

The Personal is Political

The Personal is Political

The experiences, feelings, and possibilities of our personal lives are not just a matter of personal preferences and choices but are limited, moulded, and defined by the broader political and social setting. They feel personal, and their details are personal, but their broad texture and character, and especially the limits within which these evolve, are largely systemic.



Jacqui aged 5

Experiences

Abuse
Betrayal
Neglect
Denial
Blame
Threats



Coping Strategies

Hearing Voices
Self Harm
Eating 'Disorder'
Creativity
Resourcefulness
Sense of Justice

My experiences of the Mental Health System

- **Pathologised**
'You are ill. Everything that you say and do will be seen as a consequence of your illness.'
- **Denial**
'It never happened' or 'It did happen but you will never recover'.
- **Medication**
'You are resistant and the fact that you don't want to take medication is evidence that you are ill' .
- **Dependency & Compliance**
'You must accept the psychiatric diagnosis and medication and we will give you benefits and a bus pass'.
- **Disempowered**
'You will never recover. You will always have this illness. You won't be able to work'.
- **Passive**
'You do not know what is best for you. We know what is best for you'.

Finding a new paradigm

- Trauma & Recovery Model
- Understanding Dissociation
- The Personal Is Political

Trauma and Recovery

(Judith Herman)

- Safety
- Remembering & Mourning
- Reconnection

Trauma and Recovery

- **Safety**
- **feeling safe and feeling protected**
- To talk - need a language to describe what has happened – time, space, safety, protection and an empathic witness
- To know that I am not alone
- To know that I am not crazy
- To know that my responses are normal in abnormal circumstances
- To know that recovery is possible as others have recovered
- To accept support as an act of courage and commitment to life and the future rather than as a sign of weakness

Trauma and Recovery

- **Remembering & Mourning**
- *‘When the truth is finally recognised, survivors can begin their recovery’*
(Herman, 1992).
- Restorative power of truth telling
- Reconstructing the story of the trauma in the presence of an empathic witness/witnesses
- Mourning, to truly honour what has been lost
- Integrating the experience – putting the new and the old together and moving through to the future

Understanding Dissociation -

- Dissociation - a term coined by Pierre Janet a French psychiatrist in the early part of 20th century.
- Dissociation exists on a continuum.
- Many people experience mild dissociation even when there is no stress or danger.
- At one end - everyday mild dissociative experiences - e.g. daydreaming, not remembering a car journey ('highway hypnosis') or getting lost in a good book.
- At the other end - dissociation is a self protective mechanism helping people to survive traumatic experiences.
- 'It was like I left my body...'
- 'Time slowed down...'
- 'I went dead and couldn't feel any pain...'
- 'I watched from the ceiling as it happened to 'somebody else'... '

'Voices'

Dissociated selves that became internal representations of my external world

- **Children/Teenagers**
 - **Abusers**
 - **Deniers & Blamers**
 - **Comforters & Protectors**
 - **Intellect guides**
 - **Spiritual**
- Hold memories of trauma - victims
 - Hold memories of trauma – perpetrators – mother, father, 'main abuser', selves created to handle the abuse,
 - Mother, grandmother, main abuser, confused selves, psychiatrists, society
 - Imaginatively created selves i.e., 'great mother', old man,
 - Pure intellect...free from feeling
 - Higher power, connection to the world, nature, my own innocence, my survival instinct, love is my religion!

Changing my relationship with my 'voices':

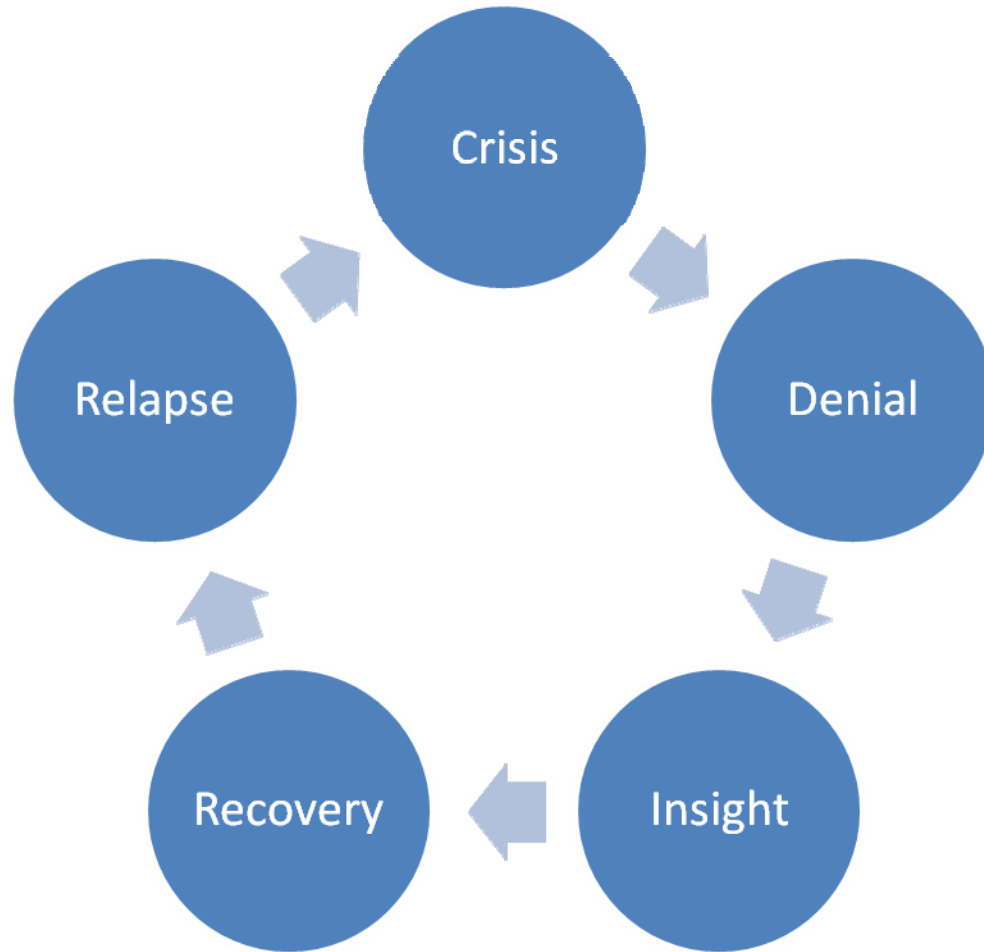
- Needed to listen to them and understand them and the context in which they emerged
- Greet them with compassion and understanding
- Honour them - they helped me to survive
- Work towards supporting and understanding each other
- Increase the sense of connectedness and wholeness
- Life becomes a shared, mutual collaboration

