

# Preparing to share your experiences

A guide to sharing your experiences of mental health and suicide in a safe and supported way



Scottish  
Recovery  
Network



Suicide   
Prevention  
Scotland.

Lived Experience Panel

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## Get help now

### Breathing Space

**Tel: 0800 83 85 87** (This number is free to call)

**Website: <http://breathingspace.scot/>**

Breathing Space is a free, confidential, phone service for anyone in Scotland **over the age of 16** experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. They are there in times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice, and giving information. Lines are open 6pm – 2am Monday to Thursday and 24hrs at weekends (From 6pm Friday to 6am on Monday).

### Samaritans

**Tel: 116 123** (This number is free to call)

**Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

**Website: <http://www.samaritans.org/>**

The Samaritans service is available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

### NHS 24

**Tel: 111** (This number is free to call)

**Website: <https://www.nhs24.scot/>**

NHS 24 provides comprehensive up-to-date health information and self-care advice for people in Scotland. Call them free on 111 if you are ill and it can't wait until your regular NHS service reopens.

## Acknowledgements

Scottish Recovery Network, Kirstie Cusick of United to Prevent Suicide and Keir McKechnie of the Suicide Prevention Scotland Lived Experience Panel developed this resource in partnership with the United to Prevent Suicide social movement and members of the Suicide Prevention Scotland Lived Experience Panel (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group Lived Experience Panel).

Through a series of workshops, people discussed examples of times they had shared their experiences of suicide, what worked well, and what could have made it better. Their invaluable knowledge and expertise guided the development of this resource, and the accompanying resource for organisations.

Their experiences not only lay the foundation for this resource, but people also contributed their advice directly - highlighted when you see this quotation mark throughout this resource:



Thank you to everyone who gave up their time and shared their wisdom with us. To the many individuals and organisations across Scotland who spoke with us about how they thought others could best prepare to share their experiences of mental health and suicide to help others.



## Introduction

This resource is for any individual who wants to share their lived experience of mental health and/or suicide (this includes people who have been bereaved by suicide).

It contains information to support you to prepare to share your experiences and reflect on how you do this safely whilst maintaining your wellbeing. It also provides guidance on the different places and spaces you may wish to share your experiences.

By the end of this resource, you should have the knowledge and understanding needed to make a fully informed decision on:

- Whether you want to proceed with sharing your experiences.
- Where and why, you want to share your experiences.

We hope this resource empowers you to be able to set boundaries on how much you share and to know that you are in control at all stages of sharing your experiences.



## Summary of this guide

Below is a brief overview of each section of the resource. You can read through the parts in any order or choose which parts you want to read – the choice is yours. For the best experience, we would recommend reading all parts in order.

### Part 1: Why we share our experiences

- Discusses benefits for self, and the value for others
- Purpose of sharing experiences

### Part 2: Safety

- Looks at what support should be in place before, during, and after you talk about your experiences
- Prepares you for what reactions may occur once you have talked about your experiences

### Part 3: Wellbeing

- How to look after your wellbeing when sharing your experiences
- Self-care and tools to promote good wellbeing

### Part 4: Where can we share our experiences

- Looks at where you can share your experiences
- Discusses peer support, lived experience engagement opportunities and sharing a recovery story.

## A note on language

### Story vs experiences

For the majority of this resource, we use the word ‘experience(s)’ as people involved in developing this guidance told us this resonates more with them than the word ‘story.’

People have a wide range of experiences and many shared that the word ‘story’ did not represent this. Some felt the word ‘story’ had a feel of something being fictional or something that could be boxed up neatly, when in fact people’s experiences can be complex and unique to their own circumstances.

In Part 4 of this resource, we did however feel it was important to include a section on sharing recovery stories, acknowledging this as a commonly used approach. We have made sure to outline the differences between sharing recovery stories and sharing experiences.

### Recovery

We also want to acknowledge that whilst recovery is possible for everyone who struggles with their mental health, recovery is different for everyone and will mean different things, and that for people bereaved by suicide it might be a feeling that things will get better as they learn to process their grief.

This short animation outlines [what we mean by recovery](#)

# Part 1

# Why we share our experiences?





## Introduction

Deciding to share your experiences can be powerful. Many people who share their experiences do so because they want to help others. They want to help make things better, so that other people do not have the same experiences that they do, but also to inspire others and show that there is hope. That recovery is always possible.

