think about, reflect on, and prepare his story. Sometimes sharing comes easily and sometimes it takes time.
- Respect the integrity and authenticity of someone's life story. When you ask someone to share, don't ask for a predetermined story. For example: "Will you please tell us about how happy you were to be placed with your foster parents and what a difference they made in your life?" A better approach is to share your purpose for inviting someone's story, listen respectfully to the story and to the person's own way of sharing. In advance, work with the person to determine whether your purposes are compatible and if sharing would be appropriate for this setting.
- Be sure that you aren't asking the person to harm their integrity, clean up, edit, or distort their life story in a way that damages the authenticity of the sharing.
- Encourage the person to reflect on, claim, and interpret their own experiences. Don't interpret and retell a story for the person. Think twice before you start a sentence like: "What he's saying is ... "
- Provide full disclosure about how a life story will be used. Will it be written down anywhere, recorded, or repeated? Are the media likely to be in attendance? Or people in authority?
- Respect the person's privacy. If you suggest adding details, be sure it is because the story needs clarification or will be stronger for it. Don't ask questions just to satisfy curiosity.
- Whenever possible, balance self-disclosure by inviting audience members to introduce themselves and share from their own experience. Model strategic sharing with a story of your own. Remember that we all have a life story—not just clients and former clients.
- Remember to say "thank you", and to provide the same kind of recognition for the expertise of a person sharing her story as you do for other "experts".

