

Survivor Story 1 Transcript:

Interviewer: with your permission, tell me your story.

Survivor 1: I've struggled with mental health since I was a teenager. I come from a hearing family, when I go through something, they will not tell me, or help me talk about what I am going through. My first counseling experience was when I was 15, it was not a great experience because at that time I didn't know why I was going to counseling. My mother just asked me if I was experiencing or feeling depressed, fingerspelling the word depressed. I didn't really understand what that word meant, but I said yes, I am feeling depressed without realizing what it really meant.

Interviewer: Curious, was there an interpreter?

Survivor 1: No, the counselor signed themselves. First one that I worked with did. I wouldn't share with that counselor, because my mom was in the appointments with me. Where was my privacy? My safe space? So, I complained instead, or talked about other things. One day, I finally asked my mom what the point of counseling was, nothing was being explained to me. I didn't want to go anymore. I was done, so we stopped going. After that, I started to struggle even more. I did work with more therapists, but they were hearing and with an interpreter. I went through about... let's see, I was 18 years old, about 18 or 19, after my first son was born, after my second son was born, then again when I moved. That one knew and interacted in the deaf community, unfortunately all the other ones before that therapist was a missed opportunity. I could have been getting successful therapy much earlier, it wasn't until I was in my 30's before meeting the one that understood basic deaf culture.

Interviewer: The ones before that didn't understand deaf culture?

Survivor 1: No.

Interviewer: Wow, you were young. Through all that, when did you know you needed help? You told yourself it was time to get help? How did it start?

Survivor 1: My kids. At that time my kids were in middle school, elementary and middle school. I realized that my depression really affected my kids, because they told me they felt like they always had to walk on egg shells around me. They didn't know if today would be a good day with mom, or not.

Interviewer: That hit you hard when they said that?

Survivor 1: Oh yes, it really hurt me. That made me realize that my kids saw me and that my struggles were who I am, when in reality it wasn't who I am. I realized that they don't know their own mother. Trying to be a mother while fighting my inner battles? That's what made me motivated, even if it was later in life, better than never.

Interviewer: With your experiences, and your journey, what were some barriers you experienced?

Survivor 1: After the therapist that knew deaf culture finished their residency, I was switched to a new therapist every two years, none of the other therapists had the experience or basic understanding of deaf culture. Now my recovery is starting to decline and I have to work twice as hard now because I don't want to go back to counseling again with interpreters or another therapist who doesn't understand deaf culture.

Interviewer: In all of your experiences, what helped you stay strong and focused on your healing?

Survivor 1: I'm still working on it today. I have ups and downs, just like a rollercoaster. It is an everyday thing.

Interviewer: Wow thank you for sharing your story. I'm curious about support system. Every victim has different kinds of support systems, like family and friends, advocate, counselor, and so on. What helped you continue your journey?

Survivor 1: I did have a small group that was a support system. I allowed them into my circle, one of them knows what it's like to have mental health needs, and one person focuses on my spiritual needs.

Interviewer: Ok, many people have different ideas of what self-care looks like. Some people look within themselves and learn to love themselves, how do you do that? Some swim, working out, coloring, or some people write in journals. What is yours?

Survivor 1: I have many different ways. I crochet. Why? While counting, I think about things and let it go away. Counting keeps me distracted temporarily while at the same time refreshing my brain. Crocheting and thinking helps. I also use the Happy Color app on my phone.

Interviewer: What's that?

Survivor 1: It's like a coloring book, but on the phone. You match the color to the number in the picture and fill in the numbered spaces. It's a digital version than the old-fashioned paper way. It's on the phone. Why that works for me? It's easy when I am on the go and can't pack everything in a bag. I needed something on the go, and happy color app is that something. There are many things to color, like animals and etc. I really enjoy it. I play with my dogs.

Interviewer: How many do you have?

Survivor 1: I have two and both are deaf dogs. They keep me busy, I can sign to them, go for walks, and have someone to be there for me and know what I need.

They can tell what I need, I also love to pet them a lot. It is an amazing feeling. I feel loved and that someone loves me too. Petting them and loving them back makes me feel good too.

Interviewer: What were some things that didn't work for you?

Survivor 1: Facebook and talking with toxic people. Those are the things that I noticed I need to avoid when I am not doing well. I have to avoid them. If I talk to them, they will respond back with negativity, or more which brings me down even more. Also, sometimes I want to read articles or information that someone posts that will help me, but ends up triggering me. Sometimes it's not always a good idea to use technology as part of self-care, unless you have games or coloring apps, at least for me. It's nice to have that something on the go when I can't take everything with me.

Oh, I also love to sit outside and look around, look at the trees. I do a lot of mindful activities and thinking when I'm outside. I love to watch the trees outside too, watch the trees move when the wind blows. It's like they are dancing in the air.

Interviewer: That is so cool, really awesome!

Survivor 1: Trees, nature, watching animals play around, that is really my therapy. If I could, I would be at the mountains every day. If they had any here in Wisconsin, I would love that!

Interviewer: You brought up toxic people and people to avoid. There are a lot of victims that are out there, what if one of them comes up to you and asks for advice? What would you tell that person?

Survivor 1: I would ask them "What do you really want for your future, or what do you want for yourself?" I'd start off with giving themselves something to look forward to short term instead of long term because sometimes they feel they can't wait that long to accomplish something. Ask if there is something they like to do, what do they see themselves in one week from now. Talk to someone that you trust and feel comfortable with. Don't hold it in.

Interviewer: Comfortable person who are they, where do they come from? Do they have to have background training or can they be anyone?

Survivor 1: Can be anyone you feel comfortable with, can be a professional, a friend, or a family member. Maybe something established like a support group. Anyone where you feel something is there and you can connect with.

Interviewer: Wow! Thank you so much for sharing your soul, your whole experience. I am sure everyone will learn more from you! Thank you!