

Telling Your Story Effectively

The following six steps will help you craft your story in a succinct and powerful way. Each step includes examples. Make sure you include each step, but put things in your own words.

1. Introduce yourself

- Share your full name and city/county/town. This helps your audience connect with you. *Example: my name is Sharon Johnson and I am from Anytown, Virginia.*
- Let your audience know how you are affected by mental illness. This gives a “real face” to mental illness and prepares your audience to empathize with your story. *Example: I am the mother of a son who lives with bipolar disorder.*
- Let your audience know why you are speaking or writing. Let your audience know what you want them to support (or oppose). *Example: I am here to share my son’s story and to ask for your support in preserving mental health services.*

2. What happened?

- What happened before you received the help you needed? Keep this very brief – think about the main highlights that you could share in 30 seconds. *Example: Our family was in a state of panic and chaos for years. Andy went in and out of the hospital. He tried dozens of medications, and was even arrested once for being a public nuisance.*

3. What helped?

- Describe what has helped you/your loved one. *Example: It took months to get him into stable, supportive housing where he could receive case management and psychosocial services.*

4. How are you different today?

- Share with is going right in your life, or how you are experiencing recovery. *Example: Today Andy attends a peer support group at the local community services board, and was recently placed in a part-time job through the Department of Rehabilitative Services which enabled him to socialize and earn money for himself. He is working hard on his recovery and makes us all proud.*

5. Talk about mental illness or mental health care and the hope of recovery.

- This is a transition from your personal story to a message for your audience. *Example: Andy’s challenge is more common than one might think: one in seventeen adults lives with a serious mental illness like bipolar disorder, major depression, or schizophrenia.*

6. Make your ask.

- Let your audience know how they can help. Say thank you. *Example: We need your help to protect mental health services and to preserve the hope of recovery. Thank you.*