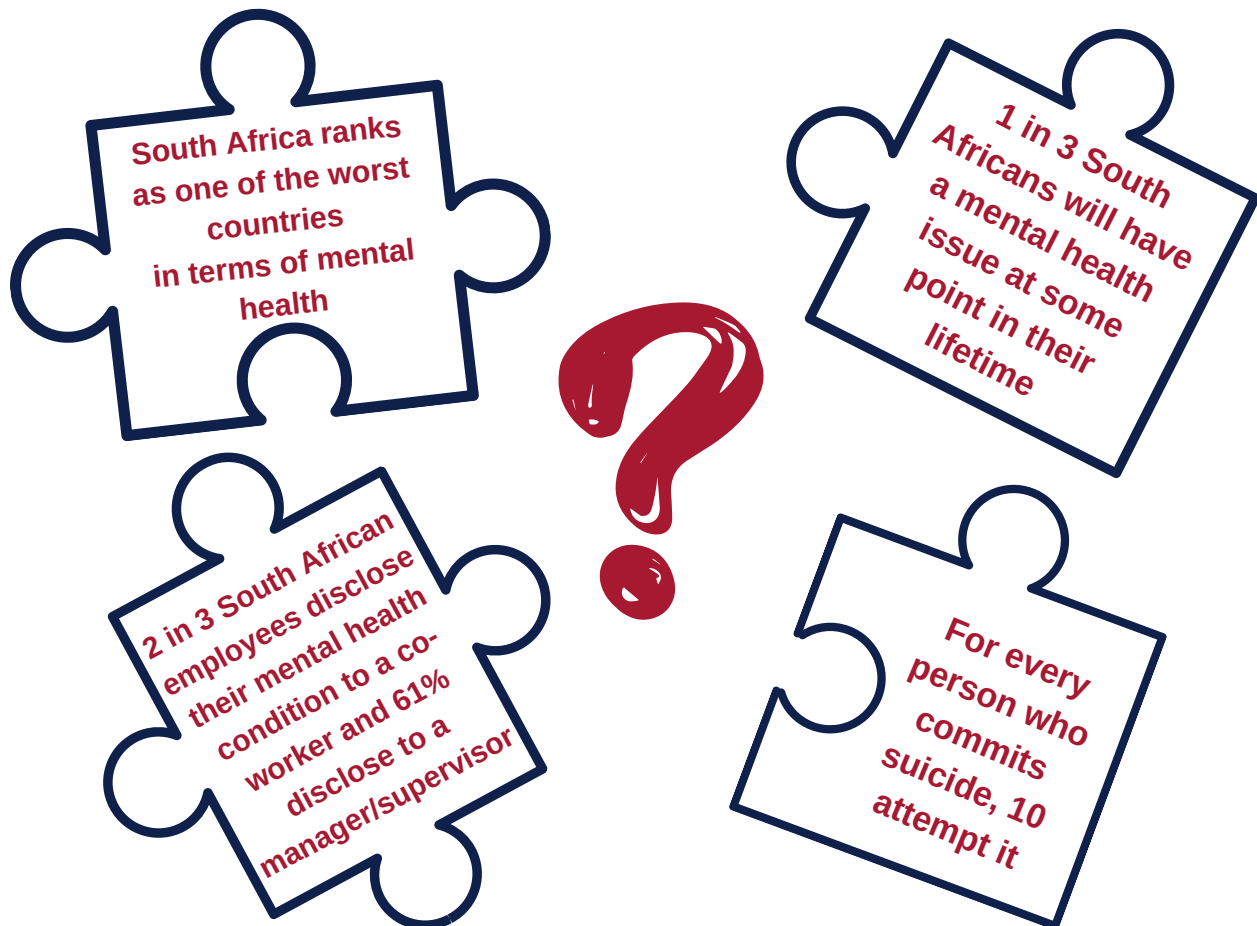


# WEEK 1

Building the *confidence* to share your mental health story...

