

Gathering lived experiences

A guide for anyone supporting
people to share their experiences
of mental health and suicide



**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

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.

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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 anyone who supports people to share their lived experiences of mental health and suicide. This can be to inform your organisation's policies and the development/improvement of support services. It can also be because you are interested in developing peer support or wish to develop resources and campaigns. Organisations can range from the health and social care sector to the third sector and beyond.

Underpinning this work is creating the right environment for people to share their experiences, as well as for the individual gathering these experiences. Preparing the person sharing their experiences for what reactions may occur, what spaces they may wish to share in, and how to maintain wellbeing throughout are they key things to consider.

Approaches to gathering experiences need to be person-centred as a one-size fits all approach is unlikely to work for people who want to share their experiences. You need to be aware that people will likely be at different stages in their recovery journeys, through loss, and disenfranchised grief. It is the role of the person facilitating engagement and the participation of people with lived experience to ensure that the right scaffolding of support is in place before, during and after.



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 want to celebrate lived experience



Introduction

Lived experience is a valuable but often overlooked resource. The best way to find out about how we make things better for people affected by poor mental health or suicide, is to ask those people directly.

People are experts of their own experiences, and organisations should be taking steps to harness this valuable knowledge. However, we must ensure we do this in a way that is meaningful; both for the person sharing and the audience.

Value

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

Benefits

There are many benefits of sharing experiences. It can be incredibly rewarding for the person and can lead to opportunities for personal growth and development of skills. For organisations it is a way to develop and improve your practice to ensure you are meeting the needs of people who your organisation sets out to support.

Purpose

When deciding you want to gather and share lived experience, it is important to ensure your motivations are in the right place. Too often people with lived experience feel they are only asked to share as part of a tokenistic, tick-box exercise. Before you invite people to share, think about why you want them to share and how their information will be used. Is it going to be mutually beneficial, or only to benefit your organisation. Purpose is important, and it is vital you make sure there are value and benefits in place for the person who is sharing their experiences. This ensures all parties can benefit the most from sharing experiences, without any harmful impacts to their mental health.

Time Space 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 gathering experiences. Think about how you can provide the person sharing their experiences with Time, Space, and Compassion.



Reflection space

Think about your motivations and purpose. Why do you want to gather and share people's experiences? What does your organisation hope to gain from this? What do you want the person sharing to gain from this?

Part 2

Safety



Introduction

Sharing experiences of mental health and suicide can be a great way to raise awareness and show there is hope. It can play a key role in preventing suicide. 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 explore the different people who may wish to share their experiences with you and provide some understanding of why they might want to do this as well as the barriers. We want to help individuals feel empowered to tell their experience, and we want to help organisations to be better equipped to capture and manage these experiences safely.

Reasons for sharing experiences

Every individual will have their own unique reasons for wanting to share their experiences with others. For example, somebody might want to share their experience as a cathartic part of the process for healing and recovering; and someone else might want to do it to raise awareness that suicide is preventable, and that positive action can be undertaken to help others.

The decision to share their experiences needs to be carefully thought through, whilst being supported by the organisation responsible for gathering and sharing experiences with others.

Sharing experiences can:

- Be part of the person's recovery journey.
- Create hope for the person sharing and the audience.
- Let people know that suicide is preventable.
- Reduce stigma by normalising conversations by people from all walks of life.
- Help others to talk about mental health and suicide confidently.
- Encourage people to reach out for help.
- Put lived experience at the heart of mental health and suicide prevention.

Initial contact

When a person initially reaches out to share their experience, it may be that they are currently looking for help and may possibly be in crisis. They may have tried to get support from elsewhere, but for whatever reason they haven't been able to access it successfully.

For others this may be the first time they've spoken about this subject with anyone. These different possibilities need to be taken into consideration first, especially if someone is struggling with their mental health and/or is experiencing suicidal thoughts. We also need to be aware that people bereaved by suicide, can also be at an increased risk of developing suicidal thoughts themselves.

