

# Blue Voices fact sheet: How to share your lived experience safely

Sharing your mental health experiences can inspire, educate and inform improvements to our programs, services, and strategies. But it can sometimes be a difficult topic to talk about.

When sharing your lived / living experience, it's important to be mindful of how you choose to speak about your mental health. We've pulled together a few tips to help minimise the impact of sharing your experiences on yourself and on others.

## Before sharing your lived experience

- **Our mental health is not static and can change over time – one day you might feel fine, the next not so great.** Make sure you are in a good place with your recovery by checking in regularly with yourself and asking: ***“Is this the right time for me to share my experiences?”***
- **If you decide it's not the right time to share your lived experience, that's perfectly okay** – being transparent about your feelings reflects strength and self-awareness. If you choose not to participate, it won't prevent you from joining future activities.
- Give yourself enough time to heal and gain perspective after experiencing a tough time. **We recommend waiting 6 – 12 months before sharing your experiences in an activity**, but this will vary person to person.
- Gain confidence by **practising sharing in front of friends or family**. If something felt triggering or made you feel vulnerable, consider how you might re-frame how or what you share in future.
- Consider the **key points and messages that you want to convey**. Sharing too many details might take away from your key messages.
- We will do a **wellbeing check in** with you prior to a Blue Voices activity to understand your current mental health state and to identify any support you may need to participate. This is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions so you feel prepared and confident to take part!





## While sharing your lived experience

- Your lived experiences are personal to you and **you're in control of how and what you choose to share**. This may adapt over time or change depending on who is in the room. You can always say ***"I am not comfortable talking about that"*** or a simple statement: ***"due to traumatic events that I witnessed/that occurred..."*** is enough to give context without causing unnecessary trauma.
- Reflecting on our experiences can bring about strong feelings and emotions. Hearing about other people's experiences can also sometimes bring up unexpected trauma responses. **Get to know your personal triggers and signs of distress.**
- **Create a plan so you know what to do if you start feeling distressed.** This could include taking a break, stepping back from participating, using calming exercises or knowing what supports to reach out to.
- **Your participation is voluntary**, you are welcome to take breaks when you need to or stop participating at any time.
- **Consider who else is in the room.** Everyone, including our researchers, have their own unique lived experience and triggers. When talking about topics such as suicide, **avoid going into too much detail** such as talking about the number of attempts or methods.
- **Use inclusive, respectful and neutral language** to avoid stigmatising people with a mental health condition or reinforcing negative stereotypes. **Mindframe has some excellent resources** with language tips around communicating about mental health concerns.
- **Mental health perceptions vary across individuals and cultures.** During group activities, be respectful and supportive of these differences to foster a judgment-free, safe environment for sharing.
- Unless specified, **your comments will be de-identified to protect your privacy.** You can also ask for certain statements to not be included in our research notes.
- If you are sharing an experience that includes someone else, make sure you've checked with them that they feel comfortable with you talking about them. Also remove identifiable information such as their name and location.


## After sharing your lived experience

- **Look after yourself and practice self-care.** Everyone will respond to sharing their experiences differently, but it's important to unwind and look after yourself. Our [Wellbeing Action Tool](#) can help you identify and create your own wellbeing plan.
- **Know who's in your support network.** Make sure you know who to connect with when you need support. This could be a friend / family member, a counsellor / psychologist or a peer support forum.
- After participating in an activity, you'll receive a thank you email from the Blue Voices team. **If you need additional support**, please let us know and we can connect you.

You can always contact the Blue Voices team on [bluevoices@beyondblue.org.au](mailto:bluevoices@beyondblue.org.au).

### If you do find yourself feeling distressed after sharing your experiences, we recommend reaching out to the following free supports:

- Chat to a [Beyond Blue](#) counsellor via [live chat](#) or phone on 1300 22 4636
- Call [Lifeline](#) on 131114
- Connect with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter at [13YARN](#) (13 92 76)
- Reach out to [Switchboard](#) for peer-driven support services for LGBTIQ+ people, and their allies, friends and families
- Always call 000 in case of emergency



Remember, you are an expert in your own lived experience and it takes courage and bravery to share this with others!