



# Telling your Story

Whether you are a person with experience of a mental health issue and/or families and carers of someone with a mental health issue, you may at some point want to share your experiences/recovery journey with others.

*“Stories have the power to change the decisions people make...inspire people to learn”*

(Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017)

Letting people know of your experiences can be rewarding, as well as contribute to destigmatise societal stigma in mental health.

However, there are major factors you should consider before sharing your story:

## **Purpose**

Consider why you want to share your personal story, for example, is it to inform and educate others? Is it to share what has been helpful to you?

If you have been asked to share your personal story consider how it will be used and for what purpose. You always have a choice and can say no.

## **Exposure**

You will need to consider the exposure that the story will bring to you. Publishing the story online may cause you to be opened to judgements and feel overwhelmed. Once your story is out in the public domain then there is no going back.

Have you shared your personal stories with others – it is better to share first with people you trust before going public.

## **Honesty**

Share your story from your own view point. You are the expert (Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017). Be yourself.

## **Others**

Will your story include other people? Do you need to seek their permission prior to telling your story? Will publishing the story affect them?

## **Boundaries**

It is always best to think about your boundaries prior to telling your story. There may be aspects of your story that you wish to keep private. You do not have to tell all of your story and you don't have to answer questions you do not want to answer.

## Name

Do you want to use your full name, first name only or a make-up name?

## Anonymous

Do you want to remain anonymous? Do you want to use an alias?

## Emotions

Telling your story may be an emotional experience as you revisit past experiences. It is important to ensure you have a support system in place to deal with any issues which may arise during and after the storytelling process.

You can ask for any material that is in the public domain by WayAhead to be removed, e.g. from a website - before using your personal story WayAhead will inform you if it is possible to remove it at a later date, for example, a story on the website can be removed but participation in an online video is more difficult.

## Audience

Keep in mind who you are sharing the story with. Be mindful that sharing your story with the media may sometimes cause your story to be sensationalised, askew and/or your personal life to be intruded.

You do not know who will be your audience and how they are feeling so care is needed when discussing suicide ([see guidelines re talking about suicide](#)).

In order to counter stigma and discrimination toward people who experience mental health issues it is important not to perpetuate myths that people may have.

Stories of both challenge and positivity, and examples of your achievements and aspirations that go beyond your experience of mental illness are helpful.

## Content

Consider what do you want to tell in your story. Things you may consider:

- Successful instances in challenging times
- The types of support system which has helped you
- Your unique view and experiences
- Any challenges which you and/or your loved ones may have faced and how they were overcome
- Avoid language of shame or guilt / language which may perpetuate stigma and stereotypes towards mental health
- Your first experience of distress
- Your recovery journey to wellbeing
- What is your motivation for sharing your story?
- Where are you now

### Where do you want to tell your story?

Depending on your purpose, think about finding a comfortable, non-distracting time and place to tell your story.

### How do you want to tell your story?

Do you want to tell your story via speech to the public, interview, written stories, poems, painting, video, or song?

See - <https://wayahead.org.au/guidelines-for-telling-your-story-to-wayahead/>

However, remember that telling your story  
does not replace seeking help.

### Useful Resources/ Contact number:

For Emergency please call 000

Lifeline (24 hours service) 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

Mensline Australia: 1300 78 99 78

Carer Australia (Eligibility criteria applies): 1800 242 636

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 (Also provide online forum to share experiences and talk with other carers, families and consumers with ill mental health.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours/7 days) or Chat online: 3pm to 12am / 7 days a week.

### Reference

Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017. Stories Matter.