

Stories are powerful. Share your story. There are Zero Reasons Why we shouldn't break the silence. Your story matters. Your voice matter. There are Zero Reasons Why conversations about mental health shouldn't be heard. Start the conversation. Speak up, speak out.



**ZERO
REASONS
WHY[®]**

STORYTELLING GUIDE

Suicide Prevention Through Storytelling

Storytelling is central to the Zero Reasons Why® campaign. We believe (and research backs it up!) that sharing why you care, or even personal stories of struggle, helps remove the stigma of mental health. Once stigma is reduced, a teen is more likely to seek help – hopefully earlier, before a crisis. Storytelling also creates empathy and connection, helping individuals know they are not alone or helping people better understand the journey of another person.

Your voice and your story are a necessary, welcome part of this conversation.

STORYTELLING TIPS

Sharing your story can be a powerful experience, and while it requires a kind of vulnerability that can feel daunting, it should never feel unsafe. Working to ensure that sharing your story remains a safe experience comes down to asking yourself a few simple questions before, during and after you share.

Before You Share

Make sure you are ready. Not everyone is ready to share their story, especially if it may involve recalling troubling or traumatic events. It's okay if you are not yet in a place to share your experience or perspective. Speaking about the events of your life should not be taken lightly, and you deserve time and space to determine when you want to share that information with others.

Determine what you want to share. One of the best ways to know if you are ready to share your story is to determine what you plan on sharing. Are there events or lessons you've learned that you want others to hear about? Are there aspects of your story or questions about your life that are off limits? Consider making a list of what you would like to talk about and, if applicable, what questions are off-limits. You have complete authority over what you share about your life and having a clear vision of what you want to say will help enable you to share comfortably.

Let someone know. Consider telling a friend or trusted adult that you are planning to share your story. Knowing that you have a support system prior to sharing will make you feel safer while sharing and ensure that you have someone to check in with once you're done. Talking with someone prior to sharing can also help determine whether or not you're ready to share.

Please note: any individuals under age 18 who share their story with Zero Reasons Why are required to have a parent/guardian sign off prior to their story being shared publicly.

Suicide Prevention Through Storytelling

STORYTELLING TIPS CONT.

While You Share

Focus on yourself. It is important that your story focuses on your experience and/or perspective rather than those of someone else. Of course, experiences and events in the lives of others inform our own, but if sharing about someone else, be sure that intent is to explain their impact on you. Draw on your own experience or perspective as much as possible.

Focus on the support you've received. Emphasizing the support you've received or how you have overcome challenges is what has proven to be most helpful to others who are struggling. Show how your perspective or experience can provide hope to those who are feeling hopeless or talk about the resources you found that have helped you along the way.

Focus on sharing in an informed and destigmatizing way. When sharing about the topic of mental health, try to use correct information and proper terminology. If you're unsure about something you're sharing, it may be better left unsaid. Instead, share what you've learned from your experiences with mental health, or about how asking for help has impacted you. Address stigmas you've heard and how we can confront them.

Please note: for reasons of public safety, specific details of suicide or self-harm methodologies are not included in the stories Zero Reasons Why publishes. We advise steering clear of sharing specifics if these elements are part of your story.

After You Share

Check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Sharing your story can be a valuable, yet emotionally draining experience. Give yourself space to breathe and reflect on the experience. Consider reserving 30 minutes after you share to go on a walk or do another form of self-care that you enjoy.

Check in with someone else. Whether or not you talked to someone before sharing your story, consider reaching out to a friend or trusted adult after you've shared to talk with them about the experience. This is a great way to ensure that you have support should you need it.

Need help now? Call or text 988 for 24/7, real-time support.

share
your story.

Use this worksheet as a guide for practicing how to talk about mental health through peer-to-peer storytelling. For this activity, pair up in groups of two to interview one another using the prompts below. As the interviewer, practice active listening and approach the conversation with sensitivity and care. As the interviewee, try to share openly and honestly, but know that don't have to share anything you don't want to.

Note: the questions in column two are simply to help with context. You don't need to provide an answer to each. If using the worksheet as a solo activity, space has been provided to write and reflect.

Why are you passionate about mental health and suicide prevention?

Have you had personal experience with mental health struggles? Do you know someone who has? How has that impacted you?

What stigmas have you heard surrounding mental health? Why is it important to remove the stigma?

Removing the stigma is the primary pillar of the campaign. What might it look like if stigma or misconceptions around mental health were reduced or removed? How can we work together to do that?

What do you think schools or communities can do to better support teen mental health?

Why is it important that the whole community works together? How does knowing that you are seen, heard and supported by the community help?

What advice or encouragement would you give someone who might be struggling?

If you have struggled yourself, what positive coping strategies have you used? Who in your life offered support? What did they say or do that helped?