

A GUIDE TO SHARING YOUR STORY WITH OTHERS



The positive outcomes of sharing a mental health lived experience

- ✓ Improved positive associations to mental health.
- ✓ Encourages others to reach out for support.
- ✓ Builds empathy and compassion towards experiences of mental health challenges.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Individuals with lived experience who choose to share their stories for a lived experience campaign or as part of an engagement process.

HOW THIS GUIDE WILL HELP

This guide will help lived experience individuals take steps to protect their own mental health and wellbeing when sharing their lived experience stories.

Importantly, it will also highlight the key considerations to think about throughout the disclosure process, and the rights that the individual has when sharing their story.

WHY SHARING STORIES IS POWERFUL

Mental health is something that affects all of us and, because of that, it is a powerful connection that all people share.

We all know what it is like to feel sad, angry, frustrated, disappointed – yet very few of us talk about it with others in fear of being judged or made to feel ‘less than’.

Telling personal stories about our mental health experiences can be immensely powerful – not only for others to hear and feel inspired by, potentially encouraging them to speak up and reach out for support – but also for the individuals sharing their story to feel proud of who they are and what they’ve navigated.

By sharing stories, we are able to create an authentic understanding of what we have been through that makes someone else feel an intrinsic connection to our story, and fuels a sense that we are not alone in our experiences.

WHAT IS DISCLOSURE?

Before we jump into the mechanics behind sharing your story, it is important to first recognise the concept of disclosure.

Disclosure is the process of sharing something that was previously unknown to the person/s that we are sharing with.

In the context of sharing a mental health story, disclosure usually involves sharing personal experiences that we have gone through, such as being diagnosed and/or managing a mental health condition, or the details of what it was like going through a specific experience in life that may have affected our mental health.

Disclosure does not have to mean that you are required to tell every detail of your story.

You may decide to only share the part of the story that is most connected to the purpose of a campaign and within what you’re comfortable sharing.

TIP

Remember, there's no such thing as stupid questions or too many questions in this process. Ask as many questions as you need to feel comfortable with the campaign you're taking part in.



You alone are not responsible for keeping yourself safe and well if you take part in a campaign.

Ensure you work closely with those running the campaign so that they are aware of how they can best support you through the process.

TIP

Make sure you're aware of approval processes and scheduling. This will give you more certainty around the sharing of your story.

DECIDING AND PREPARING TO SHARE YOUR STORY IN A CAMPAIGN

Deciding to share your story is no small thing. It is important that the decision is made consciously, mindfully, and not influenced by external pressure.

The most important thing to remember is that **sharing your story is always a choice** and is a two-way process for both the individual sharing and the individual listening. If you do decide to share your story, it's important for you to take the time to clearly understand the campaign you're taking part in and what your role will look like, and ensure you are taking steps to keep yourself safe and well throughout the process.

THREE KEY CONSIDERATIONS TO ADDRESS BEFORE YOU SHARE YOUR STORY

1. Make sure you have a clear understanding and purpose of the campaign

Ask as many questions as you need to understand the purpose of the campaign you're involved with. Some examples might include:

- What is the key messaging you are looking to deliver in the campaign?
- What type of stories are they looking for?
- How will my story fit in to the purpose of the campaign?

Based on the answers to the above, plan what you want to share and write it down, e.g. a specific experience or part of your story. Sometimes when we get nervous sharing our story, we can tangent away from what we wanted to say, so writing down what you'd like to share beforehand will help you only share what you feel comfortable to. It might also be worthwhile to write down what you do not feel comfortable sharing. Keep this in front of you when you share so you can refer to it if needed.

2. Make sure you have a clear understanding of where and when your story will be shared

It is important you have full knowledge of where exactly your story is being shared. You may want to ask such questions such as:

- Is my story being shared within a restricted audience or is it being shared more broadly?
- Is my story being held on an internal workplace platform or on a public forum?
- When will my story be shared?

When considering the platform that your story is being shared on, it is worth asking whether there will be comments or responses enabled or whether you will be identifiable by name or image. This will help you understand whether you might expect to see people's responses to your story or if people might approach you afterwards, which you'll need to prepare yourself for. It is important to remember that even positive responses can cause us to feel overwhelmed by the process.