Henry's thoughts on sharing his own story:

**Telling my own story about my caregiving journey was the first time I had reflected back on it since it all happened. It helped me clarify my thoughts – and changed the way I felt about it – I felt I was paying tribute to the person's life, to my role in supporting them as well as the roles of others who contributed. I was buzzing after it. I also got a lot out of seeing my story being shared in different health and social care events after that. I thought there are bits of that story that really could help others in similar situations.**



## Benefits for yourself

There are many benefits of sharing your experiences. It can be incredibly rewarding. Sharing your experiences can also lead to opportunities for personal growth and development of skills. It is a chance to reflect and potentially even reframe your narrative. A chance to take control of not only the way in which you share your experiences but also how you come to understand them and their meaning.

**I am hoping that sharing my experiences will help me process what I went through. I also know, from running my own mental health group, that my honesty helps others. They see that I have “come out the other side” and can give others hope. And maybe I feel stronger for it.**



**It can help you in the grieving and healing process by helping you to make sense of your experiences and feelings.**



## **Value for others**

Your lived experience matters. There is great value from sharing and hearing from the voice of lived experience. Sharing experiences can help raise awareness, challenge stigma, and foster more compassion and empathy towards those struggling with their mental health or suicidal thoughts.

**I was referred to look at some of your stuff...and it's helped looking at other stories...I do recommend people to your website ([United to Prevent Suicide](#)) if they are experiencing similar signs and feelings as I did.**

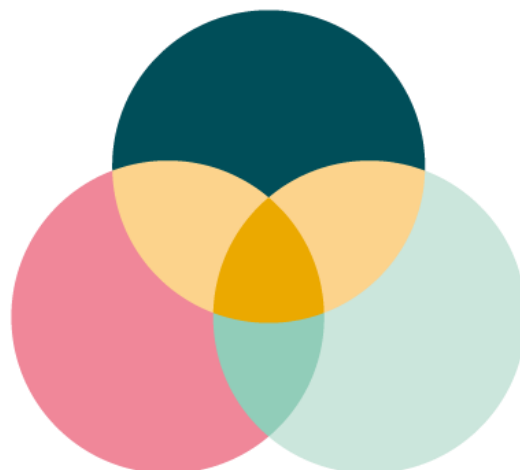


## Time Space and Compassion

The recently launched Suicide Prevention Strategy for Scotland – Creating Hope Together - includes a commitment to embedding the [Time Space Compassion](#) principles in support for people experiencing suicidal crisis. It sets out what is needed to support someone experiencing distress:

- **Time** – for people to discuss their feelings and be listened to.
- **Space** – which is designed to take account of people’s emotional and psychological needs and be responsive to trauma and which feels safe.
- **Compassion** – be given the attention, validation and empathy needed, and helped on your terms.

The Time Space Compassion principles are important to consider when sharing your experiences. Think about where and who you are sharing your experiences with, and if this is providing Time, Space, and Compassion.



## Purpose

When thinking of how you want to share your experiences, it is important to think about purpose. What message do you want to get across to your audience? What is the best way to communicate this message?

Keeping the purpose of sharing your experiences in mind is a good way to ensure you don't overshare information you may not be comfortable with others knowing. It helps to keep the balance of sharing enough to make a difference, without leaving yourself vulnerable.

Purpose is important to both the person sharing their experience, and the listener. When the listener is aware of the purpose, they can decide whether they feel able to listen to the experience without being potentially triggered.

This ensures all parties can benefit from sharing experiences, without any harmful impacts to their mental health. We hope this guide will help you to feel fully prepared and empowered to share your experiences in the way that you want to.





