



Guidance for Victims and Survivors

Working alongside organisations when publicly sharing experiences of Child Sexual Abuse



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Contents

Page 3	Taking care of yourself	Page 8	You are in control
Page 4	Impact	Page 9	Logistics and planning
Page 5	Things you might be asked to do	Page 9	Final review and sign off
Page 6	Staged approach	Page 9	Consent
Page 6	Contract/MOU	Page 10	Media
Page 6	Anonymity	Page 12	Financial
Page 7	Boundaries	Page 14	Timing
Page 7	Support	Page 16	A personal message from our group of victims and survivors
Page 8	Not just a story		

This guidance has been written by and in collaboration with a group of victims and survivors who share their experiences of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) publicly.

It has been created to support other victims and survivors who are either already working, or want to work, with organisations to share their own personal experiences of CSA.

It can feel quite daunting to work in this area, particularly if you don't work for or have connections with an organisation who can support you. The most important thing for you to know is that you aren't alone in this and that you deserve to be supported by the people working with you. Throughout this guidance we have set out some topics which might be helpful in knowing what type of work you may be asked to get involved in, the support you're entitled to while doing this, and some things to think about when figuring out what support you need to be put into place.



Taking care of yourself

Every now and then, it's important to check in with how you feel about doing this type of work. Look after yourself and make sure that you're doing this for the right reasons and at the right time. Sharing traumatic experiences is a difficult thing to do, it can take up a lot of time and energy and it can be difficult to fit in around other commitments in your life. The repeated telling of your experiences can lead to you feeling like you're dwelling on what happened, and it may take its toll on you over time. You may reach a point where it gets a bit much, and it's ok if you need to take a break for a little while, or even longer. You are not expected to dedicate the rest of your entire life to this work – you can if you want to, but you don't have to. You are free to make decisions about what is right for you.

Accept help, be careful, trauma can come back like a punch to the heart - but it can't break you if you have someone helping you mend.

Be honest with yourself about how you are feeling. You are not letting anyone down if you need a break.

Without self-care you aren't going to be able to do this work in a way that impacts you and others in a healthy, safe manner.



Impact

This type of work impacts us all differently, both in our day-to-day lives and for each individual project we're involved in. It can feel hugely positive and rewarding when we see that sharing our personal experience has made a real difference. At other times, the process can be very draining, emotional and difficult. It isn't just talking about what happened to you, there's an element of reliving it, and the potential for it to re-traumatise you. This can leave you feeling conflicted because you feel that what you're doing has a positive impact, but at a cost to you personally, leaving you questioning whether you want to do it again.

Sometimes you come away feeling empowered other times you come away feeling a little broken, both feelings are normal. I always ask organisations to pass on feedback from delegates to write a thank you letter for taking part. Then I store it all in a folder I nicknamed the 'I am great' file. It helps to look back at it and see the difference I am making and why I do the work.

Before a conference I was told that I may feel a range of ups and downs and it may take it out of me. But it may also feel cathartic as well.

Most times I have told my experience I have felt empowered and happy that I have helped to make positive change.

I heard that a child had listened to my experience, recognised that something wasn't right with her friend and was empowered to report it to a teacher. The police got involved and caught the perpetrator before he could meet the girl's friend. I cried happy tears when I heard that because I knew I had truly helped somebody. It made everything feel worthwhile.



Things you might be asked to do

When we talk about projects, this is what we're talking about:

Speaking and answering questions about your experience:

- To a small professional group, in training or at a seminar
- To a large audience at a conference, whether in person or online

Presenting your experience:

- In the form of a video for use at any of the things we just mentioned
- In the form of a written case study for use in training, reports or media

Bringing the voice of lived experience to:

- Campaigns to raise public awareness or influence public policy (Government, industry)
- Consultations (legislation, professional codes of practice)
- Academic research

The creation and reviewing of products developed by organisations

To ensure the voice of lived experience is reflected appropriately in terms of both approach and language.

Social media awareness campaign

Having your experience shared on social media platforms as part of an awareness raising campaign

Being interviewed for or on:

- Newspaper outlets
- TV for news or documentaries

It's also important to point out that sometimes you might be asked to be involved in something, and then it doesn't go any further.

There may be lots of reasons for this happening, such as the organisers choosing to go in a different direction or a project not receiving the necessary funding and getting cancelled. It is not ideal and can be frustrating, but it does happen and it's something to be aware of. This is not a personal reflection on you.