Secondly, if a person is interested in sharing their experiences publicly, for example in the media, on social media, or speaking at an event. Then you may wish to have an open conversation with them to explore why they want to share their story so publicly and outline the other places they can share their experiences whilst still having an impact (see Part 4).

Encourage the person to reflect on if they feel ready to share with the media, outlining all the potential positive and negative outcomes. The person's wellbeing is the main priority, and you need to consider this when planning content and deadlines, as ultimately the person may wish not to share publicly and that is okay. The person should always be in control of where and what they want to share, as facilitators you can only offer guidance and advice from others who have shared their experiences.

Best practise and media guidelines

People or organisations gathering experiences should be aware of the [Samaritans Media Guidelines](#) for reporting suicide and online resources, which reinforce industry codes of practice, supporting the highest standards of coverage of suicide. The [Guidelines for sharing experiences with suicide](#) is also a useful resource.

People who facilitate gathering and sharing experiences should be [trauma informed](#), preferably have undertaken some suicide prevention training, and responsive to the needs of the people they are working with.

Organisations should also consider putting support in place, so employees and volunteers have a safe place to talk about, digest, and reflect on, the experiences they gather. This could be formal support e.g., access to regular counselling support or more informal support e.g., buddy identified at work.



Your responsibilities when gathering experiences

Before

- Discuss with the person what, how, and when they want to share. Make sure you understand what the person needs you to put in place for them to feel safe when sharing.
- Make clear from the outset that emotional support is available, and people are clear what that support looks like, and how and when they can access that support. This should include what crisis support is available to people.
- Provide adequate levels of emotional support throughout the development of the content (before, during and after) – this is not an optional extra.
- Check that the individual has a support system in place e.g., has had a discussion with family members before publicly sharing their experience and check whether they have any other support e.g., GP, counsellor, etc.
- Set clear boundaries about how and when the individual sharing their experience can get in touch.

During

- Ensure the person sharing their experience knows that they are in control every step of the way and can withdraw from the process at any time.

- Explain the process for capturing, editing and approving the experiences, taking into account content that could be deemed triggering and/or breach other best practice e.g., Samaritans Media Guidelines.
- Get written consent to share their experience for a specified period of time, with consent reviewed at a given time, with the opportunity for consent to be renewed for a further period of time.
- Share the final version of the content with the individual prior to public promotion.
- Ensure appropriate signposting is included in any experience shared to help people who are reading or listening to the experience.

After

- Agree a feedback loop to help reduce any anxiety for the sharer once the experience has been shared.
- Gather ongoing feedback about the process of sharing experiences that can help improve the experience for others wishing to share their own experiences.
- Ensure that the details of the person sharing their experiences are stored in line with the organisation's privacy and data management policies.

Barriers to sharing experiences

It's important to be aware that certain barriers may exist prior to someone taking the first step to sharing their experiences and at the same time other barriers may emerge during the process of engagement. It's important that we explore potential barriers and challenges for individuals who may be willing to share their experiences.

Some examples of barriers are as follows:

- Not being fully aware of the expectations and potential impact their experiences could have on others.
- Not fully understanding the process, guidance and support available to help them.
- Not having approval from other people in their family.
- Fear of the consequences of being honest.
- Not being in the right emotional place to share experiences, but perhaps unable to acknowledge this.
- Not having the right emotional support in place.
- Stigma, both external and self-stigma*.

*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.

Boundaries

Boundaries are considered to be general guidelines that guide our behaviour in relationships with others. In the relationship of supporting someone to share their experiences, boundaries will be based upon the expectations of your job such as:

- Promoting trust
- Increasing safety
- Demonstrating respect
- Developing rapport
- Providing structure to the relationship

There are many ways in which these boundaries may be challenged, and you will need to find a balance between our own needs and the needs of the person you are working with.

Work boundaries may involve issues of:

- Power and control
- Professional distance
- Self-disclosure
- After-hours involvement
- Friendship versus friendly behaviour

Your organisation may have a Code of Ethics policy that encompasses the agreed-upon rules developed to address boundary concerns as well as any safety issues, and which you as an employee are expected to abide by. If your organisation doesn't have such a policy, it might be worthwhile suggesting that they consider developing a policy.