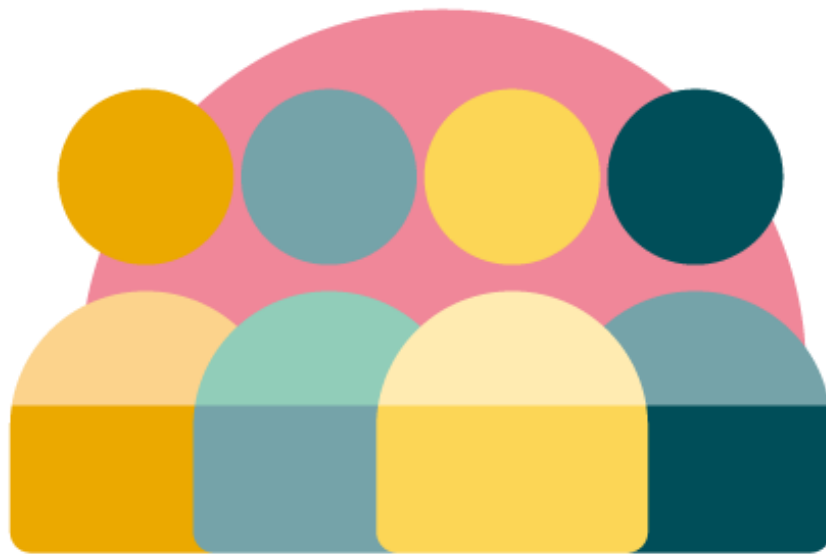
## Reflection space

I am sharing my experiences because...

Think about your motivations and purpose. Why do you want to share your experiences? What do you hope to gain from this personally? What do you want others to gain from hearing your experiences?

# Part 2

# Safety



## Introduction

Sharing experiences of mental health and/or suicide can be a positive part of your journey. However, due to the complexities and stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, some people don't feel able to speak about the topic. The stigma associated with suicide can prevent many people from seeking help or talking about how they are feeling.

One workshop participant said:

**It can be a real chicken and egg situation as to raise awareness and to educate people about suicide we need to be able to have conversations about suicide.**



In this section, we want to provide you with a better understanding of what support should be in place **before, during, and after** you talk about your experiences. We also want to help prepare you for what reactions may occur once you have talked about your experiences. Most importantly, we want to help you feel empowered to share your experiences safely.



## Who is gathering the experiences?

There are a range of organisations who gather experiences to inform their policies, campaigns, to development and improve their services, or to raise awareness. This happens across all sectors. Types of individuals who will gather these experiences may be case workers, development officers, people designing services and support, communications officers, or journalists from media channels e.g., newspapers, TV, radio, blogs and podcasts.

Where you can share your experiences will be covered in more detail in Part 4 of this resource.

## Your reasons for sharing your experiences

There are many different reasons you may wish to share your experiences with others. You might want to tell your experience as a cathartic part of your process for healing and recovering; or you might want to do it to raise awareness around mental health and suicide to show things can get better.

Whatever your reason for deciding to share your experiences, it needs to be carefully thought through, and well supported by the organisation responsible for facilitating, gathering, and sharing your experiences with others.



## Considerations

It's important to consider a number of factors prior to sharing your experiences. It's also good to be aware that other factors may emerge during the process of sharing your experiences. These considerations will help you ask the right questions at the start of the process.

- Be fully aware of the expectations and potential impact your experience could have on yourself and others.
- Make sure you fully understand the process, guidance and support available to help you.
- You may wish to discuss your plans to share your experiences with your family, friends, and loved ones.
  - Although they shouldn't hinder your desire to share, it can be useful to understand their thoughts and feelings, particularly if they feature as part of what you plan to share.
- You may experience both stigma and self-stigma\* if the experience is shared in an unsupportive space or reaches an unsupportive audience.

## Are you in the right place (emotionally)?

It is important to reflect on if you are in the right emotional place to share your experiences. This can be challenging, you may wish to share to help others, however you cannot help others if you do not look after your own mental health and wellbeing first.

Timing and having the right support in place are key. Being in the wrong emotional place when sharing your experiences can be incredibly damaging. Ultimately, the decision on whether it is the right time to share is one for you to make, however the person facilitating the sharing can support you to reflect on this. To ensure your wishes and boundaries are considered here are some things you may wish to discuss with them:

- Reflect together on the safest place and method for you to share your experiences.
- Discuss how your experiences will be captured and shared. How much say will you have over how your information is edited and shared?
- Understanding what support is available throughout the process, including how the organisation can support you, and when you may need to access your wider support network for assistance.
- Knowing that you are in control every step of the way (considering the potential impact on your family, friends, and/or colleagues) and can withdraw from the process at any time.

