

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 before you 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 in your recovery (or would have helped). 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 experiencing recovery. 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 living with mental illness.
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 legislator if you can count on their support (or opposition). Include a bill number, if possible. Thank your legislator 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 in your recovery (or what would have helped). Aim for a hopeful tone that helps show what is helpful.

4. How I'm different today	Aim for 1-3 sentences. Share what is going right in your life or how you are experiencing recovery. 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 living with mental illness 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.



1. My introduction

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

I'm also the proud mother of a 23 year old son who lives with bipolar disorder. I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

2. What happened

When my son was still a toddler, I had a thought that no mother should have: I wondered if my beautiful boy would be in juvenile detention on his 16th birthday. He just did not respond the way other children did to requests, to routines, to daily life and love.

As he grew, we never knew what would be broken, who might be hurt or when it would happen.

3. What helped

In fifth grade, my son's teacher said, "Jenny, honey, I've taught hundreds and hundreds of kids. I know when a boy is misbehaving and I know when something is wrong. And something *is* wrong. You just keep looking for help."

When Andy was finally diagnosed with bipolar disorder, our lives changed. With treatment, he started smiling, enjoying school and making friends.

4. How I'm different today

On his sixteenth birthday, Andy wasn't in juvenile detention; he was creating art. Today, he's enjoying life, working hard and making me proud.

5. What is the need or problem

My son is proof that treatment works. But, not everyone gets the help they need.

6. What will help others

A strong mental health system will help children and adults get the right care at the right time.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to protect mental health services—and give families the hope of recovery?



1. My introduction

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

As a person who lives with schizophrenia, I'd like to share my story with you and ask for your support of mental health services.

2. What happened

I was married and had a successful career in business. I worked hard and never imagined I would experience a mental illness. But, I did.

I started seeing a therapist after experiencing nightmares, nervousness and problems going to work. I thought that with a few visits to a therapist, these problems would be over. But, my symptoms got worse and worse. Eventually, I lost everything.

3. What helped

With the help of a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with schizophrenia, I found my way back again. I will always remember him telling me that having schizophrenia did not mean life was over. He gave me hope.

4. How I'm different today

Today, I'm proud to be working again and volunteering with NAMI's *In Our Own Voice* program.

5. What is the need or problem

Many people have mental illnesses like mine, but not everyone gets the help they need.

6. What will help others

A strong mental health system helps more people get the right care at the right time to experience recovery.

7. My "ask"

Thank you for meeting with me and listening to my story. Can I count on you to protect mental health services?