

Telling Your Story



Ideas and tips
for preparing
to share your
experiences

I'm Special



I'm special. In all the world, there's nobody like me.

Since the beginning of time, there has never been another person like me. Nobody has my smile. Nobody has my eyes, my nose, my hair, my hands, my voice. I'm special.

No one can be found who has my handwriting. Nobody anywhere has my taste—for food, or music or art. No one sees things just as I do.

In all of time, there's been no one who laughs like me, no one who cries like me. And what makes me laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else, ever. No one reacts to any situation just as I would react. I'm special.

I'm the only one in all of creation who has my set of abilities.

Oh, there will always be somebody who is better at one of the things I'm good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of my combination of talents, ideas, abilities and feelings.



Like a room full of musical instruments, some may excel alone, but none can match the symphony sound when all played together. I'm a symphony.

Through all of eternity no one will ever look, talk, walk, think, or do like me. I'm special. I'm rare. And in all rarity there is great value. Because of my great rare value, I need not attempt to imitate others. I will accept—yes, celebrate—my differences.



I'm special. And I'm beginning to realize it's no accident that I'm special. I'm beginning to see that God made me special for a very special purpose. He must have a job for me to do that no one else can do as well as I. Out of all the billions of applicants, only one is qualified, only one has the right combination of what it takes.

That one is me. Because...I'm special.

Anonymous



Making a Difference through Telling Your Story...

We learn from our own experiences and the experiences of others. These "life lessons" help us make future choices that better meet the needs of our family. When we share our "life lessons", we can also help others understand our position and improve the quality of life for our children and others.

Parenting a child is not easy. Our children do not come with instruction manuals when they are born. Even though there are a lot of "how to" books on the shelves of libraries and bookstores, there is no "best way"! Each child has their own set of unique needs and gifts. As each family goes about their daily routine they have their own set of traditions, needs, experiences and challenges.

Families may have different journeys as we raise our children, but we all share a common goal. We want good outcomes when we connect with the agencies and systems that affect the lives of our children and our family. Sharing our experiences or "telling our story" with policymakers, community members and service providers is one way we can bring about positive changes for our children and family.

How many times have you tried to talk to your child's doctor, your child's teacher or someone in a government agency and asked yourself "is anyone listening?" In this fast paced world, it often seems as if no one has the time to really listen. Time is precious. Your time and the time of others is a resource we must use wisely. If it is important for someone to listen to us, we must find effective ways to get our message across. We want to send our message in a way that gets their attention and convinces them to take action in a way that benefits our family and child.

It is our hope that this workbook will help families gather their thoughts and experiences, prioritize their ideas and be effective in communicating their family's needs. We believe that, as a family member, you will find that "Telling Your Story" provides a tool that will be valuable in other aspects of your life.



Why Is It Important To Tell Your Story?

Families are inspired to tell their stories for different reasons . . .

1. To Raise Sensitivity and Awareness of Family Issues

It is a chance to let your community know what can be done to increase awareness of the concerns of families.

There are people who may never have had the opportunity to interact with those who have had experiences like yours.

2. To Educate About the Idea of Family-Centered Services

Communities, policy makers and providers need to see that children are part of a family and that it is important for them to work with children in the context of the whole family.

Telling your family story educates the public and other families about issues that are important to you. Telling your story can also include highlights of policies and strategies that are working well for families and why.

3. To Support Other Families

It can help families to know that there are others who are having similar experiences. You may offer to talk about your experiences and otherwise be a resource to other families.

Telling your family story can influence how community activities are conducted by helping promote a vision of inclusive environments.



Questions To Ask As You Prepare

Are there other reasons that you might want to tell your family story?

Where Is It Important To Tell Your Story?

1. Informal Groups

Talking with other parents may be something that you already do at school, parent meetings or other gatherings.

Friends, relatives and neighbors also listen to your family story. You often tell your family story when you introduce yourself and share parts of your life. These can be opportunities for casual practice.

2. Classroom

You may be asked to tell your family story to future teachers, future doctors or policy makers, as well as community related service providers. You may also have an opportunity to share your story with your child's classmates as a part of a school effort to promote appreciating differences.

