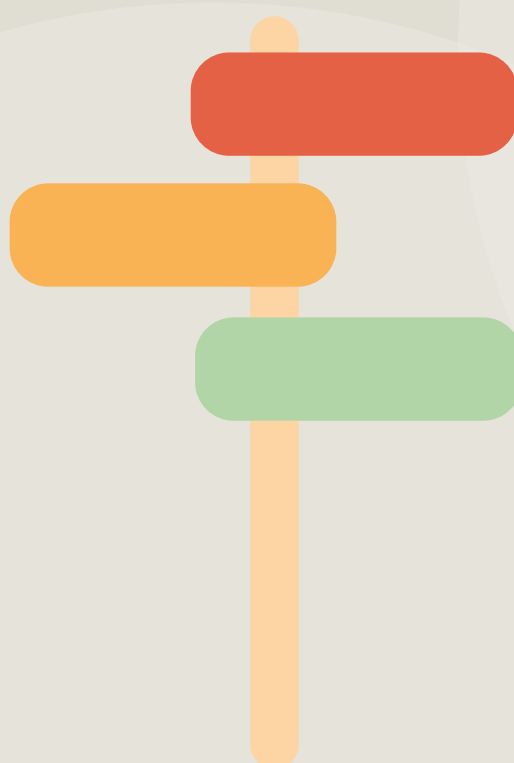


A Guide to Sharing Recovery Stories



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1 Introduction

Welcome to our Guide to Sharing Recovery Stories. This guide will provide you with information and materials that you can use to support people to develop and share their stories of recovery.

It contains information, guidance and materials on:

- The benefits of and values underpinning the collecting and sharing of recovery stories
- The role of recovery story sharing facilitators
- Ensuring a positive, safe experience for all
- Getting consent for the sharing of stories more widely
- Different tools and approaches to collect and share stories

This Guide is just that. It is not an instruction manual. The Guide has been compiled to assist you to support people to develop and share their stories in a way that works for you and those sharing their stories.

Our aim is to help you create a positive experience where people come together to share their stories of lived experience and recovery in a way that benefits them and also provides, where wanted, opportunities for people to share these stories for wider benefit.

We encourage you to adapt this Guide for your needs and also to share this with us so that we can keep this as a live document which builds on the experience of the people supporting others to develop and share their stories.



2 Background to the Guide

This Guide was initially compiled to support recovery story sharing work through [Making Recovery Real in Dundee](#).

Making Recovery Real in Dundee brings public and third sector partners, Scottish Recovery Network and people living with mental health challenges together to agree, develop and implement local recovery approaches as part of a longer term journey to transform mental health and supports in Dundee.

Our recovery story sharing work in Dundee resulted in a film where people shared their experiences of recovery. This film was premiered at Dundee Contemporary Arts and has been used extensively in the city to inform conversations about mental health, wellbeing and recovery and the services and supports needed.

[Watch the Recovery Stories film](#)

(The film is just under 20 minutes long)

We have also created a [number of short films featuring sections of the film](#).

These films cover themes of Hope, Taking Control, Sharing Stories, Opportunities and Relationships and tell three personal stories.



3 Why share recovery stories?

The sharing of personal experiences, also commonly known as sharing recovery stories, has been closely linked to the development of the recovery approach. Sharing our stories allows us to visualise our experiences over time and to reflect on the long-term journey of recovery with its ups and downs. They can also inform and inspire people with experience of mental health issues, their carers and supporters and service providers.

Learning about other people's experiences can also help to challenge misconceptions. Stories offer hints and techniques on recovery. They recognise the fact that people in recovery are experts by experience, showing very clearly that people can and do recover.

Developing and taking control of your own story can be an empowering experience and is an essential part of the recovery process. By thinking about our experiences, we are able to look for things that have worked and gone well, as well as the difficulties, distress and challenges. This is especially important and powerful as many people spend time being assessed and assisted by mental health professionals and social services. Naturally, the conversations are often focused on the negative effects of poor mental health.

As a result of repeating these conversations over time, the problems and difficulties begin to define who the person is. For example, the person's 'story' might become 'I have this diagnosis'; 'I am someone with a drug problem', or 'I am someone who has had a traumatic experience'. While these statements are true, they are not the whole story – or the whole person. The fact is that many people with mental health problems have had to face severe hardships – yet they've survived. So it's clear they have exceptional resilience and strength, but for as long as they stay focused on the negative effects of mental ill health, it's unlikely they'll see these positive qualities. And that can hinder recovery.

