



Parent/Professional
Advocacy League

Sharing Your Family's Mental Health Story

Your family's mental health story has power! With it, you can reach out for help, connect with families who have been through similar experiences, and build community. You can create empathy in others, reduce the stigma surrounding mental health challenges, and effect positive change in services and policies. Yet talking about mental health can be complicated and scary. What do families need to know about sharing their stories?

Why should I share my story?

- **Connect** - Knowing what you are going through allows those with similar experiences to reach out and build community.
- **Get help** - Others can help you get through this if they know what you need.
- **Reduce stigma** - Hearing your story can create empathy and compassion in others who may have less experience with mental health challenges. And when families who *do* have this experience hear you talking freely about yours, they may feel more comfortable doing the same.
- **Help other parents** - Parents with children with mental health challenges can learn from your experiences, whether their take-away is how to work with insurance around hospital care or just that they are not alone.
- **Advocate for change** - Sharing your story with the media, government workers, and lawmakers helps pressure the system to change for the better.



Where do I share my story?

- Start with **someone you trust** - a close friend or family member that you feel comfortable with.
- Or, start by sharing **anonymously** on a webpage especially for families of children with mental health challenges.
- Find **sympathetic audiences**. Join a PPAL or other support group for parents of kids with mental health challenges. Or talk with your school's special education parent advisory committee. Other parents of kids with disabilities "get it" in a unique way.
- Have you gotten comfortable and feel **ready to talk** about your experience further? PPAL is often contacted by the media looking for parents to share their stories. Consider calling PPAL and telling us you have a story to tell - we can help you amplify your voice.



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Concerns about telling your story

- **Whose story is it?** You might feel that the story belongs to your child and isn't yours to tell. Think about your child's age, talk to your child about their comfort level, and consider focusing on your experience as a parent and/or using a pseudonym for your child when discussing them publicly.
- **Will I break down?** Are you afraid you won't be able to hold it together while telling your story? It can help to have a stock phrase ready, such as "I always well up at this point" or "I get emotional every time." And remember that it's ok to have feelings; this is tough on you, too.
- **How will others react?** More and more people are becoming educated about mental health, but you can still get a few unhelpful or rude responses. Try to focus on how you tell your story - being clear, making your points, and being satisfied with what you said. It may help you care less about how others will respond.
- **Will it make me vulnerable?** Some parents worry that they might be judged or socially isolated if their community knows what is going on. Use your own best judgement. Sharing your story has many benefits, but only you know how much you should divulge.



Empowering your child

- Talk to your child about **how much of their story they feel comfortable sharing** - both themselves and with your help.
- Tell them that **it's OK to talk about their mental health**, and help them determine how much of their story they want to tell, who they want to tell it to, and when and where to tell it.
- Teach them that when people ask questions they don't want to answer, **they don't have to respond**. Help them practice saying "that's private" or "I don't feel comfortable with that question."
- If you have a teen or young adult with a mental health story, **connect them with [Youth MOVE](#)** - to connect with others, grow personally, and learn more about how and when to tell their stories.
- Always teach your children that, whether or not they want to share their story broadly, **mental health challenges are nothing to be ashamed of** and you are proud of them for who they are.

