# Transparency in Social Work: Having the Difficult Conversations

The ability to speak up honestly lies at the heart of social work's advocacy and social work's advocacy and social justice mandate. Service users tell us it helps them to work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2012). Practitioners tell us it helps them to work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressures to remain silent can experience the debilitating physical and psychological symptoms of moral distress (Austin, 2007; Austin, Rankel, Kagan, Bergum, & Lemermeyer, 2005). Transparent communication is as important in the social work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2011). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressures to remain silent can experience the debilitating physical and psychological symptoms of moral distress (Austin, 2007; Austin, Rankel, Kagan, Bergum, & Lemermeyer, 2005). Transparent communication is as important in the social work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressures tell us it helps them to work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2012). Practitioners tell us it helps them to work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressure to remain silent can experience the debilitation of trust in effective helping relationships, (Balagner et al., 2011). Practitioners tell us it helps them to work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those work in strength to speak and the contact of the

The ability to speak up honestly lies at the heart of social work's advocacy and social work's advocacy and social work in strength-based ways without ignoring relationships (Gallagher et al., 2011; Ghaffar, Manby, & Race, 2012). Practitioners tell us it helps them to work place work classroom as in the workplace work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressures to remain silent can experience the debilitating physical and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports worker resilience, as those who succumb to pressures to remain silent can experience the debilitating physical and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work classroom as in the workplace work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength-based ways without ignoring risk and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 2015). We know it supports work in strength and problems (Author's own, 20

Dr. Carolyn Oliver, Elizabeth Jones and Allyson Rayner

## The Problem

#### How do you teach courage?

The trend towards participatory learning approaches means that students are increasingly called on to speak up in defence of their values and boundaries in classrooms and practicum settings. This is particularly true for social work students; the ability of social workers to 'speak up' is central to their professional resilience, effectiveness in helping relationships and ability to advocate for social justice. We can work to create safe classrooms supporting open discussion, reflection and rehearsal of transparency skills, and we can teach students what they might say. Still, when faced with real world 'difficult conversations', fear of the consequences often keeps students silent.

Our project sought strategies to help students learn how to brave potential negative consequences in order to speak their truth. In a practicum seminar course (SOWK 316), the everyday struggles with practicum supervisors, colleagues and service users became emotionally engaging learning opportunities around which to build curriculum supporting students to have difficult conversations in a safe way.

## Literature

Huish, R. (2013). Dissent 101: Teaching the "dangerous knowledge" of practices of activism. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 34(3).

May, D. R., Luth, M. T., & Schwoerer, C. E. (2014). The influence of business ethics education on moral efficacy, moral meaningfulness, and moral courage: A quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 124(1)

Oliver, C., & Charles, G. (2015). Enacting firm, fair and friendly practice: A model for strengths-based child protection relationships? *British Journal of Social Work*, bcv015.

The 6A's model was adapted from Rushton, C.H. (2006) Defining and addressing moral distress: Tools for critical care nursing leaders, *AACN Advanced Critical Care*, 17 (2).

## The Project

With past students, we developed new curriculum including:

- An original model for how to have a difficult conversation
- A wallet card and learning activity asking students to 'play their difficult conversation card' in a real-world situation
- Story-telling by past students
- Moral courage self-reflection measures
- Emotional regulation activities
- Role plays
- Small group discussions

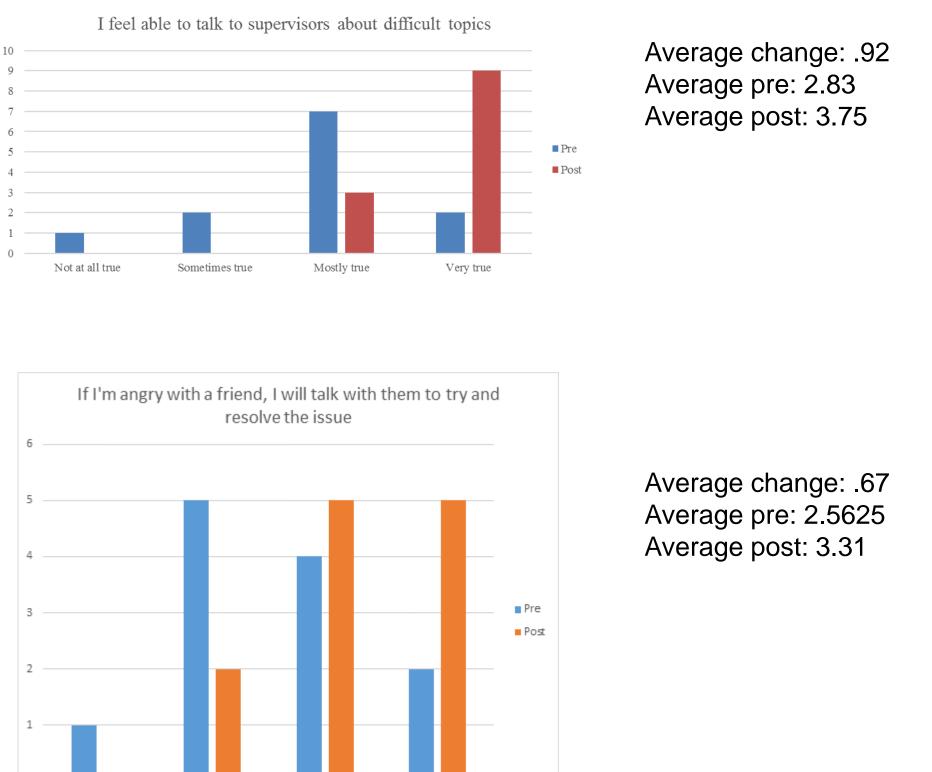
With current students, we are evaluating the new curriculum through focus groups, an online survey and pre/post measures.

## ASK if a difficult conversation is needed ACT ASSESS the safety of having on your plan for the the conversation conversation A Difficult Conversation is when we brave social or emotional risks to speak up to protect our values or boundaries **AFFIRM** ARRANGE your right to choose space for the whether or not to have conversation the conversation ACKNOWLEDGE shared goals and positive intent

Oliver, C. (forthcoming)

## The Early Findings

#### How do students say they have changed?



"I react to it with more compassion. I've come to understand that difficult conversations are not just a selfish act of needing to say what I have to say but involve two people and I now make room for the other party to respond"

"Now my instinct is to ask questions before making conclusive or labelling statements."

#### What activities helped?

"I enjoyed hearing other people's experiences with difficult conversations as it allowed me to see various communication styles. I also really enjoyed the concreteness and clarity of the 6 A model".

"When the fourth year students came I really enjoyed that, and it was effective. I think because peer to peer learning is something that I can engage with, with more ease... I also like the 6A's small card handout it was cute, and helpful!"

"Even if it wasn't my issue we were talking about, classmates had very unique and effective methods of handling situations that I never would have thought of".

## Acknowledgements

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