

Six Wee Wordies Facilitation guide



A letter from Bridget

I am so happy to be writing this, because it means that people are interested in this project!

When I first came across the concept of Six Word Stories, I was completely amazed that it was possible to tell an entire story in just six words, but the more I thought about it, the easier it became. To start with, it was an incredibly satisfying achievement, but the more I practiced, the more fun it became. Eventually, I would create these stories as a distraction and a coping mechanism. And I absolutely love the moment when other people see the fun or even the benefit of doing it themselves.

When applying the six-word theory to discussions about mental health, one of the biggest attractions for me is the fact that words are restricted. To be able to express a thought or feeling in just six words feels much less overwhelming, and removes the pressure to say more than you really want to. We moved away from the idea of "stories" because, again, that felt like an additional pressure when really it is the words that matter and the meaning behind them.

Listening is such an important part of communication, and so with only six words to take in, the person listening can easily reflect and understand them without distraction. Although with language being what it is, even six words can lead to many different interpretations!

I really hope you all enjoy creating your own six wee wordies and I can't wait to hear some of them!

From Bridget Dickson (See Me volunteer and creator of the Six Wee Wordies project)



What is a Six Wee Wordies workshop?

A Six Wee Wordies workshop is an opportunity to have a go at some basic creative writing exercises in a really easy format. It includes a range of exercises which enable participants to create a poem or sentence of just 6 words. While this can be an individual activity, this facilitation pack will focus on group activity sessions.

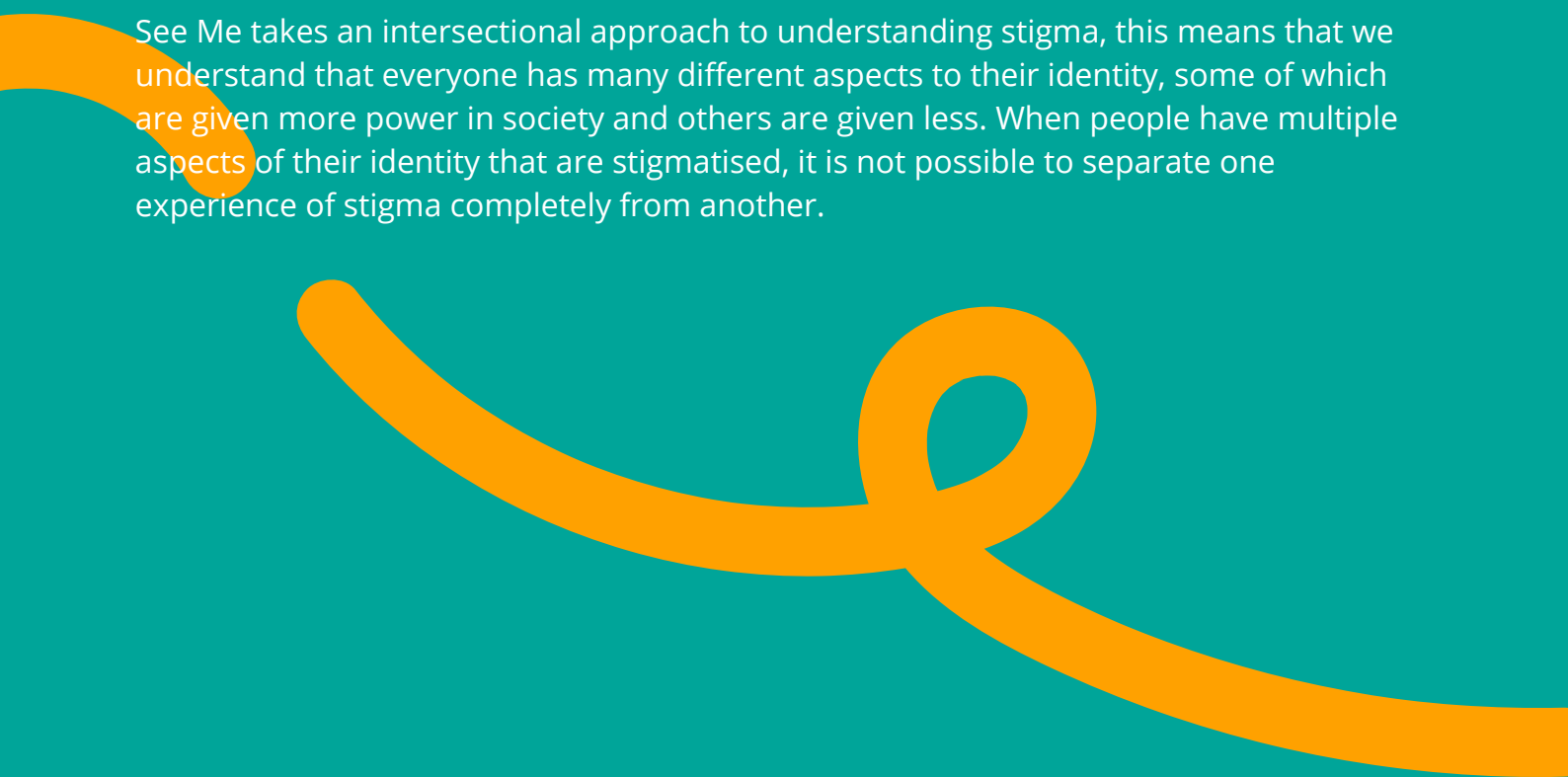
Six Wee Wordies are not only easy to create, but also easy to share (and remember!!). The workshop is designed to be flexible to the needs of the group; the different exercises provide building blocks that can be adapted and fitted together however you choose!

