

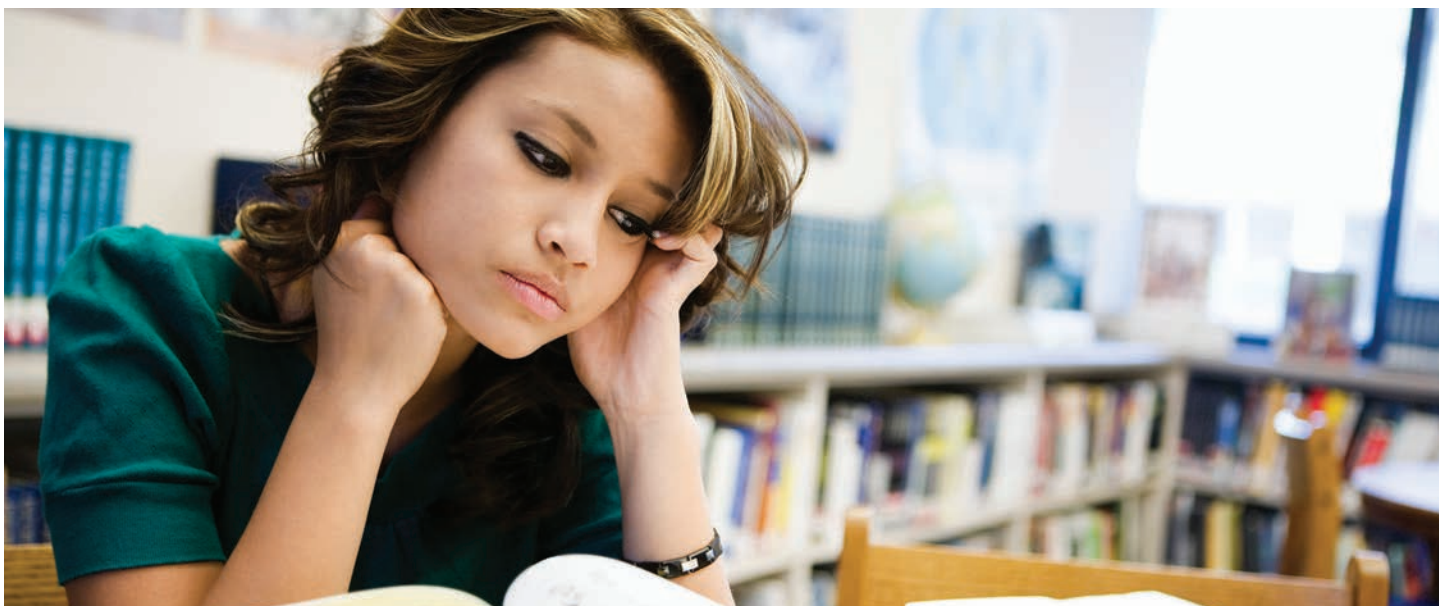
Up to Me: Talking about my mental health?



Brief Reflection Workbook

TEEN

WISE and Patrick W. Corrigan
(Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination)



Introduction

You have a lot of control over if and what you say about your mental health challenges and recovery! There may be times you want to tell people your story or part of your story. There will be times you may not want to tell people. And, there may be times you are unsure what you want to do. This workbook will help you learn how to make wise decisions for yourself. And, in instances where you want to talk to people, this workbook will help you better express what you want to say from a place of recovery, empowerment, and hope and it also gives some tips to make it go as well as possible.

The strategies in this workbook were taken from the evidence-based program. In this workbook, we will first explore the costs and benefits of sharing our personal challenges and wisdom gained on our path to recovery. These vary from person to person and situation to situation. Then, for times you choose to share, you will learn strategies for sharing relatively safely and how you can craft a message that best represents your goals.

The writers of this workbook have their own experiences of mental health challenges and have wrestled with these choices ourselves. If you are working through this workbook on your own, take time to process all the information and think carefully about your responses. If you give yourself time to think about the material, you will have a better understanding of how to make these choices for yourself. And, you will be much more confident in what, and with whom, you are willing to share!