You may want to consider asking how long the story will be available to the audience for, or whether the campaign has an end date in place. This will provide you with the knowledge of the longevity of your story.



3. Make sure you understand what support looks like through the process

- Ensure you ask what support is in place throughout the process. Check in with yourself frequently throughout the process to ensure you're making the right decision for yourself to share. It is easy to get caught up in the 'hoo-ha' of a campaign, but sharing your story is real and it is important that you're continuously checking how you're feeling throughout.
- It is important to remember that just because you say yes to sharing your story in the beginning of the process, it doesn't mean you have to continue with the process if something doesn't feel right. Ask upfront what the withdrawal process is if you decide that you do not want to proceed.

Sharing your story is a big step, and no matter how many times you might share your story, even the most experienced storytellers will find it difficult. It is important to be kind and patient with yourself throughout the process and prioritise your self-care as you tell your story.



If your story includes other people, you may want to consider seeking permission from those individuals prior to sharing your story.

This is particularly important if an individual is identifiable in the story.



If you're sharing your story in a live medium, be that via an in person interview, televised or a digital broadcast, make sure your interviewer is aware of the content you are not comfortable sharing.

Remember, even in a live setting, you can refuse to answer a question if you are not comfortable.

TELLING YOUR STORY

If you've taken the steps above, and are ready to share your story, the next step is formulating what you'd like to say. There are two main considerations to make when thinking about what and how to share your story.

Content – What story will you tell?

As mentioned earlier, when considering what to share, you do not need to tell your entire story to make an impact. Most of the time when we share our stories for a campaign, we will need to be concise and think about specific experiences to share about how we felt at any given period of time.

It can be helpful to think about a specific example in the context of:

- The first-hand experience of the situation.
- How you felt at a given period of time or in a specific moment.
- The types of support that helped you during your experience.
- Any challenges which you and/or those around you faced and how they were overcome.
- Your wellbeing recovery journey.

When sharing your story, it is important to try and avoid language of shame or guilt, and anything which may perpetuate stigma and stereotypes towards mental health.

Medium – How will your story be told?

The other consideration is the medium by which you share your story. Typically, when we think about sharing our story, we immediately think of doing this verbally. However, it is important to remember that this isn't the only medium we can use and there are other options to consider.

You may also choose to share your story as a written piece, a video, a podcast, or something else entirely. If there is creative freedom, other great ways of sharing stories include poems, paintings, or songs.

Whatever medium is chosen, it is helpful to practice sharing your story via that channel first. For example, if you're sharing your story through an interview, perhaps ask in advance for the questions that the interviewer will be asking you. Write down what you are comfortable sharing, then ask a trusted friend to practice asking you the questions before meeting with the actual interviewer.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

The process of sharing your story can evoke unexpected emotions, which can result in experiences or memories that you have potentially worked hard to support yourself through, coming up again.

Having a self-care plan is pivotal, not only during the process, but also after you've shared, and once your story goes live.

Think about what you can do to make sure you remain well in the process of sharing your story – remember, a self-care plan will look different for everyone. Some tips that could support creating a self-care plan include:



Acknowledge your feelings throughout every step of the process.



Know your limits and set clear boundaries to know when you might need to pause and regroup (and withdraw completely if needed).



Share with a trustworthy friend that you've decided to share your story so they can support you through the process.



Practice mindfulness / meditation to keep yourself in the moment.



Engage into activities that make you feel joyful and/or relaxed, for example, taking a bath, getting a massage, seeing friends and family, reading a book, or watching a good movie.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

READY Disclosure Tool:
readydat.com.au

Reach out for support from your local GP, health professional or your workplace Employee Assistance Program.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263

Lifeline Australia: 13 11 14



This document has been developed in collaboration with Camille Davey, an expert in engaging with lived experience of mental health within workplaces.

Find further information at
www.growtogethernow.com

Throughout the process, it is a good idea to remind yourself the reason you decided to share your story in the first place. For many of us, the reason we choose to share our lived experience is because we want to help others who may be going through what we have been through before.

Sharing your story is something to be proud of, so make sure you don't forget to look after yourself and enjoy the process as you go.