



Exploring Prevention Audio Library:
Series 1, Episode 7 Transcript

Addressing Power and Privilege in Prevention Efforts

Total time: 18min 30sec

Carli Rohner 00:00

A series on common prevention challenges as part of a larger audio series to help explore creative prevention ideas, and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we discuss challenges and brainstorm some strategies to navigate those challenges related to addressing oppression in our prevention work. Today we're joined by sexual assault taskforce staff.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:18

I'm Kate Hildebrandt, Campus Coordinator.

Meg Foster 00:20

I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator.

Carli Rohner 00:23

And I'm Carli Rohner, the Campus Advocacy Coordinator. The challenges we're going to discuss right now were provided by participants in statewide comprehensive prevention trainings. Let's get started. One of the things that comes up a lot for our participants when talking about privilege and power within our trainings and within facilitation is how we are challenged to not use privilege in a harmful way as facilitators.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:47

Yeah, that's a big challenge. And the first thought that I had was that you're going to and think we all just need to accept that, that we can go in with the best of intentions and work hard to train ourselves, and at some point, we are going to cause harm, and we are going to use our privilege in a harmful way. We all have before, and we all will again. That's just the reality of the way that our, our culture and our systems are set up. And that doesn't mean that we don't try not to do it, of course, but I do think that it is important to accept that and to think about what you're going to do when you do find yourself using your privilege in a harmful way or abusing power as a facilitator or in an official role. I also think that helps prepare us to be open to hearing that as feedback or to sensing that. As a part of the room, if you see participants shutting down and you notice there's some different things going on, you can think about your own role in that.

I also think that one thing you can do to minimize and mitigate that is to do your own self work before we even get into the space. It's really important for you to examine your own positional and systems-based privilege, where you might experience marginalization, where you might experience privilege, how you've seen that show up in your life, what various advantages or barriers you face, and to do some of your own work to come to terms with that, and especially the ways -- because privilege is often invisible, think about the ways that your privilege might have manifested. That starts with

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individual work, definitely seeking additional training, seeking support. If you can find a great therapist that has a social justice background or is trained in this and getting some outside perspective, or if that's perspective from like a co-worker, from supervisors, from other people who are invested in this work. I do think you want to be careful not to ask marginalized communities to do the labor of pointing out all the times where you have abused your privilege. However, of course, there may be people in your life that you do have that relationship with and can ask and that's a really valuable perspective as well.

So do your own work before you come in work, work to set up a space with, again, group guidelines agreements... We often talk about this as a good strategy and that's because it's really important, but do that in a way that holds you accountable as well, things that you can adhere to as a facilitator. There are times where I know that the agreements are going to look different for me versus participants and so naming that and talking about that. Also, talking about how participants can hold you accountable to your facilitator role and what that looks like; that's a really good starting place and you at least have that openness when you get to that space and also just being really like thoughtful and interrogating your own choices. Also, when you find yourself as a facilitator having a reaction to a dynamic in the room to a comment that somebody made; know that that's okay. Of course we are going to at times, we are all human, sometimes participants say things that are hurtful to us, or that are just really challenging to navigate. So, if you find yourself having an emotional reaction of any kind, getting angry, getting upset, feeling triggered, whatever that looks like, slow down, just take a second and slow down. One of the things we know about enacting oppressive [unclear] is that we want to intervene on patterns that we built, we need to slow down and take the time to make careful, thoughtful reactions. So know that that means that like, as a facilitator, be comfortable with silence, you can take a second to think about things, be flexible, use your brakes too, if you need to just have the room take a break so that you can get yourself together and you're not doing something that's going to be problematic.

It's really important to recognize that as a facilitator, we're coming in with an inherent position of power in the room, but that doesn't mean that we know the most. It's really helpful and healthy model that we, if we are in a training or another type of program where we are around other people, that there is a collective wisdom in the room and that you can model both accountability and humility by one, owning up to when you've done something, but then also modeling healthy ways to respond to that and being able to process that with the group and saying like, "Wow," you know, "I haven't thought of that before. Thank you for sharing that with me. I'm going to need to think about that for a minute. We're going to do an activity and then I'd like to come back and talk about it more folks are okay with that," things like that. It can really help model not just for the group that you care, but also model for folks who might have similar challenges that it's okay to like take a step back, take a break, and then also to admit when we're wrong, to admit when maybe we didn't say something the way that we wanted to, to admit that as facilitators, we are not the end-all-be-all of the knowledge in the room.