Be aware that you need to know the limits of your role and responsibilities, and please remember you're not there to provide, or offer, crisis support or clinical support.

In summary, boundaries help us to define what is okay and not okay in any relationship. There are professional boundaries that help to protect both you and the person who is sharing their experiences, either on a one-to-one basis with you or in a peer-to-peer setting.

Reactions

You have a responsibility to help prepare and support people for the reactions they may receive once they share their experiences.

Examples of immediate reactions:

- They may receive an applause, standing ovation if they are speaking at an event (both in-person and virtually) and people may have further questions for them.
- People may wish to give them hugs.
- People may post comments about them and their experiences on social media.
- People may get in touch with them seeking help and/or to share their own experiences.
- May spark positive or difficult conversations with family, friends and/or work colleagues.
- May lead to further discussions about mental health and suicide.
- People who have lost loved ones to suicide sometimes may find it hard to accept that suicide is preventable

Examples of longer-term reactions:

- You may need to remind them that experiences shared on websites, social media may be found in search engines years after they've been published, and even when deleted.
- You may need to remind them that someone from a peer group may meet them while they are with other people who don't know their circumstances.

Impact

Knowing that you have helped someone be heard and that their experiences may help one person can be very satisfying for you and empowering for them. Naturally, the person sharing their experiences, as well as your organisation and perhaps other stakeholders, will want to know the impact of sharing lived experiences. Results may include social media analytics, views, downloads etc. You will also be able to gather feedback from the person about what reactions they may have received directly.

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.



However, the true impact may never be known or quantifiable. But it is your job to assure the individual has the potential to make a real difference in many different ways and at the same time continue to secure the support of your organisation to give people with lived experience a voice e.g., sharing experiences is a key component of suicide prevention and mental health awareness training.



Reflection space

Now that we have reviewed how to gather and share experiences safely. Think practically about what your organisation can put in place to ensure the person feels safe when sharing their experiences?

Part 3

Wellbeing



Introduction

Embedding wellbeing practices into the process of gathering stories and experiences is essential. Organisations have a key role to play in supporting the sharers wellbeing.

There can be a lot of pressure on organisations to gather stories and experiences for the purposes of evaluation, service improvement and/or performance measurement. It is important to resist pressure to do this at speed, without paying attention to the factors above. One of the most critical responsibilities of the organisation is to make the time available for staff to work with potential sharers to ensure that the experience is as positive as possible. If this time is not available, then it is arguable that the gathering should be postponed.

Sharing experiences and stories can be a very hopeful experience, both for the sharer and the audience. For that to be the case, the experience will contain a hopeful thread. The 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. Preparatory work with the person sharing should include a conversation that establishes this understanding as a prelude to doing the work, as well as to assess together how you maintain wellbeing throughout this process.

This opportunity may stand in contrast to the experience of services that people may have encountered, perhaps where the time and space to have good conversations can be limited or non-existent. The primary responsibility is on the organisation to provide the time and space and compassion to the person sharing their experiences. There are also factors in how the sharer looks after their own wellbeing that can help.

Creating a safe space

There are many ways that supporting organisations can help to make sure that people are in the right place at the right time to share their experiences. Organisations involved in facilitating work with people around sharing experiences can provide guidance, support and resources around helping the individual to notice when their mental health and wellbeing is going well or when it is poor.

Making people aware of things that they can do as an individual and what supporting organisations can offer will help to ensure that a safe and compassionate space is always present when developing and sharing experiences.

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 stories can also become emotionally overwhelming, and it is important for individuals to be able to recognise that they 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.

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 and organisations 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 we do to help us live well and improve both our physical and mental health. When it comes to our mental health, self-care can help us manage stress, lower our risk of illness, and increase our 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 involves **individuals looking after their own health using the knowledge, information and support available to them.** It involves making decisions that enables individuals to look after their own health and wellbeing, in partnership with organisations including health and social care professionals as and when needed.

