

WEEK 2

Sharing your mental health story!

#ShareYourStory

AN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING INITIATIVE: FOR ALL UFS EMPLOYEES



"We're wired for story. In a culture of scarcity and perfectionism, there's a surprisingly simple reason we want to own, integrate, and share our stories of struggle. We do this because we feel the most alive when we're connecting with others and being brave with our stories—it's in our biology." - *Brené Brown, PhD*

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

Ready, Set, Share!

Week 2 challenge: Write down and share your mental health story.

You can share your story anonymously at the QwaQwa Library or any of the Bloemfontein UFS Libraries.

You can email your story to Carmine Nieman at NiemanCL@ufs.ac.za and indicate whether you would like your story shared in a "UFS Stories" booklet to be shared across campus at the end of October 2022.

You can also share with a person you trust.



This week's BOO-tiful reminder:
"Your feelings are always valid"

This week's coping mechanism

Do a 30
minute
exercise
routine that
you enjoy!

"Man Up" - the stigma about men's mental health.

77% of men have lived with a
mental health condition. Only **40%**
ever talk to anyone about it.

Christopher's story:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S4zKZV_dLE

Note: Carmine Nieman is a registered psychological counsellor and bound by confidentiality

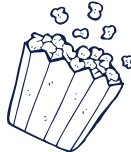
This weeks books to read:

- *Sugar and Salt: My Life with Bipolar Disorder* – by Jane Thompson
- *Atlas of the Heart* - by Brené Brown
- *Unholy Ghost: Writers on Depression* – by Nell Casey
- *Rising Strong* – by Brené Brown



This week's movies to watch:

- *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012)
- *Good Will Hunting* (1997)
- *The Breakfast Club* (1985)



This week's series to watch:

- *Spinning out*
- *This Way Up*
- *13 Reasons Why*

When did I last push the
boundaries of my comfort
zone?





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) to help give you a picture of your mental health state.

Sharing your mental health story!

Week 2 focuses on sharing your story to positively impact another person's story.

We take a look at how to share your story with some focus on “identity switching”. We also discuss some of the important factors to take into account before you share your story and how to go about sharing your story specifically within the work context. You will have the opportunity to either share your story, anonymously, with the UFS or with someone who you trust. We also share some of the stories that have inspired us and countless others. We end off with some general coping tools to help you through those tough days.

How to share your story:

Each person's mental health journey looks different. For some it will be a pathway to recovery, while for others it will be a journey of learning to better manage their mental health conditions. Each person's journey comes with setbacks but a great way to get yourself back onto a path of mental well-being is by sharing your story.

When sharing mental health stories, you can share them in a way that reflects where you are on your healing journey. For example, someone may tell their story of when they were at their lowest and needed support to cope. Another might share their story of when they overcame their mental health challenge and are currently learning to live and cope with it. Another person can bring in their story of great tragedy but telling it from a place of thriving- that is, their experience does not define their identity.

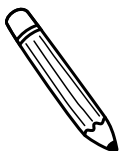
“It happened to me; it is not who I am.”

TedTalk of April Mason's story and how to change your life by making an identity switch:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlhQZvZTSm4>

What do you understand by “Identity Switching”?



When done right, sharing our stories has the potential to be a community-building experience that promotes mental health awareness in your milieu. So how do we know when we are sharing our story in the right way?

Important factors to consider before sharing your story:

Decide who you want to tell.

Determine the level of privacy you wish to maintain.

Think about the purpose behind sharing your story.

Decide how much information you are comfortable with sharing.

Tell your story in your own words and speak from the heart.

What kind of reaction are you expecting?

Decide on an appropriate time and place to share your story.

Depending on the situation, prepare for questions when you finish speaking.

What will you do if the reaction is different to what you are expecting?

Use words that others will understand.

How do you want to tell your story? In writing? Through song/dance? In a discussion?

Seek permission from others if they are involved in your story.

Be sure not to perpetuate any myths that people may have about mental health.

Article: *Harnessing the Force by Owning Our Stories*

Written by *Brené Brown*



<https://brenebrown.com/articles/2018/05/04/in-you-must-go-harnessing-the-force-by-owning-our-stories/>

Sharing your mental health story at work.

There's no right or wrong time to tell your story to your colleagues at work. Some decide to discuss their anxiety or depression at the recruitment stage, while others may decide to tell their line managers or team members only if stress becomes an issue. Some additional considerations in telling your story at work include the following:

Formal or relaxed?

Do you want to meet in a private room, or in a more relaxed setting like a café or staff area?



