

Example of How to Share your story- General

In this section, you will find an example that can be utilized with all populations

Grenesha's Story

My name is Grenesha. Even when I was very young, I always felt different. I always felt like I was there, but I wasn't there. I dealt with depression all my life, but junior year of high school is when things really started to get bad. I sought some treatment, but I never really stayed on meds or anything. There were times when I thought, "There's nothing wrong with me. I'm just depressed or something." But I had a number of hospitalizations, and after a while, I thought, "Okay, maybe there is something going on."

I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. Schizoaffective is some symptoms of schizophrenia, and some symptoms of bipolar disorder. I dealt with grandiose thoughts, and at times, extreme paranoia. On the bipolar side, I dealt with depression, and I had moments of hypomania—talking fast, spending money I didn't have, not sleeping, starting a lot of projects and not finishing them—things like that. So I decided to get help in day treatment. That's when my recovery process really began.

We did a lot of different things in day treatment—exercise, meditation, occupational therapy, art therapy. The majority of the groups we had were about learning life skills and mindfulness, and learning to communicate with others and have goals for your life. Fitness is also a big part of my recovery, like doing tae kwon do.

There's also the psychiatry and therapy part where you talk to your therapist or psychiatrist to work on medication. Before day treatment, they had me on very high doses, and I just slept all the time. So I would go off it, but I did it without the help of a doctor. In day treatment, I worked with my psychiatrist to find the right medications in the right combinations.

In day treatment, they also told me about Grand Avenue Club. Since I've been a member there, it has just been amazing. Grand Avenue Club is part of the international clubhouse movement, and it offers support, friendship, and purpose. We go to a lot of events in the city, and there's also the transitional employment that I have been involved in. I remember getting my first real check that didn't say Social Security on it and that was a very big deal. This is the first time I actually had a job, and to see that I am capable of doing something and capable of working with others is very motivational and makes me wonder what else can I do.

Now I would like to go to college for art and design. Five years ago, I really didn't see myself anywhere. I was so depressed, I just figured I would probably, if I was lucky, get a job at a fast food place or something. I thought I might end up homeless. I thought of school, but didn't really see it as a possibility of something I could stick to.

Today, there are many possibilities. I just thank God for giving me a second chance at life, and for all the support I've had in this process. Now, there are so many different ways I could go. I've always loved

drawing. I've already been accepted into the animation program at a local technical college. Recently, I was at National Portfolio Day and they said, whatever you want to do, you can do it because you obviously have talent. I'm not trying to brag or anything, but it felt really good to hear that. Like I really do have a purpose and I really do have something to offer. I even have a boyfriend now. I used to think it wouldn't be possible for me to have a relationship, so it's amazing to be able to connect with somebody.

I'm very proud to be me now. Before I was more ashamed than proud, but now I'm definitely proud. Now I understand that there is maybe a purpose to the mental health challenges I've faced. It adds to my creativity, and I might think of things or look at things a certain way than somebody who hasn't faced these challenges. I wouldn't be who I am without my mental illness, and I'm proud of who I am.

Example of How to Share Your Story- Tourette Syndrome

In this section, you will find an example that can be utilized with those that have Tourette Syndrome as well as, incorporated into a general discussion for all populations.

Shoshi's Story

My name is Shoshi. Until I was 12 I felt very "normal." I had a lot of friends, did well in school and was generally a very happy kid. One day, when I was in 7th grade, I walked into the cafeteria, heard someone make a loud noise and without thinking or knowing what I was doing, I echoed it. And echoed it. And echoed it. I couldn't stop making that noise and all sorts of other noises. I hissed like a cat, barked like a dog, made a deep guttural noise, and often repeated what other people said. Along with the noises came all sorts of uncontrollable movements. I jerked back my head, flung out my arms, twisted my body, scrunched my nose, and squinted my eyes. Within two weeks of that day in 7th grade, I went from having full control over my body to someone who felt like a string puppet being controlled by someone or something without my permission.