### **\*A note on stigma**

- **Stigma** – negative beliefs and attitudes about someone based on a distinguishing characteristic, for example a mental health condition.
- **Self-stigma** – negative beliefs and attitudes about yourself, including internalised shame.

## Setting boundaries

Boundaries are considered to be general guidelines that guide behaviour in relationships with others. Boundaries are involved with how you treat others, how they treat you, and how you treat yourself. Here are several reasons that it is important to develop and maintain healthy personal boundaries:

- Helps us to know ourselves and what is important and meaningful for each of us as individuals.
- Teaches us to have respect for ourselves and others.
- Teaches us to be responsible for our behaviour when interacting with others.
- Helps us to be assertive about our personal needs.
- Helps reduce the chance of being in a situation that could be harmful to us.
- Helps us to be more accepting of others by recognising their

Boundaries are important both for the safety and the wellbeing of the person sharing their experiences, the person gathering experiences and those who are listening. We will explore boundaries further in Part 3 of this resource.

## Reactions

Reactions to you sharing your experiences can be both immediate and longer term.

### Immediate reactions

- You may receive an applause, standing ovation if you are speaking at an event (both in-person and virtually) and people may have further questions for you.
- People may wish to give you hugs.
- People may post comments about your experiences on social media.
- People may get in touch seeking help and/or to share their own experiences with you.
- May spark positive or difficult conversations with family, friends and/or work colleagues.
- May lead to further discussions about mental health and suicide.

### Longer term reactions

- Remember experiences shared on websites, social media may be found in search engines years after they've been published, and even when deleted.
- Someone from a peer group may meet you while you are with other people who don't know your circumstances.

## Internal reactions

These will vary for each person who shares their experiences. It can be useful to think about Covey's [Circles of Concern, Control and influence](#) when processing internal reactions from sharing your experiences.

One person who was bereaved by suicide shares their thoughts on this.

**For example, my son is dead, and I have no control or influence over that. I can however largely control how I deal with it and to what extent I am hopeful and positive in my attitudes and behaviours. I also have some influence over the attitudes and behaviours of family and loved ones. By volunteering and sharing my story I can help and influence a wider network of people, and so create hope. Additionally, the act of sharing and listening to the sharing of others can increase an individual's level of hope, which they then share with those around them and so create a positive feedback loop.**



## Impact

Knowing that you have been heard and that your experience may help one person can be very empowering. Once your experience is shared, the facilitator will be able to give you some idea of the impact e.g., social media analytics, reports etc. and will be keen to hear about reactions you may have received directly to best support you at this time.

The true impact of you sharing your experience may never be known but rest assured it has the potential to make a real difference in many

ways e.g., sharing experiences is a key component of suicide prevention and mental health awareness training.

**Your story and road to recovery is just like mine. Suicide needs to be talked about more without feeling shame and/or guilt. I wish you all the best and to stay strong.**



**What made sharing your experience feel positive?**



The right people were there to support me - Keir, Lisa and her team. Plus, the reaction I got on social media was hugely positive.

**What made you feel safe and supported when sharing your experiences?**

The whole process was handled sensitively, and I did feel safe and supported at all times. In the weeks beforehand, Keir was at the end of the phone and his door was always open if I'd have had any questions. I felt no pressure whatsoever and knew there was the option of pulling out at any time without feeling any guilt. On the day, Lisa and the guys were amazing. Lisa was warm, patient, understanding and put me at ease very quickly. And Keir was in the background, like my agent!

## Further reading

- [Samaritans Media Guidelines](#)
- [Guidelines for sharing experiences with suicide](#)



## Reflection space

Now that we have reviewed how to share experiences safely. Think about what would make a place feel safe to share your experiences?

Think about:

- The audience
- The purpose and what you hope to achieve
- The physical space

# Part 3

# Wellbeing





## Introduction

Sharing your experiences can be a very hopeful journey, both for the sharer and the audience. For that to be the case, the experience will contain a hopeful thread. Your experiences do not need to be all positive. Stories which include difficult and challenging experiences can be really helpful and informative too. But it is helpful to include threads of hope and possibility, so that learning from difficult experiences can drive further improvement and change.