Thinking through and sharing recovery stories has a lot to offer us at a personal level. It promotes and supports our recovery and wellbeing and helps to create positive identity and meaning in life as well as being an empowering experience. We also know that stories of lived experience and recovery are important in changing negative attitudes to people living with mental health problems and in demonstrating that recovery is real. Hearing stories of lived experience and recovery is inspiring to others living with mental health challenges and can help to connect them to others who can support them to take control of their own recovery.

Scottish Recovery Network has a number of publications based on narrative research. You can find more information on the narrative research project as well as stories of recovery on the [Scottish Recovery Network website](#).

Sharing Experiences

Not Alone
Someone Cares!
Listening
Support Each Other
Inspire

Non-Judgemental
Encouragement
Boost
Confidence Building

Building Trust

4 Values underpinning story sharing

When people first start thinking through and sharing their story, it can be an emotional and challenging experience. They may start to question all or parts of their existing story and some may feel anger or frustration that they or others had lost sight of their strengths, skills and qualities. But most people find this passes quickly and report feeling better for having got their 'story' out – whether they choose to share it, or keep it to themselves.

It is important that the environment for thinking through and sharing stories is one where we can all feel safe, supported and in control. As someone facilitating recovery story sharing you will play a central role in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment for all those developing and sharing their stories. We will look in more detail at how to create this environment later in this Guide, but everything about the story sharing process needs to be based on the following principles:

Control

The person sharing their story is always in control of the process. It is their story and cannot be altered or adapted by others. They decide what is shared, how it is shared and when it is shared. Everyone sharing their story should have options as to how they share their story and the ways in which this is then used. This consent process is not only about forms, it is also a discussion and people have the right to change their mind at any time.

Support

The person sharing their story needs to be given the time and resources they need to think through their story and to decide whether or not they want to share it. Through discussion people need to be supported to make the decisions that are right for them and ensure they take and maintain control of their own story.

Respect

Everyone's lived experience and recovery journey is different. When sharing stories, the point is to reflect on ours and listen to others. We do not need to identify or agree with other people's stories but we should respect their experiences and support them in the process of authoring and sharing their story.

Wellbeing

Sharing stories is an empowering experience but it can feel emotional and challenging at times. The wellbeing of the person sharing their story needs to be at the centre of our considerations at all times.

Responsibility

The person sharing their story is ultimately responsible for deciding what they want to share, when and with whom.

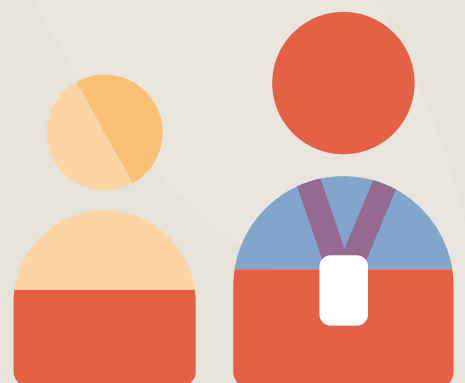
5 The Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator

The Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator plays a key role in supporting and bringing people together to develop and share their stories. The process of developing your recovery story can be a lone pursuit, or done with another person or in groups. Bringing people together to develop and share stories can be very powerful and encourage peer support during the process.

To do this effectively Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators need to create an environment where people feel safe and supported to explore their lived experiences and recovery journey, and to share with others. In doing this the facilitator should model the behaviours that create a positive and safe environment.

How can Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators create a positive and safe environment?

