

Guidelines for writing for the Student Minds Blog

Keeping Conversations Positive

We believe that it's okay to talk. More than okay. It is talking that changes lives.

We also believe in keeping conversations about mental health safe and supportive. Our goal with the blog is to create a positive, inspirational and motivational space to share thoughts, reflections and experiences. With this in mind, if you are thinking about submitting a blog, please check the guidelines below to ensure that blog fits into the Student Minds vision.

Safe and non-triggering

Rather than writing about specific behaviours, focus on the feelings and psychological aspects of mental health, where possible.

For example, if you are writing about eating disorders, self-harm or other mental health difficulties associated with difficult or challenging behaviors, try to avoid describing the physical effects of behaviors. This can be upsetting to read about and can also lead to overlooking the underlying mental health difficulties.

Please do not describe any difficult or challenging behaviors in detail. For example, avoid mentioning the number of laxatives taken, or specific self-harm behaviours. This may be triggering for current sufferers, providing ideas or an unhealthy point of comparison. It may instead be helpful to focus on thoughts and feelings about these behaviors.

We ask that you avoid mentioning specific foodstuffs or quantities, as this can be extremely detrimental to those suffering from an eating difficulty and could unintentionally provide tips to someone on their way to developing an eating difficulty.

We will not publish any photographs that reflect difficult behaviors, including self-harm or low weight.

Accurate and informative facts & figures

Facts, figures and statistics can be helpful and informative. It is always appreciated if you can include references (or just a note about where you found the data). It is always a good idea to check in with google and make sure that the fact you are almost sure is true, is actually true!

We try to avoid using mortality rates as they can lead to a focus that is distressing for sufferers, friends and supporters.

✔ **Avoid 'glamourising' mental health difficulties or treatment**

Please try to avoid 'glamourising' treatment, for example we would ask you not to focus on how long your hospital stay was etc. It can be easy for people who have not needed to be hospitalised to read descriptions of hospital stays or even reference to someone else needing to be hospitalised and take this as an indication that because they have not been in hospital, they have not been "ill enough".

✔ **No numbers**

Avoid using any kind of numbers, e.g. weights, BMIs, calories. People experiencing eating difficulties can be very competitive and a lower weight, BMI or calorie consumption number in an article may provide them with a new target to strive for, which can then set them back in recovery.

✔ **Positive and inclusive language**

We try to keep our language around mental health positive and inclusive. We talk about mental health as a continuum; we can all move around this continuum, with varying degrees of mental health. While we recognise that some people feel that their mental health difficulties might last many years, we try to keep a recovery model in mind, recognizing that recovery and / or effective management of difficulties is possible for everyone.

If we talk about suicide, we will talk about attempting or completing suicide. We might talk about someone attempting to take their own life. We don't use the phrase "committed suicide".

✔ **Awareness of variety in the system**

We are aware that services for mental health vary and at times can be far from ideal. When talking about the limitations of services or difficult experiences with services, we try to keep the variety in the system in mind and want to always encourage people who are experiencing difficulties to ask for help from their GP, university mental health advisers or counselling service.

✔ **Think about how this blog will affect you**

If you are writing about your own experience of having a mental health difficulty – well done! This is a brave and inspirational thing to do. Please take your time and think carefully about whether you want the public to read your thoughts. We recommend that you talk about your decision to write a blog with others first; if you don't feel like talking to friend or family, do contact the Student Minds Blogging Team to discuss your thoughts. It's ok to publish anonymously if you want to.

Please remember that while we can always take blogs down, once something has been published online we cannot control who reads it or what their reaction will be.

Submitting a winning blog

So your blog post is safe and positive. We also want it to be engaging and easy to read. Here are a few suggestions to help you on your way to really high impact piece:

✔ Plan!

Writing a good blog can take time. It takes most people several days or even a week. It is always helpful to play around with ideas for a while before you get stuck in. Everyone's writing styles differ though. You may find it helpful to sketch out your concepts into an ideas map so that you can move these around and hone a key message. You might find that it helps to write a first draft of the whole blog in one rapid rush, leave it to soak and then use your draft to slowly write your actual piece.

✔ Short and sweet

Our recommended word count is 600 words, so aim to stick to something around this. People are happy to read a blog post because they expect to be able to digest this in a few minutes. If your blog is longer than this, a member of the Blogging Team will work with you to help condense the blog.

And the rule of keeping things short extends beyond the total word count! Short sentences are easier to read, as are short paragraphs. Paragraphs should cover one point and one point only. They do not usually need to be more than 5 – 8 sentences. You can use bullet points and steps to make it easier for the reader to understand and engage with.

✔ A simple message, communicated clearly.

Being easy to digest is not just about being short. It is about being to the point. What is the key message? Your blog will be easier to digest if you stick to a single message (if you've got lots of things to say, remember you are welcome to write lots of different blog posts!)

✔ A comprehensive structure

Remember that old rule about beginnings, middles and ends... well it applies to blogs too! Your blog should have an introduction: tell us what you are going to be telling us about. The blog should also have an end and a conclusion, where you summarize what you have told us.

This rule can be followed effectively in paragraphs as well. The first sentence can state the point of the paragraph and explaining how this relates to what has been said so far. The last sentence can summarize what the paragraph has said.

Writing out a map of your blog, with the key point of each paragraph or section identified before you start writing should help you keep to a structure. Sometimes it is helpful to check this structure again when you have finished writing. You can do

this by giving each paragraph a title and checking that none of your titles repeat and each follow on from one another in a logical order.

Is your blog scannable?

Most people read online by scanning the page for individual words or phrases, headings or other visual cues. If your blog is scannable, someone should be able to get the point of your blog within 15 – 30 SECONDS. Techniques including using lists, formatting (bold, italics etc.), headings, subheadings and spaces can all help. Most importantly though – get to the point. Try to keep things succinct and ensure you don't bury your point. A good trick here is to make sure each paragraph starts with the point; you can then use your paragraph to elaborate, expand upon or explain the point.

Think about your heading!

An attention catching heading is always a winner.

Have you edited your blog?

This is hard. Often a lot harder than writing! There are the simple (YAWN) points about checking spelling and punctuation (yes, we know this is boring, but please don't forget!) But there is a lot more to effective editing. Editing is about seeing the piece as a whole and working to make the whole blog cohesive. Avoid repetition – that is repetition of words, phrases or even ideas.

Have you read your blog post out-loud?

Reading your post out-loud lets you check the flow. If you find yourself struggling to read sentences you know that you need to rework the sentence so that it can roll smoothly off your tongue. It can also help to get someone else to read your blog – ask for and be prepared for constructive criticism!