

TMI and Organ Recitals

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow

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No, TMI is not a new disability diagnosis and the organ I'm talking about is not the kind you play. TMI stands for Too Much Information and the organs are the body parts we all have! And too many of us provide TMI and we're giving too many Organ Recitals!

The TMI "syndrome" (maybe it *is* a label, after all) can be best described using a metaphor we're all familiar with: you ask someone what time it is, and he tells you how to make a watch!

In the disability arena, TMI means revealing too many details about a person with a disability! As I've written about in other articles, we often share way too much information—information that is personal, unnecessary for others to know, and which is generally nobody's business! It's not unusual for parents or service providers to openly discuss highly intimate details about a child or adult with co-workers, acquaintances, or even strangers!

That's bad enough, but there's more! The children and adults who are being spoken *about* often acquire the TMI Syndrome (because they hear and see others do it, including their own parents and others who care about them), and they spend the rest of their lives revealing personal details about themselves!

Egads! Where are our manners? Where is our sensitivity? Where is our respect for the privacy of others or ourselves?

I try hard to make sure I don't give TMI about my son, our family's life, or anything else. During the course of my presentations and in some articles I write, I *do* share some personal stories about my family members—but I've asked for, and received, their *permission*.

When I'm on the *receiving end* (and this happens frequently), I gently tell the speaker, "TMI—you're giving me too much information!" I love meeting new

people at conferences and via my web site, but many often tell me very personal things about their children that are none of my business! And I wonder if they would speak in the same way if their children were standing right next to them. Isn't it time to protect the privacy and dignity of the people with disabilities in our lives? Let's put a stop to TMI before it becomes an epidemic!

Organ Recitals are closely related to TMI. Generally, older people seem to give more Organ Recitals than younger people (it may be an unspoken entitlement of age), as when they share detailed descriptions of how all their organs and body parts are operating at a given moment. It's possible that people switch into the Organ Recital mode when they have nothing better to talk about, when trying to outdo someone else (a dubious form of competition), or if they believe the status of their organs is the most important thing in their lives.

If you're on the receiving end of too many nitty-gritty details about someone else's organs, attempt to change the subject by talking about the weather. No, that probably won't work—it might stimulate comments about how the weather is affecting the person's organs! Instead, ask the person if the offending organs should be permanently removed. Or you could move into a defensive position and give your own Organ Recital! No, you'll probably lose if you're a novice at this game.

I've encouraged my children to shut me up if, in my later years, I inadvertently begin performing Organ Recitals. I hope someone in your life will do the same for you!

Let's respect the privacy and dignity of ourselves and others—no more TMI or Organ Recitals. Let's find our manners and use them, day in and day out.