The timing of sharing experiences which involve recall of traumatic experiences is critical. While sharing your experiences can contribute to recovery, it can also present a trigger for distress and carries a risk of compounding trauma if not sensitively done. Sharing traumatic experiences is not always going to be the right thing to do for you at that time in that context.

There are a number of factors discussed in this section on how to look after your own wellbeing that can help you to decide whether to share your experience, or not, and how best you can prepare to share your lived experience. This opportunity may stand in contrast to the experience of services that you may have encountered, perhaps where the time and space to have good conversations can be limited or non-existent.

Sharing your experiences can be an important part of your recovery journey, it should be a positive experience where you can reflect on how far you have come and the skills and strategies you have developed to maintain your mental health. The prospect of being able to use your own (perhaps painful) experiences to help others in similar situations may help to heal your suffering. However sometimes during this reflection, particularly on difficult periods of your life, you may need to utilise your coping and self-care strategies to keep yourself well.

## What is positive mental health and self-care?

We all have mental health just as we all have physical health and being aware of what we can do as individuals to promote our own wellbeing can help us all to better manage our mental health, wherever we are on the mental health spectrum.

Good mental health, according to the World Health Organisation, is defined as **a state of complete well-being where individuals are able to: realise their own potential, work productively and cope with the normal stresses of life.**



## Why self-care is important

Self-care focuses on the things you do to help live well and improve both your physical and mental health. When it comes to mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower risk of illness, and increase energy levels. Engaging in a good self-care routine has been proven to assist in reducing anxiety and depression, reducing stress, improving concentration, minimizing frustration and anger, increasing happiness, improving energy, and so much more.

Self-care isn't an optional extra and involves **looking after your own health using the knowledge, information and support available to you**. It involves making decisions that enables you to look after your health and wellbeing, in partnership with organisations, including health and social care professionals, as and when needed.

The facilitator and organisation have a duty of care to ensure that your wellbeing is considered at every stage when sharing your experience.

## Top tips for safe sharing of experiences

### Identifying individual support networks

A support network can include both formal and informal support. It is good practice to talk to at least one person you trust about the impact the experience is having on you. It is also very important that there is a clear line of connection to the facilitator so that you know who to turn to if you have any doubts about the process, about the impact it is having on you and about being able to stay in control of the situation.

### Support and reassurance

You might feel anxious about the impact of sharing your experiences on the other(s) who you discuss as part of sharing. You may need considerable reassurance about confidentiality being maintained. You may also feel that you are breaching your own sense of loyalty to the people who feature in your experiences. It is important to acknowledge that this might be a concern and to be able to talk about this if you are worried about it. This can avoid negative impacts on your wellbeing.

## Boundaries

Boundaries can support wellbeing; however, we need to establish boundaries in a compassionate way. Having a clear understanding of your role as the sharer and the facilitators/organisation supporting you will help to establish a good understanding of how sharers and facilitators interact while working together.

When there is more than one sharer involved in working together, e.g., working as part of a large group, boundaries are more likely to be crossed. This can be due to human error, tiredness, stress or just having a bad day. It is ok to take time out from sharing your experience and to feedback when you feel boundaries are becoming blurred. Examples of boundaries include:

### Purpose, process and timeline

You should have a conversation with the facilitator at the outset which clarifies the purpose and process of sharing your experiences. This might also include a discussion about duration of the contact they are likely to have with you, whether this is expected to be part of a temporary project or takes place within a longer-term working relationship. If this is part of a distinct time-limited project, conversations about other, longer-term sources of support are an important aspect of boundary setting.

### Only share what you feel comfortable with

It is also important for you to know and feel confident that you should only share aspects of your experience that you feel comfortable with and that you can withdraw at any time if the experience is stirring up emotions that you did not anticipate and/or are struggling to manage.

## Maintaining safe spaces

Maintaining safe spaces means that you must also be aware of the potential risks and benefits of more than one person sharing their experiences.

Several people sharing experiences together can help to build a bigger and clearer picture for people, offering potential to learn from each other about what has helped or hindered along the way. On the other hand, listening to other people's experiences can also become emotionally overwhelming, and it is important for you to be able to recognise if you are becoming distressed.

Sessions where groups are sharing their experiences should be set up so that individuals are free to take time out at any point and have the opportunity to talk in confidence to someone if they need to offload.