3. Panels (Panels are often used at conferences or for giving testimony during legislative study hearings)

A panel brings together several presenters who each have a given amount of time to discuss his or her perspective on the topic.

Ask about the order of presenters. *For example, will you speak first, last or somewhere in between other panelists?*

Ask whether there will be time for questions and answers.

4. Conferences or Formal Presentations

A presenter may be a keynote speaker or session leader at a conference. You will usually be given information about the conference theme. It is a good idea to focus your story and connect it to the theme.

5. Providing Testimony

Elected officials and agency bureaucrats can benefit from hearing your family story. In the midst of statistics, numbers and budget analysis, the views of a family about how legislation and policies affect their lives can be very powerful!

Questions To Ask As You Prepare



Will there be a microphone?

Will you be standing? Seated?

Will you be indoors or outdoors?

What will the seating arrangement be?

How many participants to expect?

How much time do I have?

Preparing Your Presentation

1. Know the Purpose of Your Presentation *(Why are you telling your story?)*

Have you been asked to share information about your specific experiences? For example; to share information from a father's perspective, single parenting, or aspects of your culture?

It may help policy makers, service providers, community members or other families gain insight into particular issue based on your experiences.

If the purpose of the presentation is to motivate a group to action, insure the group knows exactly what kind of action you are looking for and then ask them to take action.

2. Know Your Audience

Ask the person who invited you, previous speakers, or people likely to be in the audience for information that will help you create the presentation and personalize it to meet the needs or interest of the audience. For example, if the audience is mostly men, you may want to connect with them through the use of stories about fatherhood.

If you are speaking to college students, those who work with children or policy makers, it is important that you find out what their interests are and how your story will connect with them. Are they in a field, such as education, health care or public service that touches the life of your child and your family? Are they in a position to affect program or policy related to what is important to you?

Ask who has already presented to the group and what they have talked about.

Questions To Ask As You Prepare

How will you organize your presentation?

What stories could you tell that will help emphasize the main points?

What special perspectives do you have to share with an audience?



3. Organize Your Ideas

Spend time thinking about what you will say. You may feel more comfortable with some written information in front of you. You may want to use a brief outline, key words on note cards or detailed notes.

There are three parts to a presentation-

- 1. Introduction:** This is the place to introduce yourself, thank the audience for the opportunity to be there, and explain what you are going to say.
- 2. Middle:** Here is where you present information that supports your points with examples and let the audience know your views. Remember, it is best to focus on only two or three main points.
- 3. End:** This is the wrap up of your presentation. It is a review of what you have said. You may repeat your call for action. Thank the audience again. *Remember to allow time for questions and comments.*



4. Using a Theme

You may use a theme in your story or repeat the same question or statement several times over. For example: “What is wrong here?” or “Remember, the family is at the center of services!”

5. Time order

There are two ways to organize your story — in chronological order, or describe your present situation and then explain experiences leading up to the present.

You are speaking because you are a parent and your family experiences are valuable. If you feel comfortable, you may use examples of what actually happens in your home. This will have an impact on the audience as they are reminded that your experiences are real for you and your family. *(Caution: Keep your presentation time in mind. Your examples should be brief and support the main points of your presentation.)*

Telling Your Family Story

Now that you have prepared your presentation, it is time to enjoy the experience. Here are some tips and guidelines to keep in mind as you tell your story.



1. Use Two or Three Main Points

It is important to focus on two or three points so that the most important part of your message doesn't get lost.

2. Use Your Own Style

Some people are naturally funny or tell jokes well. Some like to use props, slides, overheads, or scrapbooks. Others use items such as a T-shirt worn in the hospital by a baby born prematurely. You may want your child to be with you for your presentation if that would be appropriate.

3. Practice

Give your presentation before a mock audience such as friends, neighbors, or family members. This will give you an idea about the flow of your presentation and which parts are difficult for you. It will help you feel comfortable speaking in front of people.

Even the most experienced presenters feel nervous at times. If you find yourself feeling exceptionally nervous before your presentation, find a quiet spot; soothe yourself by taking a few deep breaths.

4. Look at Your Audience

Looking at the audience shows that you are connected and involved with them. You may want to find a friendly face that is smiling or nodding at you.