Who are See Me?

See Me are Scotland's National Programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination. Mental health stigma creates a barrier to people being able to access the support they need, it makes it harder for people to fully participate in all areas of life without fear of the reactions of others.

We work in settings and communities across Scotland to understand the impact of stigma, making it easier for people to speak more openly about mental health and to access the support they deserve. People can experience many different types of stigma, and there are many different circumstances and experiences that can impact our mental health.

See Me takes an intersectional approach to understanding stigma, this means that we understand that everyone has many different aspects to their identity, some of which are given more power in society and others are given less. When people have multiple aspects of their identity that are stigmatised, it is not possible to separate one experience of stigma completely from another.



How do Six Wee Wordies sessions tackle mental health stigma and discrimination?

Six Wee Wordies sessions support and encourage people to write creatively about the things in their life that relate to mental health. When we can express the things we are feeling and experiencing in a safe and supportive setting it helps to strengthen feelings of connection, break down fears and help greater understanding, all of which are instrumental in tackling stigma.

"The power of only having 6 words is that participants are learning to give their thoughts and feelings clarity, while also having to explain why they chose the 6 words. It is helping them build and develop important tools for introspection and emotional processing."

Feedback from [ILFA](#) (Information and Learning for All) photovoice workshop

When people attend Six Wee Wordies sessions, they often express the intention to share the activities with family, friends or colleagues providing an opportunity for people to speak about their experiences and encourage others to do so.

"(This was an) engaging, useful technique that I'll take forward into work and personal life."

Six Wee Wordies workshop participant



Planning a session

Can I facilitate this session?

The job of a facilitator is to plan and guide the session, keeping it on track and managing the space. Facilitators of the session can be anyone - if you are reading this, you are already part of the way there! However it is important to reflect ahead of the session on the role of the facilitator especially if this is not something you have a lot of experience with.

It is generally best to have at least two people leading each session to ensure that one person can take on a safeguarding role for the group in case anyone in the session needs to take some time out.

See Me uses the principles of [community engagement](#) to guide our approach to facilitation. Please read through the 'facilitation tips' below which will lead you through some of the key considerations for facilitators wishing to create a positive experience for participants.