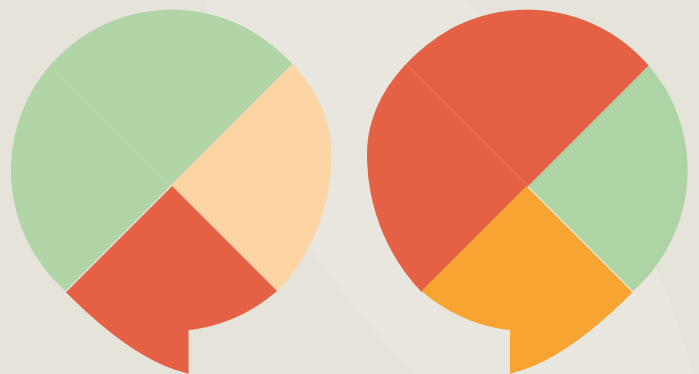
- Recognising that different participants are at different stages in their recovery journey and some will be more confident than others in sharing their story
- Making intentional use of their own story to show that change is possible, that recovery is a process and that sharing stories can promote and instil hope
- Encouraging all participants to empower themselves and participate in the group and its discussions
- Inviting, respecting and validating the experiences shared and highlighting strengths and skills identified during the process
- Reacting to difficult feelings and behaviours with compassion and curiosity rather than irritation or defensiveness
- Avoiding making judgements
- Being aware of their own needs and how they can maintain their wellbeing



How can groups be supported to share responsibility?

It is important that the Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator does not assume responsibility for all that happens in a group or feels that they have to deal with any issues that arise or decisions that need to be taken. Instead, the facilitator's role will be to encourage and support participants to take responsibility for the group and to deal with any issues that arise as a group. For this to happen it needs to be embedded into any group from the start and the group facilitator can help make this happen by:

- Taking time at the beginning of a group session for people to get to know each other and to share what they are looking for from the group and any hopes and fears they may have
- Making sure that there is an open conversation about how people want the group/session to run and the behaviours they will expect of each other. For longer term groups this may result in a group agreement. When putting together this group agreement it may be helpful to consider the values underpinning story sharing set out in Section 4
- Checking in with this group agreement regularly to make sure that it remains relevant and that people are happy with the way the group/session is running
- Resisting pressure (or the urge) to resolve any issues or conflicts that emerge and encouraging and supporting the group to work things through and take collective decisions
- Noticing when the discussion is losing focus or the group dynamic feels challenging and using gentle questions to encourage and support the group to pause and collectively agree how to get back on track
- Not assuming the role of the expert. Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators are experts in their own experience as are the other members of the group. Avoid taking decisions that can be taken by the others and the group and model that it's okay to say "I don't know"



6 Creating a positive, safe group environment

This section gives some practical tips and materials Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators can use to establish a positive, safe environment when working with groups.

There can be the temptation to go straight into sharing stories when a new group is established; however, it is very worthwhile taking some time to manage how the group gets established. This will allow you to explore what the participants want from the group and how they want it to run. This early work will also help you as Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator to establish your role and also to emphasise that the group is a shared endeavour and responsibility. It will also generate discussion and agreement that can be recorded so that the group can check-in later in the process when and if required.

An outline for a first session is suggested at Annex 2. It is based on covering four key elements of establishing the group:

- Getting to know each other
- Hopes and fears
- Creating a safe and positive group environment
- Supporting myself in the group

Short exercises are outlined for each. These are not set but provide an idea of the way to generate the conversations. Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators are encouraged to develop and try out their own exercises. Indeed, it would be ideal if these were then shared and there were a variety of exercises and approaches which could be drawn on in the future.

When introducing the group and its purpose you may want to emphasise:

- The group has been established to bring people together to explore and share their recovery stories to benefit them and others. This means that we will be focusing on people and their lives not just on medical diagnosis and symptoms
- The values underpinning story sharing and what they mean for the group – control, support, respect, wellbeing and responsibility. These should be a starting point for discussions about how the group will operate and also how people will support themselves in the group process
- During this process people will be encouraged to draw on and share of themselves. It is important to emphasise that they should only share what they are comfortable with and that their wellbeing is at the centre of our considerations
- The primary purpose of the group is to explore and share recovery stories. This is an empowering process and also one which is joyful and fun but it can also be challenging and emotional at times. The group can support each other but it cannot provide therapy. Participants are encouraged to think about how they can support their own wellbeing and contribute to the peer support provided by the group

7 Consent

It is important that people give informed consent to their story being shared with others.

In Making Recovery Real in Dundee our aim was to share stories of lived experience and recovery with a wider audience that included decision-makers, practitioners in services and the wider community. You may also be involved in a project to collect and share recovery stories or people you are supporting to develop their story may decide that they want their story shared more widely.