5. Acknowledge Your Emotions

Talking about your family may be an emotional experience. You will find that sharing information may be difficult at different times in your life. It is important that you think about your comfort level and set boundaries for yourself when you are preparing for your presentation.

Take some time to think about how you might react as you present and how you will feel after your presentation is finished.

You are going to do a great job!

Remember that a bit of nervous energy can add strength to a presentation.

Remember you are the only one who knows what you are going to say.

Relax. They won't know if it does not come out perfectly!

Responding To Your Audience

It is important to be responsive to your audience. Always stay connected to them.

1. Leave Time for Questions and Answers

Remember that some of the best information comes out during a question and answer period. This discussion may give you ideas for your next presentation. For example, you may choose to include information from frequently asked questions. You may want to think of probable questions and answers as you prepare.



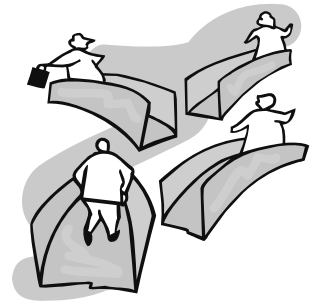
2. Let the Audience Know Your Boundaries

Certain questions may be “out of bounds” for you. Feel free to tell the audience what you consider private (personal matters, such as family income). In some case, you may want to say that you'd be willing to talk with the person privately after you have finished your presentation.

3. Be Honest if You Don't Know an Answer

You might offer to help find the answer or put that person in touch with someone who can.

It's all right to say, “I don't know.”



Questions To Ask As You Prepare

How can you be responsive to the audience? _____

What questions might be asked? _____

Do you feel comfortable looking into the audience? _____

How much time will you need to allow for questions and answers? _____

Now it's time to practice building your story.

The sample story on page 8 gives you an idea of how one parent prepared to tell his story. As you read it, remember that there are many ways to build your story. Forms on pages 9 and 10 give you a choice of ways to build your story. Pick the one that's best for you or work out your own design! Your story should fit your style.

This is a sample of one parent's story.

Purpose

Why are you telling your story?

I want to ask the school board to identify strategies for improving family involvement in schools.

Audience

Who will be present when you tell your story?

School Board, educators other families and others attending a school board meeting.

Location

Where will you tell your story?

Countryside Elementary

Introduction

Introduce yourself and share child/family information that you want the audience to keep in mind. Briefly explain what you'll be talking about. Let them know that you appreciate this opportunity to speak with them.

Hello my name is Johnny Otero and I am here to share my experiences about my involvement at my children's school. For my daughter, Rose Ann, it seemed school personnel really did not need me to be involved. However, it was a different story for my son John Jr. I was told that he could not learn and I should keep him home. I am hoping you will develop policies for the school district that will encourage families and educators to come together to educate our kids.

Body of Your Story

- ★ Choose three main points for your story. Write these in the boxes 1, 2 and 3.
 - ♦ Think of more specific details or examples that would help the audience understand this point.(1a,2a,3a)
 - ♦ Add more details that would give a clear picture of each point you are trying to make. (1b, 2b and 3b).

★Main Point 1

The school leadership was inviting to me.

1a Details

I met with the principal and volunteered to help out. The school principal took notes and my phone number.

1b More Details

The school principal called a few days later and asked if I could help out with a computer class in the school.

★Main Point 2

Myself, I was unskilled I was a stay-at-home dad. I cared about my kids I had time to share.

2a Details

I had no computer skills but was willing to learn so I could be a part of my child's school.

2b More Details

The Principal made me comfortable and helped me find my strengths.

★Main Point 3

Teachers

3a Details

Teachers were not comfortable with me. After all I was a man in a woman's world!

3b More Details

We built a relationship over the year. Teachers knew they could count on me and that I had something to offer to the school.

Conclusion

Wrap up your story. Take this time to restate your main points and repeat your call for action, or to promote awareness about your issue or cause. You may also want to answer questions from the audience. Thank the audience.

My son John can learn. I believe that because of my involvement he is doing well in school. The principal found out what I could do to help and was committed to my involvement. His leadership helped teachers to be more friendly and inviting to me. I would ask that the board develop a policy on parent involvement in the school. I would further ask that you add some incentives and accountability for parent involvement. Thank you for the opportunity to share our family's story. Do you have any questions?