How long should the session last?

Six Wee Wordies sessions are flexible, you could fit one into a lunch break for example. Ideally allow at least 30 minutes for shorter sessions with just a couple of exercises to get people started. Alternatively, a longer workshop could easily last up to 2 hours. You would be able to include a wider range of exercises in these sessions, and more practice time for participants.

Where should I hold the session?

A quiet, undisturbed space is best for this kind of workshop to allow people to have a calm space to write, reflect and chat. If it is possible, try to provide a separate 'breakout' space for anyone who needs to take some time out of the session to take a breather or have a chat.

What materials do I need?

At its most simple, just pens and paper! You may find it useful to have flipchart paper and pens for some of the group exercises. If you are ending the session with 'Six Word Mantras', using postcards and felt tip pens is a nice way to give participants something they can decorate to take away with them.

Creating a Session Plan

There is a list of Six Wee Wordies exercises included in this pack. They are intended to be the building blocks to create the right session for you and the group you are working with in the time you have available. You can choose the exercises you want to include and create a session that fits the needs of your group and the time you have available.

Tell See Me about it!

If you decide to run a Six Wee Wordies session, it would be great to let See Me know it's happening so we can see how this pack is being used. You can email us at Maeve.Grindall@seemescotland.org.

Facilitation Tips

Creating a safer space for everyone

When we talk about safe spaces, we are usually referring to emotional or psychological safety. This means for example; how comfortable did the session feel for the participants? Was the atmosphere warm and welcoming? Did everyone feel they had the opportunity to take part? Did people feel like their experiences and feelings were valued and respected?

See Me often refers to a 'safer' space rather than a 'safe' space because it is not always possible to guarantee complete emotional safety for everyone, as a facilitator it is not always possible to know what might make someone uncomfortable. However, you can help the group to feel that you all have a shared role in making the space as safe as possible.

Establishing a shared agreement for the session helps to set the tone for participants, and encourages them to feel that you are creating something together. You could have a few suggestions for a group agreement written out in advance, these might include:

- **Listen to other people when they are speaking**
- **Be respectful of other people's experiences and opinions**
- **Be mindful of the impact of your words and actions on others.**

Invite participants to suggest any additional ground rules and check they are happy with the ones you have suggested.

It is important that no one feels any pressure to share their own personal experiences with anyone else. Explain to the group that sharing the Six Wee Wordies that they write is completely optional, some people may choose not to read out what they have written, others will be happy to share.

"We found 6 little wordies to be highly effective in facilitating difficult conversations and was incredibly effective in fostering open and honest communication amongst participants. It helped to encourage a safe space where participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives, their own experiences and their inner concerns."

Feedback from [ILFA](#) photovoice workshop

Understanding the group

It is important to think about the group you are working with ahead of time. Is this an established group of people who know each other, or will you need to spend some additional time getting to know each other?

Do some group members require additional support in the session, e.g. translation services or help with writing? Make sure you build extra time for this into your session plan. The nature of the group you are working with, and the context may suggest particular themes or exercises that will have particular resonance.

"When working with a group made up of women who were all mothers or grandmothers we used 'motherhood' and 'family' as a prompt for one of the exercises because we knew that was such an important topic for the group and very much linked to their mental health experiences."

Reflections from See Me Six Wee Wordies Facilitator

Talking about mental health

Six Wee Wordies sessions can often generate conversations about mental health and sometimes people choose to share personal experiences. There are lots of ways to have conversations about mental health, and modelling calm, supportive conversations about mental health is a really valuable thing to do. Don't feel like you need to be able to 'fix' things for anyone, just a space for conversation can be really useful.

Different groups will speak about and understand mental health and stigma in different ways; people might talk about 'stress' or 'wellbeing' for example, and stigma may be described as 'shame', 'isolation', or 'blame' or words similar to these.