**Remember - It is not the role of those sharing their experiences to provide crisis support to others in a group and the facilitator should make support services and crisis contact information available to everyone in a group.**

Here are some boundaries that people who shared their experiences have found useful:

**Adding a note at the end of a publicly shared experience**

**“I will not be responding to direct messaging, but you can get support from Samaritans on 116 123”. This boundary is put in place as after sharing experiences publicly, some people may reach out directly for support which in some circumstances can negatively impact your wellbeing.**



You can change your mind at any point without feeling guilty. People sometimes feel like they need to share to help others, but that's only okay if you are okay. You shouldn't sacrifice your own mental health for others. If a plane is going down, you put on your own oxygen mask before helping others and I think that needs to be remembered when it comes to sharing our stories.



When considering sharing your experiences it is worthwhile that you take some time to reflect on what you feel your personal boundaries are when sharing your experience, boundaries for sharing in a group (thinking about how it may affect the group and yourself), and also how to maintain your boundaries.

## Tools for looking after your wellbeing

### [Wellness Action Plans](#) – Creating a self-care toolkit

A Wellness Action Plan is a personalised, practical tool that anyone can use – whether they have a mental health problem or not – to help identify what keeps someone well at work and in our communities. You may wish to develop a Wellness Action Plan with the facilitator or organisation supporting you to share your experiences.

### [SAMH 5 ways to wellbeing](#)

There are lots of things we can do every day to support our wellbeing. The New Economic Foundation suggests there are five keyways to better wellbeing. You can use this resource to get inspiration on ways to improve and maintain good wellbeing.



## Reflection space

Take time to reflect on the following. You may find it useful to bring this page with you if or when you decide to share your experiences, so you can keep in mind what will help you to look after your wellbeing during this process

<b>What can I do to look after my wellbeing?</b>
<b>What boundaries might I want to put in place?</b>
<b>How can the facilitator best support me?</b>

## Part 4

# Where can we share our experiences?





## Introduction

There are different spaces and places to share your experiences. Where you decide to share your experience is a personal decision, you may develop your narrative and decide not to share it with anyone – this is okay. There is no ‘one size fits all’ and where you decide to share your experience is unique and different for everyone.

To start, you should consider what places feel safe and the potential outcomes of sharing your experiences in these places.

## Peer spaces

### What is peer support?

Peer support can be formal or informal – in fact, some peer support is naturally occurring, and you may not even recognise you are doing it. Peer support is when people use their lived experience of mental health and/or connection with suicide to help others. There are different types of peer support, however it will always involve people using their shared experiences to support each other.

**Peer support is really important in a variety of situations, that connection with others, that you aren't the only one going through the experience.**



Peer support is generally understood to be a relationship of mutual support. People with similar life experiences offer each other support, particularly through challenging or difficult periods of time. Sharing your experiences in a peer space creates connections, which are powerful for recovery.

## What does peer support look like?

Peer support exists in many different forms in mental health and suicide prevention. The sharing of experiences and knowledge between people experiencing mental health challenges is not new and is increasingly well developed in self-help and mutual support groups.

Peer support takes place in many different settings, it can be informal or formal, one-to-one or group settings, in the community or within mental health services – the list is endless, but it can take place anytime, anywhere.

## What does peer support feel like?

Hope, connected, safe, supportive environment, beneficial to recovery.

**Peer Support is simply people who care and “get” each other.**



**People often bottle up their feelings and once they open up, they feel relief. This can often be the beginning of their healing.**



## Time Space Compassion

Peer support allows for a flexible approach, one that meets people where they are in their journey. It invests in creating a safe and non-judgemental space, where people are met with compassion from peers who can truly understand and empathise with their experiences.

## Lived experience engagement opportunities

Using your experiences of life and your mental health journey to influence and create change for the future. We call this process ‘Lived experience engagement.’ Some examples of this are involvement, influence and participation, co-production, and co-design, to name just a few.

Lived experience engagement can be done through a variety of methods, some include completing a survey, taking part in a recovery conversation café/focus group/workshop, co-designing and co-delivering training, contributing to decision-making on an advisory panel/group, or being involved in collaborative projects.

