

MY STORY
Our Future

STORYTELLING WORKBOOK

*for people using
mental health services*





AIM OF THIS WORKBOOK

We hope that this workbook may provide you with some tools and ideas that will help you to tell your story.

We have designed this workbook to help you explore your own story, and to decide which parts of it you may want to tell people who support you, and which parts you may want to keep private.

We would be very pleased to gain feedback on these resources. Do get in touch: contact@mcpin.org

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ABOUT MY STORY: OUR FUTURE

My Story: Our Future is a research project conducted by the McPin Foundation between April 2016 and September 2019. It used a qualitative approach to work with people who were using Early Intervention in Psychosis services. During the project we heard from nine people who had used Early Intervention in Psychosis services, and five people who had cared for people who had used the services. You can read the full report on our website here: mcpin.org/mystoryourfuture/.

The stories we heard were very rich and different from each other. We found that the way people told their stories, in their own words, enabled us to understand important things about their lives. We were able to hear not just about people's experiences of psychosis, but also about the events and situations that may have led them to become unwell in the first place, and the context in which they were trying to recover. There was something powerful about this for us and for the storyteller.

From our research, we learnt about the value that a storytelling approach can have as a tool for communicating and building trust, something that we think could help establish effective relationships in services.

When we presented our findings to some mental health practitioners and people who use services, there was an appetite to learn more about how a storytelling approach could supplement and build on some of the therapeutic strategies they were already using.

With that in mind, we have put together this short workbook that may help you tell your story to clinicians who may be supporting you in mental health services.

We would like to thank everyone who helped produce this workbook.

This includes Sam Robertson, McPin Foundation Consultant and Involvement Lead in R&D for Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for her feedback on the tools and co-facilitation of the consultation workshop, Kathryn Watson, Communications Officer at McPin, for her artwork and Vanessa Pinfold, research director at McPin.

Finally, we would like to thank all the survivor researchers for their work on *My Story: Our Future*, including Gary Coyle, Alison Faulkner and Dolly Sen, and the people who shared their stories with us.



WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A 'STORYTELLING' APPROACH?

Storytelling is a natural part of how we interact as human beings, and there are many ways in which people can tell their stories. In this workbook, what we mean by 'storytelling' is creating the space and time to enable you to tell your story, or stories, of what has happened to you.

We hope this will enable you to talk about the things you feel are important to your life and your recovery. We hope the information and tools we provide in this guide will be helpful to you.



PRACTICAL TOOLS

Helpful ideas when thinking about stories

We have put together a selection of practical tools that you may want to try. However, these are just suggestions, and you should only use them if they are helpful. You may want to adapt them or come up with your own ideas about how to think about your story instead.

There are lots of ways in which you could do this. When we spoke with people who had experienced mental health difficulties, they had the following ideas about things that could help:

- Keep a notebook or journal in which you could write about or draw your experiences
- Use photographs or pictures that are important to you
- Create a collage of different things that you may like to talk about with old magazine images
- Create images or pointers that could be attached to fridge magnets to remind you when a storytelling session is happening soon
- Use Post-It notes to 'map out' events on a large piece of paper – Post-It notes can easily be re-arranged until you are happy with the order of things.

MAPPING STORIES

In the *My Story: Our Future* project we offered people a choice of several visual tools to help them think through what they wanted to tell us.

We also asked people to think about what they didn't want to tell us, so that they retained control of what they said and what was not said. We have given examples of a selection of mapping tools that may be useful below.

When we consulted with people with lived experience of mental health difficulties on these materials, they felt that these would be useful. However, they suggested that you may want to work with different mapping tools at different parts of your mental health journey:

1. **The timeline** – This tool is very simple and may work well if you are just beginning to think about telling your story.
2. **Thinking in pictures** – Again this tool is quite simple and may help you begin to make sense of your story.
3. **The Tree of Life** – This tool is a bit more complicated and you may want to try using it after you have tried out the 'Timeline' or 'Thinking in Pictures' tool.
4. **The six-part story method** – This tool is quite complicated and you may want to work through this with someone who is supporting you in mental health services.