At this point you will need a process to record people's consent to their stories being shared. To assist you we are sharing a template consent form (see Annex 2 page 20) which you can adapt and use to meet your needs.

This form has been developed in consultation with people involved in Making Recovery Real in Dundee. It has been designed to support a conversation about how people want their story to be used and if they want to be named or anonymous.



8 Recovery stories: the big questions

Collecting and sharing stories of lived experience and recovery is at the centre of a lot of the work that Scottish Recovery Network is involved in. Through a variety of projects we have worked with people living with mental health challenges to identify key questions for people to consider when exploring and sharing their stories.

The key questions are in red with some suggestions of other ways to approach these questions or to word them. Some people are happy to talk about recovery but others find the concept or the word challenging and respond better to questions using terms such as 'wellbeing' and 'having a good life'. Some are happy to ponder the big questions but others need more specific questions to help them get started. There is no right way to pose these questions as everyone is different. The suggestions here are to guide you to pose the questions in a way that suits you as the Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator and also the person developing their story.

What does recovery mean to you?

- What gives you hope?
- What makes you feel well?
- what does a good day feel like?

What have you learned about recovery?

- Do you have any techniques that have been helpful when you are feeling really down?
- What sort of lessons would you like to pass onto others?
- If you could give one thing to assist someone's recovery what would that be?
- What has helped you to build resilience?
- What would you tell someone who feels they won't recover?
- How did you deal with changes to your recovery journey?

What has helped your recovery?

- What was your first step on your recovery journey?
- What helped you take this step?
- What works for you and why?
- What activities have helped you? How do you feel when you are doing them?
- What has helped during times of hardship?
- At what point did you realise that you needed support?
- Where did you find the support? Was this challenging?
- Has there been someone who has supported you during your recovery journey?
- What were the barriers to recovery? How did you overcome them?
- What has been unhelpful or missing in your recovery?

9 Recovery Stories

Tools

This section suggests some exercises that Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators can use to get people exploring their recovery story. These exercises can be used alongside the questions posed in section 8 and provide people with an opportunity to view their story in different ways. They show that we do not necessarily need people to share everything and that a story can be as short or long as they want.

Materials to support you to use these exercises are available.

Letter to my younger self

The wonder of hindsight is a great thing. If you could write a letter to your 16-year-old self what would you say?

- What words of guidance would you give?
- How would you comfort and encourage yourself?
- What learning from life would you pass on?
- What other messages do you want to share?

This is a good exercise to help people look back in a way that highlights their learning from their experience of mental health problems. It emphasises skills learned, strengths discovered and learning or wisdom developed. It can help people to think about what has helped their recovery and what they have learned that can be shared with others.

My perfect day

What's your perfect day? Picture yourself at your best – on a great day...

- What are you doing?
- Who are you with?
- How do you feel?
- What's different about you?

This is a good exercise for people who find it difficult to express their dreams. It also supports people to articulate what a 'good day' and 'wellbeing' means for them and the key components of this. This helps them to identify what keeps them well and what they have learned that can help others.

Message from my best friend

It is so easy to be your own worst critic. What would a good friend say about you?

- What do they value about you and your friendship?
- What strengths and qualities do they admire?
- What message would they have for you?

This is a good exercise to help people see things differently. It emphasises what they have to offer. It also allows them to explore the role of positive people and relationships in their recovery.

My life... my song

Imagining your life as a song can seem light-hearted but it can reveal truths about how you see your life.

- Do you have a song that tells your story?
- Who wrote it or who sings it? Is it yours?
- What story does it tell?
- How do you feel when you hear it or sing it?
- What would make the song better?
- If you could write another verse what would it be?

This may seem light-hearted but can be a good way to get people exploring their story. Many people are interested in music and this can be a way for them to express their feelings and reflections on their life and hopes.