The following key principles can help in ensuring that wellbeing is not compromised when gathering and sharing experiences:

- Self-care isn't an optional extra – it needs to be embedded from start to finish in any approach to working with people sharing their experiences.
 - Wellbeing and self-care should be promoted before, during, and after sharing experiences. Facilitators/organisations should ensure there are plenty of opportunities to start conversations about wellbeing and/or check-in with peers or facilitators before, during and after any activities in individual or group settings. Asking

someone how they feel enables them to check in on themselves, further promoting good self-care.

- Raise awareness and understanding around wellbeing techniques – and involve and encourage those sharing their experiences to consider the techniques that help them to reduce stress, anxiety and to stay well.
- Provide easy access to self-help/self-management resources.
- Encourage the sharer to have a discussion with family members/friends before publicly sharing their story.
 - This can help with continued support if required after sharing. It can also be important to encourage the person to think about any family member who might feature in the story, to avoid information being inadvertently shared without prior consultation, even if they are not named. It might also be worth encouraging them to think about whether they have any other support they might want to tap into e.g., GP, counsellor, etc.



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 encourage the person who is sharing their experiences to talk to at least one person they trust about the impact this is having on them. It is also very important that there is a clear line of connection to someone in the support organisation so that they know who to turn to if they have any doubts about the process, about the impact it is having on them and about being able to stay in control of the situation.

Offering support and reassurance

It is important to be aware that the sharer might feel anxious about the impact of their experiences on the other(s) who they mention. They may need considerable reassurance about confidentiality being maintained. They may also feel that they are breaching their own sense of loyalty to the people who feature in their experiences. It is important to acknowledge that this might be a concern and invite them to talk about this if they are worried about it. This can avoid negative impacts on wellbeing.

Agreeing boundaries

Boundaries can support wellbeing; however, we need to establish boundaries in a compassionate way. Having a clear understanding of your role as the facilitator/organisation and the role of the person sharing their experiences 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. Having a conversation with the people sharing their experiences at the outset about the emotional nature of the work is important for all concerned to be aware of potential boundaries issues.

Setting an expectation that it may be necessary for some time out from sharing is helpful. Feedback when sharers/facilitators feel boundaries are becoming blurred should be encouraged. It is vital to ensure that all parties involved in the relationship know and understand how boundaries form a positive part of the support offered to individuals and groups.

Examples of boundaries include:

Purpose, process and timeline

You should have a conversation at the outset which clarifies the purpose and process of sharing experiences. This might also include a discussion about duration of the contact you are likely to have with sharers, 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.

Sharing what is comfortable / opting out

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

Provide support and crisis contact information

Facilitating organisations should adopt an “open door” policy and be available to sharers to discuss any additional support requirements or raise any concerns. This support should be highlighted at every meeting (before, during and after).

Emphasising that facilitators will aim to do everything in their power to support people sharing their experiences will go a long way to offering reassurance to those involved.

Remember - It is not the role of those sharing their experiences to provide crisis support to others in a group. Organisations/facilitators should make support services and crisis contact information available to everyone and actively encourage people to access them when needed.



Promoting wellbeing for Facilitators and individuals

Facilitators need to also make time for self-care and wellbeing. Hearing distressing stories from others can trigger emotional reactions for the facilitator and can potentially tap into traumatic experiences they have had in the past.

In the Preparing to share your experiences guide for individuals, there is an activity on 'My wellbeing'. If the person feels comfortable in sharing this with you, it may be useful to have a discussion around what the person sharing their experiences would like to have in place to support their wellbeing. You can also use these tools to check-in with your own wellbeing.

You can reflect on what support you need as a facilitator and where you can signpost others for further support.

[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.

Introduction

Traditionally when we think about people sharing their experiences, we think of ‘life stories’, where people publicly share details of their life experiences. Whilst this works for many people, there are different spaces and places to share experiences. As a facilitator your role is not to decide where someone shares their experiences, but instead it is to inform them of all of their options while enabling the person to feel empowered to make their own decisions on where to share. To start, have an open discussion with the person to reflect on what places feel safe to them and the potential outcomes of sharing their 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 life struggles 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 ultimately 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.