Over the next three years the noises and jerking movements came and went but, were always there in some form or another. Along with those things, I began having trouble focusing, became very anxious and depressed, and my grades started slipping. When I was in middle school the kids were nice to me because, they had known me for a long time. However, when I started high school, the new kids teased me constantly. Even some of my long-time friends stopped talking to me. During class, kids would yell out, "Shut up" when I made a noise and one time a group of kids tried to light my hair on fire. I was a freak. At least that's what it felt like. I was embarrassed and lived in my own world because, no one wanted to be a part of mine.

When I was 15, a doctor finally figured out what was happening to me and I was diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome. It felt so good to know there was a real reason why I was doing the things I was doing. I started on medication, which helped to control the tics, but the pills made me very tired. I would put my head down during class and sleep. And, the medication did nothing for my depression, anxiety, attention problems and lack of self-worth. Time went on and I finished high school and went to college. The tics started lessening, as they do for a lot of kids with Tourette. By that time, I had also developed better control over the tics that were noticeable. I still had to deal with the depression, anxiety and attention problems, however. Since I had never really learned how to study in high school, I ended up flunking out of college. I came back home, got a job, and was nearly fired because I was unable to sit at my desk all day and get my work done.

At that point, I realized that I had to rise above my symptoms -all of my symptoms- or I would not be able to succeed in my life. I started in therapy and I will never forget something my therapist said: "You are like a runner without a track record. You don't know how fast or how far you can go because you have never put your best foot forward." That helped me realize that my "failures" were only a reflection of what I had done and did not have to limit my future efforts and accomplishments. He also helped me realize that Tourette is only a part of me. That there are all sorts of other wonderful parts. If I could develop those other parts then, the Tourette part will start getting smaller and smaller and be less significant.

Over time, and with a lot of hard work, that is exactly what happened. I went back to college, graduated, and then went on to get two master's degrees. I'm now a school psychologist, am successful in my career, have a wonderful marriage and have raised amazing children. I am confident that the struggles I endured shaped the person I am today; and that's a good thing. It has increased my sensitivity to others and enables me to understand and help people, in a way that I don't think would be possible had I not endured the really tough years. Although Tourette and the other challenges certainly made my life more difficult, I, like many others who have learned to live with TS, demonstrate the possibility that it CAN be done. There IS life beyond Tourette. And it can be a very, very good life.

Example of How to Share Your Story- Adult

In this section, you will find an example that can be used as part of a general discussion with college-age or adult populations.

David Goldberg's Story

My name is David Goldberg and I have a mental illness. I'm sure many of you have heard of depression. This is a serious mental illness that has caused major problems in my life. I was born in Delaware, to a loving family. I lived there for about 6 years, attended Montessori when I was age 4 and 5. Shortly before we moved from Delaware, my sister was born. My family and I moved to Minnesota when my dad was transferred to work in Minneapolis. You might be thinking if you've moved before, that moving can be a traumatic experience. Believe me, it can be, but not at this point in my life. I remember being excited to start elementary school (and a bit nervous).

Elementary school was mostly uneventful. I was enrolled in primarily accelerated/gifted classes. I spent most of my time hanging out with the neighborhood kids and a couple good friends down the street. The only negative thing I can really think of is being picked on for being nerdy and overweight. That upset me, but it wasn't until middle school where I started experiencing some more serious problems.

In the middle of sixth grade, things started to change. I was invited to join the International Baccalaureate program because I performed very well academically in elementary school. Unfortunately, this meant a lot more work. I wouldn't really call it a "program for smart kids". It was more that the amount of homework we received sucked the life out of us. Academically, I wasn't doing so great. There was a ton of competitive pressure and my dad was laid off from his job.

When my dad lost his job, I knew that it meant we would have to move again. I had plenty of friends and I liked Minnesota, but that would all soon change. When my mom told me the news, we both cried. It's still clear in my mind. We were driving home from school in the old minivan. She said we'd have to make some changes, which basically meant less spending, but that didn't bother me. I was just concerned about moving. My mental illness started when I was about 12 years old.

