



MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

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MY STORY MATTERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

TO HELP YOU EASILY NAVIGATE THE PACKET, YOU CAN CLICK ON ANY LINK TO GO DIRECTLY TO THE SPACE YOU NEED. AT THE BOTTOM RIGHT OF EACH PAGE THE "HOME" LINK WILL BRING YOU BACK TO THIS PAGE.

THIS IS NOT A RACE. THE **ONLY TIMETABLE YOU'RE ON IS YOUR OWN**. THIS DISCLOSURE RESOURCE IS TO SUPPORT YOU IN FINDING THE WORDS YOU'RE COMFORTABLE USING.

YOU DESERVE SUPPORT.
YOU DESERVE TO BE HEARD.
YOU DESERVE THE CHANCE TO SPEAK.
YOU DESERVE TIME AND COMPASSION.
YOU DESERVE THIS.

LETTER TO SURVIVOR
CHAPTER ONE: WHO AND WHY
WHEN AND WHERE
CHAPTER TWO: VOCABULARY
HOW DO I SAY IT?
MY STORY MY WORDS
MY STORY MY WORDS CONTINUED
MY STORY MY WORDS CONCLUSION
CHAPTER THREE: WHAT I NEED
THREE THINGS I NEED YOU TO KNOW
DIGGING DEEPER
AND ALSO KNOW THIS
CHAP FOUR A REMINDER OF WHAT I NEED
CHAPTER FIVE:
RESOURCES

DEAR SURVIVOR,

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO YOU, AND YOU'VE BEEN HOLDING IT IN, BEING STRONG, PRETENDING NOTHING HAPPENED, TELLING YOURSELF IT WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING. MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN **TELLING YOURSELF IT WAS YOUR FAULT**. AND OVER THE DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS OR YEARS SINCE IT HAPPENED, NOTHING'S BEEN THE SAME. IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE **SUFFOCATING BENEATH FEAR AND SHAME**.

SECRECY BREEDS HEARTACHE BECAUSE IT HIDES THE TRUTH: IT WAS NEVER, EVER, **NEVER YOUR FAULT. AND THE SHAME IS NOT YOURS TO HOLD**. BUT NOW, REGARDLESS OF HOW LONG IT'S BEEN, YOU ARE THINKING OF **DISCLOSING YOUR SECRET TO SOMEONE ELSE**. WHAT COURAGE THAT IS. WHAT STRENGTH THAT IS TO OPEN YOURSELF UP TO THAT KIND OF VULNERABILITY AND TO ASK SOMEONE TO SEE THE HURT YOU'RE IN. THE VERY FACT THAT YOU'RE CONTEMPLATING DISCLOSING WHAT HAPPENED TO SOMEONE ELSE IS A **TESTAMENT TO THE POWER OF YOUR RESILIENCY AND THE PRESENCE OF HOPE**. SEE, WHILE DISCLOSING IS ONE OF THE SCARIEST THINGS EVER, YOU DO SO BECAUSE THERE'S A PIECE OF YOU CLINGING TO THE IDEA THAT ALL IS NOT LOST, THAT PEOPLE CAN BE KIND, AND THAT **HOPE IS REAL**.

MY NAME IS TIFFINI. I, TOO, AM A SURVIVOR OF YEARS OF ABUSE. THIS RESOURCE IS BECAUSE I DON'T FEEL SAFE WITHOUT A PLAN. AS A VOLUNTEER FOR **RAINN (RAPE AND INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK)**, **THE LEADING, AUTHORITATIVE VOICE ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE**, I'VE TALKED TO MANY SURVIVORS WHO WANT TO SHARE THEIR STORY BUT DON'T KNOW HOW. BETWEEN THE PAIN, THE FLASHBACKS AND THE ANXIETY, IT IS EASIER TO REMAIN QUIET. SOMETIMES THE SILENCE EVEN FEELS LIKE THE SAFEST OPTION.

I PROMISE YOU, I KNOW. I SPENT MOST OF MY CHILDHOOD AND TEEN YEARS SCRATCHING MY SKIN UNTIL IT BLED TO GET THE ANTS OUT AND MAKING BRUISES ON MYSELF SO THAT MY OUTWARD APPEARANCE MIGHT CLOSER RESEMBLE WHAT I THOUGHT I WAS ON THE INSIDE. BUT, BY **TELLING MY STORY** THROUGH WRITING AND ADVOCACY, **I'VE LEARNED ABOUT THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF HOPE** AND HOW IT CAN MOVE SOMEONE FROM THE BRINK OF DESPAIR TO JOY.

