



Pain to POWER

As you think about sharing your story, consider the Pain to POWER philosophy, which involves moving from a place where pain controls our behavior to a place where we find power within ourselves.

Figure 1: Pain to POWER Continuum



POWER Preparation

Moving from Pain to POWER requires a little prep work. So before you dig into, or even commit to, presenting your story to others, be sure to:

Check Yourself. Know and understand where you are in your life, and decide if it is a good time for you to be presenting to this audience and in this place. Remember, moving from Pain to POWER is also about letting go of the anger or hurt you have felt.

- Have you learned the difference between using a “tack” some of the time, rather than a “hammer” all of the time?
- Is sharing your story taking too much of a risk for you, or for your child? Talk to your child or adolescent about how much he or she is OK with sharing.
- Ask yourself, “Is doing nothing keeping me in a place of pain?” If the answer is “yes,” then you may want to see where you are on the Pain to POWER continuum (see Figure 1). This will help you determine whether presenting will move your thinking and actions closer to POWER.

In the Heat of the Moment, Apply Your POWER. Write POWER at the top of your presentation notes. This will be a reminder of what to do when your nerves take over, emotions are running high, or the environment is not friendly.

Pain to POWER Vocabulary

Language matters, but *how* you say something can be as important as what you say. Your words should match your thinking.

Pain Vocabulary

- I can't (no control)
- I should
- It's not my fault
- It's a problem
- I'm never satisfied
- Life's a struggle
- I hope
- If only
- What will I do?
- It's terrible

POWER Vocabulary

- I won't (choice)
- I could
- I'm totally responsible for my actions
- It's an opportunity
- I want to learn to grow
- Life's an adventure
- I know
- Next time
- I know I can handle it
- It's a learning experience

Source: Jeffers, S. (1987). *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. Fawcett Books, a division of Random House, New York: NY.

Pause, Others, Why, Eye Contact, Relax

- **Pause.** If you are feeling emotional or have lost your place, just pause. People will understand if you simply say that you need to compose yourself. Explain that although this is difficult, it is important to you to finish your presentation. Pausing will also get the listeners' attention.
- **Others.** Remember: You are not alone. You are using your voice to represent many others who will speak when the time is right for them.
- **Why.** Stay focused on why you are presenting. Remember the important points without getting lost in your story and losing your message.
- **Eye Contact.** Make eye contact with someone in the audience that is friendly. Look for a person that gives you some supportive head nods or smiles at you. Use them as a focal point when you are feeling emotional or nervous.
- **Relax.** "Left foot ... right foot ... breathe." This is a simple phrase to recall when you need to relax and get through a tough period. Taking a breath and letting out the air can be relaxing and help to settle you so that you can continue.



First-Person POWERful Example

When my son (who has bipolar disorder) first started running away, things were hard, but he ran to close places. Then he grew older, a whole 14 years of age, and ran across the country. He had hitch-hiked from Cincinnati to L.A. without so much as a "fare thee well" to anyone at home. It was 4 months before we heard from him.

This painful experience became a powerful one as I look back and remember how distraught I was, but how I had to learn to put it aside or I would not be able to carry on with my life. Now, my son is 31, and is again "on the road" but I can talk about it as a mom whose son is maybe in the armed services, or moved away for a job, so that I can take care of myself, others that count on me, and my job.

I used tips similar to the POWER acronym to empower myself to "carry on." I would pause, collect my thoughts, and decide what parts of this story, or any other story I had lived, could be stated without opening the wounds.

Living the story again and again by re-telling it gave me strength as well. Thus my pain turned to power. Not a loss of caring for my son, that could never happen, but instead, just as my son had made his choices on his own, I made a power-filled choice to move forward with my life.

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