My dad found a new job in Des Plaines, IL. This the first time I remember feeling "depressed". Nothing else seemed to matter anymore. I struggled with telling my friends that I was leaving. My mom called several of them and told them the news. I was not the same happy kid that I used to be. My personality became much darker. I found solace in heavy metal and violent games and movies. I felt down and sad a lot more than I ever had before. School now became a challenge. I didn't really care. My grades turned from A's and B's to B's and C's. My mediocre grades placed me into the "slow" classes. I continued to be on the slow track throughout high school and I really do blame my mental illness for this. I really started to self-handicap myself by never studying, but this isn't just about school. I began to have trouble committing to friends and family obligations for fear of having to leave them behind. Regret was common for me. I tended to dwell on the past, believing life would be so much better if we never moved. Minnesota was great for me and suddenly I'm dragged down to shitty Illinois. There's certainly more to this part, but I'm afraid I don't remember a lot from 12 years ago. Freud might say that I'm repressing those memories.

I continued to suffer in school. My parents took me to see a psychologist, Dr. Hayes, whom I met with on a regular basis until I graduated high school. It was nice having a neutral party to talk to. My family and I fought a lot at this time in my life. If I even brought up an idea, I felt like my parents would just shoot it down. It's like they had to approve of anything I thought of. This was very disheartening for me.

I began to develop a fascination with swords, knives and axes, which led to me buying my first katana at age 13. Whenever I became upset or angry, I'd always find comfort in my weapons. I'd walk around the room, holding one, admiring its blade. This was a type of suicidal ideation. Although I never injured myself, I thought about it quite often. Hurting myself seemed like a wonderful idea, but at the same time, I never liked the sight of blood and I knew this would negatively impact my future. I had some friends who cut, but I had the discipline to stop myself. As for my friends who did, I can't blame them.

Fast forward a few years. High school was the worst. I felt like I was in prison. One wrong move and the teachers would bust you for anything. But it wasn't just the teachers, it was my friends, too. I got harassed many times for being Jewish. I never even knew what a "kike" was until someone called me by the word. This happened on a semi-regular basis, but there was one time that was exceptionally bad. I was surrounded by a group of students in a circle, who chanted hurtful things like "stupid Jew" and "kike" and "Christ killer". I managed to break out of the circle. Once I got home, I cried to my parents. They tried to comfort me and together we went to the dean. The good news was that no one bothered me for my religion anymore, but now I've been labeled as a tattletale. This happened when I was a junior. My junior year was easily the worst year in high school. It got so bad, I considered dropping out. My parents convinced me that education was the path to freedom and instead I graduated a semester early.

How does this relate to my depression? I was incredibly disturbed by this event and my self-loathing and suicidal ideation was worse than ever. Had I not had a supportive family and a great therapist, I don't think I'd be alive today. This event kept coming up in my counseling sessions. It took me quite some time to get over this and I'm a pretty resilient person. I'm not trying to say that my life was any harder than anyone else's. I know a lot of people who struggled during high school, but this bullying really made me struggle on top of my chronic depression. Bullying someone for being different is such a terrible thing and I'm afraid I just don't understand the motive.

When I went away to college, my relationship with my family improved greatly. I had that freedom I had always wanted. The first year away was great! I was happy to be four hours away. I may have partied a bit too much my first semester, but I straightened up my act. This was the first time in my life I really didn't experience depression. I had a strong group of friends. My dorm roommate and I got along great!

However, depression is a chronic condition. The next year, I began to hate Springfield. I realized that such a small school wasn't for me. I ended up transferring to University of Illinois at Chicago. Life improved greatly. I loved living in the city. I no longer had to deal with bullying (from high school). I still suffered from anxiety and depression in this new environment. However, I was consistently happier than I ever had been. Depression was something I could shove under the rug and not worry about it. I joined a fraternity and am still active with my chapter today. My support group was like a tree with many, many branches.

