

# SANE AUSTRALIA

## SANE Australia Mental Health Meet-Up

Date: 25/03/2021

**Topic:** Opening Up About Your Mental Health

**Description:** Learning to share your story safely and effectively with loved ones

**Welcome everyone to today's Online Mental Health Meet-Up talking about opening up about our mental health. This is a new peer support service we are trialling. Because of this, we really value your thoughts on how it goes, so we will send a link to a short survey at the end of this event for you to complete. While this survey is optional, it is a chance to provide feedback for us to improve our services. In case you might need to leave part way through the event, you can find the survey here now: [https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW) If you have any questions about this Chatwee website, please see our FAQ here: <https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up/chat-faqs> Tonight, peer support workers @Girasole and @HappyCastle will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of opening up to have conversations about our mental health. If we're able to share aspects of our mental health with others, it can allow them to better understand us, be better informed to support us, and potentially make the relationship even closer. We'll be moving through a number of discussion questions tonight, and it's entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation might be heavy in nature as we talk about our mental health struggles. @Jynx, who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together, and we encourage your active participation with each other! :)**

Girasole (Peer Worker)

We will be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join :)

Girasole (Peer Worker)

Girasole (Peer Worker)

Girasole (Peer Worker) Welcome everyone! Feel free to introduce yourselves :)

HappyCastle (PSW)

Hi everyone. Hope you're all well tonight. I'm one of the peer support workers over here and really keen to chat to you all tonight

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

Hey @bipolarbunny & @Jay5! :) Great to have you here

Jynx  
(Moderator)

Hey all, I'm Jynx I'll be your mod this evening. Keen to hear about everyone's experiences :)

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**Our first question for tonight. In order to share our mental health story with others, we will probably want to feel safe to do so. What does safety mean to you?**

Jay5

Hi, so sorry, I couldn't get on

Jay5

I hope this works

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

Welcome, glad you got connected. We were just starting to talk about safety :)

Jay5

just put 3 year old to bed so may be in and out if chooses to not cooperate tonight.

Jay5

ok great

Jynx  
(Moderator)

Safety for me often revolves around feeling like I'm not going to be judged or shut down if I feel like sharing.

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

I feel you @Jynx (Moderator) I think safety is hugely important. I know I've tried to learn how to work out if someone is safe for me before I start to open up about my mental health for that exact reason

Jay5 Safety means feeling heard and that the space is comfortable for you, you don't feel like what you say or do will put against you.

Girasole (Peer Worker) Safety to me includes physical safety, emotional safety, and psychological safety. They're all grounded in respect

Jay5 Ageee @girasole and if you don't have one, the others fall down.

Jay5 by that I mean if you don't feel safe physically it's highly likely you don't feel safe to share things and be vulnerable

Shaz51 hello @girasole, @happycastle, @jynx

bipolarbunny Hi sorry had trouble getting on. Safety for me means emotional & psychological safety too. Safety means being respected and being heard.

HappyCastle (PSW) Hey @Shaz51 welcome!

Jynx (Moderator) Welcome Shaz!

Jay5 Emotional safety is a big one for me too, I don't know if that's what it is actually called but being able to express how I'm feeling with people around me that I love and accept that, at home I know I be having a shit time and it's ok, like it's a safe place to be like that.

Girasole (Peer Worker) Great to see you @Shaz51! :)

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

I'm really happy to hear you have a safe space at home @Jay5

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**Next question: How do you identify someone who might be safe to share with?**

bipolarbunny

Yeah I definitely dissociate if I feel I'm being dismissed or not taken seriously. It completely shuts me down.

Jay5

I think it's important for everyone @happycastle but not everyone has that, I know that if I'm having a really sucky day at work and I'm angry and upset, I make it through the day and let the walls down at home and it feels safe to

Shaz51

not sure @Girasole as my husband does not want our families to know

Shaz51

@Girasole, @happycastle, my husband shares with me but that is it

bipolarbunny

I can identify who's not safe to share with. Trust is a big issue. If I trust that person, if they've proven that trust to me in the past, then I'll share.

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**Or: what qualities might someone who's not safe have?**

Jynx  
(Moderator)

I think I first have to have some kind of relationship with them

Jay5

Depends on what I'm sharing, and what I need, if I know they will listen and not provide any suggestions (sometimes that is what I need, just somebody to talk to who won't try to "fix it")

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

People who compare their problems to yours, don't allow you the space to talk about what you're going through

Shaz51

yes very true @jynx

bipolarbunny

@Girasole I shared openly with what I considered my circle of friends early on in the piece. The majority of them couldn't handle it. I regret being so open early on, it caused a lot of grief.