Peer support resources

As an organisation, you may already host peer support groups or be interested in facilitating one. You may find the following resources useful:

- [Let's do Peer2Peer](#)
- [Let's Develop Peer Roles](#)
- [Let's do Peer Group Facilitation](#)

Alternatively, you can contact your [local Third Sector Interface](#) (TSI) to find out about peer support opportunities in your local area, then appropriately signpost people to this if they are interested in sharing their experiences in a peer support space.

Lived experience engagement opportunities

When people use their experiences of life and their 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.

Recovery Conversation Café toolkit

As an organisation, you may already or want to support people to get involved in your project development, creating new resources and publications, or work with public sector organisations to shape mental health/suicide prevention policies and campaigns.

To help you do this, have a look at the Scottish Recovery Network [Recovery Conversation Café](#) toolkit which can support you to engage with people with lived experience as active responders rather than passive participants.

Sharing recovery stories

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

downs. The format in which people may share their story is a personal decision, however as a facilitator you should be clear from the start of your organisation's capabilities. Facilitators should encourage people to share their experience(s) 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.

It is useful to discuss with the sharer how they want to tell their recovery story and the potential outcomes and responses. Some 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 examples of different types of stories:

- **Personal recovery story** – this type of story would have their 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 their name or identity attached. They could 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.

If your organisation is interested in supporting people to develop their recovery story there is a suite of resources on Scottish Recovery Network's [website](#) to help you do so. You can also find examples of recovery stories on both the [Scottish Recovery Network](#) and [United to Prevent Suicide](#) websites.

Sharing with the media

Sharing their experiences with the media has its own benefits and drawbacks which facilitators should discuss with the sharer. 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. As a facilitator you have a responsibility to inform the sharer of the potential outcomes of sharing with the media, so they have all the information.

- Once a 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.
- The sharer 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 will family and friends feel, are there elements of the story which are part of their experience also, which they may not want in the public domain?
- People may reach out to the person sharing their experiences directly for support after seeing their story in the media.



Reflection space

Working with the person who wants to share their experiences, discuss the potential positives and drawbacks of each of the following three methods. Reflect on where they would feel most comfortable sharing.

Remind them that they can share in as many places as they wish, but if it is their first time, they may want to start with one place and reflect on this experience afterwards.

- 1. Peer spaces**
- 2. Lived experience engagement opportunities**
- 3. Sharing a recovery story**

What next?

Hopefully you should now feel prepared to start supporting people to share their experiences. You may find it useful to talk through the Preparing to share your experiences guide with the person sharing to allow them space to discuss their reflections and wishes.

Creating Hope with Peer Support

[This three-year project](#) led by Scottish Recovery Network 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. It will include a variety of training and learning opportunities, resources, and networking events. [Sign up](#) to hear about upcoming opportunities.

United to Prevent Suicide

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. 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](#)

Local suicide prevention activity

Your local area is likely to have a multi-agency suicide prevention steering group and action plan and there may be opportunities to link into this. If you would like to be connected with the local suicide prevention coordinator in your area, send an [email](#)

Additional resources

- [Governance and Collaboration](#) – COSLA

Provides guidance on including lived experience in the development of local suicide prevention action plans.

- [Involving people with lived experience: FAQ](#) – National Suicide Prevention Alliance

Provides guidance for professionals and organisations seeking to involve people with lived experience in suicide prevention and suicide bereavement support activities.

- [Live Life](#) – World Health Organisation

Contains a summary on page 87 (Box 50) of the key elements of the approach in Scotland to meaningful participation of people with lived experience of suicide.

- [Making co-production work](#) – VOX Scotland

Support and guidance for mental health professionals and service providers to implement co-productive practice.

- [Participation Practice](#) – COSLA

Provides guidance for developing effective and meaningful participation approaches and practices involving young people (aged 16-25) and highlights key considerations when involving young people.

Get in touch

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

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

You can also join the conversation social media using

