



Storytelling for Suicide Prevention Checklist

Healing, hope and help are happening every day. For every one person that dies by suicide, 280 people seriously consider suicide but do not kill themselves. These stories of hope and recovery have the power to help others through a crisis and dispel stigma and myths about suicide.

The decision to share one's lived experience of suicide should not be taken lightly. If you are considering sharing your story, we recommend that you use this storytelling checklist to help determine how to share your story safely and effectively – for yourself and others.

This checklist incorporates recommendations from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Suicide Awareness Voices in Education, and the Activating Hope website (www.activatinghope.com).

BEFORE YOU TELL YOUR STORY

Decide if you are ready to speak. Ask yourself if you are ready to speak. If you don't want to tell your story, you don't have to. Give yourself time to heal and gain perspective about your experiences. Know the difference between healing yourself and helping others. Consider consulting a mental health professional to help assess if you are ready.

Decide how to share your story. Sharing your story does not have to take a certain form or shape. Think about your goals. What do you want to promote or achieve, and for whom? Weigh the potential benefits and risks for yourself and others. Identifying your values, goals, and needs can help you determine the audiences you feel most comfortable addressing, whether that audience is a selection of people in certain situations, the general public, or somewhere in between.

Identify what you want to share. Decide what aspects of your story you may want to avoid or be cautious about discussing, and what you feel comfortable sharing. This may be influenced by your audience. The suicide prevention field recommends avoiding

sharing graphic details of self-harm and suicide. The field also recommends identifying and sharing any resources, actions, and people that helped you through crisis.

Prepare to tell your story safely and effectively. Consult [available guidelines for safe messaging](#) and suicide prevention. Learn about suicide prevention resources in your area, contact a suicide prevention organization to collaborate, or take a suicide prevention training or mental health first aid course. Avoid glamorizing suicide, implying that suicide is inevitable, or perpetuating myths about suicide. Focus on hope and healing rather than pain.

WHEN YOU TELL YOUR STORY

Introduce yourself. Describe who you are, what you do, and a bit about yourself. Be mindful about sharing identifying information if you are not comfortable doing so.

Share your experience of crisis. What happened before you received the help you needed? Think about the most important thing you'd like your listener to know. Keep this section brief. Avoid sharing graphic details of self-harm or methods of suicide.

Share what helped you. Describe how you got through crisis and found help and hope, or what would have helped you. This step is important, as it illustrates the value of support and provides resources or actions others can take.

Share your experience of recovery. How are you different today? Share what is going right in your life, and how recovery feels for you. Describe any ongoing supports that help in your recovery now. Focus on sharing hope for others.

Share resources. Encourage people to call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) or reach out to other mental health services and resources if they are in crisis. Share the [#BeThe1To steps](#) that others can take to support people in their lives that may be struggling. Provide ways that people can participate in suicide prevention, such as supporting their local crisis center. If you are speaking to a journalist, share the [Reporting on Suicide](#) guidelines.

AFTER YOU TELL YOUR STORY

Be ready for others to reach out to you. Your story of hope and recovery has the power to affect and help people in crisis, as well as educate others about suicide prevention and mental health. People may reach out to you with questions or to share

their own mental health stories with you. This may be difficult if you are not used to discussing your lived experience with others. Identify what you feel ready to discuss with others and what your limits are.

Be armed with resources. Have a variety of resources on hand to share with people that may be experiencing a crisis, are concerned about others, or seek advice on a mental health matter. Encourage them to reach out to these resources and services, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, The Trevor Project, the SAMHSA Resource Locator, and other local supports. You might consider attending a gatekeeper training like safeTALK, ASIST or QPR so that you are more comfortable when approached by someone who is experiencing thoughts of suicide.

Utilize your personal support system. After sharing your story, it may help to talk out your feelings, the stories you've heard, and the emotions you may have experienced with people that care about you and understand the nature and impact of your story and your work. Your support system can include a mental health professional, friends, family members, clergy, or colleagues.

Rest up. Take a break from talking about mental health and suicide prevention. Schedule down time or an unrelated activity in order to help maintain balance in your own life.

Connect with other survivors. It may be valuable to reach out to other survivors for understanding. Organizations like United Survivors, the American Association of Suicidology Lived Experience Division, or Live Through This, can connect you with others who have lived experience with suicide. Some communities might have a suicide attempt survivors support group, such as the one at Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center in Los Angeles.

Regardless of whether or not you choose to share your personal story of recovery, know that you are a member of a community of survivors that spans across the country and the world. Stories like yours help give hope to others. By sharing our experiences, we all can change the conversation about suicide from one of tragedy to one of hope and healing.