

# Mini StoryWork TOOL KIT



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## FIRST, SOME BACKGROUND

**Why stories?** Stories can help humanize and heal, deepen understanding and motivate action, and catalyze greater impact for systems change. Strategic storytelling may help change the narrative about factors and forces leading to fetal, infant, and maternal deaths, and how to reach more first birthdays. Stories can lift up circumstances and outcomes not limited to any one situation, which combined, reflect a larger pattern. Storytelling may help individuals and families experiencing loss discover their own stories and shape their own narratives.

**Honoring Lived Experiences.** This initiative invites parents and families, and people involved in the work of Healthy Start, to know and tell their own stories. We want to welcome, hear, and elevate the lived experiences of mothers, fathers, birthing people, and families in new ways.

**Addressing Health Equity.** Stories also can illustrate and illuminate how racism - past and present - manifests: as discrimination, implicit bias, and unequal treatment in health care access and delivery; biologically, as cumulative trauma and toxic stress; and over time, as chronic community stressors - including wealth inequity, housing instability, food insecurity, environmental toxins, disinvestment, and economic discrimination. Through *strategic* storytelling, the influence and impact of racial inequities on health outcomes, across generations, may be better heard, understood, elevated, and acted upon.

**Personal stories, stories of us, are among our most intimate, sacred possessions.** They take time and intension to shape and share. They require patience, honor, and respect. In story work, it is both necessary and wise to co-create conditions that foster mutual trust and enable us to hold ourselves and each other accountable for what we hear and tell and do with stories that are told.

**Let's use a version of *TOUCHSTONES*<sup>1</sup> to Ground and Guide Storytelling Work.**

1. **Be 100% present.** Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Bring all of yourself to this work. We all learn best in spaces that truly welcome us. Let's welcome others to this space and presume that you are fully welcomed.
2. **Listen deeply.** Listen intently to what is said. Listen to the feelings beneath the words. Listen also to yourself. Strive for a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking, and acting.
3. **Always by invitation.** It is never 'share or die.' You are invited to share your stories. You may be invited to work in pairs, small groups, and in the large group. The invitation is exactly that. *You* determine the extent to which you want to participate in our discussions and activities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Touchstones* are adapted from *The Circle of Trust*, CENTER FOR COURAGE AND RENEWAL, and *CityMatCH*.

4. **No fixing.** Each of us is here to discover our own truths, and to take our own journey. We are not here to set someone else straight, or help right another person's wrong, or to 'fix' or 'correct' what we think is broken, or incorrect in another member of the group.
5. **Suspend judgment.** Set aside your judgments. By making a space between judging and reacting, we can listen to the other – and to ourselves – more fully. Our ideas, perspectives, decisions and actions can be more informed.
6. **Identify assumptions.** Our assumptions often are invisible to us, yet they shape how we see and hear things - our world view, our decisions and our actions. Only when we are aware of what we assume is going on, can we set our assumptions aside, and open our minds to greater possibilities.
7. **Speak your truth.** Say what is in your heart. Trust that your voice will be heard, and your contributions will be respected. Your truth may be different from, even opposite of, what another has said. Speaking your truth is not debating with, or correcting, or interpreting what someone else has said. Own your truth by speaking only for yourself.
8. **Respect Silence.** Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. After you or another has spoken - *or told their story* – take a pause. Take time to reflect and fully listen, without rushing to filling the space with words. Take a breath.
9. **Maintain confidentiality.** Create a safe space by respecting the confidential nature and content of stories shared, and discussions held. What is said here, remains here, unless there is clear permission given to share it elsewhere.
10. **When things get difficult, turn to Wonder.** If you find yourself disagreeing with another, or becoming judgmental, or getting defensive, or shutting down, try turning to wonder: *"I wonder what brought her to this place? I wonder what they are feeling right now?"*  
*Be curious!*

## REFLECTIONS:

- Which TOUCHSTONES are most important to you, to follow and practice in your work?  
*Why?*
  - *What's missing?* Are there additional agreements that need to be set in our story work going forward?
  - How will we use the TOUCHSTONES, and use them well?
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## NOTES:

## NEXT, WE START BY TELLING OUR OWN STORIES, FIRST

### Storytelling starts with *stories of US.*

The purpose of identifying, shaping, telling and sharing an personal anchor story is to (re)discover what compels us to keep doing this work, and listen deeply to hear others' stories.

Everybody has a story.  
"Everybody is a story."  
It's yours.  
It's your super power.  
It's your most sacred currency.  
It's an anchor to your WHY.

