

# GUIDELINES FOR SURVIVOR SPEAKERS

In consultation with survivors of prostitution and human trafficking



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# BACKGROUND CONTEXT:

Survivors of the system of prostitution and human trafficking are often asked to speak at events, take part in interviews and / or share their stories. These opportunities are important as they can help with further understanding of these issues and related ones, shine a light on challenges faced during and after rescue or exit from the industry, as well as provide hope to others.

However in some instances sharing of one's experiences can be harmful, leading to damage and further setbacks in recovery, healing and reintegration. If one is not careful, these "opportunities" can also become situations where one might be triggered and re-traumatized, or which bring about further exploitation.

As such, this set of guidelines has been designed in partnership with survivors, for survivors and persons working alongside survivors. It aims to offer some guiding questions and considerations to assist survivors as they consider any requests to speak or share their story. Opportunities presented could include an interview, an awareness or fundraising event, or could be for research purposes. While these guidelines do focus on speaking engagements, they can also be drawn upon for any situation where one's story might be translated into written format, filmed or recorded.



# GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR SURVIVORS

## SECTION 1: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Honestly answer as best you can the following questions for yourself before considering any speaking engagements or opportunities to share your story. It is important to understand and reflect upon where you are in your continued self-awareness and healing journey, and whether or not you are in a good and healthy space to be sharing your experiences with other people.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:



Have I been out of my situation for at least two years, and have I been through a healing and restorative journey with professional help that ensures I feel strong enough to stand up and speak or share my story with others?



Am I aware of what my triggers are, and do I have good and healthy coping mechanisms in place, should I become triggered at any point?

**Note:** A trauma trigger is a psychological stimulus that prompts recall of a previous traumatic experience, and can cause intense and often negative emotional reaction.



Am I strong enough and / or do I have enough support, that any pressure or triggering won't push me back into old habits, addictions or depression?

**Survivor tip:** Be ready with a good memory or item to hold that you can use to ground yourself, if and when necessary.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF CONTINUED:



Am I at peace with myself, and confident in who I am? Am I ready to face any comments or questions that may be intentionally or unintentionally triggering for me, or face people who may come across as condescending or cynical about my experience? Am I prepared to answer some difficult questions e.g. why didn't you go to the police for help?

**Survivor tip: It might be helpful to role play some questions beforehand, or to draft down possible responses to some of the potentially challenging questions you may be asked. Are you comfortable with what to say if you do not have the answer or do not wish to answer that particular question? Some forethought and preparation will help you to respond confidently and boldly.**



What is my motivation for sharing my story? Am I going to be speaking out for the right reasons?

**Survivor tip: Ask yourself why you are willing to do this: are you trying to help someone? Are you seeking approval from other people? Are you wanting to change something? Or gain something? If this is a tool to gain something, it could only end up in disappointment and you are in essence, exploiting your own pain. Think about how you might feel after the talk and what you want people to do with your story?**



## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF CONTINUED:



Am I able to be real and authentic in my sharing? Can I be honest about where I am in my healing journey, realising that making false claims about being further along than I really am, could have massive negative consequences for both myself and others listening to my story.



Can I stick to the truth without needing to exaggerate or change my story?

**Survivor tip: Your story is what it is and most people have not experienced these kinds of situations. If your motivation is right, there would be no need for any exaggeration. You also don't have to settle in your faith or beliefs just because we live in a diverse world. Your story is your truth and no one can take it away from you, or make you change it to suit their own needs.**



Am I prepared for the feedback from the room? It could range from pain and anger, to disbelief and victim blaming, to pity - would I be able to manage these various audience responses?

**Survivor tip: Know the value of your story, and realise that you have the power to correct some faulty default responses, such as victim-blaming, treating victims like criminals or “junkies”, or questioning a victim’s integrity or sanity because of issues such as trauma bonding. These things are especially common in many Government departments, making them a tougher audience to speak to than a church group, for example. It is important, if possible, to address this issue firmly but respectfully, and can be a great opportunity to educate officials on how insensitive assumptions and accusations can further traumatize an emotionally fragile victim.**

**Survivor tip: There may be some hidden trauma in one or more members of the audience. Try to be sensitive to this; make sure that your message of hope is strong, and do not take on any guilt if someone in the audience is triggered by your story. They have their own journey to walk.**

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF CONTINUED:



Are there any risks to my personal safety? Are my perpetrators still free and able to find me at the event or through the information shared and posted publicly or online?

