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## Using the power of stories to help overcome depression

*If you try to recall the bedtime stories and fairy tales we were told as children by our parents while being tucked into bed, they not only allowed our imaginations to fly high, but could also instantly cheer us up.*



Dr Eric Miller

**Bhavana Akella**

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### Chennai

Inspired by the power of stories to make people happy, Chennai-based storytelling trainer Dr Eric Miller has been attempting to use storytelling as a tool to lift up one's spirits and overcome depression.

“Art therapy, which involves using drawing or painting, as a form of therapy has been around for a long time. Later, drama, music and dance as therapy

have grown popular. Storytelling as a therapy is also following and evolving in the same direction. It focuses on stories and the social relationship of telling a story to someone. I'm currently part of a global community that is developing the field of storytelling as a therapy," says Eric, who is the co-founder and director of the World Storytelling Institute in the city.

But, instead of the traditional storytelling that involves the narrator sharing a story, its use in therapy involves the listener narrating his or her personal tale. "The life story is then discussed with the facilitator (a trained storyteller), and explored if it reminds of a movie, a novel or a story from an epic. The person can then see that there are similar issues faced by other characters in the stories they know, and learn that he or she is not alone," he elaborates.

Sharing personal stories, which can be a means of catharsis, can help in healing, Eric says, adding that stories are very much part of one's identity. "Even though people don't sit down to tell their grandmothers' stories anymore, I don't think stories are disappearing. In India, people are still very aware of the characters from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Stories are our identity – there's a story of your family, community, caste, state, nation and profession. If one puts all these together, it's who a person is. We perceive ourselves and our communities in terms of these stories," asserts Eric.

Along with his wife Magdalene Jeyarathnam, who specialises in using drama as therapy, Eric also co-founded the East West Center for Counselling and Training in Chennai. The centre uses different performing arts, including painting, drama and stories, for healing. "Depression is still a taboo subject to talk about, and storytelling makes it a personal way of addressing the subject," he remarks.

**Eric will be holding a workshop on using stories and storytelling to overcome depression on December 8 from 10 am to 1 pm at The Wandering Artist in RA Puram.**

power of stories

overcome depression