PRACTICAL TOOLS

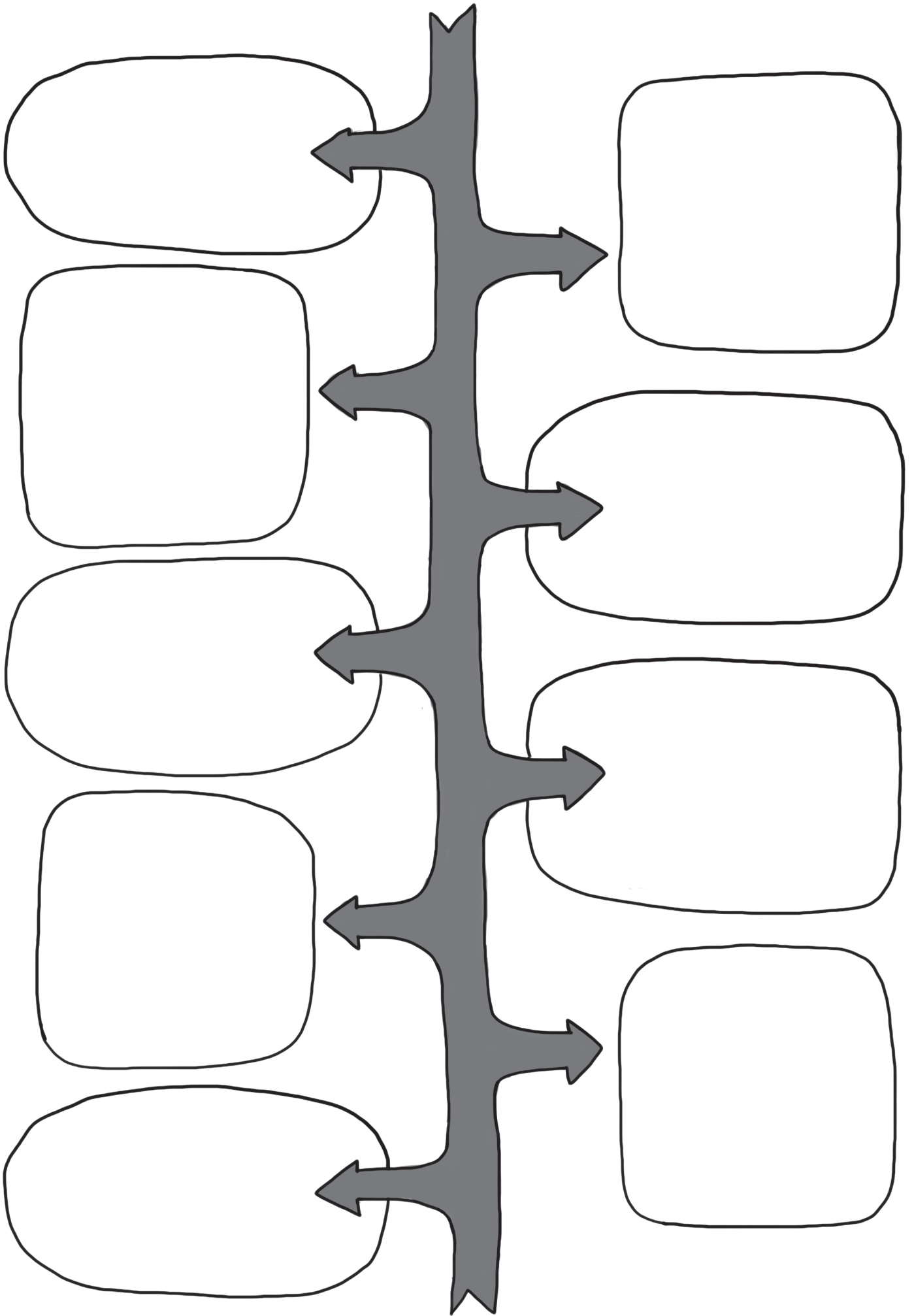
THE TIMELINE

Perhaps the simplest way of starting to think about your story will be to draw a timeline of important things that have happened to you. On the timeline diagram below you can draw or write about different times or events in your life that you think are important to your story.

Some people like to use the boxes above the central line to highlight positive events and boxes below the line to highlight negative events, but it is up to you how you use it. You may also like to stick photographs or magazine images that are meaningful to you within some of the boxes, if this helps you think about how you want to talk about your story.

You can then choose one box that you want to start talking about. You can also use this diagram to think about the things you may not want to talk about at the moment, or at all.

NOTES:



THINKING IN PICTURES

In each of these boxes you can draw or write something that may be important to different stages of your life.

You may also like to stick photographs or magazine images that are meaningful to you in some of the boxes, if this helps you think about what you want to talk about.