After college, life got bad. I was a poor college graduate. I needed money, so I found a job completely unrelated to my field, shipping John Deere tractors all over the world. It was alright at first, but I quickly discovered the hypocrisy of the corporate workplace. The money was good, but the authoritarian style environment was just awful. I called in sick many times just to get a break from the terrible office. Because I was so depressed, I decided I needed to get out of there. I applied to Illinois Institute of Technology, and they accepted me!

I was working 25 hours/week at the same company during my first semester there. It was rough. I quit after a few months. Several colleagues commented on how much happier I seemed. I was finally working toward a field I had gone to college for. I started taking anti-depressants about a year ago. That and a healthy lifestyle have really improved my quality of life. I still get depressed once in a while, but life's not perfect. I'm proud to say that my mental illness is manageable.

Despite these problems, I have achieved several accomplishments. I graduated from UIC in 2011 and will be graduating from IIT in May 2014. I have a 4.0 grade point average. I've discovered that I belong in academia and intend to pursue a PhD in the future. I have traveled to over 40 states as well as several foreign countries. I was awarded a Black Belt in Karate and Tae Kwon Do when I was 16. I still actively practice. I am financially independent and now have a great relationship with my family.

Despite my accomplishments, I have experienced some stigma and unfair responses to my illness. The first thing that comes to mind is my family "dumbing me down", rejecting my ideas while I was depressed. If they could have just listened more, I think our relationship would've improved while I was living at home.

I "came out" to a few people in 2011 and got some surprisingly negative responses. "Why don't you just be happy?" "Get over it!" "You have no reason to be sad. You have a loving family. Unlike you, I've seen some REAL shit in my life." If you're thinking about coming out, that's great, but you should really weigh the pros and cons before you actually do.

A couple friends have been amazed that mental illness runs in my family. When I told them, they didn't understand. "It's genetic? But how? You're not always depressed." I explained that Bipolar disorder and depression are common throughout my mother's side of the family. There were a couple distant relatives who had schizophrenia. Another relative committed suicide before I was born. He would have been diagnosed with PTSD

How to Share your story- College

In this section, you will find an example that can be utilized as part of a general discussion with college-age or adult populations.

Kyle Uphoff-Wasowski's Story

Hi. My name is Kyle Uphoff-Wasowski and I'm here to tell you about a disease called bipolar disorder or manic-depression.

The disorder I have, when it's untreated, can cause severe mood swings. The actual disorder occurs in the brain and neuro-pathways. Illnesses like depression, manic-depression, and schizophrenia are referred to as neurobiological brain disorders.

I was diagnosed with manic-depression seven years ago now – shortly after the birth of my first child. I had one severe depression that was so devastating I began thinking about ending my life. This is not a depression that most people think of as depression. There should be a different word for what those of us with a mental illness experience. It is like a paralysis of the whole brain – nothing like what I used to call depression! I honestly felt physically disabled – as though I'd had a stroke or something. Just getting out of bed and brushing my teeth was an unbelievable challenge. There was no joy in anything! – even my newborn son who I loved more than life itself, and who through no fault of his own, was a constant reminder to me of how useless I was.

Before my illness struck I lived a life much like anyone else, I guess. I am one of five children in my family. We have loving and supportive parents and come from an upper middle class background. I was always active in school with sports and friends and was quite popular in high school. I was cheerleader and a gymnast and hung out in the "popular crowd." I don't tell you any of this to impress you, but to impress upon you that my life was not abnormal from the get-go!

My own stereotypes of mental illness made it impossible for me to accept the diagnosis at first. I didn't fit the stereotypes, so how could I have a mental illness? I was not a loner as a child. I had loving supportive parents and had not been sexually abused or traumatized as a child- nothing "twisted" happened to me at all. Therefore the doctors must be wrong!

When I was 28 years old I had my first child. My son, Luke, was born in Edison, New Jersey, and we lived happily there for another seven months. We wanted to move back to the Midwest because that's where we were both raised, and our families were there. My husband got a transfer. The stress of moving, having an infant, the physical challenge going on in my body (at the time, my son was gradually weaning from nursing) and the fact that I was predisposed

to having a mental illness – all created the right environment for this illness to emerge.

