



## **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.