

HOW TO SHARE YOUR STORY SAFELY

Can you tell your story in a way that keeps yourself and your audience safe? This is perhaps the most important filter when choosing how to share your story.

Stories are an art form that are designed to reach out to people and connect to their imagination, their visceral senses and impact their view of the world. Therefore, the responsibility is on the storyteller to keep their audience as safe as possible, by carefully curating the story and delivering it in a consensual way, while keeping themselves safe in the process.



Done well, people will relate to the story, and may be inspired to face their own pain & struggle. Delivering a story safely doesn't mean we have to remove the pain or dilute the impact; disinfectant stings when it is cleaning a cut, but it is still working.



The biggest risk sharing our story is its potential relevancy to someone else's current experience or narrative, resulting in increased distress or pain for the person receiving it (contrasting the intended impact of connection and reduction of loneliness).

Risk usually occurs when the receiver has severe unresolved or unprocessed parts of their story. The story sharer cannot predict when this may occur, and so there are some mechanisms we can put in place to decrease the likelihood of inadvertently creating a distressing situation - both for the person sharing and receiving.



PROTECTING OTHERS

Avoid specific details.

Sharing what you have been through is important, and is the main ingredient for empathic connection. But using general terms is safest. This can mean saying "physical violence resulting in hospitalisation" rather than describing the specific acts and injuries that occurred. The way we use language is important so as not to dramatise or glorify dangerous situations. Even when told with the desire to show others the depths you have overcome, they can be provocative for a vulnerable few. There are some other areas, where the commonly accepted best practice to avoid inflaming a present and sensitive area, is to limit specifics.

Specific details are:

- Suicidal thoughts and behaviour: to avoid copycat behaviour, refrain from disclosing methods or locations.
- Eating disorders: remove numbers in reference to weight or measurement to help avoid unhealthy comparisons.
- Substance use or addiction: Quantities and volumes consumed or frequency of use can be unhelpful as it may appear to glorify use.
- Trauma: Avoid any specific details of the traumatic events as this may be triggering to others. Rather – a general reference to the type of trauma and how it affected you may be safer.

Use trigger warnings.

If you think that some aspect of your story may bring up excessive pain for other people, give them some warning and an opportunity to opt out or engage with the story in a safer way, at a safer time or in a safer environment. Reassuring the audience that you are well and stable now, can reduce the likelihood of them being triggered, especially if they are prone to over empathising.

Check in with relevant others.

Particularly if you are sharing your story of being a supporter. Make sure the person to whom you may be referring in your story is comfortable with you sharing. The focus of the story as a supporter will be on you, but it's still good to check in. Ask if they would like to be named, or not. Ask which parts are ok to share and which parts are not. Family members or friends involved in your journey may feel they have let you down or have other beliefs, and this could result in anger, denial or blame. They may feel blindsided if they aren't in the loop about what you have chosen to share. Being conscious and respectful of other people's roles in your story and the implications it may have for them is important, but ultimately it is your story. When done right, there should be total transparency and no negativity caused for anyone involved.

PROTECTING YOURSELF

Choose what to share.

There may be parts of your story that still feel too raw or too personal to share with a wider audience. It's ok to leave them out until you feel ready.

Enlist your support network.

Let your nearest and dearest know what you are doing. They may be able to help you shape your story and offer reflections. They can also offer support once your story has been shared.

Choose the right time.

Even when people feel like they are in a relatively stable space, there are still ebbs and flows. Pay attention to your schedule and relevant dates (for example life anniversaries) that may feel unsettling. Try not to pressure yourself to follow through if things have shifted and the time no longer feels right. Listen to and respect your intuition.

Be aware of legal implications or retaliation.

In some cases, it may be illegal or unsafe to mention certain names or make certain statements, about a perpetrator for example. If you have any doubt around this, we recommend that you seek professional advice so as to deliver your truth in a way that feels honest, yet keeps you protected.



ACTIVITY

- 1. What details in your story will you leave in/take out to protect yourself?**
- 2. What details in your story will you leave in/take out to protect others?**
- 3. Is there anyone you'd like to consult with to affirm or check any details?**