

What's the normal thing to say at a funeral, after a miscarriage, when someone's pet is sick, in the ashes of a housefire, when a parent dies, when a spouse leaves? In culture at large, people avoid their own feelings, and avoid the feelings of their loved ones also.

If they say anything, most people slip into cliches and common knowledge, uncreative in their response to tragedy. Rather than reach inside for how they actually feel, finding words for those feelings, they panic. Many people grasp for the Normal Thing to Say.

My favorite thing about radical mental health today is that... More than any other group social space I've found, people in a radical mental health collective meeting will say something based on what's actually happening in their inner life. Creative, surprising, unhinged. I love to hear the weird truth.

Sometimes people in a radical mental health meeting still grasp for the Normal Thing to Say. It's ok if some folks need to fall back on that. But I'm showing up to hear something authentic that blows my mind. My mind craves being blown by authenticity and possibly love.

truth

"I'm terrified," is a good example of a truth I could say at a radical mental health collective meeting. "I was crying all weekend missing someone I love, who gave up on me. I'm afraid I don't know how to be in the world anymore. I don't like who I am right now."

I can tell the whole truth when I'm in a gathering of people who are doing something different. Radical mental health means there are no mandated reporters, professional mental healthcare workers to look toward as authorities, or hierarchies of healing. I love spaces where we share power equally, so we can tell the whole truth.

For an hour and a half, we can be real with each other. You could find that pleasurable, healing, enlivening, annoying, fascinating, scary, or any combination, depending on your temperament and where you're at today.

Even if I get annoyed by someone's worldview or tone, I love hearing people speak about what's real for them. For an hour and a half at a Eugene Radical Mental Health Collective meeting, I can listen, and speak a little too. We microdose family.

shame

Many people stick their shame on mental health. I'm sorry we made culture that way. Shame doesn't help.

Abusing substances, isolating socially, playing video games for hours instead of sleeping, dropping out of school, disappointing parents... we can be ashamed of any of this and more. Hopefully showing up for radical mental health is a way to show up for love. For me at least, love is more powerful than shame.

Radical mental health is a way of bringing each other back into the fold. You are welcome at the table. Please show up and see who you are today, and meet some other nervous people.

Did you get nurtured right as a child, for who you actually are? I think few people get this. One parent or grandparent might nurture us, others abuse us, neglect us, do the bare minimum. Difficult to make progress when we're constantly trying to dig ourselves out of a hole.

trust

The Eugene Radical Mental Health Collective has been going for almost a year now. We can't undo our traumatic pasts or even understand, sometimes, what happened. But we can move forward in community and be there for each other in mutual aid, now.

I like rebuilding the ability to trust. When I spent seven years helping to run an interfaith anti-nuclear non-profit, I helped people attend interfaith events out in the desert. I was ostensibly there to support people in making peace.

But my secret motivation was to build community and radicalize everyone who came through the door. Likewise, I do radical mental health as mutual aid support, to help create a better culture for all of us, and build disability justice in community. But my secret motivation is to relearn how to trust, and help others learn / relearn how to trust.

The security culture vibe of “trust no one” is a sad way to die. How do we know when to trust, and who to trust? Radical mental health is an experiment. What if for an hour and a half, I trust these people enough to say how I really feel? What would happen if I told the truth about what I’ve been taught to keep hidden with shame?

Sure, I might not know these people. Some of them I met just today. But let’s see if the world explodes because I cry in front of a stranger, or I’m real about how lonely I feel without my mom as a living person on earth anymore.

Vulnerability is a skill. Let’s practice. I’m happy to make a fool out of myself in case the person sitting across the table needs to cry in front of strangers too. We can shift– bit by bit– what it even means, to make a fool out of ourselves.

Personally I think hiding how we feel is foolish. Audre Lorde said, “Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.” I need all the knowledge of my body, in order to do the work I’m here on earth to do.

time

It’s been 19 years I’ve been doing radical mental health,

since I was first diagnosed bipolar 1 with psychotic features. I'd just survived my first "full blown manic episode." I was freaking out, trying to decide whether to swallow the cocktail of mind-altering psych meds I'd been prescribed by a psychiatrist who insulted my body and treated me like I wasn't a human being. (All I need to do is mention I hear voices, and the psychiatrist will stop treating me like I'm a human being.)

That led to a whole journey. I went to my first radical mental health collective meeting in San Francisco. I'm happy I helped start radical mental health collectives in Sacramento, California, then Las Vegas, Nevada. And now Eugene.

It's always a good time to tell the truth. I've come out countless times. First I came out as bisexual as a teenager. Then queer as a young adult. Then crazy, then disabled, then trans.

Who knows what's next. I hope to come out over and over again for the rest of my life. Telling the truth is freedom.

how radical mental health saved my life

When I was at a low point of fear, radical mental health saved my life. I learned there are brilliant, crazy people in this world who know how to love and would love me. So I didn't need to die.

There are people in the world who are already centering love, not money. We want more than buying things, having a big house, and growing an empire. There are people who care about community; I can find them and build community with them. I can find you and build community with you.

Strawberry Pancake Fae Nopales is a queer, disabled artist anarchist who lives in community on River Road— a witch in the

tradition of madness. Find berry at
listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakesense.com, ilikeyourstims.com,
and on instragram as @xtrikeslutsx.