



PERSONAL STORY INTERVIEW TIPS

Almost anyone who is affected by mental illness has felt stigma at some point. Sharing personal stories of mental health recovery as a family member or peer is one of the most powerful ways to start a conversation and give others hope. When gathering stories for publication, keep these interview tips in mind.

Interviewees

Your subjects are relaying information that is highly personal. Talk about levels of comfort with having their full name and title, and the company's name (if applicable) linked to the piece. You might choose to use first names only. For each person, decide up front whether the story will be shared internally and/or externally, and then sign an agreement that details these decisions. Your legal group might request they sign a standard interview release form.

Some mental health journeys are complex and change over time. That can be an overwhelming task to record. Let the interviewee decide key points to disclose. A list of questions can help start the conversation about their lived experience, but also let the dialogue develop organically.

Questions to Consider

- What is your own lived experience with mental illness?
- What challenges have you met on your or your loved one's path to recovery?
- How has that experience changed your perception of mental illness?
- Can you share a time when a person or group of people unintentionally upset you, perhaps due to their own lack of awareness of mental health truths?
- Why is it so important to have an open dialogue about mental illness?
- We get treatment for physical health problems such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Why do you think getting help for mental illness is so hard for so many?
- Why do you think only about one-quarter of those living with mental illness in the U.S. seek the help they need?
- Do you think society is changing the way it views mental illness? Have we made any progress?

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- What needs to happen to see that shift?
 - How does talking about mental illness positively change the workplace or community?
 - Why is it so important to help reeducate others about the misconceptions of mental illness?
 - What does mental health stigma mean to you?
 - What does that wristband on your wrist represent to you?
 - Why have you chosen to share your story?

Ways to Share Personal Stories

- **Conduct the interview in Q&A format, and allow the full questions and answers to appear.** The length can be longer in this format. Share a personal photo if allowed.
- **If applicable, write an article for the organization's newsletter or website.** For print stories, keep the count at 1,000 words or less and at an 8th-grade reading level or lower for health literacy. Share a personal photo if allowed.
- **Plan a video shoot for the interviewee,** and capture a 3-minute or less video about mental health recovery and perceptions of stigma.
- **Encourage people you know to wear the wristbands** and share personal stories whenever and wherever they can.