THIS OUTLINE IS JUST ONE RESOURCE THAT MAY HELP YOU **FEEL LESS OVERWHELMED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF SHARING** YOUR STORY WITH SOMEONE ELSE. THERE MAY BE PIECES THAT DON'T WORK FOR YOU -- AND THAT'S OKAY. WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IS THAT YOU REMEMBER HOW **VALUABLE AND HOW LOVED YOU ARE**. I KNOW YOU'RE HURTING. I KNOW YOU MISS THE PERSON YOU WERE BEFORE THIS HAPPENED. BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT THE **PERSON YOU ARE TODAY IS JUST AS BEAUTIFUL, JUST AS VALUABLE AND JUST AS WORTHY** AS YOU WERE ON YOUR HAPPIEST DAY. **YOU ARE NOT BROKEN**. YOU DO NOT HOLD THE SHAME. YOUR STORY MATTERS BECAUSE YOU MATTER. AND **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**.

AS YOU WORK YOUR WAY THROUGH THE OUTLINE, KNOW THESE WORDS ARE HERE, **ON THIS SECOND PAGE**, AND YOU CAN COME RE-READ THEM AS OFTEN AS YOU NEED. AND, IF NO ONE ELSE IN THE WHOLE WORLD CARES... I DO AND YOU CAN **SEND YOUR STORY TO ME** AT ANY TIME.


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[HOME](#)

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Chapter One:

This is my story. This is my narrative. I control the who, when, where and how much. In the space below jot out the logistics of what you want to share.

Why do I want to tell?

Who do I want to tell?

How? There are many ways to disclose and there are pros and cons to each method. There is not a wrong or right way. How would you feel most comfortable sharing? Complete chart below and color in the circle of the method which is best for you.

Method	Pros	Cons
In Person ☐	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Over phone ☐	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Written (email, text) ☐	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

When do I want to tell? Consider things like: is there a particular day of week or time of day when the person I'm going to disclose to will be more relaxed and less distracted? Is there an upcoming date that might work well? For example, if you've chosen to disclose by phone, do you speak to the person every night or every Friday? If you've chosen to disclose in person, is a weekend day better than a weekday? Fill in the blanks below. You can either list an exact time or use the cues. For example, you might circle "after" and add "dinner".

I will disclose to _____ on (day of week) _____
at/before/after (time of day) _____

Where do you want to disclose? Consider things like: noise level, your physical safety, ease of getting there. Is a restaurant better because you feel safer with other people around or is your home better because it's void of distractions? Maybe the park because nature calms you. Maybe a cafe because you always meet for lunch and it's a neutral place. Again, no right or wrong answers just what is best for you? If you are disclosing through text or letter, you may think about where you'd like to write your story.

Location Option	Pros	Cons
Home: Mine ☐ His ☐ Other _____ ☐		
Public Place _____ ☐		

MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Chapter Two:

Now that you know the logistics, it's time to think about the heart of it: what will you share? The important thing to know is that there is not a wrong or right answer. There is only what is best for you. Some people need someone to know details because, if someone knows, they aren't bearing it alone. Others don't need or want to relive those memories: they only need someone to know generalities. Either is okay. As you work through the outline questions, if you need to skip one, do so, and remember: this is just a guide, not a rulebook. You are the expert on what's best for you.

Vocabulary: Before continuing, think about the language that you feel most comfortable using to describe what happened. Consider whether the person you disclose to will understand what happened with the terminology you use. The word "rape" is a legal term that generally means there was penetration of your body without your consent. Consent isn't just the absence of a "no" -it's the explicit presence of a "yes." [This](#) article gives a broad definition of consent and also lists circumstances where you cannot legally consent. It can be powerful to remember that the original meaning of the word "rape" meant "to seize / carry away / steal." If you feel something was stolen from you, that might be a good fit.

[This](#) link takes you to a database where you can search for the definition of words like rape and sexual assault in your state. It can be helpful and powerful to have an objective definition.

On the next page, decide which terminology you'll use to share to share your story.



MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

How? There are many ways to disclose and there are pros and cons to each method. There is not a wrong or right way. How would you feel most comfortable sharing? Complete the chart below and color in the circle of the method which is best for you.