Trauma and Recovery

- **Reconnection**
- *‘Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery’ (Herman).*
- Reconnecting with ordinariness and the sense of being like others
- There is more to life than the trauma
- Finding a ‘survivor mission’

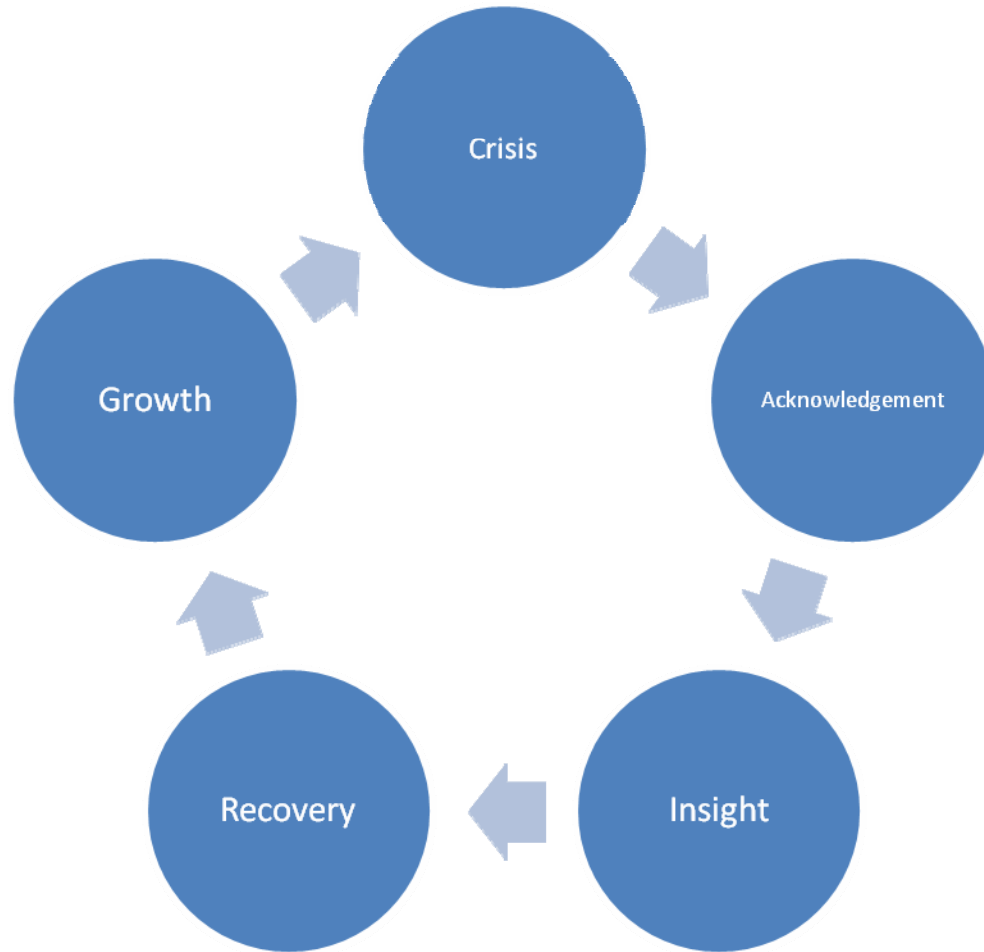
Recovery Model

A Bio- Medical Version



Recovery Model

A Survivor's Version



Join The Last Great Civil Rights Movement!

- Collective Responsibility
- Paradigm Shift
- The Personal Is Political