



Custody Loss: Tell Us Your Story!

Parenting can be one of the most significant and enjoyable roles in a person's life. Losing custody, or the threat of custody loss, can be devastating and undermines one's recovery process.

The University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration (www.upennrrtc.org) is seeking stories from parents with mental illnesses regarding their experiences with the child welfare system, child custody issues, barriers to reunification associated with having a mental illness, and custody being used to encourage treatment compliance. This information will be useful to us in developing training, policy and research initiatives to increase opportunities for parents with mental illnesses to have lasting, loving relationships with their children.

We are looking for stories that include the following information:

1. A brief description of your mental health history.
2. The incident that led to the removal of your child(ren) from your custody and a detailed description of this process, as well as the outcome. Did you maintain as much contact with your child as possible?
3. Did you seek reunification with your child or children? Why or why not?
4. What barriers did you face when trying to regain custody of your child? What supports helped you during child welfare involvement and the reunification process?

5. Did you feel that custody of your child(ren) was used as an implicit or explicit "threat" to force you to comply with treatment?
6. Do you have advice for other parents with mental illnesses in similar situations and suggestions for changes in legislation and child welfare policies regarding this issue?

The information that you submit will be confidential, if you so stipulate. Providing your contact information will enable us to contact you to learn more about your experience and ideas.

By submitting your story you give us permission to use it in part or in whole in trainings, presentations, and/or policy briefs. No identifying information about you will be included in any use of your story.

Please contact Pam Cousounis (pamelac2@mail.med.upenn.edu or at 215-746-1950) if you have a story and ideas that you would like to share with us that may eventually benefit policy makers and other parents with mental illnesses.

We look forward to hearing from you - thank you in advance for your contribution!

The UPenn Collaborative on Community Integration is A Rehabilitation Research & Training Center Promoting Community Integration of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). For more information, please visit us at www.upennrrtc.org.

The previous information is provided as a PMHCA member-benefit for informational purposes only. The opinions and ideas expressed are not necessarily reflective or representative of PMHCA, its Board of Directors, or its employees.