



Hidden Victims Hidden Healers: An Eight-Stage Healing Process For Families And Friends Of The Mentally Ill

Julie Tallard Johnson

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The impetus of this book began with a personal search of mine for support groups for families of those with mental illness. I had a brother with Schizophrenia. I was also finishing up my graduate degree in Social Work (back in 1982). What these groups for families of the mentally ill “supported” concerned me. What I typically found were dysfunctional groups supporting negative and even hostile mindsets. Most of them encouraged a victim mentality to the surrounding culture and to the mental illness. When I considered using other group processes such as the 12 Steps, it didn’t convert well enough to help family members struggling with a loved one’s persistent and chronic mental illness. I also recognized that mental illness happens within the context of a family – not just the individual. Too often these groups focused on the mentally ill person at the expense of the family’s over-all own mental health and the health of other family members. I discovered in my research that how the family responds to the mental illness will either be part of the antidote or continued problem. In any give difficulty we are either part of the problem or part of the solution. I intended to offer a means for family members and friends to be part of a solution. Furthermore, families and their individual members are all personally affected by the disruption and difficulties brought on through living with mental illness. Those living with mental illness secondarily through a loved one also needed an aggressive healing path to help them live with (and sometimes beyond) the mental illness. So, I developed the Eight Stage Healing Process. My combined personal and professional experiences contributed to the chosen Stages. Furthermore, I researched what works and what doesn’t work in such support groups. When securing a publisher for the book I insisted that “coping” be left out of the title. Everyone is coping – the Eight Stages takes one beyond just coping with mental illness and the surrounding family dynamics and helps individuals and families heal. Twenty years later I still find, along with thousands of other family members that the Eight Stages is an authentic healing process that benefits all family members. The Eight Stages are; Stage One: Stage Two: Stage Three: Stage Four: Stage Five: Stage Six: Stage Seven: Stage Eight: The Eight Stages can be used individually or within a group context. If in a group, I have available the Facilitator’s Manual to use as a guide: Title here. Now the Eight Stages is the most used program for families in Australia and used throughout Canada and the United States.

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