Morning or afternoon?

Do you feel better talking just after your morning coffee? Are you and your manager usually free just after lunch?

Short chat or longer discussion?

What level of detail about your mental health challenge are you comfortable talking about?

Katrina shares her story about depression with her line manager and colleagues at work:



Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T4jneESPtA&t=90s>

Part 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vQz8eAAj3Y

Want to tell someone at work and need some more help to prepare? Use this [Conversation planner](#) developed by *HeadsUp* to help you think about what you're going to say. There's space for you to type or write notes as you go.



<https://www.headsup.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/bl1390-having-the-conversation---telling-someone-at-work-about-your-mental-health-condition.pdf?sfvrsn=20>

Celebs sharing their stories ...

Princess Diana



"I was unwell with post-natal depression, which no one ever discussed... and that in itself was a bit of a difficult time. You'd wake up in the morning feeling you didn't want to get out of bed, you felt misunderstood, and just very, very low in yourself," she said in a 1995 interview. "When no one listens to you, or you feel no one's listening to you, all sorts of things start to happen. For instance you have so much pain inside yourself that you try and hurt yourself on the outside because you want help, but it's the wrong help you're asking for. People see it as crying wolf or attention-seeking, and they think because you're in the media all the time you've got enough attention, inverted commas...I didn't like myself, I was ashamed because I couldn't cope with the pressures."

Prince Harry

"I've spent most of my life saying 'I'm fine,'" Prince Harry said in an interview with *The Telegraph* journalist Bryony Gordon on her mental health podcast. "I can safely say that losing my mum at the age of 12 and therefore shutting down all of my emotions for the last 20 years has had a quite serious effect on not only my personal life but also my work as well...I have probably been very close to a complete breakdown on numerous occasions."



Dakota Johnson

"Sometimes I panic to the point where I don't know what I'm thinking or doing. I have a full anxiety attack....I have them all the time anyway, but with auditioning it's bad. I'm so terrified of it," said of her anxiety.



Ellen DeGeneres

"When I walked out of the studio after five years of working so hard, knowing I had been treated so disrespectfully for no other reason than I was gay, I just went into this deep, deep depression. It's so corny but it's true. You have no idea where the darkest times of your life might end, so you have to just keep going," she explained.

Adele

"I can slip in and out of [depression] quite easily," Adele told *Vanity Fair*. "I had really bad postpartum depression after I had my son, and it frightened me," she said. "I didn't talk to anyone about it. I was very reluctant...Four of my friends felt the same way I did, and everyone was too embarrassed to talk about it."



Ryan Reynolds

"I never, ever slept. Or I was sleeping at a perfect right angle — just sitting straight, constantly working at the same time," he told *Variety*, describing the anxiety he experienced while filming *Deadpool*. "By the time we were in post [production], we'd been to Comic-Con, and people went crazy for it. The expectations were eating me alive."



Olivia Munn

"OCD comes from a place of needing to feel safe... I had it growing up, having had a little bit of a tumultuous upbringing, moving around a lot with a mixed family with five kids," she told *Self*.

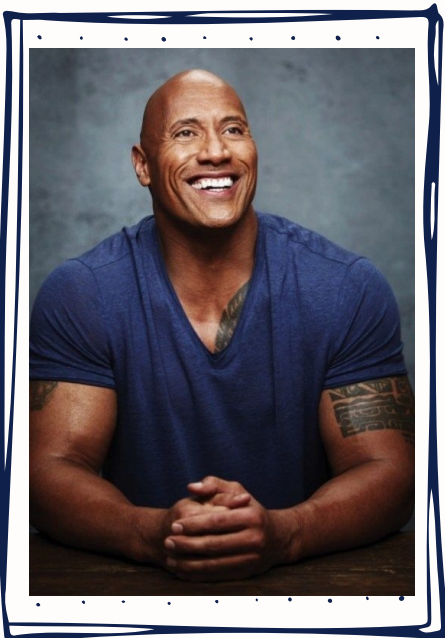
Nicki Minaj

"It was just one dead end after another," Nicki said of contemplating suicide. "At one point, I was, like, 'What would happen if I just didn't wake up?' That's how I felt. Like, 'Maybe I should just take my life?'"



