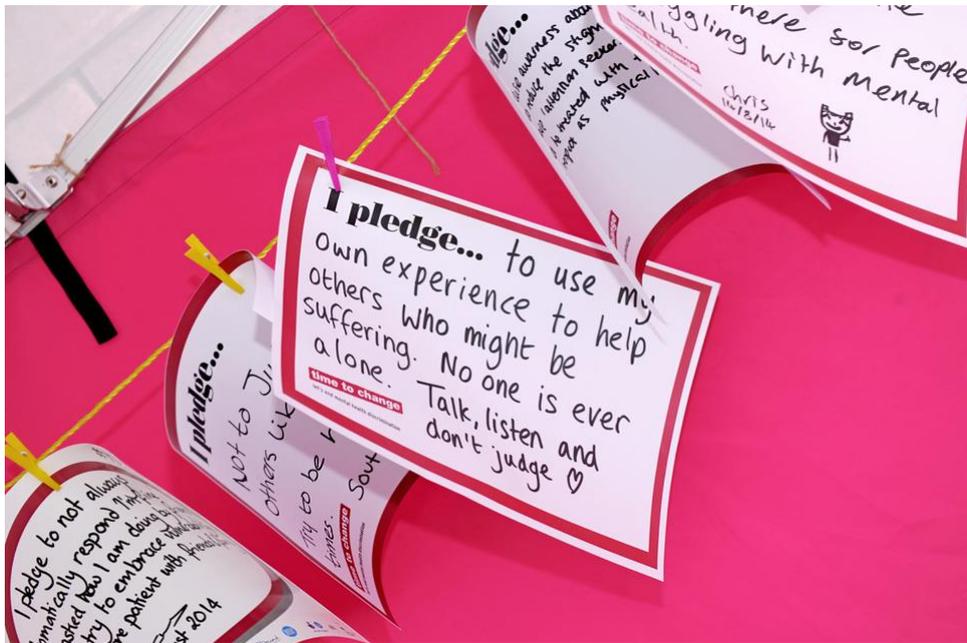


Speaking Up, Speaking Out

Sharing your personal story

"Stories are really important. Stories get people to understand the real impact and see things from a different perspective. Stories give people courage to seek help and speak up. Stories create an environment for change."

Adam Spreadbury, Bank of England.



Everybody has a story to tell. Sharing your own experience of stress, anxiety, low mood or other mental health problems can be a powerful weapon in smashing stereotypes. This tool is designed to help you think about how to go about doing so in a safe and effective way.

Benefits of sharing your story

Sharing your story can:

- Demonstrate that people can continue to work and manage anxiety, depression or other mental health problems effectively
- Encourage others to speak openly about their experience with mental health problems. You may be surprised by how many of your colleagues have also experienced a mental health problem at some point in their life, or supported a loved one
- Help others experiencing a mental health problem to take action
- Encourage your employer to make workplace mental health a priority

Remember: if you have your own personal experience of mental health problems there is absolutely no requirement to share your story as an Employee Champion. We recognise this is a big and very personal decision. Don't force yourself out of your comfort zone just because you think you should. For more information, read the [to disclose or not to disclose](#) page of our website.

Five Questions to ask yourself before telling your story

1. **Why are you telling this story?** What do you hope to accomplish? Will your story inspire a colleague? Or maybe give a compelling reason for implementing a specific policy recommendation within your organisation?
2. **What do you feel comfortable sharing?** Think carefully and decide what personal information you feel comfortable sharing with your colleagues about your own mental health experiences, and whether it is helpful to disclose this information in certain situations. To help you with this, try our [Stream of Consciousness Exercise](#) included in this news-letter.
3. **What more could your workplace do to support mental problems?** Based on your experience, how do you think positive change around mental health can be achieved within your organisation? What have you seen done well and what needs improvement?
4. **Who needs to hear your story?** Who do you think needs to be involved in making change within your workplace? Will your story reach them? If not, how can you make it reach them?
5. **How can others help?** In your experience, did someone help you in a memorable way? Can their actions be copied, or improved upon, to help create cultural change within your organisation? It could be worth highlighting this in your own story.

time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Employee

Champions

"I have never opened up the conversation without getting a response. There are different responses, some are tough, but you always get an opportunity to make a difference somewhere, whether by giving someone the opportunity to open up or by prompting someone to rethink their assumptions."

Martin Coyd OBE, Head of Environment, Health & Safety for Europe, Lend Lease Europe

Twelve steps for Speaking up successfully

Be prepared: Think about the different reactions, positive and negative, that the person might have so you're prepared. The person will be thinking about their perception of mental illness, you as a person and how the two fit together.

Choose a good time: Choose a time and place when you feel comfortable and ready to talk.

Be ready for lots of questions...or none: The person you are talking might have lots of questions or need further formation to help them understand. Don't worry about this, you're the expert on your own experience and feelings. However, they might feel uncomfortable and try to move the conversation on - if this happens it's still helpful that the first step has been taken.

An initial reaction might not last: The person might initially react in a way that's not helpful - maybe changing the subject, using clichés rather than listening. But give them time.

Have some information ready: Sometimes people find it easier to find out more in their own time - why not have some of our Time to Change materials to hand them?

Keep it light: We know that sometimes people are afraid to talk about mental health because they feel they don't know what to say or how to help. So keeping the conversation light will help make you both feel relaxed.

Take up opportunities to talk: If someone asks you about your mental health, don't shy away, be yourself and answer honestly.

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Courage is contagious: Often once mental health is out in the open people want to talk. Don't be surprised if your honesty encourages other people to talk about their own experiences. We will discuss how to manage this in the next newsletter.

Adjust your expectations: You are a success if you reach one person, make all your points before your time runs out or avoid embarrassing myself. You don't have to be perfect or reach everybody.

Be honest about where you're at: You'll get the same positive reaction if you're "just" working on your recovery and still have a long way to go or still experience difficulty or setbacks. People respect a brave struggle just as much as a victory, so be honest about it.

Use prompts if you need them: Don't be self-conscious about using cards. They tell your audience that you care enough about them to prepare in advance, (even if your 'audience' is only one person!).

Ask your audience questions: "Everyone has dark days whether they have a mental illness or not. What helps you in your dark days?" People love the opportunity to analyse themselves and to engage personally, so try giving them the opportunity to do so.

"Be cool, stand your ground and don't try too hard at first. Build up your portfolio of ideas and use them sparingly. This is not a race, it's a long battle on a wide front and needs to be fought with cunning, guile and courage. Don't be afraid to speak out, because no social change was ever handed to anyone on a plate"

Ian Howard, Highways England

Structuring your story

Time is a natural organising principle for a story. What came first, what happened next, and what happened after that? Another organising principle you can use is "what helps and what hurts." E.g. Illustrate helpful and hurtful things with anecdotes from your life or someone you know. Your colleagues may like this kind of presentation because they want to know how to be better helpers. What do you want them to know? What do you want them to feel? And what do you want them to do?

How to manage if others tell you their story

Part of the role of an Employee Champion is encouraging more open discussion of mental health in the workplace. As a result, you may find that colleagues tell you about their own thoughts, feelings, experiences and concerns, as part of seeking support around their own mental health.

Stand by for next months' tool whereby we will be providing information on how to manage disclosure.

