Session 47: Your Story in a Helping Role: Testimony With Guardrails

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard; workbooks and pens

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Tell a two-minute version of their story shaped for a peer's need, not their own
- Apply Session 33's safety rules inside a helping conversation: no graphic detail, no war stories, no advice disguised as testimony
- Decide when not to tell their story at all

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that your story in a helping role has a handle and a blade — carry it with guardrails. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Your story is a tool now. Like any tool it has a handle and a blade: used right, it opens a locked person; used wrong — too long, too graphic, too much about you — it cuts. Today we learn to carry it like professionals.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "What is the one sentence of your story that seems to land hardest on newer people? Say just the sentence." Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Session 33 taught telling your story safely in public settings. A helping conversation is a different stage: one listener, usually in pain, whose need sets the length and the content. The guardrails tighten: two minutes, one chapter, chosen for them — the part of your story that stands closest to where they are standing — and then the floor returns to them with a question.

- **Serve the listener's chapter** They are grieving a custody loss; the chapter of your story that matters is the season you parented from a distance, not your arrest record. Relevance is the discipline.
- **Two minutes, then the floor** Set the length before you start: 'Can I tell you the two minutes of my story that sound like tonight?' Their nod is consent; the clock is respect.
- **Some nights, holster it** Fresh crisis, raw trauma, or a person who needs information and a warm handoff — your story waits. A peer who can withhold the story can be trusted with it.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Narrative identity research examines how the stories people construct about their lives relate to change, and group literature describes universality — learning that one's experience is shared — as a therapeutic factor in groups (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Key sources for this session: McAdams & McLean (2013); Yalom & Leszcz (2020); White (2008). Evidence strength: Moderate

— observational and theoretical literature. Spiritual practice: Testimony / telling your story — correlates with narrative identity and group universality; evidence: Moderate (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which chapter of your story is most often useful to newcomers here — and which chapter do you tell mainly because you like telling it?
2. What detail do you always leave out now that you used to include? What taught you?
3. How can you tell, mid-conversation, that your story has stopped helping? Name the signs.

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Two-minute drill (in pairs, timed): each person tells the two-minute version aimed at a scenario the partner names — a newcomer afraid of their first night; a peer ashamed after a slip (Session 30's rules apply); a participant furious at a house decision. Partner feedback: what landed, what ran long, and where the floor came back. Switch.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Write your two-minute version in your workbook: the chapter, the turning point, what helped, and the question you end with. Keep it under half a page; if it does not fit, it is not the two-minute version. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

The group agreements bind peers in conversation as in session: no graphic use detail, ever. A peer never promises that what is told to them stays secret from staff where Session 45's limits apply. Any public testimony is reviewed with the Program Director first (Session 33).

Closing (2 minutes)

Tell it short, tell it true, hand back the floor. Your story is a bridge — people are supposed to cross it, not live on it. Next session: boundaries — carrying with people without carrying for them.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