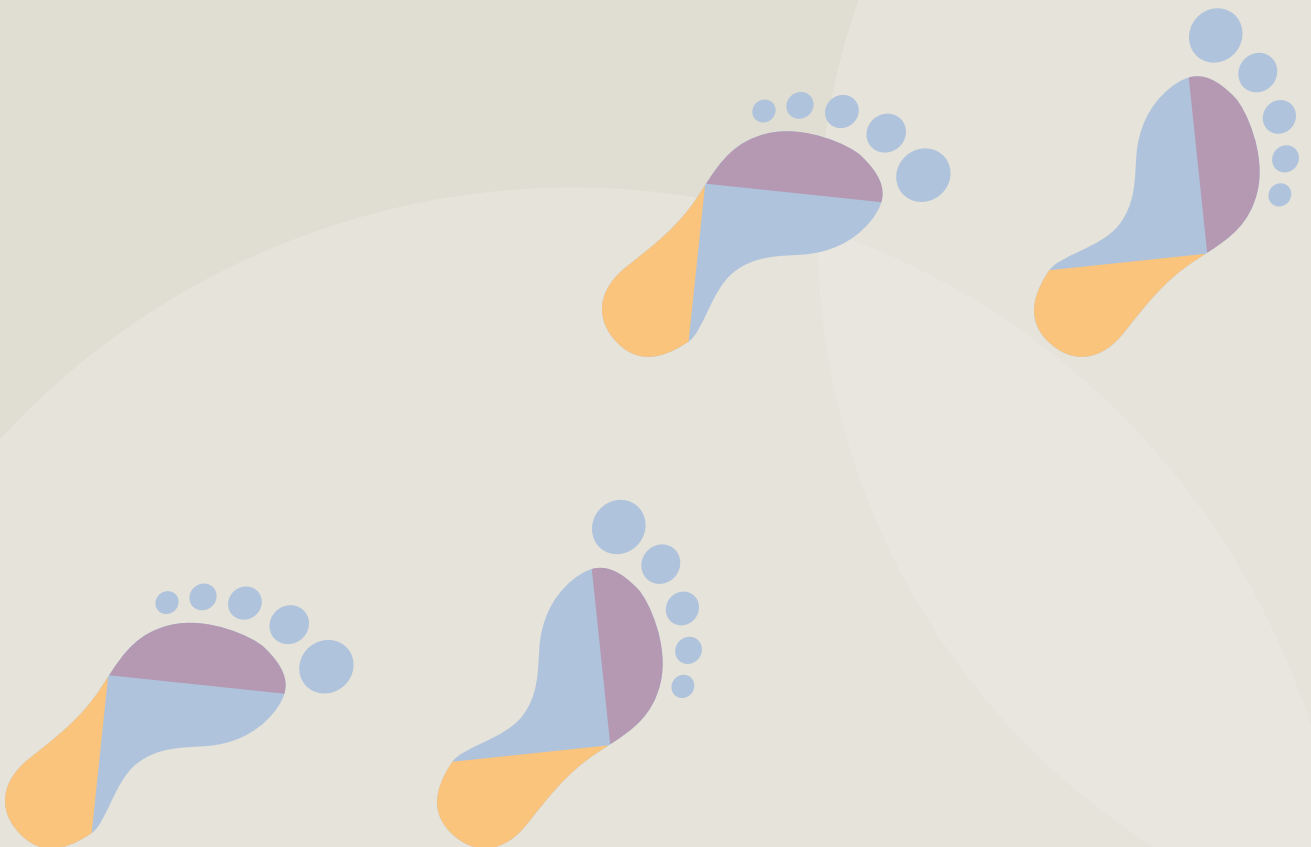


My recovery journey

Recovery is often described as a journey – one that has many twists and turns and needs to happen at your own pace. Draw the picture or map of your recovery journey.

- How would you describe your journey?
- What were the turning points?
- Who has been with you on the journey?
- When did you need to take a break?
- What keeps you on the journey?

Where people don't want to speak or write this can be a good way to get them thinking about their story. It will also help them to identify what has been good about their journey as well as their strengths and skills and the people who have supported them on the way.



CHIME

CHIME is a framework developed by researchers who looked at lots of studies of recovery stories from around the world and identified five things that people said supported their recovery:

This framework can be used as a way to help people explore what has helped their recovery. One way to do this is to ask them to select one of the themes and think about what this means for their life. They can then look at the others and repeat the process.

This exercise can help people to identify what has supported their recovery, what else they believe would support them and to identify learning that can be shared with others.

Discussions on identity can also help people to see themselves beyond their experience of mental health problems and to explore how this experience, no matter how devastating, has also brought them new learning and strengths.

