

Benefits of Telling your Story

“Whatever the limits and travails we face, we want to retain the autonomy – the freedom – to be the authors of our lives. This is the very marrow of being human.”

(Atul Gawande *Being Mortal* p.140)

1. Telling (or writing) a story about one’s life experience has been shown to have beneficial effects on one’s life and is associated with improved physical and mental health wellbeing.
2. Stories can be very healing and many people benefit from getting the opportunity to pass on their wisdom to others.
3. For many people telling their story is what helps them cope with their challenges in more positive ways.
4. Stories help explain the world, making sense of it.
5. Personal stories can inspire and provide hope.
6. Stories help with self-development and reconnecting.
7. People can learn to express themselves and learn how to think about what has happened in your life in a way that makes sense.
8. Telling a story can provide the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of one’s experience and oneself.

Sharing Your Story: being ready

You may be thinking about sharing your experiences with others, but don't know if it's the right thing for you or the right time. This section will help you decide. You may also wish to discuss the idea of sharing your experience with your counsellor or other support person.

Signs that you are ready

- **You are in recovery.** You have moved beyond, for example, the impact of substance use in your life and are focused on developing new purpose, meaning and a plan to stay well.
- **You are passionate.** You want to share your message so others can avoid the things that caused you problems.
- **You can articulate your story.** You feel ready to talk about your experiences.
- **You are reflective.** You habitually ask yourself how you're feeling. You are in a good place emotionally.
- **You take the initiative.** You are ready to approach your support worker or an event planner and indicate you want to speak.
- **You are confident about yourself.** You feel comfortable preparing and sharing your story. You know that it's natural to be a bit nervous.
- **You want to heal.** And you want to move on.
- **You are resilient.** You are able to "bounce back" from difficulties or challenges.
- **You are motivated.** You have heard others speak and you want to do the same thing.
- **You stay connected.** Even though you've been stable or in recovery for a while, you keep in touch with those who support you.
- You can show up on time for a speaking event.

Signs that you are not ready

- **You are still using prescription opioid medication** in a way that does not follow a treatment plan prescribed by a doctor.

- **You have a lot of anger.** You feel angry about what you've gone through, about the system or about yourself. Maybe you blame others for what happened to you.
- **You feel extreme or negative emotions.** You are disturbed by the topic you plan to share.
- **You are easily triggered** into cravings or emotional reactions.
- **You have not been stable or in recovery for long.** You do not feel grounded or have a sense of stability.

However, if you are **functioning well, have a stable life, are comfortable to where you are in your recovery** and are motivated to speak publicly about your experiences, you might choose to seek out speaking engagements on your own. Having family and friends to support you and to run ideas past may be all that you need.

Do you have support?

If you make presentations about your experiences, you will find it best to have one or more people supporting you along the way. This may include professional support workers, peers, family members and friends who:

- will help you look at your life holistically to determine how safe you feel to stand up and talk about your experiences (for example, how do you feel talking about your substance use?). Do you feel you can talk about your experiences without getting too emotional or feeling out of control?
- will guide and advise you as you develop your story;
- can help you decide how much of your story to disclose;
- can help you recognize your triggers and how to manage them;
- will offer encouragement;
- are likely to tell you when opportunities arise.