Before the move to Illinois, I felt tremendous lethargy and was also losing weight as well as having trouble sleeping. I attributed all of these symptoms to what was happening in my life – not to a mental illness. The unrecognized "blip" of depression that occurred in New Jersey was replaced by a full-blown manic episode in Illinois. At first my husband and I thought it was wonderful! I went from having no energy and feeling low, to feeling great and unpacking the entire house we'd moved into, painted rooms, and got the whole house

organized in a day! Who would not love this?

I was very verbal and had tremendous insight about all kinds of things. My husband thought I was brilliant. Then my wonderful, insightful talks became hard to follow and somewhat bizarre. I had lost a lot of weight and was having trouble sleeping too. But having just had a baby I thought it was a good thing I was losing weight – and just figured I was having trouble sleeping because of stress. We still owned our home in New Jersey and we were unhappily paying the mortgage on both homes! My husband was concerned but kept telling himself I'd be O.K. Finally one day he came home from a business trip to find the house a mess (very uncharacteristic of me), and I was laughing and crying very inappropriately about things. Somehow as sick as I was, I always took good care of my son – he was not sitting in a dirty diaper somewhere in the corner!

*By this time, my husband was quite frightened of my rapid mood swings and called 911. The ambulance came and took me to the hospital and held me there against my will. It's interesting to note that my illness became much more severe the moment I was forced to stay in the hospital. I became delusional and paranoid and was convinced the whole staff was plotting some story about why I had to stay on the psychiatric ward when I really **didn't** need to be there- and they all knew it! I thought there was literally a key I had to find to get out of there and the only way I could get it was to get the information from the staff. When I got the "information" I would find the key. The first hospitalization was the most painful **thing that's** ever happened to me – to know your mind can go off like that with no warning and that you could think and do such goofy things is terribly frightening. There is so much shame involved with this illness. I went home from the hospital and fell into a severe depression that lasted 9 months. I lost all my self-confidence and was so ashamed. My only focus was to make sure no one found out about my illness and try to look "normal" at all times. It was the beginning of hiding my big ugly secret.*

*So much of this illness has to do with stigma. In my experience most of the stigma was self-induced. I did more damage to myself than anyone could have! I worried so much about what people would think if they knew and convinced myself I **wouldn't be** accepted. I lived in utter fear that people would find out. I worried my friends **wouldn't want** to hang out with me if they knew, or the **neighbors wouldn't** let their kids play with mine. I worried about what my family "**really**" thought of me. I even went so far to think of what my mail carrier thought of me because I got mail from the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. I was consumed by fear of being found out.*

I began to get better the more I grew to accept my illness! I did this through educating myself. I read all the books I could find about manic-depression. I also joined a support group which helped me see that people do recover. I found a new doctor who is very supportive and encouraging and has never made me feel that I'm in any way responsible for my illness. Nor has he made me feel my parents are!

The one thing I've done that has improved my recovery the most is talk about my illness. What I have come to find out is that mental illnesses are extremely common and nothing to be ashamed of. In talking about my illness privately and publicly now for four years I feel totally liberated and healed.

*I coordinate the **Speaker's Bureau** at the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and encourage other people with mental illness to speak out about their experience. We go out to colleges, high schools, church groups, etc. I have actually found that my illness is something I can derive tremendous reward from; that in fact without the illness I would never know the*

reward I now experience. I would not be someone who would be doing public speaking otherwise! I am consistently amazed and pleased by the number of people who come up to me after I speak and share their stories of mental illness—either their own or family member and friends.

*I have, since my diagnosis, had a second child, my daughter, Madison. She is such a gift. Not only did I think I would never have any more children after my son was born, and I felt tremendous sadness and loss because of this, but I felt my life would never be the same and was irreparable. My daughter was born in the same hospital **where** I've had my hospitalizations and has helped change the way I see it. The hospital is a place of health and life!*