#ShareYourStory

AN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING INITIATIVE: FOR ALL UFS EMPLOYEES



Developed by:

Carmine Nieman (Organisational Development and Employee Well-Being Specialist)

Sophia Smith (Industrial Psychology Intern)

Bianca Victor (Industrial psychology Intern)

T: +27 51 401 2537 | E: NiemanCL@ufs.ac.za | [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)

[f](#) UFSUV | [t](#) UFSweb | [u](#) UFSweb | [i](#) ufsuv

Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care.

# Let's get into it!



This week's BOO-tiful reminder:  
*"You are capable of amazing things"*

## Week 1 challenge: QUIZ Time!

Challenge your knowledge  
about mental health in  
South Africa

<https://surveys.ufs.ac.za/evalsys/online.php?p=UE5T4>

## This week's coping mechanism

Mediate by  
sitting  
outside in  
nature or  
listening to  
soft music

## Mental Illness: Myths vs Reality

*A lesson activity*

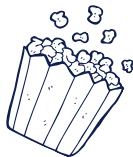
<https://positive.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/Mental-Illness-Myths-and-Reality.pdf>

## *This weeks books to read:*

- *Faces of Mental Illness: 20 Stories Bringing You Through Your Journey From Stigma to Health* - by Claudia Fernandez-Niedzielski, Samantha Ruth and Kate Butler
- *Monkey Mind: A Memoir of Anxiety* - by Daniel Smith
- *The Dark Side of Innocence* - by Terri Cheney

## *This week's movies to watch:*

- *It's kind of a funny story*
- *A beautiful mind*
- *Taylor Tomlinson: Look At You* (comedy show)



## *This week's series to watch:*

- *After life*
- *This is us*
- *The Queen's Gambit*



Why do you think it is  
important to discuss mental  
health issues instead of  
ignoring them?



---

---

---



The UFS offers a limited number of free counselling sessions for UFS staff  
(contact CareWays on 0800 004 770).

You can also do your own mental health screening ([mhaascreening.org](http://mhaascreening.org)) to help give you a  
picture of your mental health state.

#ShareYourStory



# Building the *confidence* to share your mental health story ...

Welcome to week 1 of the UFS mental health awareness campaign 2022. This week is about understanding the value behind sharing your story and building your confidence to do so. To do this, we start off with a refresher on what mental health is and its importance. We will also reflect on the stigma behind mental illness and poor mental health, and the role that sharing your story plays in combating this. We also reflect on our journey so far with mental health and get comfortable with our story. We really want to plant the seed of building your confidence in sharing your story, so we will highlight the value that sharing your story has on other people and some tips to help build your confidence to be able to reach the point where you feel comfortable enough to do just that.

## *Mental health*

Your mental health is essential at every stage of life, from childhood through adulthood. Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how you think, feel and act, and determines the healthy choices you make, how you handle stress, and how you relate to others. It is also an essential component of your overall health, including the prevention of many physical health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and strokes.

Did you know: Poor mental health and mental illness are not the same thing? A person can experience poor mental health and not be diagnosed with a mental illness. A person diagnosed with a mental illness can also experience periods of mental, physical, and social well-being.



## Can your mental health change over time?

Definitely! Your mental health can change over time depending on many factors. When the demands placed on you exceed the resources at your disposal and your coping abilities, your mental health could be impacted. Take your work, for example – if you continuously work long hours and do not give yourself enough time to rest, you may experience poor mental health.

## The stigma around Mental illness and Poor Mental Health

Unfortunately, there are still many misunderstandings and harmful attitudes around mental illness that may cause people to ignore their mental health, fuel stigma, and make it more difficult to reach out for health.



Why is it taboo to talk about mental health? Watch this video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_aBVFM-z1Jg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aBVFM-z1Jg)

### ACTIVITY TIME!

1) Write down some of the stigmas you have heard around mental health:

---

2) How does stigma around mental health affect you?

---



*The story behind the semicolon tattoo*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX1i5J76Wuw>



What are your thoughts on Project Semicolon?

