

STORYTELLING AFTERCARE

What we commonly see when people decide to share their story publicly for the first time is a roller coaster of emotions, from terrified, to relieved, to regretful & self-conscious, to overwhelmed, to finally a sense of support and empowerment they have never received before in their life. This does level out over time!

Here are a few things to look out for help you feel more in control:

Be prepared for mixed responses.

The vast majority of responses will be positive. Some response may be neutral or absent, which can be confusing. It's ok for people to take their time to process what they've heard. You may also get some negative responses. It's rare, but it happens so it's wise to think about how you might handle that in advance.

Be prepared for questions.

People you know or even strangers may be drawn to your story but this can sometimes be overwhelming, especially if the questions breach your boundaries, like asking for more information about your situation or asking for you to contact or meet them. They could ask you for advice you don't feel comfortable or qualified to give.

Set healthy boundaries.

Ask yourself how you will prepare for peoples' responses to your story, and how you will engage with people you don't know if they contact you. It's natural to feel excited that your story had impact and compelled them to connect with you but always check in with yourself to find the right balance between helpful and overwhelmed.

Be aware of pressure to be perfect.

After you've talked about what you've overcome, how you manage day to day alongside mental health challenges, you may feel pressure to display an image of being "fixed". You may sense an expectation (self-imposed or otherwise) that you must maintain stability otherwise you are a fraud. This is a natural fear. Let it pass. You very well may fall back into the things that your story spoke about "overcoming". Wellness isn't a destination, it's a daily practice.

Have a support network.

Debrief. Reach out to someone you trust for a chat or for support, whenever you need. Think about the people, actions and mindsets that support your self-care. Sharing can take a lot out of you. But, when done well, it gives back way more than it takes.

STORYTELLING AFTERCARE

The most important thing to remember after sharing is that you haven't just become everyone's therapist or supporter. Don't feel compelled to engage with or allow yourself to be pulled into the situations or stories of others, beyond your capacity to do so.

One way to avoid this is to not end your story by saying: "if you ever want to chat to someone, feel free to reach out to me". That's an incredibly generous statement, however, it's also a very blurry boundary. You will very likely get lots of people, including strangers, reaching out to you for advice and support. It can be a lot to handle and may take away from your own wellbeing.

It's vital that you don't feel guilty about not being able to help everyone that asks for it or to answer every question that comes your way. It's ok, and healthy, to say "I can't answer that/do that right now", or simply not engage in the first place.

Sharing your story is the helpful act, after that it is on the receiver to be accountable for their own wellbeing through the channels setup to support them (e.g. professional help).

It may seem counterintuitive, but one strategy for creating a solid aftercare plan is to imagine the very worst things that could happen and build coping techniques and support systems to soften the impact if any of them do occur. Take your time. Share your story when you feel ready, in the way that is best for you.



ACTIVITY



1. Picture getting hostile responses from people you do or don't know. Think about getting a barrage of questions about your story. Envision sharing your story getting lots of attention and people putting you on a pedestal. Then visualise how you would respond to those things (before they have happened). Take whatever actions you can to prevent undesirable outcomes.