Staged approach

It can be good to ease yourself into this type of work at the start of your journey. This could mean doing a small, more protected project. Once you feel confident and comfortable, you might decide to start taking on some more larger scale projects. This gives you time to reflect on whether you are feeling ok about doing this kind of work and whether it feels right for you. It gives you space to look back after an event and see what impact, if any, it has had on you. It also allows you to question if now is the time for you to be doing this and, if yes, is there any additional support you feel you need to have in place.

I appreciated doing it slowly. The first ones were the most difficult. You don't really know what it's like until you've done it



Contract /MOU

It's very important that you have a contract or memorandum of understanding before you engage in any project. This will give you the opportunity to ensure that you are clear and happy about the agreement in place for undertaking the work. Throughout the rest of this document we will cover some important things to be included in this agreement.



Anonymity

In law you have the right to anonymity. You can choose to waive this right, but you should never be pressured to do so. You can also change your mind at any time. Treat each piece of work as a separate decision, weighing up all options. When considering anonymity please remember to also consider the impact of your experience being "out there" and the possibility that it may affect your relationships with family, friends and work colleagues, both now and in the future.

What works for one situation doesn't necessarily work for another. You may feel comfortable speaking at a professional conference and using your first name but might choose to remain anonymous for an interview by local newspapers or news channels where there is an increased likelihood of people identifying you in your home area.

Organisations are often quite good at initiating this discussion, but there may be times when you need to. Feel confident in your decision and be clear about exactly what you would like. If there are any attempts to persuade you to do something you're not comfortable with, you can refuse and choose to end your involvement in the project.

There are lots of different ways to maintain anonymity, and you can choose to use some or all of them, depending on the circumstances. These include using a different name; using only your first name; giving no details of your age, location, education or employment; using an actor or a voice actor; shadowing out during filming; and on virtual platforms there is the option to change your name, keep your camera turned off, and keep your microphone off and only use the chat function.

When I started, I would be completely anonymous, but now I generally use my name and have even started to allow photos to be used. I always let my family know about it first though, so they aren't caught off guard and see something I'm involved in when they aren't expecting it.

I'm not hiding anymore. It's my story and I'm getting it out there to help others.

It is your choice to be public or not. Let no one else decide. I found it terrifying, but after a while it became the catalyst for my mental recovery. I will not hide any more. Your choice.



Boundaries

There may be certain aspects of your experience that you do not want to talk about. You might be happy to take questions at the end of a presentation, or you might not. This is completely ok. Even though you are happy to share some of your experiences, they are still private and deeply personal. You are in complete control of what you want to share and when. It is important that this conversation happens at the start of your involvement with an organisation. If you don't feel comfortable doing this yourself make sure you have somebody else do it with or for you.

Don't allow professionals to tell you how you should be feeling. They do not know where you are at emotionally and have no right to assume. You have the right to feel however you are feeling.

When giving a presentation at an event you can choose if and when to take any questions. All conferences should have the facility to pre-screen questions (for example the use of Slido) and virtual conferences will be able to use the platform-based chat facility. If this is something you would prefer, then insist on it. You have the right to say, "I don't want to talk about that" or "I'd rather not answer that question."



Support

You may find it helpful to have somebody you trust and who can support you whenever you do this type of work. If this is something you want to do, inform the organisers when you first start planning your involvement and ask them to ensure all arrangements are made for both you and the person supporting you. Ideally, this person should be involved in the planning process with you to make sure they are fully aware of what is involved in the work and what you will be doing. Alternatively, you may prefer to do this alone as you might find it easier to talk about certain experiences without somebody close to you hearing it. This can help with keeping this work separate from everything else in your life. Either way is fine, as long as you have the support that you need when you need it.





Not just a story

Your lived life experience is not just a story, though you may feel comfortable referring to it as a story. The telling may be what happened to you from start to finish but we know that you often have so much more to share. This might include the ongoing impacts of what happened and how that has affected you and your life moving forward. Or it could be information about how a particular professional (or professional organisation) worked with you and how this did or didn't help you on your recovery journey. You have experiences and insights which are much wider than the detail of what happened to you. If you want to speak about this, you can and should.



You are in control

Remember that your involvement in this type of work is completely your choice. You do not have to do or say anything that you don't want to, and you are in control. If you want to stop at any point, that is your right. Even if a lot of work has already been done, or the presentation is only around the corner, it doesn't matter. If you need to stop or take a step back, then the organisers should respect this and support you to ensure that you are ok. You are also the one that is in control of the telling so if you have more information that you want to bring into the discussion, then do.

