

A man with a beard and a brown hat, wearing an orange sweater, and a woman wearing a yellow shirt and blue overalls with a hat, are running and laughing in a dry, open field. The man is holding the woman's hand. In the background, there are some trees and a fence.

## INTRODUCTION

**We guess you're here because you're curious about how to share your own mental health experiences. And we'd love to help you through that process...**

**In this storytelling resource, you will learn about the power of storytelling, the benefits and potential pitfalls of sharing your personal journey, and how to cultivate your story in accordance with the three most important elements: safety, authenticity and impact. We'll also guide you through what to do before and after you share.**

This content is helpful for experiencers of mental ill health and also for those supporting loved ones or colleagues through mental health challenges. This training will guide you through all aspects of sharing, from the who to the how, when and why. Then, if you feel ready, we'll show you how to use HOMS as the vehicle for releasing your story, so that someone, somewhere may feel less alone.

## STORIES CREATE BELIEF, BELIEF INSPIRES ACTION.

**Hearing the stories of other people who have had similar experiences, feelings, thoughts and behaviours, can help us to understand that we are not abnormal. Seeing how others have coped and thrived to integrate the things we may be struggling with, can be inspirational and give us hope for our own lives.**

Many of us have the same core wound that tells us "there's something wrong with me". A common truth about mental health is that we cannot start to heal until we fully accept ourselves. Stories don't solve problems, but they allow us to face them. They may be just enough to give us the courage to finally stop band-aiding our wounds and address our core issues. If we don't let go of the shame, we remain stuck in a place of suffering and anguish. By seeing others go through what we have, it often gives us permission to let go of our old story, and create a new one.

# ARE YOU READY TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

## PREPARATION



**It can be incredibly confronting to take the first steps and speak to a professional about your inner struggles. So, when that part starts to feel more comfortable, you may be approaching readiness to share with a wider audience. At this point you can start small, by sharing your truth with loved ones like family or friends who have played a part in the development of what's real for you.**

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Careful consideration needs to precede your choice to share your story about your mental health journey. These are all questions we should bring into our planning. It can be difficult to talk about issues that most people find quite sensitive.



WHEN SHOULD  
YOU SHARE?



WHERE COULD  
YOU SHARE?



HOW MUCH WILL  
YOU SHARE?

The purpose behind sharing is different depending on the way we share and the audience for which it's intended. Every situation is unique and it's important you carefully evaluate if and how you go about doing so. If sharing a story does more harm than good, for yourself or others, you shouldn't do it. But if it can help you heal, and maybe save a life in the process, it's worth it. Let us help you make an informed decision about how you share.





## PREPARATION

**You don't need to feel "recovered" to share your story, but what you do need to feel is strong and integrated enough to allow others to witness your humanity, from their own perspective, and safely absorb their reflections while maintaining your sense of stability. For this reason we recommend storytellers are people who are in a stable headspace, managing effectively day-to-day, and want to use their experience to help others feel less alone.**



### ACTIVITY

**Journal prompt: when has a story told by another, inspired you to take action?**

Almost every single person has an important story about how mental health has impacted or touched their life, or the lives of those closest to them. Whether they identify as an "experiencer", meaning that they are personally affected by the symptoms or diagnosis of mental ill health, or a "supporter", meaning they care for, or about someone who is experiencing mental ill health. Hearing stories from both groups is equally important, as their stories are helpful and impactful.

**YOU ARE  
UNIQUE,  
BUT NOT  
ALONE.**



## **ACTIVITY**

**Read the two following descriptions and make some notes about which category you feel you fit into (remembering that it may be both)**

## **EXPERIENCER**

Whether we have an official diagnosis, a chronic condition, acute symptoms, historical trauma or significant grief, almost everyone has faced a mental health challenge at some point in their lives. In much the same way as people sprain ankles and break arms when they're physically impacted in a dangerous way, or wear down cartilage in their knees due to tension, our minds can be injured and worn by acute damage or ongoing pressure. Mental health is an integral feature of every person on earth. We do our best to take care of it, but genetics and environment play a part as well, and sometimes threats to our wellbeing increase the duration and intensity of difficult thoughts and feelings, and cause us to struggle with situations we may otherwise have been able to cope well in. There is no pre-requisite level of experience with mental health challenges someone must meet before they can share their story. Everyone's journey is important. You don't have to have a diagnosed condition to be the bearer of a story that may help countless people. We all know what it feels like to be a little bit off. There is no need to compare your situation to others. Your story matters.

## **SUPPORTER**

Supporters may be holding tremendous amounts of pain from months or years of watching someone they love suffer. That story needs to be told too, because for every person experiencing mental ill health, there are probably several others (family, friends, colleagues, teammates) who care about their wellbeing. So often, supporters minimise their role because they compare the impact on them to the symptoms and experiences of the help-seeker, which they perceive as being much worse than what they're going through. Something else that causes supporters to hesitate in owning their story is that they think it's not theirs to tell. And to a certain extent, that is true. Some details about other people may be private, but your life story is yours alone. Your experiences and the events that have impacted you are yours to own. Your narrative has been affected. You have an entire story independent of the help seeker in your life. Parts of your character have emerged as a result of this experience, and they deserve to be seen.