Meg Foster 05:21

Additionally to that, two pieces that can be really helpful is carrying some of our, like, response skills into prevention work and the facilitation work and believe that when people are talking about an

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experience that they had, or a response to something that was going on, believe them that that is true, that that is their experience. And so even though we might be coming from a different place or understand things differently, that allows us an opportunity to really be grateful for any learning moments that they're providing us or opportunities to think through what we are talking about and what we shared. I also think that a lot of times, strong reactions aren't necessarily about us. And so we sometimes as facilitators get in a place of feeling defensive or stressed out because of reactions or things that are happening, and just trusting that maybe it's not necessarily about us, that we can make space to process that in the subtle ways that Kate and Carli are talking about.

Kate Hildebrandt 07:02

Another one that comes up is sometimes not necessarily in the room or in the facilitation space, but in setting up the training behind the scenes, whether it's making decisions about what kind of content is needed for this group, how long they should have to be in this space. Sometimes it's maybe you in collaboration with others who are in power making decisions about what that training is going to look like what the boundaries and barriers of it should be. Being thoughtful about that, that you're also not using your privilege in a harmful way. Sometimes, we think we know best because we know what prevention work looks like or we've been doing this for X number of years, but remembering to take a step back and think about who is in the space, who's making decisions, whose voices aren't being heard... Is there a way that we can allow other folks voices or thoughts to be heard when we're making those initial decisions so we are not perpetuating our privilege in an unseen way even before we get into the room?

Carli Rohner 08:12

Alright, so another question we got was about working with communities that we don't hold shared identities with. What are some ways that we can do that really thoughtfully with intention?

We've addressed this in both the previous question, but also in some of our other audio series episodes where we talk about this dynamic of being able to do the work ourselves, if we're going to do work with communities that we don't share identities with, but then we need to do some personal work around our own identities, what kind of privilege and power that we're bringing in to these conversations, either through our positions, maybe through our workplace, but then also because of the other types of identities that we hold. And so starting there and being cognizant of that, but then also balancing that with not expecting that education to come from folks who are within that community.

One way to really helpfully approach that is being very intentional about building relationships with communities that you don't have shared identity with, but that you are working with in terms of prevention strategies, to build that relationship first. And that might look like us not getting what we deem as progress happening as quickly as we would like. So for example, there might be a community that I know we're going to be partnering with for prevention work and I might go to their meetings, their programs, work with their staff around just learning their organizations, being a supporter of their mission and the work that they are doing, without an expectation that that work comes back to me in

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some way. So not expecting that if I go to all of their programs that then they're going to show up to all of mine. Maybe it's just about being a trusted partner within that community before I even go to next step. So that's really helpful. It's also really helpful that if you're going to be working with communities that you don't share an identity with, that you, like Meg was saying earlier, when folks share experiences with you about what this work looks like about their life experience, that you take that in as a lesson, like be grateful for that but then also not challenging the dynamics of what that has been like for another person. And so being able to take that in and trust that folks are the authority of their own experience, but they are the person who knows most about what their life is like, and then how do we incorporate that with our prevention work.

Meg Foster 08:44

That's another important influence knowledge as well is that there is likely a very long history that different communities that you might be working with have with working with either your organizations or to the identities that you represent, and putting in the time to develop those meaningful relationships is really important and recognize that that means doing the work to overcome some of that history and navigate some of that history. Additionally, I see a lot of folks will try and partner with different groups, but they don't do it in an equitable way. They'll ask for an MOU or a partnership on a grant or a different project but aren't actually factoring in any funding or other resources for different groups that we want to work with. And so looking at, like, "What does meaningful partnership actually look like?" to make sure that we're looking at equity and equality in our partnerships.

Kate Hildebrandt 11:34

I also think this is true for most things we do but directionality matters, of course, if you are a person who is going into -- if you hold multiple marginalized identities, and you are going to work with a predominantly privileged group of folks, then that can have a different impact than if it's the other way around. And I know when I was doing prevention work, I would often work with people who were doctors or law enforcement and that felt like a very different direction of privilege and power in the room than when I was going into work with, for example, middle school students. So knowing that it definitely can go both ways and there's different levels of attention used, a lot of those community building principles that we've talked about in this and in previous sections. So obviously it's fine no matter what the direction or those relationships of power are, but thinking about that critically is really important.