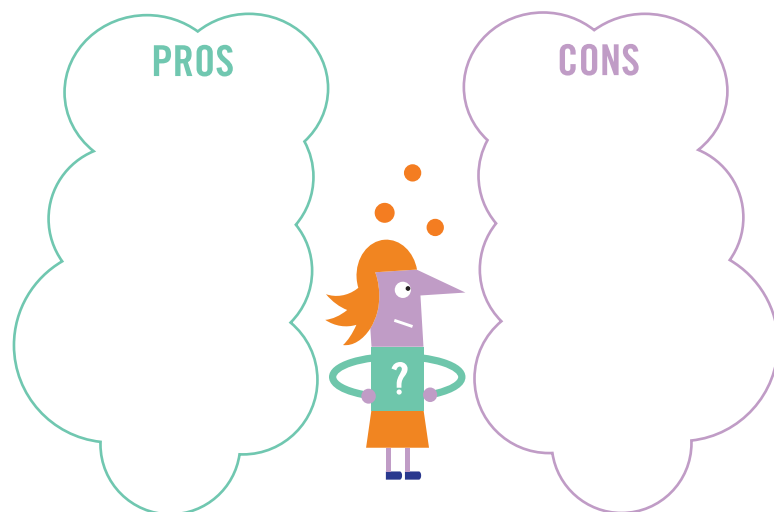
If after using this workbook you would like to learn more about the Up to Me program, you can find out about a program near you and access the program curriculum at wisewisconsin.org/up-to-me.



What are reasons for and against sharing our stories?

You have a choice whether to share your mental health challenges and recovery.

1. Identify your **pros and cons** for sharing your story in different settings.
2. Learn that you **have options in each setting**.



Pros and Cons

Let's take a minute and consider the pros and cons of sharing our stories. Take a look at the table and see some of the reasons people have shared their mental health challenges and recovery journeys – the pros.

PROS: Reasons Why I Might Share my Story

1. I don't have to worry about hiding <i>"I don't want to have to feel like I'm sneaking around with a secret." "I won't feel anxious about whether people find out a different way."</i>	
2. I can be better understood <i>"I hope others will understand my challenges and how hard it was to keep it a secret." "I'd like to know that my sister gets what I am going through."</i>	
3. I can receive emotional support <i>"Sometimes I get sad. I'm looking for friends I can talk to." "It would be nice to meet people who are going through similar challenges."</i>	
4. I can get accommodations I need <i>"I can go to school administrators or my supervisors to get the extra time I need because of my anxiety." "Can you give me a ride to the doctor?"</i>	
5. I can advocate for others <i>"I have the power to help other people by sharing my story." "Sharing my story may help create change in my community."</i>	



This is only a short list of reasons. To help you identify your personal pros, it might be helpful to ask yourself, "Why might I want to share part of my story?" What other reasons may be important to you? Write whatever comes to mind — there are no "silly" reasons.

Cons are the negatives or the harm that could result from sharing our story, or part of our story. Let's consider some of the cons people have shared with us. Later we will learn some strategies for how we can limit the possibility of experiencing some of these responses. It is helpful to recognize the possibility of cons so that we have a balanced perspective on our decision whether or not to talk with others.

CONS: Reasons Why I Might Not Share my Story

1. People may gossip about me.

"People at school or work may start talking about me or spreading rumors."

"How might the stories people tell about me affect my future?"

2. I am worried how people will treat me.

"I know kids who have been bullied and they have mental health problems."

"What will happen if I check that I have a mental health challenge on this form?"

3. I am anxious about sharing something personal with others.

"This makes me feel so vulnerable."

"I'm sure people will not understand."

4. I don't want to become a label.

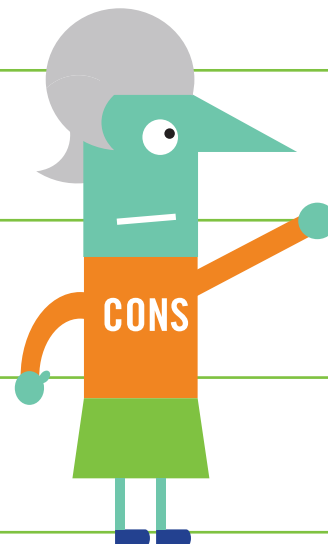
"I am more than a label. This diagnosis does not define me."

"I don't want everything I do and say to be interpreted through my challenges."

5. People will think differently about me.

"Everyone will be wondering what happened to me and what's wrong with me."

"I don't want my parents to always be worried about me."