If a participant shares a painful or challenging experience this might be difficult for other participants in the group, or you as a facilitator as well. It might be helpful to briefly pause in the moment and recognise any strong emotions you are having, or acknowledge those feelings out loud if you feel that others may be affected by what has been shared.

If people choose to share their experiences and feelings with the group ensure you take the time to thank them for sharing with you.

"The structured format of the (session) encouraged participants to really think deeply and also encouraged active listening and empathy, which were key to addressing sensitive topics (such as mental health, and mental health stigma) and understanding different perspectives."

Feedback from [ILFA](#) photovoice workshop

Safeguarding

Some participants may find they need to take some time out of the session, try to ensure there is a quiet additional space they can go to, and a second facilitator to check what support they need.

If people have been sharing personal stories it can feel abrupt for a session to finish and to leave the space. It can be helpful to let participants know that you will stay behind for a period of time e.g. half an hour after the session if anyone would like more time to talk.

A participant may share that they would like additional support with something they are having difficulty with. There is a list of organisations that provide support with mental health included in this pack but there are many more sources of support available, including local support groups. If possible you could offer to help the person take a look online to see what might be most helpful to them.

Running the session online

If you are running Six Wee Wordies online it is important to consider how you are going to create the feeling of a shared space. Welcome people into the online space in the same way you would welcome them into a physical space, if participants get the opportunity to say hello informally it can help to break down the barrier of speaking in front of the whole group. Equally, it can be helpful for participants to feel they have options for how to contribute to the session e.g. using the chat function if they prefer not to speak. Using breakout rooms can also sometimes feel more comfortable for conversations in smaller groups.

A second facilitator's role in an online session could be to monitor the chat function and read out those messages. They can also be available to receive direct messages from any participants who might need support during the session.



Six Wee Wordies Exercises

The exercises in the next section are the building blocks for your session. For each one we have described the exercise and its purpose, and provided some examples that you can share as prompts. Each of these examples have been created by previous Six Wee Wordies facilitators or participants and are shared with permission.

In each case you can begin by describing the exercise and then share a couple of examples of your own. Allow participants a few minutes to write and then invite sharing without putting pressure on anyone to do so. Sharing may take the form of reading aloud, or adding what they have written to a flipchart or other place to be read by the facilitator.

By their very nature Six Wee Wordies exercises are simple and accessible. The ones we share here are examples you can use but you can also create your own.



Six Word Summaries

What is it? Take a well-known story/film/poem/nursery rhyme and condense it into six words. This can then form a game as people share their summaries and others guess what it is describing

Why do it? It's a great starting point! This exercise helps people relax into the session.

Things to consider Does the group you are working with have a shared cultural understanding? Avoid playing the guessing game if you feel it may make one or more people feel excluded from the wider group, instead you could welcome the opportunity for people to share and explain the examples that are meaningful to them

Examples

"Indestructible ship hits iceberg. It's destructible." (Titanic)

"Turns out, evil emperor is Dad." (Star Wars)

"rat tricks ox and wins race" (Chinese zodiac story)

"Witches predict disruption to Scottish monarchy." (Macbeth)

"Ten-headed demon defeated in myth" (Ramayana)

Three pronouns and three verbs

What is it? Give an example sentence (see below or create your own) and then invite participants to change the pronouns (I, he, she, they, we, you) to change the meaning of the sentence. For example 'I ran, I fell, I laughed' could become 'We ran, I fell, you laughed'

Why do it? This exercise gets people thinking about creativity with language, but also how small changes to the way something is expressed can make a big difference.

Things to consider: Explain pronouns and verbs by using examples (I, you, he, she, they)

Examples

We laughed. We cried. We understood.

I started. I stumbled. We finished.

He looked. She smiled. They left.

I asked. She denied. I worried

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He laughed. I cried. I understood.

We started. I stumbled. She finished.

He looked. She smiled. She left.

I asked. She denied. We worried.

