

Telling Your Mental Health Story

You're likely to encounter many situations in which you want and/or need to share snippets of your own mental health journey, so it's important to think about what to share, who to share it with, and when to share it. Your answers to these questions will depend on how comfortable you are with your own mental health and what you want to achieve by talking about it.



Just Starting Out

Maybe you've just started to realize that something is wrong, or you've been given a diagnosis but haven't been able to wrap your head around it yet. If you don't want the world to know your story, but know that you need help, **start by telling a trusted adult** - a parent, your primary care physician, a school psychologist - anyone you know and feel good about. You can talk, text, email, message... whatever is most comfortable for you. Friends can be a great support as well, but know that they can't fix all of your problems - you need a professional to help with that. **It takes strength to ask for help, but you can do it - and you're worth it!**

Sharing Selectively

What if you've become a little more comfortable with your story, and are more aware of how mental health affects your life? You may want to share your story with a handful of the adults who you spend time with, because **knowing your story will allow them to better help you out**. These might include your therapist and psychiatrist, as well as your school guidance counselor or advisor and select teachers or professors. Remember that most of these professionals are legally required to keep your story confidential, unless they fear that you and/or someone else are in immediate danger - and that **their job is to help you!**



This might also be a great time to join a youth group for young people with mental health challenges or to participate in group therapy, either virtually or in person. This way, you can **meet others who have been through journeys similar to yours**. It can feel amazing to talk to other youth who get it!



Expanding Your Circle

With time, many of us get to the point where **we're comfortable with our mental health story and the role it plays in who we are**. This often comes along with getting better and feeling happier with ourselves. This might be the time to share your story more broadly - **with close friends, with others who've been through similar journeys, or as broadly as you choose!** See our section on **Crushing Stigma** to learn more about the benefits of sharing your story more widely.

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Expert Tips

- **Listen to your gut** and wait to share until you are truly comfortable with your mental health story being a part of your identity.
- **It often helps to share your goals** and ask for the support you need to reach them.
It's up to you whether you want to include your diagnosis at all.
- Consistently talking about your mental health not only allows you to **practice how to tell your own story**, but also allows other people (like your therapist, trusted adult, friend, etc.) to help build it with you.
- If it helps you remember, **write down your questions and main points in your phone.**
- **To preserve your privacy**, always specify at the beginning of the conversation if you want to keep it confidential.
- **Publicizing your story is an immensely important decision** and should be carefully considered, if you plan on going in that direction.
- **Be extra cautious putting anything online or posting to social media**, or consider doing so anonymously. These can be great platforms from which you can reach a wide audience, but posts can be screenshotted and kept for years. Timing is key, and you have your whole life ahead of you to make a thoughtful decision.



Crushing Stigma

We **actually really enjoy it when we can surprise our close friends by sharing our diagnoses**. It really defeats the stigma when someone can realize that their friend can have a diagnosed mental health condition, yet love and trust them like any other individual.

The world's view of mental health is always shifting as new people come out with their stories. Technology is allowing people to educate themselves about mental health, and some of our favorite athletes and celebrities are coming out with their unique, stigma-crushing mental health advocacy stories. And **the really important thing the collective world is starting to realize is that mental health is something everyone shares**. Everyone has a brain!

Resources

Want to join a youth group and learn how to tell your story? Visit Youth MOVE's website at youthmovemassachusetts.net

Learn about more youth groups, gatherings, and trainings at www.speakingofhope.org/events/