The best lived experience engagement opportunities tend to provide a range of options for you to be involved in a meaningful way.



## What does lived experience engagement look like?

Opportunities come in a variety of ways, however some of the common lived experience engagement opportunities look at being involved in service/organisation development and delivery, creating new resources and publications, shaping mental health/suicide prevention policies and campaigns.

Some examples of lived experience engagement in action are noted below:

- Scottish Recovery Network recently ran [A Chance for Change](#), a series of recovery conversation cafes which gathered the views of those with lived experience and front-line practitioners with an interest in mental health recovery. This feedback from these cafés is informing the new Scottish Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- The Suicide Prevention Scotland Lived Experience Panel (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group Lived Experience Panel) were involved in developing a post bereavement support services pilot in Ayrshire, Arran and Highland.
- United to Prevent Suicide held various focus groups on campaign and movement development. They have also helped connect people from within the social movement with a variety of organisations seeking the input of people with lived experience of suicide.

**Scarily exciting, but worth every second! Finding you have a voice.**



Getting involved in lived experience engagement opportunities is a way to develop skills and build confidence. It validates the experiences you have had and allows them to be used positively in order to make improvements in mental health support and services.

Sharing and talking about experiences can help you to meet others, make more sense of your own experiences and develop your views on what great services and support looks like.

**Empowering, that your voice and experiences matter and can make a difference to the lives of many others. Valued and respected.**



## Get involved with lived experience engagement

There are many ways to access lived experience engagement opportunities. The simplest way is to join / stay in touch with an organisation who shares opportunities directly with their members.

- Find out more about the Suicide Prevention Scotland Lived Experience Panel please email [livedexperience@samh.org.uk](mailto:livedexperience@samh.org.uk)
- Join Scotland's social movement for change for suicide prevention [United to Prevent Suicide](#)
- Sign up to the Scottish Recovery Network [newsletter](#)
- Join [VOX Scotland](#) as a member
- Become part of [See Us](#) (See Me Scotland)
- Check out the [Our Personal Experience Network](#) (Mental Health Foundation)
- Become a member of the [Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland](#)

You can also contact lived experiences groups and **Third Sector Interface's** (TSI's) in your area to explore local opportunities, as well as asking any services you may currently access.

## Sharing recovery stories

### What's the difference?

The sharing of personal experiences, also commonly known as sharing recovery stories, allows you to visualise your experiences over time and to reflect on the long-term journey of recovery with its ups and downs.

Recovery stories can also inform and inspire people with experiences of mental health issues and/or suicide, their carers, supporters, and service providers. In sharing your experiences, you can offer hints and techniques on recovery, as well as showing very clearly that people can and do recover, which can be helpful to challenge stigma and misconceptions.

A recovery story differs slightly to more general sharing of experiences.

Sharing your experiences through peer support and lived experience engagement opportunities can be sharing small insights into your overall journey or sharing parts of your experience which resonates with the discussion you are having.

Whilst a recovery story tends to have a beginning, middle, and end – with the focus of the story being about your personal journey.

## Different approaches to recovery stories

The format in which you decide to share your story is completely up to yourself. We encourage people to share their story in a way that feels comfortable and true to themselves. Many people choose to do a written piece, such as a blog, or a film. However, others try more creative approaches, such as artwork, photography and even through song – the choice is yours!

It is useful to think about how you want to tell your recovery story and the potential outcomes and responses. Some people are happy to share their identity and tell an individual story, whereas others prefer to stay anonymous and tell their story through third-person or composite story approaches.

Here are some reflections from people with lived experience who have share their recovery story.

- **Personal recovery story** – this type of story would have your name/identity attached to it and be very personal
- **Third person/anonymous recovery story** – whilst these kinds of stories would still be personal, they would not have your name or identity attached. You can choose to have it completely anonymous with no name, make up a pseudonym, or tell it from the third-person point of view
- **Composite recovery story** – this type of story is a collection of many different people's narrative to illustrate a single story

Insights from someone who has shared their individual story:

**Benefits – knowing your honesty may be helping someone is a very humbling experience.**



**Drawbacks - personally, I can feel pre-judged at times, mainly from people who don't understand. My own family at times need reminding of the work I'm doing. That can be hard.**

Developing and taking control of your own story can be an empowering experience, some have described it as 'cathartic.' By thinking about your experiences, you are able to look for things that have worked and gone well, as well as the difficulties, distress and challenges.