Six Words for Stigma

What is it? Invite participants to write down alternative words which describe the feeling or experience of stigma

Why do it? The word 'stigma' is not widely used to explain people's everyday experience and so this exercise helps people to connect with it as a topic.

Things to consider: This exercise is best used in a session which is explicitly to explore the nature of stigma. Mental health stigma can also be tackled without explicitly mentioning stigma.

Examples: Shame, Isolation, Loneliness, disgrace, blame, misunderstood

Fill in the blank

What is it? Share a phrase with a missing word and invite participants to suggest whatever word they feel is appropriate.

Why do it? This is a very useful way to focus participants on a particular theme or idea in an accessible way

Examples

Stigma the disease, _____ the cure

I know _____ is my superpower

Something I am proud of

What is it? Encourage and model celebrating all the achievements equally, helping create a space of support and collective power

Why do it? This exercise encourages individuals in the group to look at themselves with positivity and kindness.

Things to consider: Not everyone finds it easy to identify things in their life they are proud of. Try to give examples of 'small' achievements that people may be able to connect with.

Examples

Every day I get myself up

I ran the whole London marathon

I am a very good friend

Shared experiences

What is it? Use a current event or shared experience to explore the feelings we had and perhaps still hold on to. (e.g pandemic / lockdown)

Why do it? Using the six wee wordies format to express feelings about a difficult or complicated time.

Things to consider: For the group you are working with there may be particular news events / political discussions that have particular relevance and impact that people might feel they wish to explore.

These may equally be painful things to think about depending on the specifics so be led by the group and approach with sensitivity.

Examples (prompted by experiences in lockdown)

A great excuse not to socialise!
Constant hand washing, why wouldn't you?

Facts & Feelings

What is it? Ask participants to write out a six wee wordies which describes the facts of a significant period or incident in their life. Then ask them to write another six wee wordies that describes the feelings they have about it.

Why do it? Starting with facts and then moving into feelings might offer a new way to approach a particular subject.

Examples

Fact: "My son has an autism diagnosis"

Feeling: "Seeing excitement through his whole body"

Six Word Mantras

What is it? Six-word mantras were developed nearly a hundred years ago by Dr Claire Weekes who identified the benefits of having a mantra to repeat whenever she felt threatened or under pressure. They gave her the opportunity to stop, breathe and comfort.

Why do it? This is something that participants can literally and figuratively take away with them. A great one to end with!

Things to consider: For this exercise if possible it is nice to have postcards for participants to decorate and colour in. If you do not have budget to buy blank colouring postcards, you can download free templates online.

Examples

If they can, maybe I can.

Remember, no is a complete sentence.

Every day I do my best.

Smiling uses less muscles than frowning.

Find joy in the small things.



Useful Contacts

Breathing Space:

A confidential phonenumber for anyone 16+ in Scotland feeling low, anxious or depressed

www.breathingspace.scot

Call free on 0800 83 85 87

Samaritans:

Support for anyone struggling to cope at the moment

Call free on 116 123 or access the self help app <https://selfhelp.samaritans.org/>

Childline

Confidential support for anyone under 19 who has an issue they would like to talk about

childline.org.uk

Call free on 0800 1111

Saheliya

Specialist mental health support organisation for Black, minority ethnic, refugee and migrant women girls in Edinburgh and Glasgow

www.saheliya.co.uk

LGBT Health & Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing charity for LGBTQ+ adults in Scotland

www.lgbthealth.org.uk

Black Minds Matter

Charity connecting Black individuals and families with free therapy by accredited Black therapists

www.blackmindsmatteruk.com

Shakti Women's Aid

Help for black minority ethnic (BME) women, children and young people who are experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic abuse.

shaktiedinburgh.co.uk

Call 0131 475 2399

Further Info and Resources:

See Me Website: <https://www.seemescotland.org/>

SAMH Website: <https://www.samh.org.uk/>

NHS 24: www.nhs24.scot

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