When you have done this, you can choose which one you want to talk about today, or if there are any that you are not ready to talk about.

NOTES:

FIRST DIAGNOSIS

ADULT



WHERE I AM NOW

CHILDHOOD

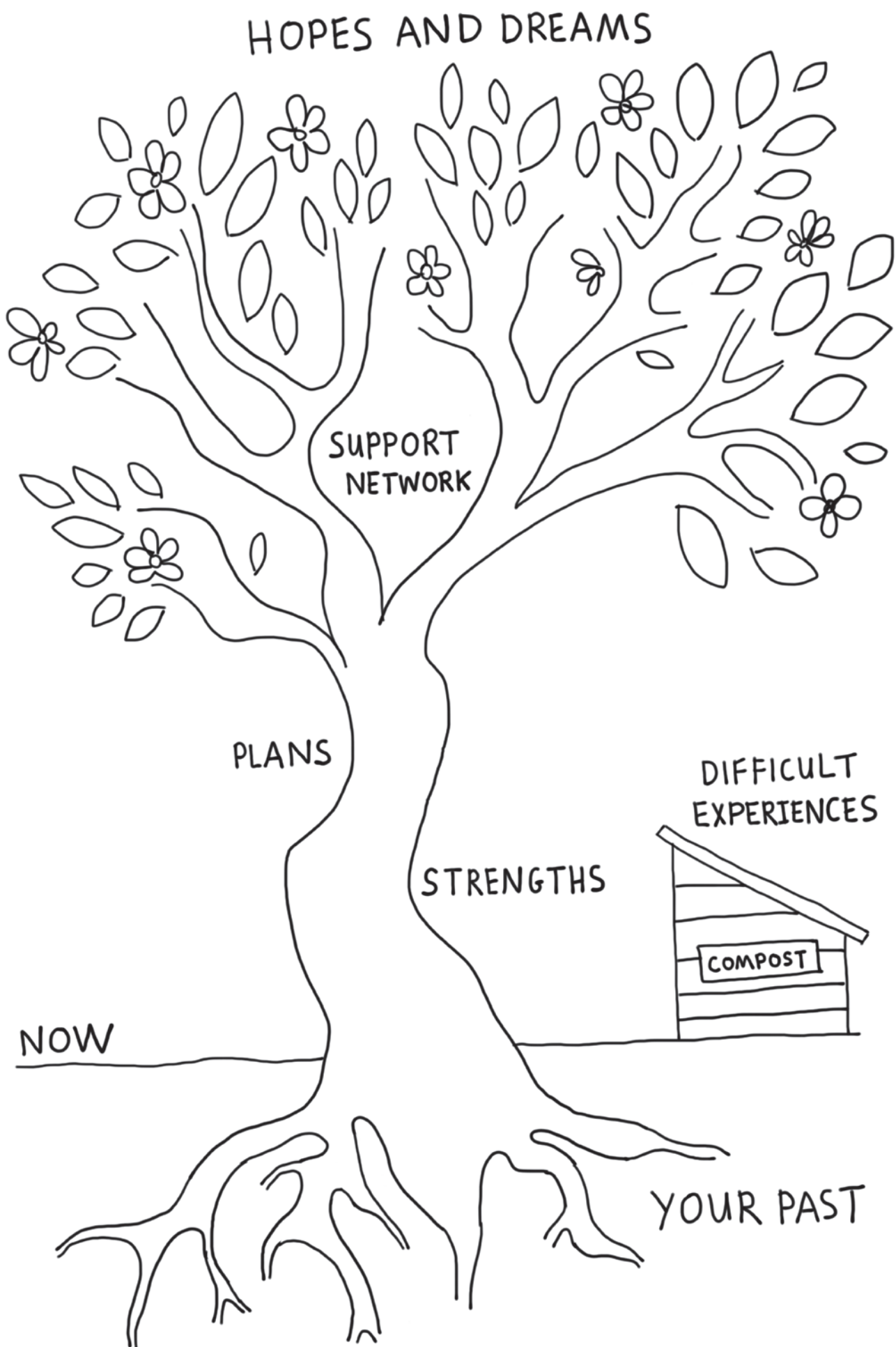
YOUNG ADULT

THE TREE OF LIFE

This is the Tree of Life diagram. It was originally designed by Ncazelo Ncube (2006). In *My Story: Our Future*, we explained it to people like this:

- The ground symbolises where you are now
- The roots symbolise where you come from – this could mean your family, your community or the place you grew up
- The trunk symbolises your strengths, the things you are good at and plans for the future
- The branches symbolise the people you support and the people who support you
- The leaves and flowers symbolise your hopes and dreams for the future
- The compost bin symbolises experiences you may have had that were difficult, but that may have led you to do something better.

