

Storytelling

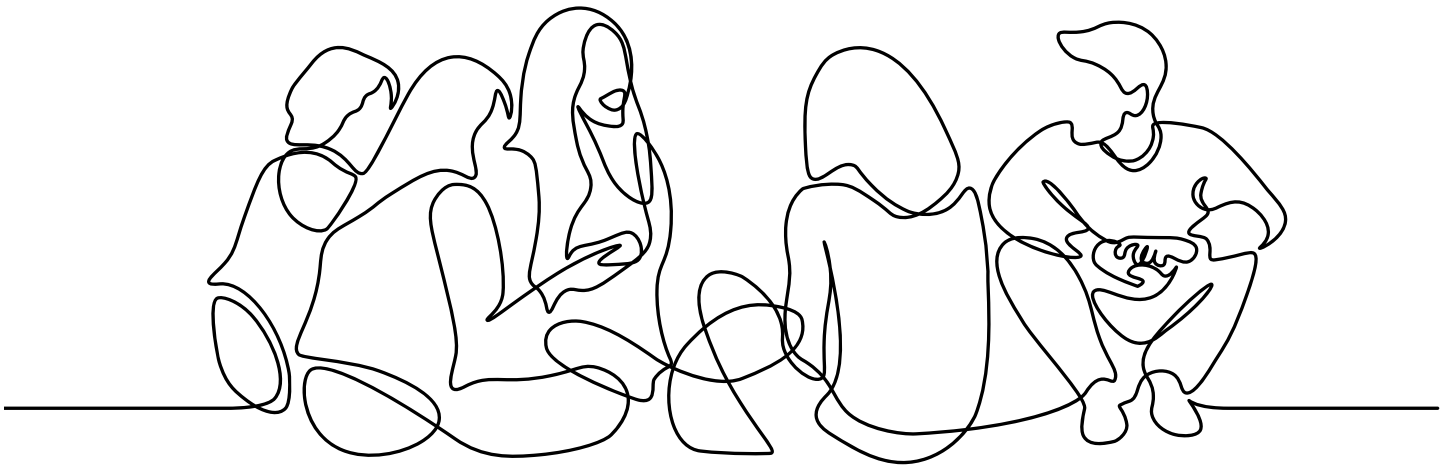
Suicide Prevention Checklist for Ideation and Attempt Survivors

316

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Healing, hope and help are happening every day. For every one person that dies by suicide, 316 people seriously consider suicide but do not kill themselves. These stories of hope and recovery have the power to help others and dispel stigma and myths about suicide. By sharing a wide variety of mental health experiences and the myriad ways in which we cope with crisis, we can help others find hope and meaning, and recognize ourselves in each other's stories.

The decision to share one's lived experience with suicide may feel scary – especially the first time you share it. While the decision to share should not be taken lightly, your experiences do not need to fit into a perfect set of steps or pathway in order to be meaningful. If you are considering sharing your story, we recommend that you use this storytelling checklist to help determine how to share your story safely and effectively – for yourself and others.



This checklist incorporates recommendations from Vibrant Emotional Health (988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Suicide Awareness Voices in Education, and Activating Hope.

Before you tell your story

Decide if you are ready to speak. Ask yourself if you are ready to speak. If you don't want to tell your story, you don't have to. Give yourself time to heal and gain perspective about your experiences. Reflect on the difference between healing yourself and helping others. Consider consulting a mental health professional that can help you figure out if you are ready

Decide how to share your story. Sharing your story does not have to take a certain form or shape. Think about your goals. What do you want to promote or achieve by sharing your experience? Who are you sharing this for? Weigh the potential benefits and risks for yourself and others. Identifying your values, goals, and needs can help you determine the audiences you feel most comfortable addressing, whether that audience is a group of people in certain situations, the general public, or somewhere in between.

Identify what you want to share. Decide what aspects of your story you may want to avoid or be cautious about discussing, and what you feel comfortable sharing. This may be influenced by your audience. Research in the suicide prevention field recommends avoiding sharing graphic details of self-harm and suicide. The field also recommends identifying and sharing any resources, actions, and people that helped you through crisis – whatever helped you may be a support to others too when they hear your story.

Prepare to tell your story safely and effectively. This could take the form of consulting available [guidelines for safe messaging](#) and suicide prevention, learning about suicide prevention resources in your area, contacting a suicide prevention organization to collaborate, or taking a suicide prevention training or mental health first aid course. Glamorizing suicide, implying that suicide is inevitable, or perpetuating myths about suicide can be harmful in stories shared with others. Focus on the hope and healing you have been able to find through the pain you've experienced (or continue to experience) to help keep others safe.

