

The Power of Storytelling

As family members and caregivers, we make change every day. From diapers and sibling conflict management, to the snacks served at school or getting a second opinion from a doctor – we are constantly making change for the sake of our kids and loved ones.

AND we are also incredible changemakers and advocates for policy and program change to make our communities, state, and country a better place for children, parents and caregivers, and families. One of the ways we can advocate for change is through telling our stories and sharing our experiences.



Shaping public policy

Stories can change the direction and destiny of public policy and shape program development and implementation.

Storytellers are experts in their own experience, and when others hear experiences that sound like their own, it makes them feel less alone. At the same time, hearing experiences that are different from our own provides new perspectives and helps us see and understand things we otherwise might have missed.

We know that when multiple people are having the same experience, the same challenge, again and again that we have a systemic problem, not an individual one. By sharing our stories, we can identify where systemic change is needed, and together we can lift our voices to make it happen.

You don't need to be an expert on anything besides your own story to be effective. Stories have a way of connecting with decision makers and media in a way that numbers just can't. They put a face on the data and help humanize the decisions being made. Decision makers and media can find the figures related to the decisions they are making, but they need the voices of people who are directly impacted to have the full picture.

Public policy and program development fall short when they don't reflect the stories and lived experiences of people on the ground, especially families who are most impacted and those who have been historically



marginalized such as people of color, families from low income backgrounds, individuals who experience disability, immigrants, and LGBTQ families to name a few. Storytellers and storytelling are essential components to how we win transformational public policies and shape programs to lift us all.

There is power in storytelling and you can choose to share your story to help make change for your own family and for others. But ultimately your story is YOURS to tell. You own your story and sometimes sharing something so vulnerable can be difficult. You get to decide when or if you want to share your story and how you want to share it.

Telling your story to win change

When you decide to tell your story, it is helpful to think about your experience and how it connects to different issues ahead of time. Like everyone, your story probably has a lot of details and may connect to more than one issue area, policy, or program. In fact, we all have many stories to tell that are often interconnected.

What part of your story do you want to tell? Your first decision is what part of your story you want to share in a particular situation and how it ties into the change that you are hoping to create. Stories are more powerful when they are clear, so you will want to focus on the key elements related to the change you are hoping to achieve.



What are the chunks of your story? It can be helpful to think of your story in chunks: What's the context? What's the challenge? What was the outcome? What's the call to action? A call to action is where you tell the decision maker, the media, or your audience what you want them to do, and it's an essential part of storytelling for change.

Creating talking points or an outline of how you'd like to share your story ahead of time can help you feel prepared and stay on message.

You may have played the game Mad Libs when you were a child. We've created a storytelling Mad Lib to help you think about how you might want to organize your story.

MomsRising Storytelling MAD LIBS

1. THE HERO

I AM A:

Mom, Dad, Grandparent, Foster Parent, Student,
Immigrant, Dreamer, Teacher, Child Care Professional,
Health Care Worker

2. THE CONTEXT

MY CONTEXT IS:

Time, Location, Community

3. THE CHALLENGES

I/WE HAVE BEEN CHALLENGED BY:

Health, Economic Hardship, Job Loss, Remote Schooling,
Child Care Challenges

4. THE OUTCOME

MY OUTCOMES ARE:

My life is...

My kids are...

My job is...

My health is...

My stress is...

5. THE CALL TO ACTION

MY CALL TO ACTION IS:

My family needs...

My community needs...

Our leaders must...

Here's an example of how a story created using this template might look:

Hello, my name is _____, and I'm a mom from North Carolina. Last year, I found out I was pregnant with my first child. It was the best news. One of the first things I did was call child care providers nearby and put my name on the waitlist. My daughter was born 8 months ago, and I am still waiting to find a spot. While we wait, I've had to pull a mom McGuyver, cobbling together care from family, friends, and part-time care. This isn't working for anyone -- not me, my employer, or my family. Our system is broken and families like mine are suffering. Families need affordable and accessible childcare now.

This is just one example and yours will look different. Everyone's story is unique, but they can all help provide a needed perspective that is helpful in shaping decisions.

Use the *MomsRising/ MamásConPoder Storytelling Worksheet* for additional support in developing your own story to share.



Opportunities to share your story

There are a number of different places and ways you can choose to share your story to win change.

Decision makers often want to hear from the people who are most directly affected by the decisions they make. This person may be an elected official at the local, state, or federal level. They also may be a program administrator responsible for developing or implementing programs or a table responsible for making decisions and recommendations.

In these cases, there are lots of different ways you can share your story to shape the decisions that will ultimately be made. You can even reach out to the decision maker to share your story directly. You could do this by:

- Calling the decision maker and sharing your experience over the phone with them or a staff member;
- Sending an email where you share your story and ask them to take action to address the challenges you raise;
- Asking to meet directly with the decision maker either in their office, in the community, or virtually and share your story as part of a conversation – these are often called legislator-constituent meetings; or
- Signing up and speaking at a town hall, council meeting, or public hearing.

If you're sitting at a decision making table, you may share your experience as part of a conversation around programs or policies that have impacted you and changes you'd like to see made.

You might choose to work with an organization to help amplify your story. At MomsRising, we gather the stories our members share and create storybooks which we deliver directly to decision makers. Sometimes when we share these stories with elected leaders, they may read them as part of their comments in committee meetings or on the floor at city council or county commissioner meetings, state legislatures, or Congress. Occasionally storytellers are invited to testify directly themselves.

In addition to sharing experiences directly with decision makers, stories are also important for helping build the public drumbeat for change. Traditional news stories through newspaper and television stations can be an effective way to get the word out. You can share your story through writing a letter-to-the-editor of your local newspaper (usually 200-300 words) or an opinion editorial (typically around 600 words). Newspaper and television reporters often connect with organizations to find storytellers for stories they are creating. If you are willing to share your story with the media about an issue you care about, find a local organization working on that issue and let them know you are available if needed.

Social media can also be a powerful place to share a small piece of your story along with a call to action. The most powerful social media posts often pair a story and a photo or image with an email or phone number asking other people to contact the decision maker and encourage them to take action.

There are lots of ways to get your story and your message out. If you are unsure where to start, reach out to an organization working on the issues you care about and ask them for help.

Harnessing our powers as storytellers

We are all storytellers. It is how we relate to one another as neighbors, as friends, as family members, as people. It is especially part of how we relate to one another as parents and caregivers.

Storytelling is also a key part of how we push movements forward – whether it's during a protest or committee hearing – stories are at the heart of people-powered movements

Are you ready to dig into your own power as a storyteller? Here are some next steps you can take today to do just that:

1. Keep practicing your story

Spend some time figuring out what you want to share and jotting down some talking points. Use a journal or your phone's voice recorder to reflect on your stories and put them into words

2. Study storytelling

When you read a news story that sticks with you or watch a video that you can't stop thinking about, take a few minutes to identify the structure of a powerful story. Who are the heroes? What's the context? What are the challenges or villains? What's the call to action?

3. Turn your story into advocacy

Your story can change the destiny and direction of public policy. That is powerful. Identify where you think your story can make the most impact and get started!