This list does not cover everything. To identify your personal cons, it might be helpful to ask yourself, "What keeps me from sharing my story or part of my story?" What other cons come to mind for you?

You can weigh your own pros and cons when deciding to share your mental health challenges and recovery journey. Over the course of your life, you will have lots of opportunities to share your story. Weigh your own personal pros and cons on each occasion in the different settings of your life.

You can make different choices in different settings. For example, telling your family about your mental health challenges may have different pros and cons than telling your friends. You may decide to tell your close friend, but not to tell your teacher/boss. Pros and cons are deeply personal. Your pros and cons may change depending on what else is going on in your life or how far along you are in your recovery journey.

Let's consider how the setting may influence someone's decision to share their story. For the sake of this exercise, we will look at three different settings: social media, family, and school/work. For each setting, list pros and cons in each scenario. Then, consider your own situation and potential reasons for talking about your experiences in these settings.



Maria is a high school student living with bipolar disorder and has just gotten back from two months in a treatment facility. She is considering whether to share her story on Facebook.

PROS:

CONS:



Juan experiences depression and he has also recently started substance abuse counseling. His workplace and close family members know He will be going to his big family holiday party next week, where he knows people will be drinking. He is wondering whether to share his substance abuse problems with his cousins.

PROS:

CONS:



Julie experiences test-related anxiety. She is trying to decide whether to tell her professors in college that she could use extra time and a quiet space when taking exams.

PROS:

CONS:



My Pros and Cons Worksheet

for Talking about Mental Health Challenges and Recovery

Setting: Family To Whom: _____

Don't censor any ideas. Write them all down. Put a star (*) next to pros and cons you think are especially important.



PROS

CONS

What would your REASON/GOAL be for sharing your experience with this member of your family?

Given the pros and cons I listed:

- ☐ I have decided TO share my mental health challenges with this member of my family.
- ☐ I have decided NOT TO share my mental health challenges with this member of my family.
- ☐ I have decided to POSTPONE my decision to share with this member of my family.

If you decide to talk to this person, what do you expect will happen after sharing?



My Pros and Cons Worksheet

for Talking about Mental Health Challenges and Recovery

Setting: School / Work To Whom: _____

Don't censor any ideas. Write them all down. Put a star (*) next to pros and cons you think are especially important.



PROS

CONS



What would your REASON/GOAL be for sharing your experience with this person at school/work?

Given the pros and cons I listed:

- ☐ I have decided TO share my mental health challenges with this person at school/work.
- ☐ I have decided NOT TO share my mental health challenges with this person at school/work.
- ☐ I have decided to POSTPONE my decision to share with this person at school/work.

If you decide to talk to this person, what do you expect will happen after sharing?



My Pros and Cons Worksheet

for Talking about Mental Health Challenges and Recovery

Setting: Social Media Forum: (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) _____

Don't censor any ideas. Write them all down. Put a star (*) next to pros and cons you think are especially important.



PROS

CONS



What would your REASON/GOAL be for sharing your experience using social media?

Given the pros and cons I listed:

- ☐ I have decided TO share my mental health challenges using social media.
- ☐ I have decided NOT TO share my mental health challenges using social media.
- ☐ I have decided to POSTPONE my decision to share using social media.

If you decide share using social media, what do you expect will happen after sharing?



You have options in each setting!

There is a range of choices from avoiding people all the way to using your story to try to change ideas about mental health (e.g., advocacy). Each of these options also has pros and cons. Let look at an example of these options while considering Juan's scenario again: *Juan experiences depression and he has also recently started substance abuse counseling. His workplace and close family members know. He will be going to his big family holiday party next week, where he knows people will be drinking. He is wondering whether to share his substance abuse problems with his cousins.*

Juan may choose to **avoid people he does not want to tell** where he decides not to tell his cousins about his mental health challenges and avoids situations where they may find out about it. For Juan, that means that he does not attend his family holiday party.

Juan may choose **secrecy** where he participates in activities, but keeps his mental health challenges a secret. In this case, Juan attends the party, but he does not talk to anyone about what is going on related to his mental health challenges and substance use.

Juan can choose to **selectively share** his story, in which case he would tell a select few individuals, but not everyone. Juan may choose to share what he is going through with the cousin he is closest to.

Another option for Juan is **open sharing**. If Juan chooses open sharing he has made a decision to no longer hide his mental health challenges; however, he is not telling everyone. Juan's cousins may ask him questions related to his mental health or substance use at the holiday party and if he is in open sharing, then he will answer them honestly.

Advocacy is another option. As an advocate, Juan will actively seek out and educate people about his experience with mental health challenges in order to challenge false ideas about mental health. If choosing advocacy, Juan might gather his cousins at his family's party to tell them what he has been experiencing, his belief in recovery, and how they might help him.

Let's put ourselves in Juan's position. What are some of the pros and cons related to each choice he might make? If you were Juan, what do you think you might do?

Now let's think about your options in a setting that is relevant for you. Earlier, we recommended that you consider the pros and cons of sharing your experience on social media, to your family, and at school/work. Pick one of those settings and consider the pros and cons of the five choices outlined here.

Pros and Cons of the Five Choices of Disclosure for Me

Setting: _____



How can you make sharing more likely to go well?

If you decide you have a good reason to share part of your story, how can you make it more likely to go the way you want?

1. Take control of what you are going to say about yourself. **Draft Your Story**
2. Test out the person before sharing to be more sure that they will respond the way you want. **Test A Person Before Sharing**
3. Be prepared with a way to respond if it does not go the way you want and with support for yourself. **Be Prepared with Responses and Coping Support**



Draft Your Story

There are a few things you can do to make your choice to share your story more likely to go the way you hope — to fulfill your reason for sharing. First is for you to think through what your story is before you begin sharing it. This may sound obvious yet many of us find ourselves saying things we were not prepared to say when we talk without thinking through what we want to say beforehand. **You can select which parts of your story you choose to tell. You are in control of how much and in what detail you talk about your experiences.**

The guide below is meant to help you think through different aspects of your story. For example, it is helpful to be prepared to talk about your strengths when sharing your story and that may not seem as natural as giving details of your challenges. **But it is important to recognize that your story does contain strengths, wisdom, and valuable lessons.**

Take some time to complete the outline. Add any information that you think is important that the outline does not address. Crafting your story is a process and your story will change over time.



A Guide to Setting Up a Story

Hi, my name is _____ and I deal/live with _____.

Here are a few things about me and my childhood. List some events in your youth that are typical of most people's lives and/or that might reflect the beginnings of your mental health challenges.

My mental health challenges started when I was about _____ years old. List some of the things that you first noticed or experienced related to your challenges.

These challenges a. did not go away quickly or b. are pretty new for me. List some examples of how this has impacted you in the past years or recently.

This is how I found what works for me. List who and what were your sources of support.

(Worksheet continues on page 13)

What works (has worked) for me includes: List what you do that helps.

List what others can do to support your mental health.

These are some unhelpful responses to my mental health challenges that I have experienced or am concerned I might experience. List some of the unfair experiences and harsh reactions you have experienced from others or are concerned about experiencing. (stigma)

Despite my challenges and sometimes because of them, I have many strengths and have some achievements that I am proud of. List some of the things that you have accomplished in terms of your classwork/job, relationships, and other personal goals. Also list some of your strengths.

I want to end with these two key points:

1. I, like all people with mental health challenges, enjoy having fun, go to class/work, and connect with friends and family just like you.
2. So, please treat me like anyone else. Do not treat me differently based on any unfair stereotypes.



What Do You Want to Share from Your Story?



The setting and your reason for disclosing will determine what you choose to share from your overall story. Rarely will you share everything.

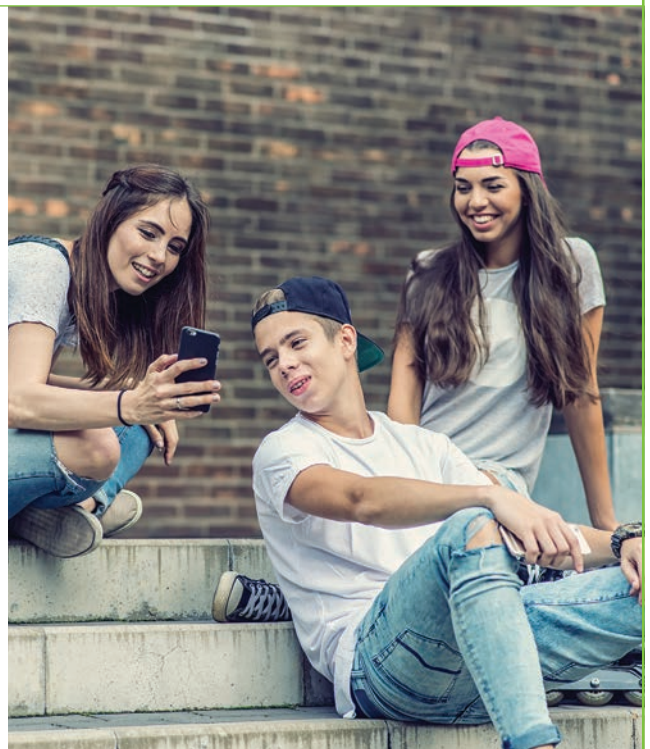
Consider two different settings/people to whom you think you have a good reason to share some of your story.

Setting #1: _____

My reason to share some of my story in this setting/with this person is:

What are things from your story that you think are most important to share in this setting/with this person?

What are some things from your story that you will not want to include when you talk in this setting/to this person? (You believe is too personal or the person might not understand and isn't important for them to offer what you need from them.)



Setting #2: _____

My reason to share some of my story in this setting/with this person is:

What are things from your story that you think are most important to share in this setting/with this person?

What are some things from your story that you will not want to include when you talk in this setting/to this person? (You believe is too personal or the person might not understand and isn't important for them to offer what you need from them.)



Identifying Your Hurtful Self-Beliefs Within Your Story

As you thought about sharing parts of your story in different settings, you might have noticed some words or ideas that you had written about yourself that did not feel very helpful for you to get what you need. The ideas may even have felt unhelpful for you to hold onto. These are known as hurtful self-beliefs or self-stigma. Two examples of hurtful self-beliefs someone may hold are:

"I am not a good friend because I have said things that freak my friends out."

"Now that I have been hospitalized for my challenges, I will always be different and not fit into my family."

These statements are not true yet someone may think they are. It would be more truthful to say:

"There were a few times that I told my friends some of the dark thoughts I was thinking and it made them uncomfortable."

"It will take some time for my family and me to make sense of my hospitalization. We can work through this together."

Sharing your hurtful self-beliefs can increase the other person's stigma towards you. Unless you work to turn those beliefs around, they can increase your negative sense of yourself too.

Look back over your draft story and cross out the words or phrases that you would like to change when it comes to talking about yourself.

To learn a process for turning your hurtful self-beliefs into more helpful self-beliefs, go to the appendix of this workbook.



Test a Person before Sharing

Now that you know what you want to say in a specific situation, how can you tell if a person is safe to talk to? One strategy that we do naturally when we want to check someone out before telling them something, is to test them out to see how they react to a related idea. For example, before I tell someone that I am thinking about getting a tattoo, I might ask them how they feel about a friend's tattoo. If they react judgmentally, I may choose not to talk about my desire to get one. On the other hand, I may choose to tell them about my desire as a way to stand up for my friend. It is my choice! And, it may be helpful to know what to expect before I share something personal.

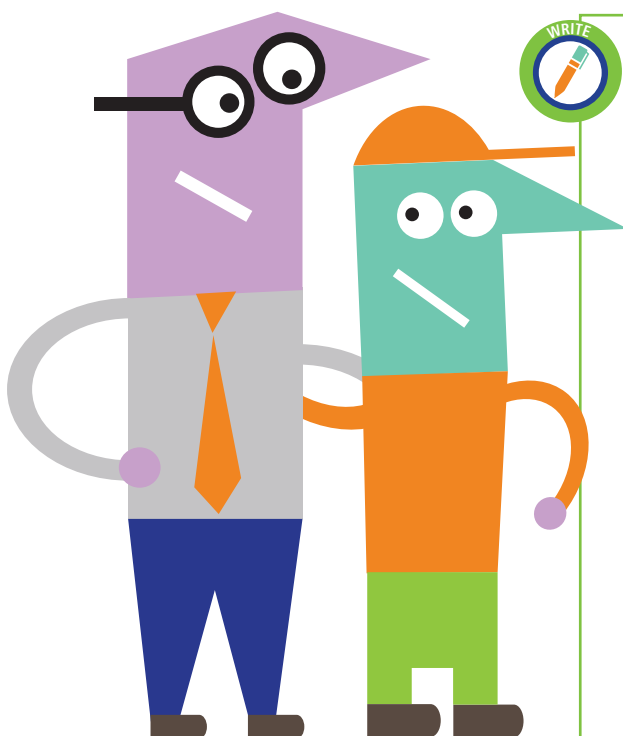
Here's an example of how one person tested out their friend before telling them that they were treated for an addiction:

"I have been hearing lots of actors and musicians talk about their mental health challenges or addictions lately. What do you think about people just coming out with such information?"

Take a look at some possible responses and decide for each one if you would find that person to be helpful to tell if your reason for sharing was to gain support:

- *"Crazy people living a crazy life. What did they expect?!"*
- *"It takes a lot of guts to open up about those things when every move they make is documented by photos and social media."*
- *"I don't know what to think. Sometimes it seems pretty cool that they are open and other times it seems like they are just trying to give excuses for their really bad choices."*
- *"My cousin is in recovery from opioid addiction and I know that she feels pretty alone, like no one else deals with the things she does. I hope it helps her to hear that others face it too."*

Look back over the responses and imagine that your reason for sharing was to challenge false ideas and increase support for others. Now, what decisions about sharing would you make for each response?



If you were looking for some support and wanted to test a person before sharing your story, what topic (current movie, news story, TV show, etc.) would you feel comfortable bringing up to the person to test their reaction?

Be Prepared with Responses and Coping Support

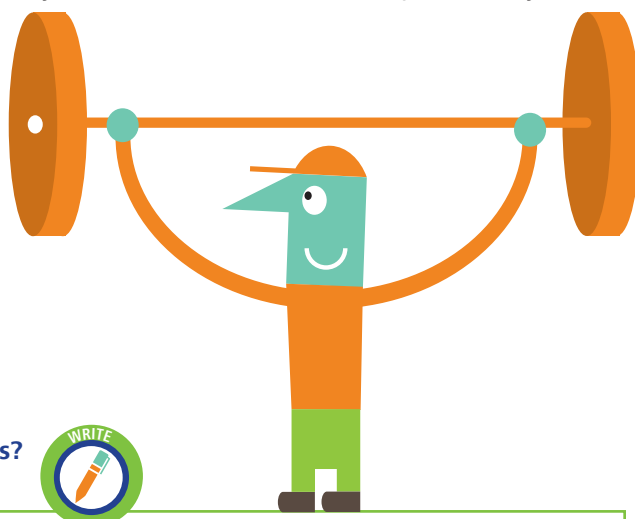
You can prepare for how to respond to negative reactions. Even when you have done the work to identify your reason for sharing, selected parts of your story that are relevant to the situation, and tested someone out before sharing, things can go in ways you did not want. Before you act on sharing part of your story with others, it is a great idea to prepare yourself for unexpected negative reactions. The list below has some helpful ideas of how to respond confidently when things go differently than expected.

Ways to Prepare For and Manage Hurtful and Unhelpful Reactions

Ways to Prepare:

- Talk with someone (your therapist or other trusted adult) who supports you about your plan to share.
- Ask that person to help you think of effective responses if the person reacts negatively.
- Consider these tips deciding what to say when you respond to a negative reaction:
 - Restate the reason you chose to share what you have.
 - Tell the person what you saw in them that made you believe that they were a good person with whom to share.
 - If you think this person might change their perspective and you want to leave the “door open,” end your response with an invitation to talk more at a later time.

Example: “I chose to share my mental health challenges because I would like some extra time on my tests. I have seen how you offer understanding and support to other students who face struggles and thought you would be able to do the same for me. If there is any other information that you need so that you can re-consider my request, please let me know.”



What are additional way you might prepare for these conversations?



Ways to Manage During the Conversation:

- Take a breath and allow yourself time to feel, process, and decide how you will respond to any hurtful or unhelpful reaction.
- Be kind to yourself by using positive self-talk.
- Walk away. Delay your response until you are ready or do not respond at all.
- Remember that the person may be having a difficult time understanding what it has been like for you if they have not had a similar experience.
- Allow yourself to make mistakes in deciding to whom you should share. When you feel ready, review what went well, what didn't, and use what you learned in future opportunities for sharing.

What are additional ways you might manage during these conversations?





