



# SHARING YOUR STORY SAFELY

Sharing a personal story about mental illness, trauma, or any life-changing experience can reinforce feelings of strength, resilience, and perseverance. It's also one of the most powerful tools to combat stigma and shame. But protecting your mental wellness is just as important as giving voice to your experience. So before putting pen to paper or speaking out in front of a group, consider the following tips to help make sure you're ready to take that step.

## 1 Take your time

There's no rush, and no "right time" to tell your story. Consider checking in with a mental health professional, peer supporter, or trusted friend to see if now is a good time for you to speak out. If you decide it isn't, that's OK! Supporting mental health is important, but lending your voice shouldn't set you back.

## 2 Consider the implications for others

If your story includes disclosing past traumas or divulging information involving loved ones, be aware that others may have different perspectives or different feelings about privacy. While your story is yours to tell, it's important to consider how your disclosure could affect those close to you. Remember that you can only control the delivery, not the response.

## 3 Choose the right outlet and scale

Going public can be as small as a 280-character tweet or as big as an op-ed in a national paper. Whether you prefer the intimacy of a small group of friends or the anonymity of a room full of strangers, you control how and where you share. It's not the scale of the disclosure that's important, it's the freedom and empowerment you derive from it.

## 4 Be prepared to listen

Disclosure can be contagious – which is partly what makes it so effective in combating stigma. Sharing your story, especially on a wider scale, may lead to confessions from friends and strangers. When someone hears or reads an honest account of a story that's similar to their own, it can be the nudge they were waiting for to share their experience. If you're open to sharing, also be prepared to listen.

## 5 Consider consulting subject matter experts

If your story involves a suicide attempt, sexual assault, or other details that may be triggering to those around you, consider consulting with subject matter experts. They may be able to help you tailor your disclosure to a reduce harm to vulnerable readers or listeners. No matter what you're sharing, try to use language that reinforces a message of hope.

## 6 Mention specific mental health resources

When sharing your experience, point to specific mental health resources if you can. Someone hearing your message may need additional support. If a certain tool, website, or organization has helped you on your journey, let people know where they can find them.

The safe conversations resources in the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC's) toolkits for [people who have been impacted by a suicide attempt](#) and [people who have been impacted by a suicide loss](#) can equally be applied to mental health and illness more broadly. Consider using them and sharing with family or friends.

For practical tips and resources on a variety of mental health topics, visit the [MHCC resource hub](#).



For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19)



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