



IMPROVING OUTCOMES AFTER FOSTER CARE.



## STRATEGIC SHARING

### **1. What it is:**

*Strategic Sharing* is a effective way of sharing our stories safely and intentionally in order to achieve a goal. To be successful as “agents of change,” it’s important for us to prepare ahead of time in order to make the most of each opportunity. This includes making thoughtful choices about which specific personal stories to share or not to share, so that the intent of our message isn’t misunderstood by the other person. We want our voices to be heard, our messages to be effective and our well-being to be protected.

### **2. Where it came from:**

The concept of *Strategic Sharing* was created by former foster youth when the National Foster Care Movement first began in the United States in the 1990s.

### **3. Why it matters:**

Every second of our personal experiences matters, but not everyone we meet deserves to know the most intimate details of our lives. As we work to improve outcomes for foster care youth and alumni, our goal in *Strategically Sharing* is to educate and inspire others to create positive change. We will be most effective in our role if we know who our audience is, and tailor our messages to topics that they can actually help to change.

We don’t want the stories we share to backfire, and negatively impact us, or harm our personal or professional relationships. Talking about painful experiences from the past can have emotional impact. We want to be especially careful about what we share if it might end up in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV. Some reporters have an “if it bleeds, it leads” philosophy, and we wouldn’t want a future employer to Google us, and immediately learn intimate details of our private lives.

### **4. Tips to share your story strategically:**

It can be helpful to write down your purpose for sharing, and which specific puzzle piece of your life story to share. Think of it like a traffic light; some topics are green: safe to share in any context, others are yellow: proceed with caution, and other topics are red: a public audience doesn’t need or deserve to know. Self-disclosure can be like clothing, and we don’t want to be underdressed for an important occasion. Foster care doesn’t always reinforce healthy boundaries and equal sharing (i.e. casefiles). But when we *Strategically Share* our voices to make positive change as leaders, we have the power to choose what we share, connect it with the goal we are trying to reach, and claim the meaning that personal experience had for us.

### **5. How to handle intrusive questions:**

Part of preparing to *Strategically Share* is creating a back-up plan for nosy questions. Remember that you don’t have to answer every question that your audience asks you. You can redirect to statistics, and the general experiences of all foster youth. You can politely decline: “Thanks for the question, but that is not what I came here to talk about today.” After sharing a part of your personal story, it can be helpful to debrief afterwards with someone you respect and trust.