

Supporting someone to share their lived experience

Guidance notes for organisations

This guidance is aimed at organisations supporting someone who intends to share publicly their lived experience regarding mental health issues or self-harm and suicide. It should be used in conjunction with the *Guide to speaking publicly about personal experiences of self-harm/suicide/mental health issues*, which can be given directly to the person who intends to share their story.

Having someone share their own personal experience can enrich the audience's understanding of the topic. It can help reduce stigma and encourage people in the audience to seek support and/or treatment if they are facing similar issues or know someone who is. However it's important that the wellbeing of the individual is put first and that the experience is shared in a way that protects both them and their audience.

1. Making sure the person is ready to speak publicly about their experience

Firstly, make sure that the person is ready to speak and that they have considered and understand the potential impact sharing their story may have on them, their family and others. If there is any concern at this point suggest that they consider delaying their involvement for the time being. Don't assume that your speaker is comfortable with their involvement even though they have volunteered.



2. Making sure the person is well supported

Key steps in providing support and helping the person to prepare are listed below:

- Agree a framework of support from the outset, with contact before, during and after the event.
- Schedule meetings to suit the speaker at times convenient to them at key points on the timeline, including after the event.
- Make sure the speaker knows how to contact you if needed.
- Comprehensive preparation is key. Agree the content with the speaker, ensuring they are happy with it and that it's in their words.
- Consider the audience when constructing the content, as well as the language used and its appropriateness to the setting.
- Consider the length of the piece and whether it can be further edited. Sometimes brevity is best.
- Encourage the speaker to remain positive and offer the audience hope, promote help seeking behaviour and provide signposting to services.
- **Detailed descriptions of methods/location of a suicide or self-harm incident should NOT be included as this could be upsetting for the audience and could prompt vulnerable people to harm themselves in a similar way.**
- Remind the speaker to be respectful and sensitive, and to bear in mind that those in the audience may have different perspectives and beliefs to themselves. Faith and spirituality are important parts of many people's lived experience and can be very beneficial for their recovery, however a heavy focus on these issues may mean that some members of the audience may become disengaged and the other messages may then be lost. Sensitivity and tailoring the message to the audience is therefore very important.
- Consider the media platform; is the content being read or spoken? Is it on radio or television? Each of these can present very different pressures for people on top of their story. This is referred to in the *Guide to speaking publicly about personal experiences of self-harm/suicide/mental health issues*.
- Always remember, the speaker is the expert on their own experience. This gives them the control of the piece and how it is heard and understood.
- Make sure the speaker knows that they should only respond to questions that they are comfortable with and that they can stop at any time if they need to.



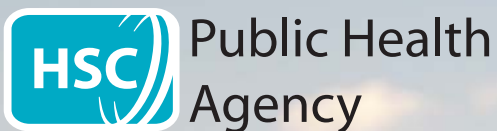
3. Useful resources

You will find more detailed information and guidance on supporting someone when sharing their lived experience here:

- Mindframe: Media and public speaking – a guide for consumers and carers (includes more detail on appropriate content/language and media interviews)
http://www.mindframe-media.info/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/8039/media-and-public-speaking-for-consumers-carers.pdf
- Suicide Prevention Australia: Suicide Prevention Lived Experience guidance
 - **Checking personal readiness to be involved**
<https://www.suicidepreventionaustralia.org/sites/default/files/resources/2016/Thinking%20about%20your%20personal%20readiness%20to%20be%20involved%20FINAL.pdf>
 - **Guidelines for sharing stories**
<https://www.suicidepreventionaustralia.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017/Guidelines%20for%20submitting%20story%202017.01.10.pdf>
- United States Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Best Practices for Presentations by Suicide Loss and Suicide Attempt Survivors
<http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/Best%20Practices%20for%20Presentations%20by%20Suicide%20Loss%20and%20Suicide%20Attempt%20Survivors%20-%20FINAL%202012.1.pdf>

Acknowledgement:

With thanks to the members of the Self-Harm Community Reference Group for their assistance in developing this resource.



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:

