

How to Tell Your Story as a Loss Survivor


Sharing your story after losing someone to suicide can be a powerful way to honor their life, support your own healing, and help others feel less alone. Personal stories can reduce stigma, build connection, and inspire hope. At the same time, storytelling should be approached thoughtfully. The way a story is shared can influence how it is received, especially for those who may be vulnerable.

Ensuring You Are Ready¹

Before sharing, consider where you are in your grief. Storytelling can bring up strong emotions. Stories can promote healing, but only when the storyteller feels comforted when doing so.

It may help to:

- Reflect on whether you feel emotionally prepared
- Consider how sharing may impact you before, during, and after
- Identify support you can lean on if needed



There is no right timeline or expectation for sharing your story. You are allowed to say no to opportunities and questions. Setting boundaries is an important part of protecting your own well-being.

Preparing Yourself and Your Audience¹

Taking time to prepare can help your story feel meaningful, manageable, and safe for both you and your audience.

Think about what you want to share and what feels appropriate for the setting. You may choose to focus on certain parts of your experience while keeping others private. There is no expectation to share everything.

Consider how your story may be received. Talking about suicide can be difficult to hear, and others in your audience may be grieving or vulnerable. Let your audience know the topic may be heavy and encourage them to take care of themselves.

In group settings, you may also consider:

- Inviting people to step away if they need a break
- Ensuring support is available
- Asking someone to help monitor the space for signs of distress

Questions to ask yourself if you are ready to share your story:

1. Why do I want to share my story right now?
2. Am I in a place where sharing feels safe for me?
3. Who is my audience, and how might they be impacted?
4. What message do I want people to take away?
5. Does my story include hope, healing, or support?
6. What boundaries do I want to set?

Personal stories can reduce stigma, build connection, and inspire hope.

Sharing Safely: What to Do and Avoid ²

Stories of loss can influence others. Thoughtful storytelling helps promote hope and reduce potential harm.

Do:

- Focus on your loved one's life, not just their death
- Use respectful, non-stigmatizing language (e.g., "died by suicide")
- Share your journey, including healing and what has helped
- Include messages of hope, connection, and support

Avoid:

- Graphic details or descriptions of the death
- Mentioning specific methods or locations
- Oversimplifying the cause of suicide
- Glorifying or romanticizing suicide

Practice and Self-Awareness ³

Practicing your story can help you understand how it may affect you emotionally.

- Notice where emotions feel strongest
- Adjust your story to feel safe and manageable
- Take breaks or pause if needed

After You Share ⁴

Sharing your story can bring up strong emotions, even if you feel prepared. Taking care of yourself afterward is just as important as preparing to share.

After you share, you might:

- Take time to rest or decompress
- Check in with yourself about how you are feeling
- Reach out to someone you trust for support
- Engage in activities that help you feel grounded

Offering Support and Resources ⁵

Sharing your story is also an opportunity to connect others to help. Including resources reinforces that support is available and recovery is possible.

- Encourage help-seeking behaviors
- Share resources like 988 and local supports
- Highlight prevention and connection

References

1. American Association of Suicidology. Best Practices for Presentations with Suicide Loss and Suicide Attempt Survivors. https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Best_Practices_Presentations_Suicide_Loss_Suicide_Attempt_Survivors.pdf
2. Mindframe. A Guide for Speaking Publicly About Suicide. <https://mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/A-Guide-for-Speaking-Publicly-About-Suicide.pdf>
3. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Sharing Your Story. <https://afsp.org/sharingyourstory/>
4. Mental Health Awareness Education. Mental Health: How to Tell Your Story. <https://mentalhealthawarenesseducation.com/mental-health-how-to-tell-your-story/>
5. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Storytelling for Suicide Prevention Checklist. <https://988lifeline.org/storytelling-for-suicide-prevention-checklist/>

ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



(614) 429-1528 / OhioSPF.org

