

Seven Steps to Telling Your Story

The following seven steps will help you craft a succinct and powerful story.

1.	Introduce yourself
	Give your name and city or town. Include your organization. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.”
	Share how you are affected by mental illness. Are you living with mental illness, a family member, a caregiver? This brings a "real face" to mental illness.
	State your issue and position. Let your listener know what you want them to support or oppose (or do). This helps your listener focus.
2.	What happened?
	What happened when you/your loved one received the help you needed? Keep this brief--think about the most important thing you’d like your listener to know.
3.	What helped?
	Describe what helped (or would have helped, if you or your loved one didn’t receive the care you needed). This adds a hopeful tone and helps show the value of services and supports.
4.	How are you different today?
	Share what is going right in your life or how you are doing today. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.
5.	What is the need or problem?
	Mention the problem or need you want addressed. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people with a mental health condition.
6.	What will help others?
	Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.
7.	Make your "ask"
	Ask your policymaker if you can count on their support (or opposition). Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your policymaker for his or her time.

Story Practice Sheet

1. My introduction

Include your name and city and organization, if applicable. We encourage you to describe yourself as “a member of [NAMI State Org or NAMI Affiliate], part of America’s largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.” Add how you are affected by mental illness and your issue and position.

2. What happened

Aim for 3-9 sentences. Briefly describe the most important and compelling thing(s) about your situation.

3. What helped

Aim for 1-5 sentences. Briefly describe what helped you or your loved one (or what would have helped). Aim for a hopeful tone that shows what’s helpful.

4. How I'm different today

Aim for 1-3 sentences. Share what is going right in your life or how you are doing. This concludes your personal story on a positive note that inspires.

5. What is the need or problem

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Transition to the challenge(s) faced by people with mental health conditions that you want addressed.

6. What will help others

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Talk about what will help. Let your listener know what will address the need or problem you described.

7. My "ask"

Aim for 1-2 sentences. Thank your listener for listening to you. Then, ask your listener for a commitment. Be specific.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Text **"SmartsStory"** to **82608**

to sign up for NAMI's federal advocacy alerts and to advocate!

SAMPLE YOUTH STORY

1. Introduction

Hello, I'm Shannon Johnson from Monroe. I'm a member of NAMI Monroe, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

As someone who lives with depression, I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health care in school.

2. What happened

At the start of high school, I found myself feeling hopeless about my life and having very little energy to go to school or see my friends. I started skipping sports practices and avoiding my friends and family. Eventually, I was cut from the soccer team and started to fail a class.

3. What helped

Thankfully, one of my teachers realized something was wrong. She encouraged me and my parents to meet with our school psychologist who helped diagnose me with depression and connect me with a psychiatrist in our community for more support.

4. How I'm different today

Today, I am back on the soccer team with my friends and working to raise my grades. I am excited to apply to college in the fall. Before my diagnosis, I didn't understand what mental illness was, or the impact it could have on someone. Now, I am committed to making sure other high schoolers can spot the sign of depression or other mental health conditions and know how to get help.

5. What is the need or problem

Many people have mental health conditions like mine, but not everyone gets the help they need. If my teacher hadn't pulled me aside, I don't know if I would have asked for help. And if my school didn't have a mental health professional, I don't know if I would have received that help. Getting help should not be left up to chance, but too many schools don't have mental health resources available.

6. What will help others

Early identification and effective treatment for mental health conditions can make a difference for teenagers and their families across our community. School-based mental health services will make it easier for students like me to get the help they need.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to support HB 812, which would ensure that our schools can help young people access mental health care?

SAMPLE STORY OF LOSS

1. Introduction

Hello, I'm Matt Johnson from Dover. I'm a member of NAMI Dover, part of America's largest grassroots mental health organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

I lost my daughter during a mental health crisis and, because of my family's experience, I'm here to urge you to fully fund our community's crisis response system.

2. What happened

When my daughter, Ashley, was younger, her infectious laughter lit up every room. She loved dancing and painting and earned high grades in school. But shortly after she turned 20, there was a change – we stopped hearing from her regularly and noticed her personality changing. When we visited her at college, her roommate told us about weeks of erratic behavior, but we thought she was having a hard time adjusting. After a month, Ashley withdrew from her friends, dropped out and moved back home.

Once Ashley was back home, we noticed the changes firsthand and tried to help her. New mental health professionals, different medications, so on and so on – all seemed to help at first, but the unpredictability always returned. One night, Ashley became extremely agitated, beyond what we ever witnessed before. Concerned for her safety and with nowhere else to turn, we called 911 for help. Law enforcement responded, but the situation escalated very quickly. The officer started issuing orders, and I can only imagine that Ashley was panicked and confused. She confronted the officer, and she was shot and killed in our driveway. Our family has struggled to pick up the pieces, but I know that we'll never feel normal or whole again.

3. What helped

I cannot stop replaying that night in my mind. If we had someone else to turn to for help besides law enforcement, the outcome could have been so different.

4. How I'm different today

I miss my daughter every day. This didn't have to happen—to my family or others experiencing a similarly painful loss—if our community could've given Ashley the help she needed in her crisis.

5. What is the need or problem

I'm grateful that 988, a three-digit number for mental health crises, is now available to everyone. I wish we had this resource available during Ashley's crisis. But what help is available on the other side of the phone? Our community does not have the resources needed to provide the mental health response needed to help every person in crisis, which means that law enforcement may still be the only option to send to a home like mine for some when they call for help.

6. What will help others

Funding to build and support mobile crisis teams in our community will help us reimagine our mental health crisis response, focused on providing mental health support rather than criminalizing someone in crisis. People in crisis, like Ashley, deserve to receive a mental health response.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for listening. I hope I can count on your support for H.B. 234 to reimagine our mental health crisis response and help families like mine across the state to ensure no one else goes through what my family has gone through.

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