

Excerpts From:
HONEST, OPEN AND PROUD
to Eliminate the Stigma of Mental Illness

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Version for Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination



For information, contact WISE at endstigmatogether.org or visit the Resources page at www.ncse1.org.

Program Outline

Lesson 1. Considering the Pros and Cons of Disclosing

1. Do you identify yourself as a person with mental illness.....
2. Secrets are part of life.....
3. Considering the pros and cons of disclosure.....

Lesson 2. There are Different Ways to Disclose

1. Different ways to disclose.....
2. To whom might you disclose.....
3. How might others respond to your disclosure.....

Lesson 3. Telling Your Story

1. How to tell your story.....
2. Honest, Open and Proud through SOLIDARITY and peer support
3. How did it go?.....
4. Putting it all together.....

What is the overall purpose of the Honest, Open and Proud program?

“Our goal here is to consider what the costs and benefits are of sharing one’s experiences with emotional challenges and mental illness with some people.

We also seek to discuss strategies for sharing your story most effectively should you decide to do so.”

There are a few general ground rules within the program and sharing groups:

- confidentiality- what is said in the room stays in the room,
- that everyone’s opinion counts, and
- we respect each other.

LESSON 1

Considering the Pros and Cons of Disclosing

LESSON OVERVIEW

Open, Honest and Proud is the right decision for some people, but not for everyone. This section is a guide to help people decide what the right decision is for them. We approach the decision in three parts:

1. We discuss the idea of IDENTITY and mental illness so you can decide how you frame your identity.
2. We note that secrets are a part of everyone's lives so that you can decide whether your experiences with mental illness should or should not be disclosed.
3. We help you weigh the costs and benefits of coming out so that you can decide whether or not to disclose.

Worksheet 1.1

Some Reasons Why People Decided to Disclose Their Mental Illness

1. To Tell the Secret “I just wanted someone else to know that I get hospitalized for manic-depression.” “I don’t want to have to feel like I’m sneaking around with a secret.” “I felt bad for having to keep a secret. I don’t want to feel bad anymore.”	
2. Understanding “I’m hoping others will understand not only my mental illness, but the difficulty of trying to keep it a secret.” “I’d like someone to say to me, ‘I’ve had problems too.’”	
3. Support and Assistance “Sometimes I get sad. I’m looking for friends who can be supportive.” “Can you give me a ride to the doctor?” “Sometimes, I just need someone to talk to.”	
4. Reasonable Accommodations “It’s the law. When I ask for sensible help at work, you need to give it to me.” “Can I come in a half hour late this week? I’m feeling a little down. I’ll make it up next week.”	
5.	
6.	
7.	

Now partner with another group member and discuss your *Worksheet 1.1* entries.

2. Secrets Are Part of Life

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Everyone has secrets and they keep them for a variety of reasons.
- There is nothing shameful about secrets like this; still, some of us beat ourselves up with the “*secret of mental illness.*”
- Many assumptions we hold about our secrets account for our bad feelings.
- Our assumptions, however, are often false.
- We can challenge these assumptions and break down our hurtful beliefs.

“I’m not bad for having secrets. Everyone does.”

You may wish to write this saying down on a card so that you can remember it better. Then, the next time that you're questioning your integrity for keeping a secret, in particular your secret of mental illness, pull out the card. Remind yourself that everyone keeps secrets and that there is nothing wrong with it, as long as you aren't keeping your secret based on assumptions that might actually be false.

Next, we'll use *Worksheet 1.2* to change a hurtful attitude you've experienced in relation to your experience with mental illness. What are some of these hurtful attitudes? List them here.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

For the purpose of this exercise, use other group members to challenge and collect evidence against the assumptions. But, please consider whom you might ask outside the group at a later date. If you decide to follow through with this exercise outside of this group session, you need to make sure to go to someone who will prove these hurtful statements to be false.

Change Our Attitudes Exercise

Complete all five steps.