**Survivor tip:** Consider the latest risk assessment you may have undertaken with your case worker, and use this as a guide to help you determine whether or not it would be safe to accept this opportunity being offered. Be careful of personal information you share, and how it might potentially put you at risk. If your case is still in court, it might be a good idea to seek legal counsel before agreeing to share your story, especially if it has not been de-identified. If your story is going to be filmed or published in written form, consider whether or not your trafficker(s) might have access to the footage or material, especially if no arrests have been made or your trafficker might be up for bail soon.

If you feel you are satisfied with your answers to the above questions, and feel that you are in a good safe space and ready to start sharing your story, then start with gaining context and understanding about the opportunity and what it will - and won't - entail.



# SECTION 2: DETAILS OF THE OPPORTUNITY

When presented with an opportunity, always know that it is perfectly within reason for you to ask as many questions and find out as much context and information as you need, in order to make your decision. You also do not have to say yes - you are free to say no for any reason. All of the below are points to consider as you think through the opportunity. Asking for an event agenda or programme, may help you to see how the event will play out, provide some further context, and clarify at which point you would be speaking.

## IMPORTANT ASPECTS:

**Survivor tip:** It is important to understand these three aspects of the opportunity, as each opportunity and experience will be different, and may require different preparation.

**PURPOSE**

**AUDIENCE**

**SETTING**

## PURPOSE:

Understanding the purpose may contribute to whether or not you are comfortable with accepting this particular opportunity.

What kind of event is it and what is the motivation of the person who is organising it or interviewing you:

Why do they need you to speak and / or share your story.

Is it for:

- Awareness?
- Research purposes?
- To empower others?
- To increase the interest of their listeners?
- To raise funds for their organisation?
- To have you share your testimony as encouragement to others?
- To create knowledge about a particular problem which could prevent it from happening to someone else?
- Some other reason?

## AUDIENCE:

It is important to understand who will be listening to your story; a church group of mothers will be very different to a group of Government officials, for example. You will most likely share different aspects of your story, and in different ways, for different groups of people.

Ensure that you have clarified whether it will be a small closed group of people, or an open event that anyone can attend. Will the audience be majority female, male or a mix of genders, and will it be only adults? Will the audience be there in person or will they be on the other end of the radio, TV or live stream? Asking what is it that you are expected to communicate to the audience will help you prepare, and this loops back to the purpose of the opportunity.

## SETTING AND ENVIRONMENT:

Clarify whether the opportunity is in-person or virtual (online), and whether it will be live or pre-recorded. If there will be a recording, or a copy going to print, check if you are able to state any limitations or Terms and Conditions that you may have, for example not showing your face or not using your full name. It is also a good idea to check whether any cameras will be used, and if you are not comfortable with having your picture taken or published then this needs to be clearly communicated, preferably in writing as well as verbally.

Ensure you understand what environment you will be going in to, for example will it be a church building, a prison ward, a fundraiser event or a Government event? You need to be briefed on what to expect, such as who the audience is, what the room setting will be like, where you will be seated and who with, what the structure of the event is (again the agenda or programme will come in handy here). Gaining this information will help you understand what to expect and to avoid any unpleasant or avoidable surprises.

If it is going to be a panel discussion or interview, is the person who will be asking the questions someone who has worked with survivors before? Are they able to probe in a sensitive manner? Do they have an understanding of Human Trafficking and / or the system of prostitution, and can they see the value of educating the audience over and above just sharing your story? Are you able to have the questions upfront before the interview to help you prepare? You have a right to ask for the questions before hand and make it clear how long in advance the questions should be sent to allow you time to read them, ask questions and decline any you do not wish to answer.

It is also good to check whether or not they will brief the crew or relevant team on the fact that a survivor will be present, and you can also specify what you might like to have communicated to these people, for example: "Treat me like a person and not just another story" or "Any make up or preparation of the microphone needs to be done by a female only."





## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

If you feel satisfied up to this point, and are still considering the opportunity, then there are some final practical considerations to take into account.

