



Example of a recovery story

Notice the balance of these parts: describing struggles vs. describing recovery.

At least half of the Story of Me should focus **on recovery**: how the changes happened and how are you coping now.

I'm Merle and I like to think about myself as someone who can make this world a bit better of a place. But the biggest lesson along my way was that I need to take care of myself first, before I can give back to the world. I have experienced different mental health problems, but today I'm sharing my story of burn-out.

Through life, my self-worth has often been tied to how much I do or accomplish. At one point, the mixture of always wanting to be helpful; never wanting to say "no" to interesting projects, or people asking for help; together with perfectionism and terrible time-management skills brought me to a total breakdown. I tended to view my health in a crooked way – I thought: „If I'm doing good in school, I must be okay.“ When I contacted mental health specialists while crumbling during my exam sessions, I think I wanted to „fix myself“ to do my tasks. But the core problems that led me to take all those tasks – lack of self-worth and self-compassion – those remained.

At one point, I had taken on too much. I could not deal with the guilt of not managing all the tasks. I ended up doing more and more allnighters – staying up all night working and studying. Taking care of my needs – or even noticing them! – had become the least of my priorities. My anxiety and depression grew more severe. It was a time when my friends greeted me not with a „Hi“ but with a „You look tired“. For the first time in my life, I began feeling suicidal, and that scared even myself a bit.

At this time, two of my close friends intervened. They sat me down and told me they are seeing my pain and suffering, and that it should not be that way. They asked that I would consider going to the hospital, and eased my fears about it. Luckily the waiting time wasn't too long. And there, I actually got the help and support I needed. The environment, the specialists were helpful to me; as well as getting the right combination of meds and therapy. I hold a special place in my heart for one mental health nurse. I feel as if she saw right through me; knew what to say or ask. After meeting her for the first time, she said „Merle, please do yourself a favour. Don't try to be a „good patient“ here.“ For me, that meant that she allowed or asked myself to just be me, and not to hide my struggles. It was her who made me search and find self-worth and value in who I am, not what I do or what I've accomplished. And since the hospital stay, I slowly started doing things differently. For a year or so, I went to therapy nearly every two weeks, to build my skills and self-worth. Now, I keep my study or work-time between two to eight hours, daily – and I never work or study at night, anymore! I have true rest days and respect these commitments with myself. I give myself time off from social media. I've found the tools to keep myself on track and notice my well-being daily.

What is more – I try to keep an eye out for the over-achievers and perfectionists around me, because there's a lot of us! It seems to me that younger and younger students, sometimes even as early as in basic school, are experiencing similar struggles and signs of burnout.

It took a mental collapse for me to become aware that I might be worthy for who I am, not what or how much I do. And thus I want to encourage you all to value yourself for who you are. I want you to ask yourself – is it more important to me to be there for a friend when they want to share their happiness or worries with me, or to reply to all of those emails today? Do I need the university degree, or my health to experience life fully? Do I want a more important title at work, or do I want to have the will to live? And to all of those who notice the over-achievers around or within you – remind them that you are enough. Even if you don't feel like it. Because you really are.

- struggles
- roots of the problem
- thoughts, feelings during tough times

- turning points
- making changes
- recovery
- support
- how am I now

- how my experience relates to others

- the main point(s)
- call to action - what can people do?
- giving hope
- ending on a positive note

Story of Me

Story of Us

Story of Now

Three-part structure, inspired by the model for public narrative by Marshall Ganz

Story was written for sharing:
- as spoken text
- at a mental health awareness event
- to university students
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