

Guide for lived experience speakers: preparing for an interview or speech

How do speakers decide whether or not to do an interview?

Many people feel they should do an interview if they are asked. Before a speaker agrees, they might want to ask themselves some questions to see if they are prepared for the experience.

Questions to consider:

- What are you prepared to share about yourself and your story and what would you like to remain private?
- If you are a carer you are not only telling your own story, but also that of the person you care for, are they comfortable with this?
- Do you want your photograph and name to appear in the newspaper or online, or your face to be shown on television?
- How would your neighbour, employer, or hairdresser react to you if they read or heard you in the media? If the answer is not a positive one, you may need to consider whether being interviewed by the media is the right thing for you now.
- Do you work for a service that places restrictions on your ability to speak with the media?

How does the speaker decide what part of the story to tell?

When asked to do an interview or speak publicly, you should carefully consider which parts of your personal experience with mental illness or caring for someone with mental illness match the type of media you will be working with, the theme of the journalist's story, or the type of audience that you will be speaking to.

Whether you are preparing for an interview or a public speech, one way to become clearer about which parts of your story to tell is to follow these steps:

STEP 1: Write out your story in full.

STEP 2: Go back and take out any information that you would not want everyone you have ever met, or will ever meet, to know about you.

STEP 3: Take out any references to self-harm, suicide, treatments, medication or advice.

STEP 4: Highlight the parts of your story that support recovery, hope and the potential to reduce stigma.

How do speakers decide on 'key messages' for their interview or speech?

When approaching a media interview, your key messages will be your main point of discussion, no matter what questions you are asked by the reporter.

To support your key message you should think about a talking point from your personal experience of mental illness or caring for someone with mental illness.

For example:

Key message = to highlight the importance of seeking help early.

Talking point = personal experience of seeking support early.

Key messages should be:

- Short - who you are and what you want to talk about, for example:
"I'm XXX and I have experienced depression and I want to talk about how others can find support too".
- Memorable - use your personal experience to highlight the key message, for example:
"I felt afraid to talk about how I was feeling, fearing stigma in my community. But I talked to someone and they supported me in searching for and finding a service".
- Include help seeking information useful to your audience.

How will you look after yourself after the interview?

Sharing your story may bring up unexpected emotions, and because of this it is important that you have a self-care plan in place for after the interview. Acts of self-care are intentional activities you engage in to look after yourself or make you feel good. This may look different for everyone, and vary depending on the situation.

Media Interviews

This section has information on preparing for an interview, doing an interview, and what happens after an interview.

Preparation:

Once speakers are ready to work with the media, they will need to prepare. Preparation boosts confidence and the ability to focus on what should be communicated.

- Ask questions: In particular, what topics does the journalist want to talk about and why? This helps to decide what key messages you choose.
- Develop three key messages to communicate during the interview.
- Select the parts of your personal story that best match the theme of the story.
- Think about the words you want to use and remember the *Mindframe* recommendations for appropriate language.
- Think about the type of media -do the media want short 'news grabs' or longer interviews?
- Practice responses at least 2-3 times and avoid 'urns' and 'ahs'.
- Have in mind a few key facts or examples which are relevant to your story.
- Let your family and friends know that you are doing the interview.

It is best practice in an interview or public speaking event if you:

- Are able to manage your feelings and aren't likely to become angry or upset.
- Have enough time to prepare.
- Are currently well, and believe that becoming involved will not cause you any difficulty.
- Have decided what you will and will not share about yourself and your story.
- Have good support.
- Feel confident about talking to the media about the topic.
- Feel your right to privacy will be respected.
- Are comfortable about the effect your involvement may have on your family or community.

During the interview:

Regardless of whether the interview is for radio, television or print media there are some things that apply to all interviews:

- Speak in short, clear sentences containing the key messages
- Repeat the key messages

- Pause before answering each question, and then respond
- Use plain and straightforward language that the audience can relate to
- Use your words rather than ones the journalist uses: this helps to stay focused on the key messages
- Do not just answer 'yes' or 'no'. Answer in sentences that can be quoted
- Avoid over-talking. You do not need to keep the conversation going. Simply answer the question asked and wait for the next one
- Stay calm at all times, take 2 to 3 breaths and speak slowly
- Keep messages positive - remember to focus on recovery
- Be respectful and polite
- Smile! Even on radio or on the telephone, it reflects in your voice
- Nothing is 'off the record'. Be prepared for anything to be included in the final story.

Tips for handling tricky questions:

- ✓ Ask the interviewer to explain any questions you do not understand
- ✓ Instead of saying 'no comment', say you are unable to answer their question and tell them why - e.g. "I am not the best person to talk about that"
- ✓ Make general reference to the question and then refer back to one of your key messages
- ✓ Stay calm and polite, but do not answer questions you are not comfortable with.

After the interview:

Take time to think about how the interview went and what was good or uncomfortable about the experience.

- Make some notes about what you would do the same or differently next time you are interviewed.
- Create an opportunity to debrief about the interview.
- Be aware that there are no guarantees in the media. The story may be much shorter than first planned or than expected despite the length of the interview. This may happen for a number of reasons - it has nothing to do with what you have done or not done.

Tips for Public Speaking

The key is to prepare key messages and for people with direct experience to be clear about which parts of their story they want to talk about and which parts they want to keep private.

Preparation:

- Be sure you have the facts about your audience size, contact person's name, location etc.
- Choose the parts of your story that best match the type of audience you are presenting to.
- Practice: read your speech aloud until it sounds like you are talking not reading.
- Time your presentation to fit the timetable of the group you will be speaking to.
- On the day, arrive early at the venue to allow time to set up equipment if required.

Notes:

- Write your notes in large writing for easy reading.
- Leave a wide margin for notes to yourself.
- Leave pages unstapled for easier handling.
- Highlight and mark your script to guide your speech.
- Check the lighting of the podium to be sure you can read.

When speaking:

- Check to be sure you are situated correctly in the room with the projector, screen, microphone and audience.
- Take a deep breath and pause before beginning.
- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Make eye contact with the audience from time to time. If you are nervous, look just below or just above the eyes.
- Stay within the presentation time provided by the organiser.

When you are answering questions:

- Remain friendly, calm and confident.
- Answer questions briefly and as clearly as possible.
- Remember that you do not always have to know everything. You can say *“I will have to check that out for you”* or *“I don't think I am the best person to answer that question”*.
- Avoid allowing one person to dominate the questions by moving on: *“Thank you for your interest. I'll be glad to talk to you about your concerns after the meeting. Right now let's see if anyone else has questions for the group”*.

When you are finished with your presentation:

- Thank the audience for their attention.
- Remain long enough to give individuals an opportunity to talk with you.
- If appropriate see to it that arrangements are made for distributing information and/or resources.

After the event:

- Think about how the presentation went and note things that worked well and things you might do differently next time -you learn something every time you do a presentation.
- Create an opportunity to talk about how you felt and things you may have been comfortable or uncomfortable with. This will help when planning the next public speaking opportunity.