### SUPPORT

### CONSENT

### STORY

## SUPPORT:

### Psycho-social

You need to be clear and honest with yourself about what support structures you do – and don't – have in place. It is a good idea to see your counsellor (if you have one) beforehand to help you process whether you're comfortable sharing your story in public, as well as afterwards should you feel triggered. Alternatively, try to ensure that you have a debrief partner for before, during and after the speaking engagement and if you don't have someone to fill this role you can always ask the organisers to arrange someone for you. It is important to make clear your expectations and needs, and to ensure that you have the support of the organiser(s) with regards to any specific requests you might have. Some examples may include having your own room if you need to stay over; transportation requirements; preferring a woman to set your microphone up; and stating that you might not feel up to engaging and interacting with people before and / or after the talk.

### Financial

Are you being fairly compensated for your time and intellectual property? Have all your costs and expenses been considered? Some examples could include transport to and from the airport; accommodation; data costs if it is a virtual event; if you need to buy food at an expensive restaurant etc. If you require another person to accompany you for support and safety, this could be included in the compensation request due to the nature of your need to have support. If there are costs that have not been considered or covered, and it is a challenge for you to cover them yourself, then bring these to the organiser's attention in a timely manner and respectful (not demanding) tone. It is always a good idea to get any agreement on payment(s) related to the opportunity, in writing to avoid any issues down the line. Make sure that the compensation agreement is clearly defined.

**Note: The organiser(s) are allowed to decline any of these costs due to various reasons - and you then need to decide if it is worth your time and energy to proceed.**

### Safety

Your personal safety is of utmost importance, and you need to consider whether or not you need or want to be protected and if so, do you have the full support of the organiser(s) to make this possible? You can enquire from the organiser(s) whether or not there is security on the premises, or again, if you can have someone accompany you in order for you to feel safe.



## CONSENT:

It is a good idea for you to provide written consent for the sharing of your story before the event. You must also receive written consent from the organizer(s) that you are able to adjust and authorize any media before it is finalized and sent out, and you can stipulate this as a prerequisite to accepting the opportunity.



## TELLING YOUR STORY:

It is important to ensure that you have full control of what goes out there, as once it's out, you cannot get it back. The world is full of sensationalists who will abuse any story to get the response they want - don't let anyone do this to you! You also have a right to take legal action should they exploit your story.

### Terminology

Think about how you would like to be introduced and referred to – as a survivor? By name or perhaps using a pseudonym (an alias name to protect your identity)?

What language and terminology are you comfortable using and would you prefer to be used during the event / interview? Would you like a translator?

**Survivor tip: If the event promotes work against Human Trafficking, but it is clear that the organiser(s) or interviewer do not have at least basic understanding of the elements and definitions, you can either decline or use this as an opportunity to engage and educate. The aim is to eliminate, not perpetuate, misconceptions and confusion around Human Trafficking. An example could be to share the elements (Act, Means, and Purpose) and red flag indicators of Human Trafficking, alongside your story. This will make it easier for anyone in the audience to recognise potential cases in their own communities.**

**Also, do not over dramatize your story or add untrue facts to try validate your experience even if the organiser(s) of the event are doing so. While we know that cases of abduction, chains and violence can and do happen, take the opportunity to explain that not every case looks like that. People need to be sensitized to the non-violent, concealed and other psychological aspects of Human Trafficking which often take place over years, and which are just as unjust and traumatic.**

# TELLING YOUR STORY:

## Structure

What is the structure of this opportunity – by now you should know whether it is a speaking engagement, a sharing of your testimony, an interview, a panel discussion or something else. Are you the sole guest speaker or are you sharing the platform with other speakers? If so, who are they and what is their portfolio? How do their topics intersect with yours?

## Timing

How much time do you have, and what needs to be communicated within this time frame?

It is best to be well prepared. While many people probably won't mind spending a bit more time hearing your story if you do run over time, it is also important to be mindful of any time specifications given by the organisers, especially if there are other people who are also there to share or provide input.

Knowing what you have been asked to focus on – for example one particular incident from your story versus being allowed to provide some context and background to your story – will also help as you tailor and time your talk.