Challenging Your Hurtful Self-Beliefs

Helpful self-beliefs recognize your strengths, even those gained from your mistakes or challenges. They recognize the work you have put into being who you are and support you in becoming the person you want to be. They often include words such as I am able, I am hopeful, I am learning, I am strong.

Hurtful self-beliefs focus on what you couldn't do in your past, they often are blaming of others or self, and use words like always, never, all or no one.

Below is a brief example of one person's self- talk. As you read, reflect on how you feel about the two different versions of the same person's self-talk. Hearing what individuals say about themselves to themselves can help us to better understand how they perceive their experiences.

Example #1: "I used to cause lots of problems at school. Now I hate the fact that everyone thinks people like me are freaks. Having to go to the office to get my medication every day tells everyone that they are right about people like me."

Example #2: "I have come a long way since elementary school. Teachers didn't know how to handle me when I was younger. Since finding out that I have ADHD, I have learned some great ways to deal with all that I am expected to do at school. Taking medication is not so fun, but it really helps for now. If someone has a problem with that, I guess they have a lot to learn."

Reflect: Which version of this person's self-talk has more helpful self-beliefs in it? What are some of the helpful beliefs you heard?



Your Hurtful Self-Beliefs

List any hurtful self-beliefs you discovered when drafting your story. Add any others that you notice you carry about yourself related to your mental health challenges and the different aspects of your life.



Five Steps for Changing Personally Hurtful Self-Stigma



The final step is to translate your findings into a belief statement that **counters** the hurtful belief.

Maggie's example of a counter:

"My health challenge will not keep me from having good friends!"

Maggie may wish to write this statement down on a card so that she can remember it better. Then, the next time that she is questioning if she needs to keep her mental health challenge a secret in order to make friends, she can look at the card.

5. **Collect facts and ideas that challenges the true-false statement.**

Maggie's example of collecting evidence:

Maggie asked her sister's friends and a teacher if they have any friends who have a mental health challenge. She discovered that most of them have a friend with a mental health challenge of some kind. Matter of fact, many said that they had more than one friend with a mental health challenge, and two of them even shared that they have a mental health challenge. After speaking with them, she understood that her hurtful belief (*that people without mental health challenges would not be friends with her*) is not true.

To challenge a statement, you want to first **ask others** whether or not they believe it to be true. Ask people whose opinions you value. You will likely give up hurtful beliefs about yourself when you discover that your underlying beliefs are actually false.

Maggie's example of selecting people to seek out their opinions:

Maggie decided to ask friends of her college-aged sister and a trusted teacher at school.

These negative beliefs about self can be **turned into true-false statements** about people with mental health challenges in general.

A true-false statement from Maggie's example:

"People with mental health challenges cannot be friends with those who do not have a mental health challenge."

4. **Begin with a clear statement of the hurtful belief using the formula:**

I must be _____ because _____.

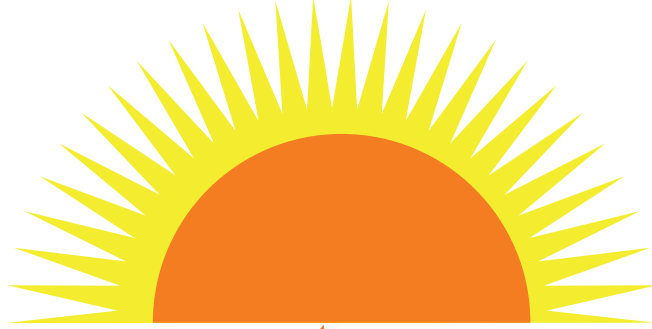
An example of one person's hurtful belief, we will call her Maggie:

"I must be unable to make friends because people don't want to be friends with people who have faced mental health challenges."

Challenging Your Self-Talk



Now that we have addressed Maggie's hurtful belief, select one of your own hurtful self-beliefs and walk through the five steps on this worksheet.



Collect evidence that shows the statement to be false.

Empty box for step 4: Collect evidence that shows the statement to be false.

Who is the trusted person you will ask to see if they believe it is true?

Empty box for step 3: Who is the trusted person you will ask to see if they believe it is true?

Create a new, true statement that **COUNTERS** your hurtful belief.

Turn into a true-false statement.

State your hurtful belief.

I must be
because

