

Motivating Others with Your Voice of Lived Experience

“What I would have done to hear a story like mine. To feel less alone. To feel connected.” — Hannah Gadsby

Your first-hand lived experience with mental health challenges gives you unique wisdom about what young people need to heal and thrive. Your story can be your most powerful tool to help people understand what is necessary to make real change.

Stories help us to:

- Advocate for ourselves and others.
- Create authentic and mutual connection.
- Motivate others to share their own stories.
- Shift culture and bust stigma.
- Inspire action.

Stories that spark action communicate three main elements:

- Your story connects and educates others about your experience.
- Your why inspires and encourages others to empathize and share your values.
- Your ask invites and engages others to create change.

Good stories make us:

- See the story by showing not telling.
- Hear the story by including vivid imagery and details.
- Feel the story by connecting to strong emotion.

Your story becomes even more inspiring and powerful when you organize it to capture people’s hearts and give them a call-to-action. Preparation is essential in storytelling, and it should be done each time you are going to share. Not just once!

Before you begin composing your story of lived experience, consider the setting and context of your storytelling.

- **Audience:** Who will be hearing your story?
- **Intention:** What do you want your audience to learn from your story?
- **Where and when:** Where are you sharing your story? How long do you have to share your story?
- **Risks:** If you are sharing online, do you feel safe and comfortable doing so? If sharing with a group, will your story be recorded and is there a form to get your consent and the consent of your parent and/or guardian? Will you name specific people or places while telling your story? If you are sharing on the internet, are you comfortable with that information being available to the public?

Now, let’s dig a little deeper into understanding your audience. When sharing your story, you’ll tap into many of your strengths – courage, bravery, and vulnerability. Inviting others into your experience is very personal, so you’ll want to consider who you are speaking to and what you feel comfortable sharing with them. Remember, speaking about trauma is tough and can catch us off guard. Thinking about your audience can help you strategically decide which parts of your story you wish to share with them.¹

- Who is part of your circles? Can you think of examples?
- Which parts of your story will/would you share with each circle?
- What might you share with friends and family, but not acquaintances?
- What are the risks and benefits of sharing with each of these audiences?



Adapt your story to your comfort level using Green Light, Yellow Light, Red Light statements:

- **Green** = Can be shared anywhere with very low risk
- **Yellow** = Slow down and think about consequences of sharing
- **Red** = Can be shared, but with higher risk or more serious consequences

Share your story of lived experience in a way that encourages your audience to hear your point, not just remember the harrowing and traumatic parts. You want them to leave with your point or your ask, so remember to P.R.E.P: ²

- **P = Point.** What is your point?
- **R = Reason.** Why are you making this point?
- **E = Example.** What is an example in your story that illustrates your point?
- **P = Point.** Restate your point. This might also include your ask – what do you want your audience to learn from you or do when they leave?

You've thought about your audience, the setting, and your intentions and now you're ready to begin turning your story of lived experience into connection and advocacy!

Use the following questions to determine your story's main point, the examples that will illustrate your point, and your invitation to action.

STEP ONE:

Write down your story or, better yet, tell your story to someone you trust. Include everything you believe is important. Afterwards answer these questions:

What was most memorable about your story?

What most captured your heart and imagination?

What do you want others to remember most?



STEP TWO:

Create or refine what will become your Lived Experience Leadership Story.

List 3 of the most important elements of your story about mental health challenges that will touch another's heart:

List 3 of the most important points about mental health challenges you want others to remember:



STEP THREE:

Describe what you invite or hope others might do with your story:

What actions might you ask them to take in light of your story?



STEP FOUR:

Using everything you've done in Steps 1-3, write your story and its leadership messages. You may also instead paint, draw, dance, sing, compose or create any other expression of your story that feels most real for you.