Jay5

my partner is one person I feel safe to talk to, because she understands even if I can't articulate it well myself in the moment, and I know that I can trust her. And also like I said, if I just need somebody to listen and that's it, then she will do that without trying to make it better because sometimes that's not what I want.

Shaz51

same here @jay5 between me and my partner too

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

I relate to that @Jay5. Sometimes you really just need someone to listen without someone trying to help or fix it

Jynx  
(Moderator)

@bipolarbunny it's so hard when folks don't know how to respond, so they either shut you down or become distant or worse, stigmatise. Sorry you had that experience.

bipolarbunny

@HappyCastle Definitely agree, those who immediately try to compare their issues with yours. Or those who try to dismiss the validity of what you share.

Girasole (Peer Worker)

**Next question now: why might you share your mental health story?**

Shaz51

yes it really helps when you have someone who will listen and not to try and fix

Jay5

So people who need to, can better support you

Jay5

and also if something is wrong they know the background behind it

bipolarbunny

To help others avoid the mistakes and pitfalls that tripped me up.

Jay5

I have shared with people before that I have had really bad anxiety in the past and still do, and when I haven't been doing some great they know that's probably what it is

Jay5

so great \* The people closest to me sometimes pick up that I'm not travelling great, before I do!

HappyCastle (PSW)

@bipolarbunny that's really great, sharing your lived experience to help others . I love it

Jynx (Moderator)

Sharing is like a release - it allows me to put my thoughts in order and afterwards I always feel lighter. I have a saying: "What's shareable is bearable."

Jay5

Isn't there a saying a problem shared is a problem halved or something like that???

Shaz51

yes @jay5 very true

bipolarbunny

@Jynx I like that saying! So true.

bipolarbunny I think sharing helps me understand myself better too. Like I need to get my ducks in a row in my head to explain it. If that makes sense.

Jynx  
(Moderator)

@bipolarbunny I had the same phrase in mind hehe

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**What aspects of your story might you share?**

bipolarbunny All of it, I have no shame any more, I'm too old to care what other people think. If it helps someone struggling like me. It's worth it.

Jay5

@girasole I have learnt over the years that not everybody needs to hear everything, when I was younger I just wanted to keep sharing everything and I wanted to retell my story a lot and I don't know why that was. But now, I would share the basic information around what has happened in my life to lead me to develop some problems with my mental health, and I know I can add a nice little page to the book that says "it got better".

Jay5

Now not know.

Jay5

I would also share what has helped me so people can learn from that.

Shaz51

bits and pieces with me and me and my husband share things all the time

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

I think it also depends on how much I trust them, how much I am willing to open up about and share

Jynx  
(Moderator)

I guess sometimes it's about finding the balance between venting and ruminating

bipolarbunny

@Jynx agree totally.

Shaz51

very true @happycastle and @Jynx

Jay5

I agree @Jynx I used to ruminate a lot, and now I don't. Venting is saved for the end of a long day at work.... my partner just nods a long hahah I let her have a vent after mine.

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**And is there anything of your story you wouldn't share?**

Shaz51

same here @jay5 with us too

Jay5

The finer details as I cant relive the stories of that anymore, I could when I was younger and found comfort in doing that but now I couldn't share those details @girasole

Jay5

It's weird how that changed for me, I felt comfort and almost safety in sharing it all, and usually it was too but now I hold back.

bipolarbunny Childhood trauma, the specifics, because it's family related and I don't want it getting back to them. I'm still stuck in their orbit, until I can go no contact it's safer to keep my mouth shut. But with the bipolar I'm an open book.

Jay5 too much for some \* I meant to say usually it was too much for some to hear it.

Kimberley\_cptsd I dont share all the wild thoughts i had in my extremely down moments at the acute stage of my mental illness when i had my initial breakdown

Jynx (Moderator) I do think it's good to be conscious of others' potential traumas and triggers and always try to check in to see if they have space before I offload things they may not have capacity to hear.

Jay5 And now it's too painful for me to share it all and I wouldn't want another person to hear those experiences, the finer details aren't necessary sometimes and it could be upsetting

bipolarbunny @Jay5 I'm the same, there's some things I feel I can't even tell my tdoc yet, too upsetting.

Jay5 It's like, I have to live with those memories all the time, I don't want another person to have to carry them.

HappyCastle (PSW) @bipolarbunny I'm not up with all my acronyms, what's a tdoc?

Jay5

If I had to say for like an assessment I might.

bipolarbunny

@HappyCastle therapist

Jay5

But the person closest to me being my partner she only knows the basics and only the details of some of the incidents when I was a younger, I don't feel a need to tell her everything

Girasole (Peer Worker)

**Sharing your story can be quite a daunting prospect. Can you think of anything you could do to help make this easier?**

bipolarbunny

@Jay5 I can definitely identify with that, I have a lot of horror stories in my head that I refuse to fill anyone else's head with.