Also clarify whether you are able to share further thoughts and insight beyond your story. Some examples might include: What it means to you to be a survivor; what you are currently doing as a survivor; and sharing what you feel might be some solutions to the challenges that many survivors face.

**Survivor tip: You are always able to make suggestions about what you can and cannot share and expand on; this will also give you greater control and help make you feel more empowered and confident when you speak.**

## Content

While content will be shaped by the nature and structure of the opportunity, how much time you have been allocated, as well as the previously considered aspects of purpose, setting and audience, it is nevertheless still a good idea to clarify what you are being expected to share so that you can go in feeling confident and prepared. Remember though that you also have the right to determine what you are comfortable with sharing, and how much you are willing to share; you need to go in already knowing what you are and are not comfortable sharing, and don't give in to any pressure to share details that are uncomfortable for you.

**Survivor tip: Don't share any inappropriate details. Some people thrive on other people's pain; avoid bringing up uncomfortable details, as best you can, especially if you don't know your audience. Share enough to foster compassion and action but not fear or sensationalism. Know what you will say if you do not wish to answer so that when you need to decline, you can confidently respond. Example: "Thank you for the question, I am unfortunately going to have to decline an answer as I am not comfortable talking about that." If you are pushed to answer and feel that the person is over-stepping your 'no' then you are free to politely but firmly excuse yourself and leave.**

## TELLING YOUR STORY:

A brief or some guiding questions from the organiser(s) can assist with preparation and shaping what you will be saying. It is also good to be mindful if a specific topic or focus has been given for your talk, for example, if you have been asked to use your story to help highlight violence within the sex industry.

Ultimately you need to decide if you are happy and comfortable with tailoring your talk or story – without changing it or exaggerating in any way – to meet the request.

Find out if there will be a Question & Answer (Q&A) session afterwards. This can be daunting if you are not expecting it. If you are not comfortable with this, request that it be excluded or ask if the organisers are willing to work on a compromise, for example taking a short break after your talk so that people can submit some questions, and you can then choose a few that you are comfortable answering.

**Survivor tip: Be mindful about the fact that other people's stories are not yours to tell, and where possible obtain permission if you have something to say about someone else. If you have family members who were involved and these relationships have been restored – if the person has changed and forgiveness has been sought – be careful not to re-accuse the person or re-open past hurts. However this is not applicable if it was a criminal offense and the person has never been held accountable.**

### Etiquette

Present yourself well, be aware of your body language, posture and dress code. Speak clearly, and use simple language to communicate. Remain calm, keep eye contact, and be mindful of your non-verbal cues which can communicate so much, such as folded arms or playing with your hands.



# SECTION 3: MAKING YOUR DECISION

Ask yourself: Do I feel pressured into, or uneasy about, taking this opportunity to speak and / or share my story? If so, what is it that is making me feel this way?

## Turning down an opportunity

It is ok to turn down a speaking opportunity should you feel hesitant, uncomfortable or just not in the right frame of mind for it at the time.

No one should be pushed or pressurized into sharing their story, and you are not obligated to continue communicating with the requester either, as long as you have clearly informed them of your decision. If you feel they are harassing you, communicate this in a polite but firm manner, restate your decision, and ask them not to contact you again.

If you have decided that it's just not the right time for you – for any reason – but that you might be open to it at a later date, and there is flexibility on the requester's side, then either ask if you may contact them when you might be ready, or give them a specific date when they can make contact with you again.

## Accepting an opportunity

If you have decided to take the opportunity, once again ensure that there is an agreement in place in writing, and that you are comfortable with everything stated in it before you sign. This agreement should also stipulate whether or not there are any contractual boundaries or exclusivity rights that you need to be aware of.

If there are clauses you don't understand, get someone who knows, to read it through and clarify for you and you can also ask the organiser to assign you a translator to explain the contract or brief, if necessary.

Be thorough, without being demanding. Be respectful; sometimes all it takes is a good conversation to sort out any problems or misunderstandings. Be clear, be brave, and be the strong, amazing person that you are. You have the power to change hearts and minds – with or without accepting a speaking engagement or event appearance.

**Survivor tip: If this is going to be the first time sharing your story, especially as a speaking engagement, it might be a good idea to talk with someone who can coach you or at the least, give you some general pointers on public speaking. This can help towards easing any potential nerves.**

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