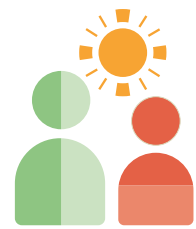
Connections

- good relationships
- peer support
- community



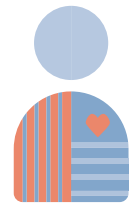
Hope

- belief in recovery
- motivation to change
- positive thinking
- dreams



Identity

- positive sense of self
- overcoming stigma
- person not diagnosis



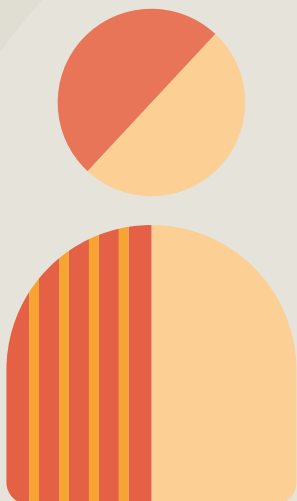
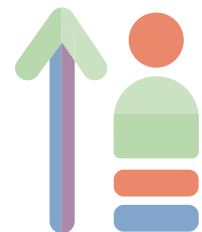
Meaning

- purpose in life
- feeling valid
- contributing



Empowerment

- focus on strengths
- control
- personal responsibility
- self-management



Annex 1

Sample Session 1: Establishing the group

The following exercises are suggested as a starting point for Recovery Story Sharing Facilitators. It is envisaged that the first session of the group lasting 60 to 90 minutes would be taken up with these activities.

Getting to know each other

Two exercises are suggested. The first is a more traditional introductions exercise and the second gives group participants an opportunity to connect up and start to share something of themselves with others.

Getting to know you

As the facilitator, introduce yourself to the group sharing your name, a little of your background and what has led you to facilitating this group.

Then ask the group to introduce themselves in a similar manner – name and why they are here. If you feel it would be helpful also ask them to share something else such as something about themselves that may surprise others or something that they are looking forward to.

Daring to dream

In pairs, ask participants to share something they have always dreamed of doing. Allow a couple of minutes per person giving undivided attention to what your partner is saying and then swap places.

Then get the participants to share their partner's dream and why it is important to them.

This exercise is an opportunity to set a positive tone for the Recovery Stories group and to help people open up and see that their dreams are important. It also helps to set a pattern where everyone is listened to and has their turn to contribute.