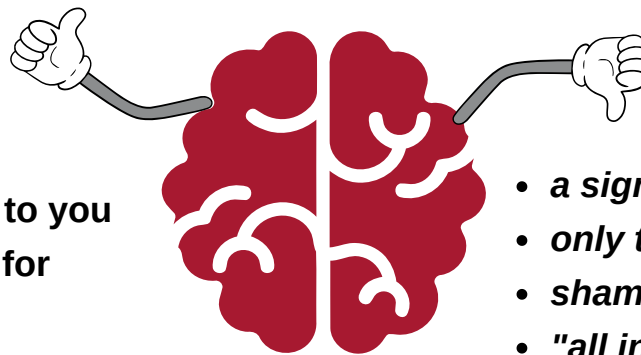
---

Did you know: A qualitative study conducted by Lindstrom, Sofija and Riley (2021), published in the *Community Mental Health Journal*, has found that young adults who share their stories of living with mental illness can increase their well-being and feel less stigmatised.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33580469/>



## Mental health ...



### **IS:**

- of vital importance to you
- worth making time for
- evolving
- complex
- affecting us and our everyday life
- influenced by many factors
- linked to physical health
- part of you
- real

### **IS NOT:**

- a sign of weakness
- only the negative
- shameful
- "all in the mind"
- something you decide to have
- relevant only to those who struggle
- the same as mental illness
- something we start looking after only when it gets broken

This is why the trend of sharing your mental health story has become more important than ever. Sharing your mental health story involves talking about your journey through poor mental health or mental illness. Sharing your story helps, it can be empowering, improve your well-being, and reduce internalised feelings of stigma.

## Here are five reasons to share your mental health story

Lindstrom, Sofija and Riley (2021) conducted in-depth interviews with 18 speakers to explore the benefits of sharing your story. These are the five key themes found and a few thought-provoking quotes from some of these participants.

### *It nurtures and improves your well-being*

1

Sharing your story helps you to 'get better at getting better'. In a way, it forces you to reflect on your journey up until this point and how you have overcome your mental health challenges. It also helps you to better identify strategies that can help you and shift how you view your mental health.

“Authentically relating the story to 300 people can be quite an intimidating experience and that sense of almost flexing your vulnerability muscles, like doing mental health push-ups in front of a crowd. It almost leaves you feeling not drained, not quite shaken, but a little raw in a good way. It’s kind of like you’ve just climbed a mountain or jumped out of an airplane.”

### *Helps you to gain self-acceptance*

2

Sharing your story can help you to change the way that you think of yourself and gain self-acceptance. It can also improve your sense of well-being and confidence by making you feel empowered and giving you that sense of purpose since you are using your experience to help others.

“I feel like we’re a lot harder on ourselves [than] we are with others. So, if I’m kinder to myself, I feel like that makes me kinder to others as well. I think it’s just a natural progression to turn that outward.”



Watch this video on what happens when you share your mental health:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2wo4bW55Jw>

## *It fights the public stigma associated with mental illness*

**3** Speaking out about your mental health also helps to actively fight against the public stigma that is associated with mental illness. Growing your understanding of mental health and illness and sharing your knowledge with others in a safe way will not only empower you to voice your opinions, but also to address the negative behaviours and language around mental illness in your own social circles.

“Any stigma is just a lack of understanding, a lack of understanding comes from a lack of knowledge, right?” said a participant. “The more that we go and we have these conversations with people, we introduce them to new ideas, we challenge their existing ideas.”

## *It increases your connectedness with others*

**4** Sharing your story can help you to change the way that you think of yourself and gain self-acceptance. For some people, sharing their mental health story helps them to separate their identity from their mental illness. It can also improve your sense of well-being and confidence by making you feel empowered and giving you that sense of purpose since you are using your experience to help others.

“I just love being able to connect with other people on that level and knowing that at least someone in the room will hear what I’m saying, and it will resonate with them,” said a speaker. “I think that too often, we forget that the human experience is a shared one, even if it’s something that is unique and individual to us.”

## *It encourages appropriate support seeking*

**5** By sharing your story publicly, you may find that you are more willing to seek help when you find yourself struggling with your mental health, and to become more aware of appropriate places to find support. Not only that, but you are also more likely to help and encourage others to seek support.

