

# TELLING YOUR STORY: IS IT SAFE



Over years of working in digital storytelling we've worked with many people and many stories. Here is our learned wisdom about working with stories that require some care, not only for your audience but also for you, the storyteller.

## BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT STORY YOU CHOOSE TO TELL

We all have many stories we could tell and choosing the most appropriate one for your digital story requires care. We encourage you to choose a story you feel passionate about, that moves you, but *not* if you know this story will re-traumatise you and trigger an episode of mental ill health. Only you can assess this, and we will respect and support your choice.

## WHY TELL THIS STORY

We have successfully worked with people with traumatic stories where they were motivated to:

- tell us about their recovery<sup>1</sup>, or
- turn their story into a positive message to others<sup>2</sup>, or
- find a short and safe form for expressing a huge story<sup>3</sup>, or
- pay tribute to someone they've lost<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> see *In a Fix* – part of the *Moving Minds* collection

<sup>2</sup> see *Ashley's Message* - part of the collection *Being True to Ourselves*

<sup>3</sup> see *One Life* – part of the *Moving Minds* collection

<sup>4</sup> see *My Incredible Mama* - part of the *Moving Minds* collection

People motivated by sharing their pain are not ready to make a digital story. You are likely to re-traumatise yourself *and* risk traumatising your audience - not a healing experience for anyone! The very human need to share psychological pain is better addressed in a professional therapeutic relationship. Besides, in our experience it is impossible to do justice to psychological pain through a digital story.

## IF YOU WANT TO TELL A STORY INVOLVING SOMETHING TRAUMATIC

### *PLEASE TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF*

At the beginning of each project we negotiate an agreement with the group about how to feel safe during the workshops. Everyone is asked to contribute and to respect each other's needs. During the workshops it is our job to keep this safety agreement alive and working. We ask you to let us know if you're not feeling safe in the group, or if you begin to struggle with your mental health. Please don't suffer in silence. We will look after you to the best of our ability but within our limits. We're not trained in psychology, so we will put you in touch with people who are.

Between workshops, even if you're not expecting to struggle with your mental health, it may be good to have a plan in place for how you will cope if this happens; activities you find healing (eg, music, exercise, writing) and people you can talk to (eg friends, family, counsellor).

### *PLEASE BE MINDFUL OF YOUR AUDIENCE*

In any audience assume there are vulnerable people and your story may have a powerful impact.

We ask you to shape your story into a short film that would earn a classification of 'G' or 'PG', and avoid themes that would attract a stronger classification ('M', 'MA15+', 'R18+').

Particular care is required around stories that involve suicide, self-harm, violence, sexual assault, drugs and alcohol, or eating disorders. There is plenty of evidence that you can inadvertently harm vulnerable viewers if you are not careful. For example, a copy-cat suicide may be triggered by providing details of the method or location of a suicide. We will help you shape your story and your images to keep them safe for your audience. For more information see *Mental Ill-Health and Suicide: A Mindframe Resource for Stage and Screen* (downloadable at <https://mindframemedia.imgix.net/assets/src/uploads/MF-Guidelines-Stage-Screen-DP-LR.pdf>.)

We ask you to end on a note of hope, however small<sup>5</sup>. It is not part of our storytelling philosophy to leave an audience in a state of utter hopelessness.

When we produce your film we may suggest:

- including a trigger warning beforehand<sup>6</sup>, or
- a 'get help' message at the end<sup>7</sup>.

We will talk to you about this first.

## PLEASE MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Words can hurt, as can images; anyone with a story about bullying, discrimination or harassment can tell you this. We'd like you to avoid using words and images that are derogatory, offensive, stereotyping, demeaning, or stigmatising. You might not intend any harm in the words or images you wish to use. If we think your choices might be a problem we will respectfully explain, and suggest alternatives that are more positive, neutral or inclusive.

## CULTURAL RESPECT

Where your digital story may include images, names, voices or other depictions of Indigenous people who have died, we will suggest the inclusion of a warning to viewers at the beginning of your film. This will give viewers a choice to watch your digital story or not.

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<sup>5</sup> see *What's Normal When You've Got Bipolar Disorder* - part of the *Moving Minds* collection

<sup>6</sup> see *Difficult is the Journey and Long is the Path of Love* – part of the collection *Walk in My Shoes*

<sup>7</sup> see *Thanks Kip* – part of the *Moving Minds* collection