1. State the hurtful belief:

I MUST BE _____ BECAUSE _____.

2. Define the True-False Assumptions:

3. Challenge the assumptions by checking them out with whom?

4. Collect evidence against the assumptions:

5. Restate the attitude so that it does not injure you. This is a COUNTER.

3. Considering the Pros and Cons of Disclosing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- There are both benefits and costs to coming out.
- Only you can weigh them to decide whether it is worth coming out.
- Costs and benefits differ depending on the setting; for example, at work versus among your neighbors.

Let's make a list of all the costs and benefits of coming out, of telling other people about your experiences with mental illness. Write them down in *Table 1.2* below.

<i>Table 1.2: Some Costs and Benefits of Coming Out with Mental Illness</i>	
Benefits	Costs

Discuss the list with others in the group.

Now let's make a list of the costs and benefits of **NOT DISCLOSING**.

<i>Table 1.3: Some Costs and Benefits of Not Disclosing</i>	
Benefits	Costs

Again, discuss your list with others in the group.

Worksheet 1.3

The Costs and Benefits Worksheet for Disclosing My Mental Illness

Setting: _____ To Whom: _____

Don't censor any ideas. Write them all down.

Put a star (*) next to costs and benefits you think are especially important.

Short-Term Benefits	Short-Term Costs

Long-Term Benefits	Long-Term Costs

Given these costs and benefits:

- I have decided **to disclose** my mental illness.
- I have decided **NOT to disclose** my mental illness.
- I have decided **to put off** my decision.

What is your GOAL in disclosing? (Consider reasons you listed in <i>Worksheet 1.1</i>)
What do you expect will happen after disclosing?

LESSON 2

There are Different Ways to Disclose

LESSON OVERVIEW

It might seem obvious, but there are different ways to come out.

1. We describe five ways here, and then guide you through considering the costs and benefits associated with each strategy.
2. We guide you through the process of selecting a person to whom you are considering disclosing.
3. We then consider how others might respond to your disclosure.

1. Different Ways to Disclose

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- People might disclose their experiences with mental illness and corresponding treatments in different ways.
- Understand the costs and benefits of disclosing in the five different ways.
- Remember, you will perceive different costs and benefits associated with each of the five ways. The costs and benefits you identify may vary by setting.

Table 2.1 on the next page summarizes the five ways people might disclose their experiences with mental illness.

Table 2.1: Five Ways to Disclose or Not Disclose

<p>1. SOCIAL AVOIDANCE: Not telling anyone about your mental illness and avoiding situations where people may find out about it. This could mean working or living in a sheltered or supported work environment, where you only associate with other people with mental illnesses.</p>	
<p>Benefit: You don't encounter people who will unfairly harm you.</p>	<p>Cost: You lose the opportunity to meet new people who may possibly be supportive.</p>
<p>2. SECRECY: Participating in work and community situations, but keeping your mental illness a secret.</p>	
<p>Benefit: Like social avoidance, you withhold information about your mental illness from others. But, you don't avoid important settings like work or the community in the process.</p>	<p>Cost: Some people feel guilty about keeping secrets. You may also receive less support from others because they are unaware of your mental illness.</p>
<p>3. SELECTIVE DISCLOSURE: Disclosing your mental illness to selected individuals, like co-workers or neighbors, but not to everyone.</p>	
<p>Benefit: You find a small group of people who will understand your experiences and provide support.</p>	<p>Cost: You may disclose to some people who then hurt you with the information. You may have difficulty keeping track of who knows and who doesn't.</p>
<p>4. INDISCRIMINANT DISCLOSURE: Making the decision to no longer conceal your mental illness; this does not mean, however, that you are telling everyone your story.</p>	
<p>Benefit: You don't worry who knows about your problems. And you are likely to find people who will be supportive.</p>	<p>Cost: You may tell people who then hurt you with the information.</p>
<p>5. BROADCAST YOUR EXPERIENCE: Actively seeking out and educating people about your experience with mental illness.</p>	
<p>Benefit: You don't have to worry who knows about your history of mental illness. You are promoting a personal sense of empowerment in yourself. You are striking a blow against stigma.</p>	<p>Cost: You are going to encounter people who may try to hurt you with this information. You are also going to meet people who disapprove of your political statement.</p>

2. To Whom Might You Disclose?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Some people are better to disclose to than others.
- Learn how to identify a good person to whom you might disclose.
- Understand the procedure for “*testing out*” the person before disclosing.

