Telling Your Mental Health Story

YOUTH MOVE MASSACHUSETTS

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 you can trust. You can talk, text, email, message... whatever is most comfortable for you. Friends can be a great source of support as well, but remember that they can't solve your problems - you will likely need a professional to help you along your journey. It takes strength to ask for help, but you can do it - and you're worth it!

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.

Sharing Selectively

When 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 some of the adults you spend time with, because knowing your story will allow them to better help you. These might include your therapist, psychiatrist, school guidance counselor, advisor, or 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 group for youth 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!

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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!

Expert Tip #1

Listen to your gut and wait to share until you are truly comfortable with your mental health story being a part of your identity. To preserve your privacy, always specify at the beginning of the conversation if you want to keep it confidential.

Expert Tip #2

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. If it helps you remember, write down your questions and main points on your phone.

Expert Tip #3

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.

Expert Tip #4

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.

Crushing Stigma

We genuinely appreciate being able to open up to close friends about our mental health. It helps break the stigma when someone recognizes that a friend can have a diagnosed mental health condition and still be just as lovable, trustworthy, and valued as anyone else. 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. The world is starting to realize is that mental health is something everyone shares. Everyone has a brain!

Want to learn how to tell your story?
Visit Youth MOVE's website at:
youthmovemassachusetts.net
Learn about more resources for young adults across Massachusetts:
https://www.speakingofhope.org/

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