Thinking through and sharing recovery stories has a lot to offer you at a personal level. It promotes and supports recovery and wellbeing and helps to create positive identity and meaning in life.

**Sharing your story is a way to connect with others who have similar experiences. Connecting with others is powerful, we are drawn to people we have shared experiences with as they understand how we feel.**





## Sharing experiences with the media

Sharing your experiences with the media has its own benefits and drawbacks which you should take time to consider.

Managed correctly, human-interest stories in the media can feel relatable and provide people with sense of hope and not being alone in their struggles. They can show that recovery is possible and signpost people to help. They are also a great way to highlight approaches that are working – that we need more of - and often provide a platform to call for change. However, there are also important things to consider before agreeing to share with the media:

- Once your story is published it can be hard to change anything or take it back especially in a world of social media. We like to use the toothpaste analogy here – it's easy to get out of the tube but not so easy to get back in.
- You will have less control over the content and editing process, some journalists may allow you to review the piece before publication, but this is not always the case. Sub-editors create titles for stories, and this is often out of the journalists' hands.
- How do your family and friends feel about you sharing with the media, are there elements of your story which are part of their experience also, which they may not want in the public domain?
- People may reach out to you directly for support after seeing your story in the media.

## You choose

Sharing stories and experiences is powerful, they can help to build insight and reflection on our own journey, as well as understanding and connection with each other. They have the power to change attitudes, mindsets, and practices, as well as raise awareness and promote recovery and suicide prevention. Ultimately, we encourage you to feel confident and safe when sharing your experiences, in a way that is comfortable for you.

**Peer spaces** - You may find it beneficial to share your experiences in a peer space to begin with, as this is a supportive and confidential environment. The initial sharing of your experiences can feel like a weight off your shoulders and offer more clarity when deciding if you want to go public with your experiences.

**Lived experience engagement** - Within lived experience engagement opportunities you can share as much or as little of your experience as you like, the power is in your hands. Some people chose to focus more on their ideas on what needs to change, using the past to inform the future.

**Developing your recovery story** - This can be a good way to get started with reflecting on your life experiences. It offers flexibility and choice, as once you create your recovery story you can chose not to share it with anyone, and it can instead be a reflective exercise for your own benefit.

**Sharing with the media** - This option has its own benefits and drawbacks which you should take time to consider.



## Reflection space

Where would you feel most comfortable sharing your experiences?

Think about the above options (page 42) – what chimes most with your motivations for wanting to share your experience?

Where do you think you will personally benefit most from sharing?

# Opportunities to get involved

## Share your story or experiences

If you are interested in sharing your lived experience and/or or recovery story it is best to go through to process of developing this with an organisation who can act as a story sharing facilitator.

United to Prevent Suicide is a social movement of people from all across Scotland, who have a shared belief that each and every one of us has a role to play in preventing suicide. Your experiences can be shared through [stories](#) and engaging with others in the movement. To connect with the United to Prevent Suicide team please go to the [website](#) or send an [email](#)

Scottish Recovery Network have a suite of story sharing resources on their website which can [be accessed for free](#)

You can find examples of recovery stories on both the [United to Prevent Suicide](#) and [Scottish Recovery Network](#) websites.



## Creating Hope with Peer Support

Scottish Recovery Network are embarking on an exciting three-year project called [Creating Hope with Peer Support](#). Our work will focus on building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention groups and organisations to provide peer support for those contemplating suicide or who have been affected or bereaved by suicide.

The project will include a variety of training and learning opportunities, resources, and networking events. Sign up to the Scottish Recovery Network [newsletter](#) to hear about upcoming opportunities.

If you have an interest in local peer support groups in your area, a good place to start is by contacting your local [Third Sector Interface](#) (TSI) to find out more about what is available in your community.

## Contact details

If you need this resource in a different format, please contact Scottish Recovery Network on

- 0300 323 9956
- [ContactScotlandBLS](#)
- [info@scottishrecovery.net](mailto:info@scottishrecovery.net)
- [www.scottishrecovery.net](http://www.scottishrecovery.net)

## You can also join the conversation on social media