I also think it can be a mistake to assume that just because you share identities with a group of people or are a part of a community, that you understand their experiences or holistically know that and even when you're a member of a community or sharing identity, you can still have power over/power within that group. I think about for example, if you are part of a community, but you have a higher education level than other members of that community, making sure that you are not using that power that you might have within that group to say, to assume that your experiences and the things that you did are going to work for everyone else. So being critical, no matter our community membership or shared identity is still very important.



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Carli Rohner 13:11

Another question that comes up often for folks is when we're doing prevention work that's directed by those people or groups that have more power, not the people who are actually doing the prevention work day-to-day, and what can that look like and how can folks navigate that?

Kate Hildebrandt 13:31

That's true for probably most of us if you're grant funded at all in the government, the state, someone else is telling you how to do prevention work, you know, whether that's like you're doing it from a research-based curriculum and you're only allowed to use one of three curriculums, so you don't have that many choices. Even when there is flexibility built in, often it is like, okay, you still have to hit X number of sessions for X number of times and for X number of topics. That is a limit that so many of us experience. The first thing that is important with that is just be transparent about that with the people that we are working with because if you don't have a lot of flexibility in how you do your prevention programming, or what kinds of topics are covered, when, how often you meet, when you meet, all of that -- just being really honest. That's often true with how we do prevention in schools or in college classrooms, for example, we just foist these things on to young people. It's being really clear about why and how it empowers them to understand and also being clear about what you do have flexibility around. Meg has talked about this previously, but finding where you can find flexibility, even within those rigid standards.

Carli Rohner 14:47

That it's also helpful to plan into some sustainability practices for yourself because one of the things that is really hard as a preventionist in this dynamic is having to do both education for the community and those strategies to increase folks' skills and changing beliefs and behaviors, while also simultaneously having to educate up and helping those folks who might be in more positional power to understand what best practice looks like, to understand the dynamics of the community. And so being able to build in ways that you can then help sustain yourself, work with co-workers to make that system more sustainable for you, so that you don't get burned out. There's other great resources available on our website and through other organizations that talk about that sustainability and one that we have available is a prevention and sustainability plan. So I encourage folks to check that out on our website because that's a dynamic that contributes to burnout for folks within this field of education in so many ways.

Meg Foster 15:52

I also think it's really important to think about the ways in which, as someone implementing prevention, you might have power and how we can shift from having power over to sharing power and having power with folks in the room. Whether you're a facilitator, whether or not you are an administrator or supervisor, like what are the ways in which you hold, and we all hold, depending on our different [unclear], power over people in different situations. One example that comes to mind is when we ask people to do something, and then just do it because we're facilitating and what does that look like? And

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what is missing? What kind of resources, information, tools are missing in that and so how can we be again, fill in that flexibility and be responsive, but also think about how we are using our power in the different situations we enter.

Carli Rohner 16:50

Another piece that is really important is that if you are somebody who's listening and you are an administrator, you're somebody who's holding some of that positional power, being able to work with the folks who are doing that prevention work on a day-to-day basis is to say, here's some of the things we absolutely can't change due to grant funding, due to some other dynamic that makes it very rigid, but here's all the other areas where you do have flexibility. Here's all the other areas where we can work within our communities to adapt what this looks like. And so I encourage you to sit down with those folks on your team or just one person to be able to identify where that wiggle room is to make this more applicable to the folks that you're trying to reach.

Meg Foster 17:30

And work with your partners, whether those be colleagues or coworkers, whether those be community partners, whether those be interdepartmental partners, whatever that looks like. It is incredibly challenging to have to interpret and navigate requirements for a program entirely on your own. And so being able to connect with people doing different kinds of work in the communities that you're working with and within is a really valuable way to make sure that we are addressing those power struggles.

Carli Rohner 18:08

So that concludes this episode about power and privilege. We appreciate you taking the time to listen and if you have feedback or thoughts, we're always welcoming them. So please feel welcome to get ahold of us. Our email is available on the OregonSATF.org website and we look forward to hearing from you. Thanks.

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