Jay5

It's my trauma @bipolarbunny and they don't deserve to be dragged into it and have it in their head like I do every day that's not fair

HappyCastle (PSW)

Definitely having some good after-care in place, like knowing I have a good show to watch to unwind after a big conversation

bipolarbunny

@Jay5 exactly. I don't have a partner, if I did I very much doubt I'd subject them to my trauma either. Like you say, it's not fair on them. And that's what therapists get paid for.

Jynx  
(Moderator)

Try to let go of any notions of needing to live up to others' expectations - i.e. giving myself permission to only share what I feel safe to do so and not feel like I owe them anything. Also agree with having aftercare in place and just taking it one step at a time.

Jay5

I'll be back in 5. @bipolarbunny my partner is a social worker and works every day with people who have experienced things I have, I don't need to put that onto her at home. I'm not her client. Already I'll be back in 5 ok?

Shaz51

yes we share with what we are comfortable with sharing at the time @jynx

Kimberley\_cptsd

When i started sharing little bits of my story with my closest friends.. some of them had a story to. And so we bonded and were able to support each other in new ways. It jut to one of us to be real to get started.

bipolarbunny

Don't expect them to understand. When I was first diagnosed I was desperate for my friends to understand, of course they never can. People will only ever see your situation from their perspective. If I had of understood that in the early days I would have saved myself a lot of frustration and grief.

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**If you've shared your story with someone before, what was that experience like for you?**

Kimberley\_cptsd

Scary but liberating at the same time

Jay5

Ok I'm back. I have shared my story many many times, more times that I wish I had but when I was at the peak of being unwell I wanted everyone to know, again I dont know why but I found in comfort in sharing, and maybe it was because I found comfort in people hearing my story and talking about me and comforting me. I'm not sure but I have shared it too many times.

bipolarbunny

Horrendous sometimes, but with the right person it feels freeing, total relief to just say it out aloud and not be judged.

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

@bipolarbunny I hear you, it can be so freeing

Jynx  
(Moderator)

That is highly accurate Kimberley! It helped me to learn that it actually takes a lot of strength and bravery to open up and be vulnerable.

Jay5

I wanted nurturing and I tried to seek nurture from people who couldn't provide eg a workplace, and I thought by sharing my story I would receive it and I opened myself wide up to everyone.

Shaz51

with me sharing my story @girasole was why did I share with that person , a couple of bad experiences but good when you find someone finally listening

Jay5

And now I have learnt that my story is my own and despite it being pretty shitty, it's my story and not everyone needs to hear it.

Girasole (Peer Worker)

I've had some great experiences, being both someone being supported and someone doing the supporting, where we've had similar experiences. By sharing our stories, we've become much closer and understand each other better :)

Jay5

and also opening up to the first mental health practitioner that ever listened to me back when I was a kid, wasn't a great experience but I have looked back now and realised that experience literally saved my life even though I didn't want to tell them.

Kimberley\_cptsd

Yeah @jay5 when i td my story to psychaiatriat i burst into tears just on sitting down in the room first time and took about 10 mins just to calm down. But afterwards it did something for me. Even in the waiting room after the others there n i were exchanging our problems and why we were there with each other. All of a sudden it normalised mentl health illness for me.

bipolarbunny

OMG, my first time sharing with a GP was one of the worst experiences of my life. He told me my main problem was I needed to be "coupled" then he pointed at the door and said, "there's the door, go out and find someone!" Then he through me a script for antiDs and refused to answer any questions.

bipolarbunny

\*worst not west

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

It sounds like we have all had some pretty hard experiences sharing!

Jay5

So hard @kimberley\_cptsd when I first went to see somebody it was somebody at my school when I was younger and I was forced to go there, I planned on not telling them a thing, in the end telling them means me and my family got the help we needed

bipolarbunny

It took me 6 years to see a pdoc and get a proper diagnosis and help.

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**Sharing your experiences can feel scary and it can take a toll on you. Do you have any ideas for how you could manage this?**

Shaz51

last week I saw a Gp @happycastle and she said that I was ok and didn't need any help

Kimberley\_cptsd I think being very selective who you share what with..and also dont feel you have to explain yourself to anyone you are not comfortable with.  
Its your story, its your right who you share it with. And you dont need to feel bad about that.

bipolarbunny If I were visiting a medical professional for the first time again, I would take notes with me. Know what I want to say and be prepared with questions. It can be so overwhelming that it just goes in one ear and out the other. In sharing with others, I'm definitely more cautious these days, but I try and put it in language they will identify with.

bipolarbunny

And then I go for a big run to release the anxiety!

Shaz51

playing music , a nice big cup of coffee

bipolarbunny

@Shaz51 oh music is wonderful too. And writing out what you feel.