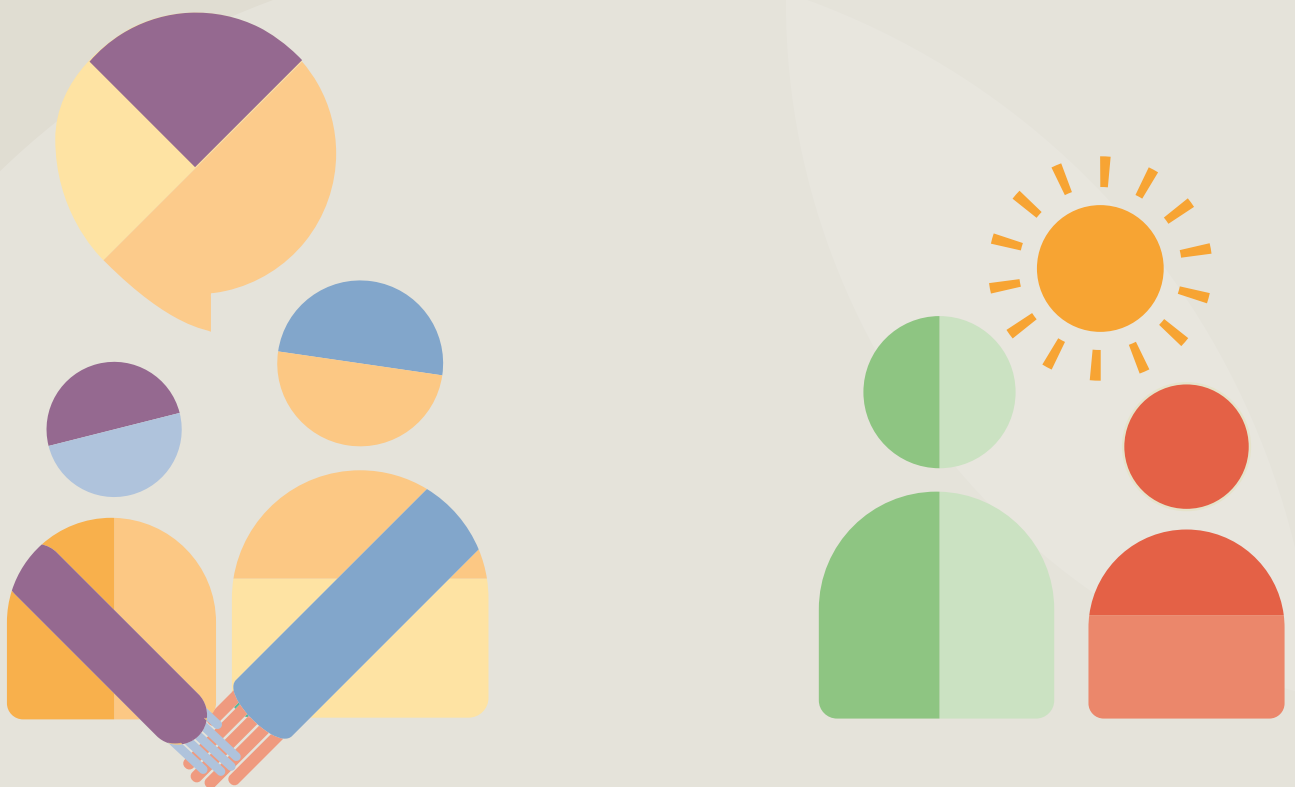
Hopes and fears

While people have committed to participating in a recovery stories group and will feel positive and excited about this it is likely that they will have some worries. It can be helpful to give people an opportunity to air these hopes and fears as it will help them see what they have in common with others. It can also be useful to come back towards the end of the process to reflect on their hopes and fears and how people feel having spent time exploring and sharing their story.

Our hopes and fears for the group

Ask the participants to share their hopes for the group. Validate and record each response. Follow this by asking the participants to share any anxieties or worries about getting involved in the recovery stories group. Again validate and record the responses as they are shared.

This exercise should provide a good foundation for developing a group agreement and will also provide participants with an opportunity to share some of their more vulnerable sides in the group setting.



Creating a safe and positive group environment

In section 5 we discussed the role of the Recovery Story Sharing Facilitator in creating a safe and positive group environment and emphasised that this was the responsibility of the whole group. One very useful way for the facilitator to bring this into effect is to support the group to develop an agreement as to how they want the group to operate – the types of values and behaviours that they want to see in the group.

Recovery stories group agreement

This is best achieved through a whole-group discussion. Following on from a discussion of hopes and fears ask the group for their ideas of how they want the group to run and the values and behaviours that will support them to explore and share their story. Refer to the values underpinning story sharing – control, support, respect, wellbeing and responsibility – and ask what this would look like in the group. Record the agreement and keep it to hand during the group sessions.



Supporting myself in the group

Given that some of those participating may not have explored or shared their story in this way before it can be a good opportunity to encourage people to think about how they can support themselves during the process.

Supporting my wellbeing

Ask participants to take a few moments individually to think about the discussions so far including their hopes and fears and to consider how they will ensure that participating in the group is a positive experience for them.

- What are they looking forward to?
- What are they worried or concerned about?
- How can they manage these worries and concerns?
- What support might they need?
- Where can they get this support if needed?

Encourage participants to take a note of this or to share it with another participant. Ideally this will be something they record and keep during the group process.



Annex 2

Template consent form

[Organisation name] is engaged in a process of supporting people to collect and share stories of lived experience and recovery. Our intention is to increase understanding of recovery / inspire others / positively influence policy, practice and attitudes in services and the wider community [adapt or delete as appropriate].

To do this we will be providing opportunities for people to share their story through groups or individually. Stories will be shared in a number of different forms: written, audio recording and video [as appropriate]. This form is being used to ensure we have your permission to share your story.

You will have the opportunity to see any written, audio or video produced before it is publically launched. All information will be held on password-protected computers and stored securely. The information collected will only be used for the purposes of recovery story sharing and will not be used by [organisation name] or their partners for any other purpose.

Please read the following carefully and indicate your preferences in relation to your story as shared and any audio or film recording made. You will be asked for your preferences for how your story and any audio and film recordings are used in materials created and how you would like to be acknowledged.