In the previous section, we showed that people might disclose their experiences with mental illness and corresponding treatments in different ways. If you are considering selective disclosure, this section helps you to identify a possible person for disclosure. Two things are considered:

1. How might you identify a good person to disclose to?
2. We propose a way in which you might “*test out*” the person before fully disclosing.

Table 2.2: Types of Relationships & Important Characteristics of a Good Person to Disclose to

<p>1. FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP The person provides some function to you where knowing your experiences with mental illness might help accomplish the function. Sample functional relationships include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ psychiatrist ▪ doctor ▪ minister ▪ car pool member ▪ supervisor ▪ co-workers ▪ teacher ▪ team member
<p>2. SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP The person seems to be friendly and will provide support and approval to you when they find out about your experience. Characteristics of this kind of person include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pleasantness ▪ concern for others ▪ trustworthiness ▪ open-mindedness ▪ loyalty ▪ helpfulness
<p>3. EMPATHIC RELATIONSHIP Some people to whom you might disclose have had similar, though perhaps less painful experiences: <i>“I know what it’s like to be depressed.”</i> These kinds of people can provide an empathic relationship. Their characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ willingness to listen ▪ kindness ▪ an understanding nature ▪ honesty
<p>4.</p>
<p>5.</p>
<p>6.</p>
<p>7.</p>

3. How Might Others Respond to Your Disclosure?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Disclosure will impact the people around you.
- People may respond in different ways to your disclosure.
- Consider the different ways that people will react to your disclosure.

Disclosure *will* impact the people around you. You need to consider the various ways in which people may respond and plan your reactions accordingly.

<i>Table 2.3: How People Might Respond to Your Disclosure</i>	
Positive	Negative
<p>Understanding <i>“It must be hard living with your illness and the secret.”</i></p> <p>Interpersonal Support <i>“I’m here for you if you need someone to talk to.”</i></p> <p>Assistance <i>“Can I give you a lift to the doctor?”</i></p>	<p>Disrespect <i>“I don’t want some dangerous loony like you around.”</i></p> <p>Denial <i>“I’m not giving you any special breaks because of your mental illness.”</i></p> <p>Retribution <i>“I’ll get you fired. I don’t have to work next to a crazy guy like you.”</i></p> <p>Fear/Avoidance <i>“You’re dangerous. I’m staying away.”</i></p> <p>Gossip <i>“Hey, did you hear about Joe? He was committed to the insane asylum.”</i></p> <p>Blame <i>“I have the same kind of problems as Gayle but I don’t go around and blab about it.”</i></p>

Which of these have you experienced? Are there other examples? Discuss these with the group.

LESSON 3

Telling Your Story

LESSON OVERVIEW

As a result of Lessons 1 and 2, you might have decided that you want to come out. Hence, this last lesson has several goals.

1. Learn a way to tell your story in a personally meaningful way.
2. Identify peers who might help you with the coming out process.
3. Review how telling your story felt.
4. Put together all you've learned in order to move forward.

1. How to Tell Your Story

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Read through one example of how to tell the story of one's experience with mental illness.
- Use the provided guide to construct your story of experience with mental illness.
- Understand the values and issues related to public speaking.

Worksheet 3.1 provides a template to fill out and yield a story that might work for you. Your story will vary depending on where you tell it.