Term	What do I think this word means?	How do others (my state, RAINN, friends, etc) define this word?	Does this word describe what happened?
Rape ☐			
Sexual assault ☐			
Molestation ☐			
"messed with", "hurt", _____ ☐			

MY STORY MATTERS

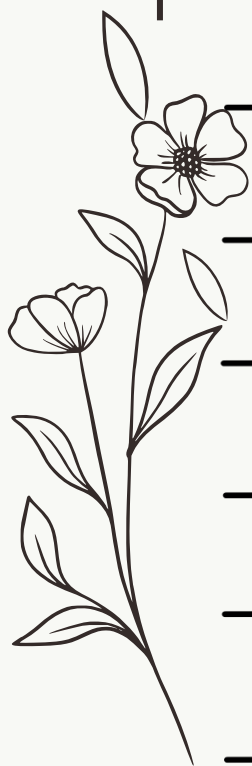
DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

In the space provided over the next several pages, write what happened. This is **NOT** necessarily what you will share; this is for you only. Start at the beginning and describe what happened. Use as much or as little detail as you'd like. This is **for your eyes only**. It will help identify the big things, the things you want to share with someone else.

Suggestions

1. Find a physical source of comfort to do this: a blanket, teddy bear, putty, a picture of a loved one, something to help ground you when it gets to be too much.
2. This is not an English paper. Don't worry about grammar, don't worry about full sentences, even. Just write freely. Whatever memories you're holding in your head, put them down in words. This is the hardest part. But it is the first step to healing. **This is your raw, unedited story. Nobody else's opinions matter.**



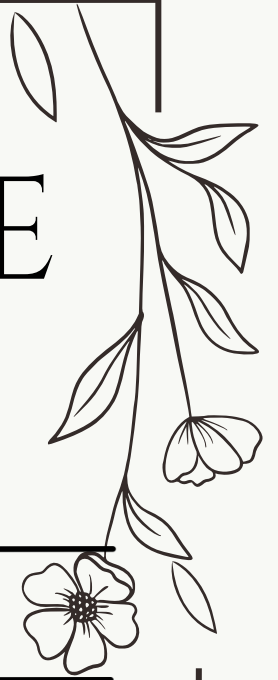
DISCLOSURE

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal black ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. In the top right corner, there is a small, simple line drawing of a flower with five petals and a central circular center. A thin vertical line extends upwards from the top of the flower.



DISCLOSURE

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. In the top right corner, there is a small, stylized black-and-white illustration of a flower with five petals and a central circular pattern. On the left side, near the middle of the page, there is a small, faint, stylized graphic element resembling a pair of parentheses or a simple bracket.



DISCLOSURE

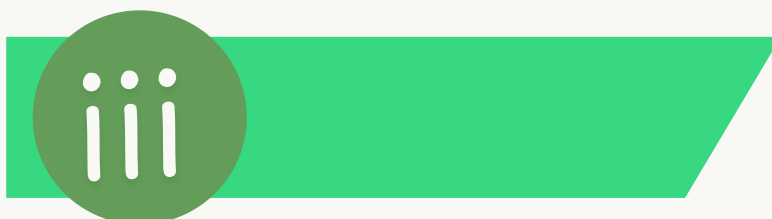
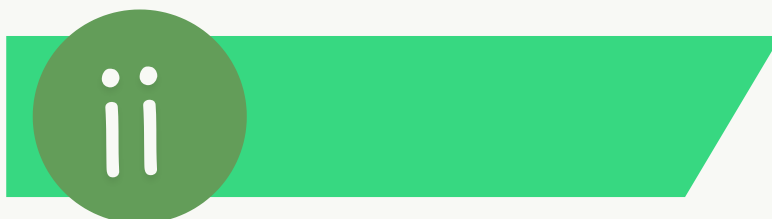
AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Chapter Three:

You've done the hardest part. You faced the memories head-on. **You are so strong.** You've survived and you are working toward healing. Not everyone can do what you've just done.

Sometimes it is **hard for people we care about** to hear our stories or **know how we need them to respond**. They might not know what to say, or what you need, so they might ask a lot of questions at once that make you feel judged or attacked when that wasn't their intent. They simply were trying to process what you said. So, it **can be helpful to tell our people what we need** from them at the beginning.

How do you hope s/he responds? Do you need them to be quiet and listen? Do you need feedback? Do you need help going to the police or finding therapy? What can s/he do right now to help you feel safe and supported? These are labeled wrong on purpose as we will come back to this at the end of the outline.



MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Keep Going!