"Anchor Stories" are at the root of **WHY** we do what we do...and have to keep on doing it.  
We must know **and be willing to tell** our stories first.... before you ask others.  
And we **must listen deeply**, to the stories that want to be told.

Part 2: Begin with **ANCHOR STORIES** of **WHY**

### **Step 1:** Find a **MOMENT** to discover a personal story.

Moments can kickstart a larger core story. The key is to find and focus on **ONE MOMENT**, *not the whole story* of everything that has ever happened. See what bubbles up, what excites you, what moves you. **Be curious:** *what is the story that wants to be told? Which story do you really WANT to tell?*

#### **PROMPT: WHAT WAS A MOMENT WHEN:**

- You knew this was the work you were meant to do..  
OR
- You felt fully committed to the work you are doing..  
OR
- You felt visible - or invisible - in the work you do..  
OR
- You knew you could make a real difference..  
OR...

**Write out your 'MOMENT' in 1 – 2 sentences.** Make sure it is a specific point in time, that you remember clearly and can still feel - as if it were just yesterday . . . find adjectives to draw in details: our senses (smells, colors, sounds, touch). Adjectives that bring forth emotion are powerful catalysts, drawing in the listener to want more.

## **Step 2: Write out a first draft of your anchor story.**

Take up to 30 minutes, uninterrupted as is possible, state by writing about 1 -2 pages (about 500 words) or so about that moment. Here are 4 beginning 'TIPS':

- **Take us right there with you. Set it up.** Describe it with details you recall, that stick out, that might bring the listener in. Offer a scene that the listener can envision, feel, taste, touch, smell... and relate to. ***What was the situation?*** Who was there, why? What was happening around you? ***How did it feel?*** How did it get complicated? Was there a choice to be made? ***What was the moment it all changed?*** How did it end up? What became clear...***what did you figure out in the end?***
- **Write just enough.** If it is hard to limit it to just 500 words, and you feel compelled... just keep writing. You may have more than one story emerge... Cap it in the first try to under 1000 words, if you are on a roll. You can edit it down later. Our aim is for a 3 - 5 minute *unrushed* story (100-150 words per minute out loud). And if words don't come easily, try *outlining* your moment. If too much, carve out just one most powerful story.
- **Take 5 minutes to read your first draft - out loud.** See how the words your wrote feel and flow. Note where you might changes, additions and deletions. ***What made it important to recall, and feel real and fresh?***
- **And, if you get stuck,** walk away. Come back to it again when you have another window of time. Your story will grow within you, once you've ignited and invited it.

## **Step 3: Shape your Anchor Story.**

**Take time to distill and hone your draft story.** Powerful stories are crafted with intention. Consider classic story structure: *Once upon a time... And every day... But one day... Then this! Then that! (Big changes) happen! And so...* **Here are some more tips.**

Every **strong** story needs to do 4 things:



- MAKE A CONNECTION
- GIVE CONTEXT
- HINGE ON CHANGE**
- OFFER CLOSURE

**TELL EFFECTIVE STORIES EFFECTIVELY.**

- ⇒ **Give 1 - 2 opening sentences that invite listeners/readers in....** so they immediately can feel a **connection** to what the story is about. Something that is *universal* - that it maybe could have happened to them . . . or someone they know.
- ⇒ **Take them there. Your story has to provide background, some **context**,** so the reader/listener can see or hear or feel or know what is going on around you in that moment.
- ⇒ **Then, describe in greater detail about your MOMENT,** in terms of something that happened, that **changed** everything.
- ⇒ **In the end, help others discover *with you* the ‘so what’ of your anchor story.** The key is to ‘button’ the story with an ending that gives meaning, a take-away, and **closure**.

**Now, edit and shape a second draft of your anchor story, based on this guidance.** Let go of parts that may be interesting, but not essential, to tell this shorter, tighter version.

**Then, read it out loud - for language, flow and content.** Note how long it takes to tell without rushing. If it is longer than 5 minutes, see where you might be able to shape and trim.

#### **Step 4: Share your anchor story with somebody you trust.**

Share in confidence, in writing, and/or make a date for a story-swap.

#### **LISTENER TIPS:**

- Agree to follow the *Touchstones* in how you tell and listen and discuss and share
- Listen to the *whole* story. Uninterrupted. Then pause.
- Ask the teller how it felt to write, and to tell their story.
- Ask what kind of feedback the storyteller would most like to receive.
- Share feedback on what really works well and is clear and compelling.
- Offer constructive input - not critique - on how it could be clearer to you, as a listener.

**Then: Practice, Practice, PRACTICE. And tell it again. And find the JOY!**