



OPENING MINDS
Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham

Mental Health Awareness Guides: How to share a story (testimony)

The story would usually be told by the person sharing their experience of mental ill health or a carer.

The person talking may find it helpful to use these suggestions in planning their talk. Some feel less anxious if there is someone standing alongside them asking them questions, which have been agreed beforehand.

For the person sharing their story

Firstly thank you. We know that hearing someone describe their experience of mental ill health, especially if it is someone they know, is the most powerful way of changing their attitudes. So by speaking you are:

- helping to dispel ignorance about mental illness
- challenging the notion that a mental health problem is shameful and so should not be discussed.
- giving others the confidence to speak out about their experiences
- enabling people to be more caring and supportive of those with mental ill health.

It does not matter if you become anxious or distressed or find it hard to speak. Telling it “as it is” is very powerful. You don’t have to give the story a happy ending. You may still be having problems and hearing how you cope with these is important.

You might find it helpful to have some notes and a glass of water in case you get a dry mouth.

A few suggestions

1. It helps people think of you as a “person with an illness” (a person with depression and not a depressive, or a carer) if you start by saying a little bit about yourself so they can identify with you.
2. How did the illness develop? How did it affect you and those around you? (Maybe it still does.)
3. What did people do or say that was helpful?
4. What did people say or do that was upsetting?
5. How did it affect your faith? (for example, your faith, your church attendance, your prayer life)
6. What did you and what would you have found helpful from church members? If you have a positive story that leaves your listeners feeling encouraged. It may be simply that you were listened to or someone made you a cup of tea. Perhaps you encountered Jesus in a different way.

After you have finished, pat yourself on the back- this is not an easy thing to do!