We're almost at the finish line. We're going to now cherry pick what is most important for you to tell your person. Using a pen or highlighter to underline/circle phrases, read over your story and **mark three things you need** your person to know. **These are the BIG points.** For example, "I was raped" or "Sometimes I think about killing myself." Whatever the BIG points are: record them here. Don't worry about the finer details - they'll come next.



I

II

III

MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Now, it's time to add **some supporting details**. Look back at your three BIG things. Review your story and find one supporting detail you can add for each one. For example: if one of your BIG three was, "I was raped," do you want to share by who? where it happened? when it happened? If one of your BIG three was, "I think about killing myself," do you want to add how? why? when you first thought about it?

Suggestions: Remember this is **YOUR** story to tell. **You do not have to disclose anything** you don't want to. If you don't want to share who hurt you, don't. Only add supporting details that you want your person to know.



A

B

C

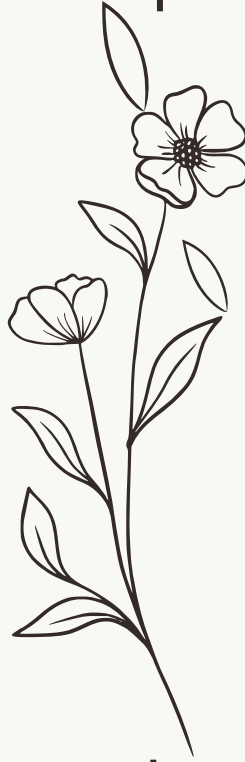
MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Almost There!

Finally, what is something else you need your person to know? This can be a second supporting detail: maybe you need them to know something that your attacker said or did. Maybe you need them to know what happened immediately before or after the attack. Maybe you need them to know how each BIG thing made you feel. Or maybe this is the space to **ask them whatever questions you wish someone might answer**. If you're not sure, go back to your narrative and see if there's something else you wish someone knew. Remember: this is your story. **You are 100% empowered to share exactly what you want to**, and nothing more or less.



1

2

3

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Chapter Four

At the beginning of sharing your story, you told your person exactly what you needed from him/her to feel most supported. Now, it's time to remind h/her of those things.

What do you need from him/her? Think back to one of the first questions you answered: **why are you telling this person your story?**

Do you need: help figuring out next steps (police, therapy, etc)? Do you need feedback (validation that what happened was wrong? Reassurance it wasn't your fault)? Do you need physical affection (hug, holding hand, a touch on the knee?) or space? Whatever you wrote earlier about what you need, **list those things again to remind your person** of what you hope h/she will help you do.

i

ii

iii

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

Chapter Five

You did it! You created your own Disclosure Outline. You wrote down why you want to tell, who you want to tell, when and where you want to tell and how you want to share. You thought through the terminology that you feel safest using. You identified concrete steps your person can do or say to help you feel comforted and safe and supported and you wrote them down so that you are able to share those things with that person. **You confronted the memories** and recorded them and then reread them, selecting the elements that are most important for you to share with your person.

The scariest things are those we haven't done. To help you feel comfortable sharing your story, a suggestion is to **practice it**. Whether that be by speaking to yourself in front of a mirror, writing down verbatim what you want to say and then reading it out loud, or anonymously sharing your story through a support line like RAINN (www.rainn.org), if you practice using this outline to help you share your story, it will be easier to do so when you're talking to your person. **If you need someone to practice on**, and you don't want to reach out to an anonymous hotline, you can e-mail me directly at tiffini@tiffinijohnson.com. **I've been where you are, and I will listen.**

You've done so much work to share your story.

Your story matters because you matter.
You are not broken.
You do not hold the shame. It is not your fault.
And you are not alone.

MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE

RESOURCES

he-ro /hiro/ noun: a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements or noble qualities.

Abuse screams that you have something for which to be ashamed, and that you are alone. Both are lies.

You are **not to blame**.

You are **not alone**.

Reaching out to find compassion, practical resources, and someone to listen makes **you my hero**.

RAINN (Rape & Incest National Network)

Available 24/7

1-800-656-4673 (HOPE)

Text: HOPE to 64673

Online chat www.rainn.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

1-800-799-7233

Mental health matters. Protecting your mental well-being protects your body, your heart and those you love.

National Mental Health Hotline:

1-800-950-NAMI (6264) M-F: 10a-10p

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

[Email Tiffini](#)

[HOME](#)



MY STORY MATTERS

DISCLOSURE

AN OUTLINE OF HOPE