NOTES:



SIX-PART STORY METHOD

This method of storytelling was developed by Mooli Lahad (1992) in his work as a trauma specialist in Israel. His original idea was to ask the people he worked with to tell him a fictional story based on six specific features.

He suggested that the way people told stories and the words they used could tell you a lot about someone's understanding or idea of themselves in the world. However, this technique of interpreting fictional stories requires a trained therapist to do successfully. Instead, we suggest that you may find it helpful to use this method to think about bits of your own story.

This tool is more complicated than others and we suggest you actively work through it with someone who is supporting you in mental health services.

Using the six boxes below, draw or write the following six features of the story:

1. The main character – this may be yourself, someone close to you, or a made-up/ fictional character that you can identify with.
2. A task that you or the main character was trying to do.
3. An obstacle you or your character encountered while trying to complete the task.
4. Helpful things that occurred to you or your character, or people you met, while trying to complete the task.
5. The climax, or big moment of the story (the main thing that happened).
6. The aftermath, or what happened after the big moment.

Once you have filled in these boxes, talk through your story from beginning to end. Ask the person listening to you not to interrupt while you do this.

When you have finished telling your story, the person listening to you may have questions they want to ask you. Try to answer these if you feel comfortable doing so.

A main character in his/her setting

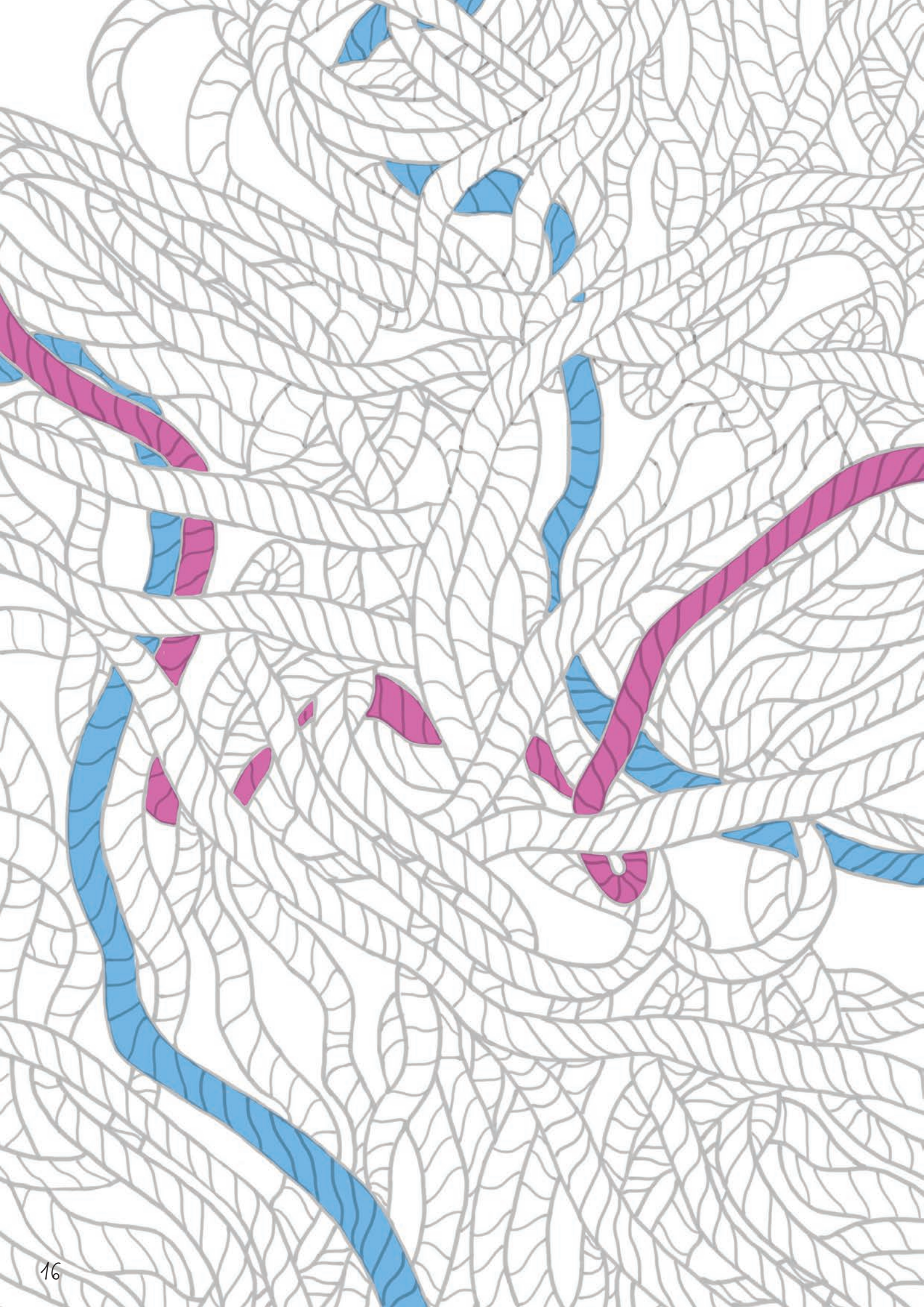
A task for the main character

Things that hinder the main character

Things that help main character

Main action or climax of the story

What follows from the main action?
What have I learnt?



BEGINNING TO TELL YOUR STORY