When you tell your story

Introduce yourself. Help listeners get to know you by sharing a little bit about yourself. Be mindful about sharing identifying information if you are not comfortable doing so.

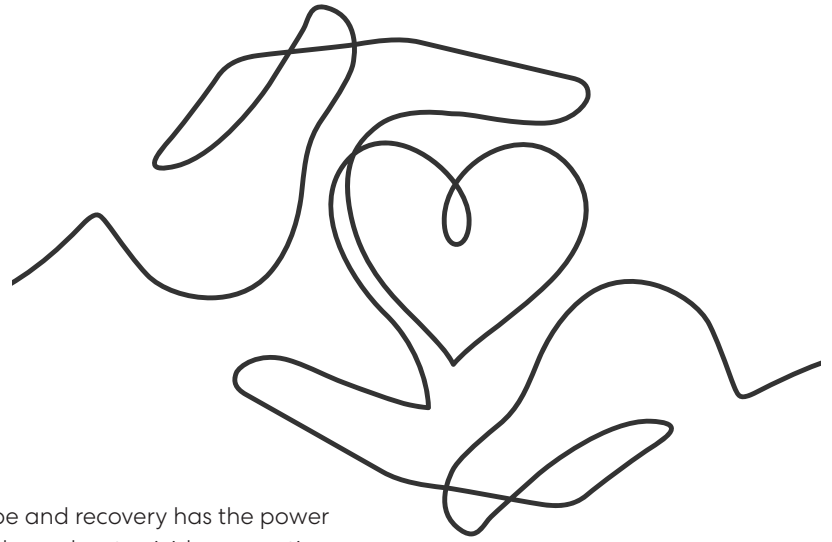
Share your experiences. What led you to thoughts of suicide? Were there any warning signs or triggers for periods of crisis that you can see now looking back? Think about the most important thing you'd like your listener to know. There is no need to minimize what you went through but keeping this section brief helps to keep the focus on ways to move through a crisis (below). Avoid sharing graphic details of self-harm or methods of suicide (for more information on why, please see the 988 information on the *Papageno and Werther Effect*).

Share what helped you. Describe how you found help and hope, or what could have helped you. This step is important to helping others through your story, as it illustrates the value of finding coping skills that worked for you, connecting to support, and it provides resources or actions others can take.

Share your current experience. How are you different today? What has helped you make the decision to stay alive and keep working to make a life worth living for yourself? How do you cope with any ongoing struggles? Share what is going well in your life, as well as any ongoing supports you have in place. Focus on sharing hope for others.

Share resources. Encourage people to call a local crisis hotline (such as the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) for those in the U.S.) or reach out to other mental health services and resources if they are in crisis. Share the [#BeThe1To](#) steps that others can take to support people in their lives that may be struggling. Provide ways that people can participate in suicide prevention, such as supporting their local crisis center. If you are speaking to a journalist, share the [Reporting on Suicide guidelines](#).

After you tell your story



Be ready for others to reach out to you. Your story of hope and recovery has the power to affect and help people in crisis, as well as educate others about suicide prevention and mental health. People may reach out to you with questions or to share their own mental health stories with you. This may be difficult if you are not used to discussing your lived experience with others. Identify what you feel ready to discuss with others, what your limits are, and how you want to communicate your boundaries to others.

Be armed with resources. Have a variety of resources on hand to share with people that may be experiencing a crisis, are concerned about others, or seek advice on a mental health matter. Encourage them to reach out to these resources and services, such as the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), [The Trevor Project](#), the [SAMHSA Resource Locator](#), and other local supports. You might consider attending a gatekeeper training like [safeTALK](#), [ASIST](#), [QPR](#), or [LivingWorks START](#) so that you are more comfortable when approached by someone who is experiencing thoughts of suicide.

Utilize your personal support system. After sharing your story, it may help to talk out your feelings, the stories you've heard, and any emotions you may have experienced with people that care about you and understand the nature and impact of your story and your work. Your support system can include a mental health professional, friends, family members, someone from your faith community, or colleagues.

Rest up. Take a break from talking about mental health and suicide prevention. Schedule down time or an unrelated activity in order to help maintain balance in your own life.

Connect with other survivors. It may be valuable to reach out to other survivors for understanding. Organizations like [United Survivors](#), the [American Association of Suicidology Lived Experience Division](#), or [Live Through This](#), can connect you with others who have lived experience with suicide. Some communities might have a suicide attempt survivors support group.

Regardless of whether or not you choose to share your personal story, know that you are a member of a community of survivors that spans across the country and the world. Stories like yours help give hope to others. By sharing our experiences, we all can change the conversation about suicide from one of tragedy to one of hope and healing.