Girasole (Peer Worker)

**Lovely self-care ideas! Have you learned anything helpful from others' experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what did you learn? :)**

Jynx  
(Moderator)

I'll definitely be remembering to write up some notes before appointments from here on out - thanks @bipolarbunny

Shaz51

I'll definitely be remembering to write up some notes before appointments from here on out -me too @jynx , thanks @bipolarbunny

Jay5 I have learnt a little bit more about my fellow forum members which is nice I don't post much and I'm pretty new so this has been good.

HappyCastle (PSW) Second that @Jynx. Thank for sharing that about the appointments @bipolarbunny - super helpful

Jay5 I think I might post more often now I have talked to people

Kimberley\_cptsd I only had my breakdown 2 months ago, so hearing how the others have navigated telling others about their mental health is really good for me. And how in hindsight many wished they didnt tell everyone or expect everyone to understand. And its really good, like makes me think we dont need to share our trauma with people to know us or have a strong connection with. I had thoughts of like.. i am a liar cos all this time people dont know who i really am and my history. But thats not who i am. Just some stuff that happened. So it helps me be more balanced in talking about it n not feeling obligated to tell everyone

Jynx (Moderator) That's so wholesome to hear Jay5!

Shaz51 that will be great @jay5 and seeing you tonight made me happy

Jynx  
(Moderator)

And so amazing to hear Kimberley that you feel you can say "I am not my trauma, I'm me!"

Jay5

@kimberley\_cptsd I agree our experiences aren't the entirety of who we are, they can be huge, but we are still people first and they are our experiences (second).

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**Tonight's topic could have brought up some heavy feelings as we talked about our mental health challenges. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do? :)**

bipolarbunny

I've learned how courageous and awesome my fellow forum members are! I'm so glad I joined! Thank you all!!

Jay5

I think my self care will be going onto the forums and continuing to chat to people

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

Thank you all so much for your contributions tonight!

Jay5

and also, having a cup of tea And some biscuits I think

Jynx  
(Moderator)

My self-care tonight will be throwing on some bouncy tunes and having a dance :stuck\_out\_tongue\_winking\_eye:

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

yesss @Jay5 I just had my third timtam so I fully support that self-care :)

Kimberley\_cptsd

Im going to eat a yummy snack 🍌 and chill on the couch with my blanket and kittens.

Shaz51

ha ha I will be having a coffee and tagging @bipolarbunny to our writing thread

Jay5

@HappyCastle we only stock mint creams in this house, the Aldi brand of course.

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**We'd love to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this Online Mental Health Meet-Up! As we're trialling this service, we'd love to hear any feedback you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Please click this link to complete the survey: [https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW)**

Jay5

If anyone wants to keep chatting I'm going to go on to the forums

bipolarbunny

I think my self care will be some strawberries & yoghurt and reading more on the forums. Then maybe a poem or two.

Jynx  
(Moderator)

Thank you for sharing everyone, I will be off into my evening chock full of wholesome goodness from this. Appreciated!!

Kimberley\_cptsd

Thanks everyone 🌸

Shaz51

thanks everyone

Girasole (Peer  
Worker)

**And if you're interested in reading some further resources on this topic, you might find this article helpful: "Telling Your Story" <https://wayahead.org.au/telling-your-story/> Here are a list of values which might help in the process of sharing your mental health story, which applies as much for people needing support as it does to people providing support: <https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BRAVING.pdf> :)**

HappyCastle  
(PSW)

Thanks and hope to see you all around the forums soon!

Girasole (Peer Worker)

**Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoyed the discussion. If you'd like to be informed when our next Online Mental Health Meet-Up will be taking place, you can sign up to our mailing list here <https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up>**

HappyCastle (PSW)

Just a heads up, that from now on we will renaming our groups from Mental Health Meet Up to Online Peer Group Chat but you can find us in the same place :)

Bpdsurvivor

Grrr....I've missed this! I was totally looking forward to joining!

Bpdsurvivor

sorry everyone!

Bpdsurvivor

I really need an on-the-day reminder 😞

HappyCastle (PSW)

Ohhhh no @Bpdsurvivor - sorry you missed tonight but we hope you can come join us for the next group :)

Jynx (Moderator)

Oh no! Would've loved to have you along BPDsurvivor, that's some really good feedback about an extra reminder on the day..

Bpdsurvivor

Yes please!! The more reminders the better!

Bpdsurvivor

The reminder a week or two in advance seem to go astray in my inbox.

Bpdsurvivor

I'll go back and read the transcript once it's up. Thank you.

Jynx  
(Moderator)

Looking forward to the next one :) I'll be closing the room soon jus so you know. Glad you were able to pop in at the end there BPDsurvivor