“It’s interesting because coming out of a mental illness as I did, there was a lot of shame about the way you feel, and how that fits with society’s view of how boys should feel,” said a 25-year-old male speaker.



## DID YOU KNOW???

Storytelling is often used in therapy. This type of therapy is known as narrative therapy and it allows us to feel heard and validated, which helps to reduce anxiety, normalise our experiences, and help us accurately perceive our experiences.

On the other hand, other people's stories can elicit empathy, help us see the world from a new perspective, provide hope, and reassure us and others that we are not alone in our struggles.

There are a number of celebrities who saw the value in sharing their mental health illnesses. Take a look at some of the well-known celebrities and the mental illnesses that they decided to share with the public:

- Chrissy Teigan - postpartum depression
- Demi Lavato - bipolar disorder (previously struggled with depression and an eating disorder)
- Selena Gomez - bipolar disorder (previously struggled with depression and anxiety)
- Steve Young - social anxiety disorder
- Donny Osmond - social anxiety disorder
- Micheal Phelps - attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Dan Reynolds - clinical depression
- Leonardo DiCaprio - obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Daniel Radcliffe - obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- Lady Gaga - post-traumatic stress disorder
- Adele - postpartum depression

Here are some videos on celebrities who opened up about their mental health illnesses:

- 10 Mzansi Celebrities Who Are Suffering from Mental Illness:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oTJgIXEqaA>



Can you think of a public figure who has shared their story of poor mental health and their journey through recovery? What were your feelings about this?

---

---

---



### *Getting comfortable with your story*

We now know that sharing our mental health stories is a powerful tool to fight stigma, recover from our poor mental health, and enhance our well-being. There is significance in each and every mental health story, but we are all different and so have different comfort levels in sharing our stories. One person may feel comfortable sharing their story to the public on social media, while you may feel more comfortable sharing your story with your partner or a close friend, and that's okay! But to share our stories with others, no matter the scale, we first need to get to the point where we feel comfortable with our own stories. This may require some research on your mental health condition, to come to terms with a diagnosis, or to learn and reflect more on other people's stories who have had similar experiences to yours. Here are some reflective activities that can help you to get started on this journey.

- What does mental health mean to you?
- What does mental illness mean to you?
- Are you currently suffering from a mental health challenge, or have you ever suffered from a mental health challenge before? If so, write it down below.
- Do some research on this mental health challenge or people with similar stories and write down what you understand about it below.

Main reflective notes:

---

---

### *Deciding to disclose your story ...*

After getting comfortable with your own story, the next step would be deciding whether to disclose your mental health history and to whom. For example, you may decide to share your story with your best friend or partner, but not to share it with a colleague who recently made a negative comment about someone else with a mental illness. Self-disclosure is complex and isn't without its risks. Sometimes you may experience labelling and discrimination. But there are still many potential benefits to sharing your story, such as getting more social support, getting professional help, being less stressed about keeping it a secret, or supporting and inspiring others.

There's no right or wrong answer when it comes to telling people about your mental health challenges. There are a lot of considerations when deciding whether or not you want to share your story and whom you would like to share it with. To help you make your decision, you can make use of the pros and cons list tool.

Watch this video on Geoffrey trying to decide whether to tell his boss about his mental health challenge by using the pros and cons list:



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=40&v=aTG2UevQL4A&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=40&v=aTG2UevQL4A&feature=emb_logo)

*Here is an example of a pros and cons list for deciding whether to disclose your mental health challenge at work:*

Pros - Reasons to tell	Cons - Reasons not to tell
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your mental health challenge is affecting your ability to perform your role safely. This is a very important consideration!</li><li>• Discussing your mental health challenge gives you and your line manager/HRBP the opportunity to talk about any support or changes you might need to help you stay at work or assist in your recovery.</li><li>• Adjusting your schedule or workload can reduce the number of sick days you need or will help you to be more productive when you are at work.</li><li>• Sharing your experiences will help to change people's attitudes and it may help others to open up or seek support with their own mental health challenges.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your mental health challenge may not affect your ability to perform well in your role.</li><li>• You do not need any adjustments to your workload or schedule.</li><li>• You are worried about potential discrimination, harassment, or reduced opportunities for career progression.</li><li>• Your line manager or the UFS does not provide an appropriate level of support or follow legislative requirements.</li><li>• You already feel like you have enough support from your network outside the university and feel that there is not much to gain from talking about your mental health challenge.</li></ul>