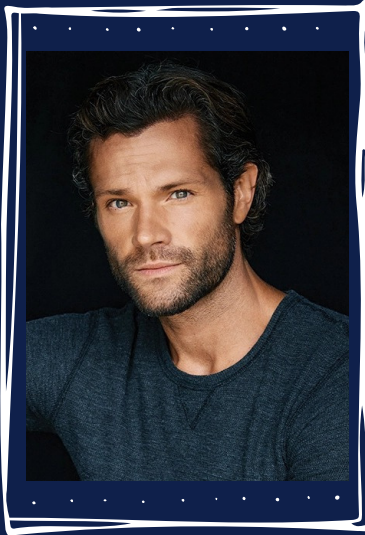
Dwayne Johnson

"I found that, with depression, one of the most important things you could realize is that you're not alone," he said in a *YouTube* video "You're not the first to go through it; you're not going to be the last to go through it. And oftentimes—it happens—you just feel like you're alone. You feel like it's only you. You're in your bubble. And I wish I had someone at that time who could just pull me aside and [say], 'Hey, it's gonna be OK. It'll be OK.' So, I wish I knew that."



Jared Padalecki

"I, for a long time, have been passionate about people dealing with mental illness and struggling with depression, or addiction, or having suicidal thoughts and, strangely enough, it's almost like the life I live, as well," he told *Variety*. "I was 25 years old. I had my own TV show. I had dogs that I loved and tons of friends and I was getting adoration from fans and I was happy with my work, but I couldn't figure out what it was; it doesn't always make sense is my point. It's not just people who can't find a job, or can't fit in in society that struggle with depression sometimes."



Cara Delevingne

"I was so ashamed of how I felt because I had such a privileged upbringing," she said on *This Morning*. "I'm very lucky. But I had depression. I had moments where I didn't want to carry on living. But then the guilt of feeling that way and not being able to tell anyone because I shouldn't feel that way just left me feeling blame and guilt."



Kerry Washington

"I say that publicly because I think it's really important to take the stigma away from mental health," she told *Glamour*. "My brain and my heart are really important to me. I don't know why I wouldn't seek help to have those things be as healthy as my teeth. I go to the dentist. So why wouldn't I go to a shrink?"



Michelle Williams

"When I disclosed it to our manager at the time, bless his heart, he was like, 'Y'all just signed a multimillion-dollar deal and you're about to go on tour. What do you have to be depressed about?' So I was like, 'Oh, maybe I'm just tired,'" she said of the depression she experienced during her time with Destiny's Child during an appearance on CBS's *The Talk*. "I was to that place where it got so dark and heavy, because sometimes you feel like, 'I'm the provider, I take care of people. I'm not supposed to be feeling this way. What do I do?' And I wanted out."



Watch a range of people talk about their experiences with mental health in the workplace, and share their stories of recovery, support and resilience:



<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLm88fe1MluDYeWh24dixuKjLVLG9nkpM1>



Coping Tools

Things to remember

It's not ok to sacrifice your mental health for others

Remember how far you have come

You are yet to meet people who will love you

Life is too short to waste time on seeking validation

You have to take the first step to change things for you

Mindful Exercises:

- Soak in some sunshine and notice how it makes you feel
- Refresh yourself with a bath meditation
- Unplug from your phone when having meals
- Light a scented candle and take in the aroma
- Journal one good thing about your day and one thing you could learn from
- Observe your feelings when listening to music



Get an accountability buddy:



Being accountable to others helps ensure you remain committed to your plans. By being open with your friends and family about what you are going through, you get to equip them with the tools they need to support you on your journey, which can aid your progress. Also, when you are open with others, you get to free yourself from the burden of always living up to expectations, and you build a space where you can just be.

Journaling App! - "5 Minute Journal"

This app aims to make journaling for mental health simple and easy. Each entry — meant to be completed each morning — contains three questions designed to start your day off on the right foot. All it takes is five minutes.





Cognitive Coping:

- Keep an inspirational quote with you
- Make a gratitude list
- Accept your next challenge with a positive attitude
- Write a list of strengths
- Reward and pamper yourself when accomplishing a goal

"Loving ourselves through the process of owning our story is the bravest thing we'll ever do." - Brené Brown, PhD



Tension Releasers:

▶ Exercise or play sports



▶ Laugh



▶ Cry



▶ Engage in catharsis (e.g. punching a punching bag or yelling into a pillow)



Want to join a support group?

SADAG has over 160 free support groups. Click the link to find out more:

[https://www.sadag.org/index.php?](https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3118&Itemid=193_)

[option=com_content&view=article&id=3118&Itemid=193_](https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3118&Itemid=193_)



If you are interested in joining a support group to share your story at the UFS, please contact Carmine Nieman at 051 401 2537 or NiemanCL@ufs.ac.za