When you start telling your story with people who support you from the mental health service you use, you may find that you end up talking to more than one person.

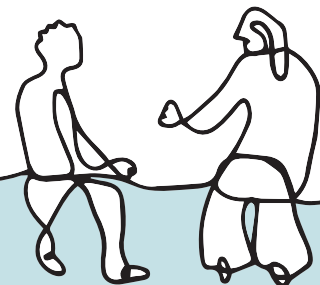
There may be things that you would prefer people to already know at the beginning of a storytelling session, rather than having to explain the same things again and again. The form on the next page is designed for you to record some important things about you.

You could then bring a copy of this to storytelling sessions, or if you are happy with the idea, keep a copy in your notes.



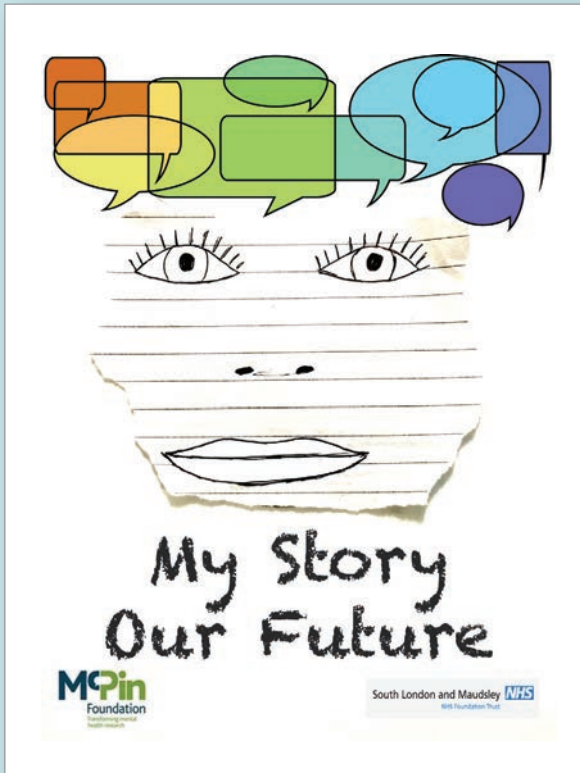
IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT ME

- These are some things that I feel are important to who I am, and I would like you to know about them before we start talking:
.....
.....
- I like to (you could list hobbies or things you like to do here):
.....
.....
- I do not like to:
.....
.....
- These things have happened to me and I think they have an impact on my mental health:
.....
.....
- I find it difficult to talk about myself when:
.....
- I find it easier to talk about myself when:
.....
- In the future I would like to be:
.....
- In the future I would like to go:
.....
- In the future I would like to try:
.....





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We are a mental health research charity. We believe research is done best when it involves people with relevant personal experience that relates to the research being carried out.

We call this expertise from experience and integrate this into our work by:

- Delivering high-quality mental health research and evaluations that deploy collaborative methods
- Supporting and helping to shape the research of others, often advising on involvement strategies
- Working to ensure research achieves positive change

Research matters because we need to know a lot more about what works to improve the lives of people with mental health difficulties, their families and ensure people's mental health is improved in communities everywhere.