### ACTIVITY TIME!

*Write down your own PROS and CONS list in order to help you make the decision to share your story with others.*

(Remember that the above list is just some of the things you may consider in terms of sharing your story in the work context. There may be other vastly different considerations to take into account when sharing your story in a different context – like sharing your story with your family or friends)

<https://www.headsup.org.au/your-mental-health/talking-about-a-mental-health-condition-at-work/disclosure-tool>

## **Building up the confidence to share your story**

So now you have decided to share your story, but you still feel like you need more confidence to do it. Here are a few tips to help you build the confidence to speak up:

### **1. Take small steps before you run**

Practise writing down your story or speaking in front of the mirror first, then speak to a close confidant. Once you feel comfortable sharing with one person, you may decide to share with a few more or even on a public forum.

### **2. Practise what you want to say**

Knowing what you are going to say helps you to get it out of your head and makes the thoughts and feelings that are important to you clearer and more concise. You may feel more comfortable when you know exactly what you are going to say.

### **3. Develop your skills in lower-risk environments**

Find opportunities to get you out of your comfort zone. You can do this by looking for people or environments that are lower in risk when it comes to sharing your story. The more you practise sharing your story with those you trust, the more confident you will feel in sharing your story with other audiences.

### **4. Think about the consequences of not speaking up**

Think about what you lose if you let the fear of speaking up conquer you. Staying silent may also mean that you inadvertently agree with the stigma that you want to speak out against.

### **5. Define why your voice is important**

Small voices have a big impact. Start off by having a conversation with yourself as to why sharing your story is important and why it is worth overcoming your nerves. Who will you inspire?

### **6. Take action rather than seek perfection**

You don't have to feel confident in order to act with confidence. Rather, confidence comes from taking action! "Do the thing and you will have the power."

### **7. Let go of the outcomes**

Being overly attached to the outcome of our sharing is something that usually prevents us from voicing our stories. If you share your story just for the sake of sharing, you let go of the outcome. Don't worry about what people will or won't do in response. No matter the response, your story is worth sharing.

# Your self-worth

*Your level of self-worth has a large impact on having the confidence to share your story. The good news is that you have the power to increase your level of self-worth by making small concrete changes to challenge your mind and body. One of these ways is to take steps to reduce your negative thinking and build up encouraging, positive thoughts about who you are and who you want to be. To do this, some helpful activities are to take inventory of your personal qualities and strengths and acknowledge your successes by celebrating them. Let's practise increasing your self-worth by completing the reflective activity below:*

*List three things I am good at:*

- 
- 
- 

*List three compliments I have received:*

- 
- 
- 

*List three challenges I have overcome:*

- 
- 
- 



**Confidence: How to Overcome Self-Doubt, Insecurity, and Fears  
( 1 hour 6 minutes):**

<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/confidence-how-to-overcome-self-doubt-insecurity-and-fears?u=104211482>



# 31-day Mental Health Challenge

Get 8 hours of sleep

Go for a nature walk

Drink 8 glasses of water

Give someone a compliment

Do a 20 – min exercise

Show gratitude

Meditate for 5 min

Listen to your Favourite Song

Phone a friend

Organise your office space

Do a creative activity

Do something fun

Avoid complaining for the day

Enjoy a cup of tea

Make a list of what you've accomplished

Make a healthy meal

Treat yourself to something nice

Read about a topic you enjoy

Unfollow negative people on social media

Do a breathing exercise

Practice a positive affirmation

Do a random act of kindness

Reflect on a positive memory

Do something your inner child will love

Do a colouring activity

Watch something to make you laugh

Take a social media break

Watch a happy movie

Listen to a mental health podcast

Do yoga

Reflect on the last month