I understand that

- I can withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason by contacting [organisation name].
- The story will not be used for personal profit or commercial gain.
- If I decide that I no longer want my contribution to appear for any reason it will cease to be used by the [organisation name] and partners involved; however, I understand that it will not be possible to recover copies of materials, film and audio already in circulation.

Name of person sharing their story

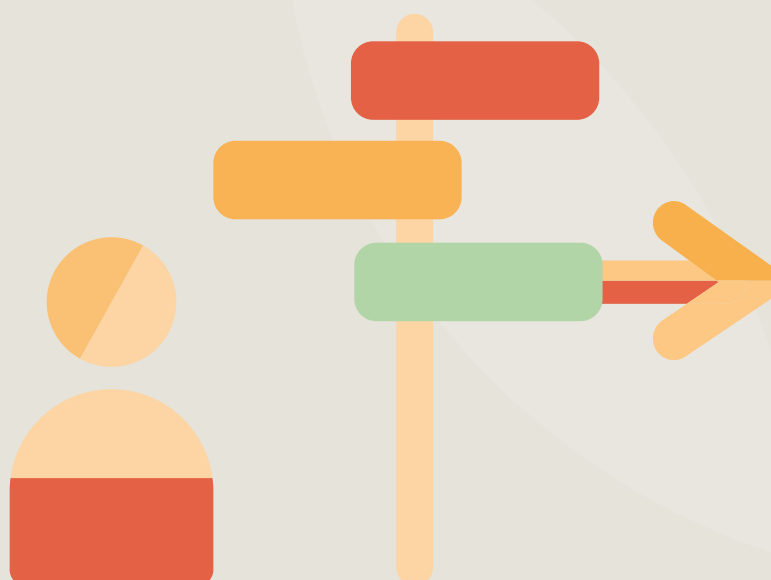
Please consider the following options for sharing your story and agree to those that you consent to (please delete as appropriate):

My story can be reproduced both as an individual story as well as being used in materials along with other people's stories Yes/No

My story can only be used in materials along with other people's stories and not as an individual story Yes/No

I am happy for my full name to be given when my story is reproduced or used Yes/No

I would prefer to remain anonymous when my story is reproduced or used Yes/No



I give consent for my story, any audio or film recordings made and any pictures taken during this project to be used in the following way(s).

In printed publications Yes/No

In video or audio publications Yes/No

In press releases, which may subsequently appear in the local or national media Yes/No

For staff/volunteer learning and development Yes/No

On the websites of [organisation name] Yes/No



Personal details:

Name:

Signature:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Postal address:
.....
.....
.....

Date:

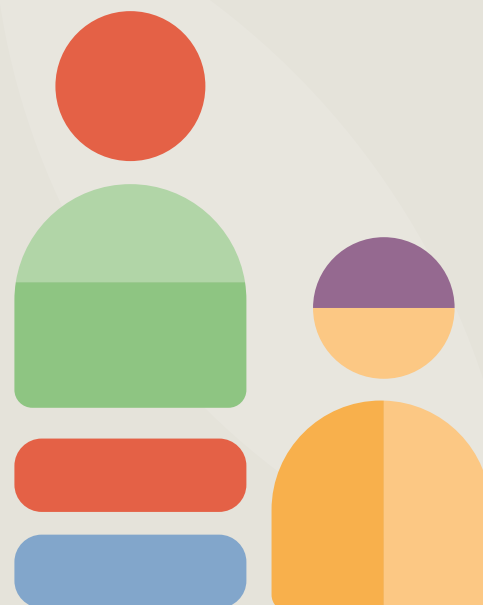
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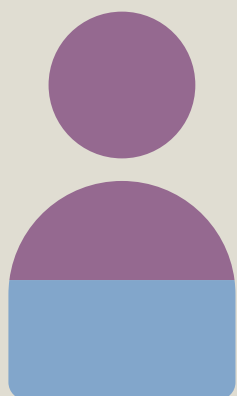
Witness signature:

Organisation (if applicable)

Address (email or postal):
.....
.....

Date:





Together we can make recovery real
for everyone in every community.


Get involved

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0141 240 7790

www.scottishrecovery.net

or join us on social media

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