

Sharing Your Lived Experience



Sharing your lived experience can inspire others in a similar situation to find a way through. It's also a positive testimony that can challenge negative judgements around lived experience and promote the value of Peer support by people who have been there!

But, sharing your story is also an important personal decision, and one that should be well thought through. Without due care, sharing your story can have negative impacts on your own wellbeing, or on the wellbeing of other people reading or watching it. Sharing too much information around your lived experience in some circumstances could also leave you open to targeting. It is important to know your audience and be aware of how much to share and when to share.

To help you confidently share your lived experience with others safely we've put together a few tips on what to prepare before, during and after sharing it, and safety aspects to consider.

BEFORE TELLING YOUR STORY

Preparing to share your story can be daunting but it could really help other people experiencing something similar, bringing hope that they too will get through it.

Before sharing your own story publicly, consider the following questions:

- How are you feeling right now? Are you busy, stressed, or not feeling your best for any other reason?

If there's a lot on your plate right now, we'd suggest waiting to share your story at a time that's more convenient for you.

- How do you feel when you look back at your hardest times? Do you feel sad, angry, or hopeful? What perspective have you gained over time? Trauma re-living the personal impact on wellbeing?

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BEFORE TELLING YOUR STORY - CONTINUED

We'd recommend giving yourself time to process your journey allowing a settlement period between living through tough times and sharing them publicly.

- Why do you want to tell your story? What's your motivation? Do you want to inspire hope for others, or is there another reason?

If you're experiencing negative feelings when you think about why you want to share, it might be helpful to consider if it is appropriate to share this with others looking for support. Experiences that feel hopeless or sadness aren't likely to impact people reading them in a positive way.

- Who's already heard your story? Do your close friends and family know about your experiences? How about your acquaintances or colleagues?

Sharing your story publicly will mean many people might see it, so if there's anyone you'd like to personally tell, consider doing this before you share it publicly or online.

- Where are you planning on sharing your story? Is it with the media, at an event, or on social media, for example?

Once stories are online, it's important to be aware that they can remain there forever. If it has been shared on social media, deleting your story entirely might not be possible. You could always ask for your story to be shared without any personal details like your name, town that you live in or any other identifiers.

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WHEN TELLING YOUR STORY

If you decide you are happy to share your story, you need to be aware of who you are sharing with, and how much of your story is appropriate to share. You may only want to tell parts of your story. Consider which parts you are comfortable sharing and, if you're being interviewed, be clear about what you're not willing to share.

For example, if you are talking to young people you should be careful not to glamorize parts of your journey as this may not send the right message (such as the money you made through illegal activities).

It is also important to be aware of themes that could be a trigger to someone else such as suicide, or self-harm. If your story shares some of these themes, it's important to include a trigger warning at the beginning of your story and some helplines at the end or local services that can help.

Points to consider:

Could what your sharing be used against you ?

Are you sending the right message? Need to consider how this may interpreted especially by young people. You don't want to promote that is ok to be a heavy drug user when your delivering prevention activity. The last 5 minutes should focus on the now and the future.

Ensure you have appropriate balance well telling your story is important and you should include a beginning, middle and end to close down.

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AFTER TELLING YOUR STORY

Sharing your story is a very brave act and it is important that after sharing you reflect on how you are feeling. It's common to have mixed feelings about telling your story publicly, either at the time or a while after you've told your story. Re-telling your story could be a trigger for your own wellbeing so it is important to have a support network around you that you feel comfortable discussing how you are feeling after sharing.

If you have shared your story with an organisation, please ensure you are happy for them to publish the story. This should only be shared if you have given your consent and most will ask you to sign a disclaimer agreeing to this. Remember you have rights, and you can ask for personal details not be shared.