Worksheet 3.1

A Guide to Setting Up a Story About Your Experiences

With Mental Illness

Hi, my name is _____

and I have a mental illness called _____.

Let me tell you about 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 illness.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

My mental illness started when I was about _____ years old.

List some of the difficult things that happened to you when you first noticed your mental illness beginning.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Unfortunately, my mental illness did not go away quickly.

List some of the things that you have struggled with the past several years due to your mental illness.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

I have found my path of recovery living with my illness. What has worked (works) for me includes:

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____
4. _____

Along the way, I have experienced some stigma and unfair responses to my illness.

List some of the unfair experiences and harsh reactions you have experienced from society.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Despite my challenges and sometimes because of them, I have achieved several accomplishments.

List some of the things that you have accomplished in terms of your work, relationships, and other personal goals.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

I want to end with these two key points:

1. **I, like all people with mental illness, live, work, and play just like you.**
2. **So, please treat me the same. Do not view me based on any unfair stereotypes.**

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY?

You probably do not want to communicate **EVERYTHING** in the worksheet.
Remember your **GOAL** (from *Worksheet 1.3*).

1. **CIRCLE** the information in the sheet you think is important for the person to hear.
2. **PUT A LINE** through any information:
 - a. you believe is too personal (I was assaulted when I was six years old) or
 - b. the person might not understand (Sometimes I hear God's voice).

2. Honest, Open and Proud through **SOLIDARITY** and Peer Support

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Solidarity with peers may make coming out easier.
- There are many types and characteristics of peer services.

Research on programs meant to erase public stigma might seek to correct the problem by appealing to **normalcy** or **solidarity**. In order to challenge public prejudices, some programs present mental illness in terms of normalcy: “people with psychiatric disorders are just like me!” People with mental illness are being told to keep their identity secret, to pass as normal.

Honest, Open and Proud promotes a different perspective; people realize that experiences with mental illness are a large part of who they are. Instead of keeping it quiet, people want to share it with others. Instead of passing as normal, people want to be accepted for who they are. **SOLIDARITY** is the alternative, the desire and expectation that the public stands with us as we are, for whom we are. People who come out with mental illness are doing that. One way is to join the Solidarity campaign anchored by this brand developed after considerable market research. We encourage people to display it broadly and proudly. *Worksheet 3.3* provides different sizes of the brand which participants might cut out and use as they see fit.



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“**I stand with mental illness.**” has two meanings.

- I stand proudly with my own mental illness as an example of recovery.
- I am in solidarity with people who are out with their mental illness.

Solidarity also has two meanings.

- Coming out is easier when I stand proudly with peers.
- I expect others to stand with me as I am proudly.

Worksheet 3.3

Honest, Open and Proud Brand



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What do you think of the idea of **SOLIDARITY**?

3. How Did It Go?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn how to evaluate a specific instance of disclosure.

Worksheet 3.5.

Details of Your Disclosure- How Did it Go?

Name of the person to whom you disclosed: _____

Date of disclosure: _____ Place of disclosure: _____

<p>Your Goal(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ▪ ▪ 	<p>What you said:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ▪ ▪
<p>Person's Reaction:</p>	

_____ How satisfied are you with the exchange?

not at all satisfied			neither				very satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

_____ How positive was the exchange?

not at all positive			neither				very positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

TOTAL SCORE

<p>MORE THAN 10: Good experience; worth doing again.</p> <p>LESS THAN 6: Not so good; what went wrong?</p> <p>BETWEEN 6 AND 10: Need more information for the future.</p>
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4. Putting it All Together

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Summarize insights from the worksheets provided in this workbook.
- Decide how you would like to move forward with the issue of disclosure.

We end the program with a pause for insight and direction. In *Worksheet 3.6*, questions are provided so that participants can summarize insights and decide on future directions. Complete these and then share your responses with a partner. After finishing your discussion with a partner, come back to the group as a whole and discuss one or two decisions that you have made about coming out and going forward from this program.