Here's one tool you might use to "build your story".

Purpose

Why are you telling your story?

Audience

Who will be present when you tell your story?

Location

Where will you tell your story?

Introduction

Introduce yourself and share child/family information that you want the audience to keep in mind. Briefly explain what you'll be talking about. Let them know that you appreciate this opportunity to speak with them.

Body of Your Story

- ★ Choose three main points for your story. Write these in the boxes 1, 2 and 3.
 - ♦ Think of more specific details or examples that would help the audience understand this point. (1a, 2a, 3a)
 - ♦ Add more details that would give a clear picture of each point you are trying to make. (1b, 2b and 3b).

★Main Point 1

1a Details

1b More Details

★Main Point 2

2a Details

2b More Details

★Main Point 3

3a Details

3b More Details

Conclusion

Wrap up your story. Take this time to restate your main points and repeat your call for action, or to promote awareness about your issue or cause. You may also want to answer questions from the audience. Thank the audience.

You might use this style to "build your story".

Purpose: _____

Why are you telling your story?

Audience: _____

Who will be present when you tell your story?

Location: _____

Where will you tell your story?

Introduction: _____

Introduce yourself and share child/family information that you want the audience to keep in mind. Briefly explain what you'll be talking about. Let the audience know that you appreciate this opportunity to speak with them.

Body of your story: *Choose three main points for your story. Next think of more specific details or examples that would help the audience understand the point you are trying to get make.*

Main Point 1 _____

Detail 1a _____

Detail 1b _____

Main Point 2 _____

Detail 2a _____

Detail 2b _____

Main Point 3 _____

Detail 3 a _____

Detail 3 b _____

Conclusion: _____

Wrap up your story. Take this time to restate your main points and repeat your call for action, or to promote awareness about your issue or cause. You may also want to answer questions from the audience. Remember to thank the audience.



Parents Reaching Out

Parents Reaching Out is a statewide non-profit organization that works with parents, caregivers, educators and other professionals to promote healthy, positive and caring experiences for New Mexico families and children. Founded in 1981 by families who had children with special health and developmental needs, we expanded our scope to serve *all families and children* in 1998. Parents Reaching Out has served New Mexico families for over twenty years. Our staff and volunteers in our Family Leadership Action Network reflect the diverse culture and ethnic makeup of our communities.

Children do not come with instructions on how to deal with the difficult circumstances that many families experience. Parents Reaching Out believes that families' needs go beyond the bounds of formal services. *What we can offer to each other is uniquely ours. We have all been there.*

Our Mission

The mission of Parents Reaching Out is to enhance positive outcomes for families and children in New Mexico through informed decision making, advocacy, education, and resources. Parents Reaching Out provides the networking opportunities for families to connect with and support each other. This mission supports *all families* including those who have children with disabilities, and others who are disenfranchised.

Parents Reaching Out achieves this by:

- Developing family leadership
- Connecting families to each other
- Building collaborative partnerships
- Providing families knowledge and tools to enhance their power

Our Beliefs

- Families need support where ever they are in their journey.
- All families care deeply about their children.
- Families may need tools and support to accomplish their dreams.
- All families are capable of making informed decisions that are right for their family.
- Families in the state benefit from our organization having the staff and materials that meet their diversity.
- Systems that listen carefully to the family perspective improve outcomes for our children.

Parents Reaching Out invites all families and those serving families and children in New Mexico to make to make PRO your resource connection for early intervention, early childhood, education, family involvement, special education, health care access and systems change. Our publications, workshops, and Resource Center offer tools for informed decision-making and building partnerships in communities. Our trained staff and network of volunteers are here to serve you.

Parents Reaching Out

1920 B Columbia Drive, SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
1-505-247-0192 ♦ 1-800-524-5176
www.parentsreachingout.org

From I-25—take the Gibson Blvd Exit 222 and go East on Gibson. Turn left at the third stop light (Girard). Turn left on Vail. Go one block to Columbia. Turn left on Columbia. Parents Reaching Out is on the east side of the street. Welcome!