The best advice I can give to someone starting out telling their story is that they are in control and not to be coerced to suit the agenda of the media or organisation.





Logistics and planning

Your individual needs are priority and must be taken into account when organisations are planning your involvement. What you need might change over time or depending on what the specific work is. If you need to travel to an event or an interview this can be tiring and stressful, only adding to the difficult and emotional work you're there to do. Think about how and when you would prefer to get there, whether you would rather stay over the night before and/or after, or even whether you'd prefer everything to happen virtually. Once you know what would work best for you, let the organisers know. They have a duty to look after your well-being, so don't be afraid to be clear about exactly what you need from them.

Whatever the event, give yourself some breathing space either side of it. Sometimes it is no problem at all, others can be more taxing - there's no formula for feelings, so look after yourself.

Make space for your own needs. Treat yourself afterwards and plan exactly what that treat is before you go... It gives me space to calm down after and something to look forward to. It doesn't need to be big, a bath and your favourite movie or something.



Final review and sign off

You should always have the opportunity to review a product before it is released. The organisation should offer this, but don't be afraid to ask for it if they don't. This is important because there may be parts of an interview that you don't want to be made public, or details within a case study which need correcting. It is your information and your experiences, so it is essential that you are happy with what is included. If you need something to be removed or changed, tell them and ask to see an updated version. Don't sign off on it until you are completely satisfied.



Consent

When you start working on something there should be a discussion about the terms of use of the final product and this should be put in writing. This could include whether you agree to a video of you speaking for a training package later being used in further training packages by the same organisation, or whether you consent to a case study being held on file and sent to other organisations or the media in the future. You might be happy to let the organisation do whatever they want with the product once you've reviewed and signed it off, or you might want to have more control over who sees and has a copy of it. Either way is fine, but it's an important point to clarify with the organisation so there are no surprises down the line.



Media

Working with the media can be really daunting. You aren't alone in this, most of us aren't very familiar with the world of the media. If you can, it's a great idea to get media training to help you navigate these experiences. There are some organisations who can help you with this and it would be worth asking the organisation you're working with to provide training.

I was advised not to speak out and when I went to court, I was asked lots of questions about my involvement with the media. In some ways it's good to speak out to expose and hold people to account, but it's important that all the information is accurate and correct.

I naively signed over the rights to all my childhood photos assuming that this would be my only media interaction. I no longer have photos to use for other engagements.

Fact-checking

You might be working with an organisation who are preparing a press release which includes details of your experience. It is important that you check the accuracy of this.

If you're asked to do an interview for radio or TV and you're nervous about it going out live, ask for it to be pre-recorded

That way it can be edited and reviewed before going out. This can help by removing any

pauses while you're thinking about how to answer questions, or if you mix up your words when speaking, or sometimes you might say something which, on reflection, you'd rather it not be included. These are all normal things to happen during an interview, so don't worry! With TV ask them to show you how the final product will look, for example if you ask to be filmed in shadow, they will be able to show you this on the screen before they start filming.

You might be approached by journalists personally

As opposed to through an organisation that you're working with. This could be via social media or maybe even by phone or face to face. You might be ok with this, particularly if they are friendly and approach you in an indirect way (maybe via social media with a nice message to see if you're willing to speak to them). Even if they are friendly, it is worth seeing some of the articles that they have written to get an idea of their perspective.

Be aware that journalists may pick out details from the press release without ever talking to you

Don't be surprised if you see yourself quoted in a paper that you haven't had direct contact with.

You should never feel obligated to do anything.

If you feel uncomfortable don't feel like you have to respond or engage with them, you can tell them not to contact you again.

Before engaging with media, ensure that the support structures you need are there for you

For example friends, family or the organisation you're working with. Something that isn't spoken about often is that when a media piece goes out there is always the potential for a story to be picked up by the national press or go viral. Unfortunately, internet trolls are everywhere. It is possible that there could be a negative reaction to a piece, which doesn't mean that it is personal, but it can feel like that when it happens. You may choose not to look at any coverage on social media so you avoid any nasty comments. If you want to know what the reaction is then it might be useful to have somebody you trust read the comments and tell you about them so they can filter out anything awful.



I NEVER do anything with the media without support, even if it's just a friend.

Legal proceedings

If you're engaged in legal proceedings, please consider the pros and cons of engaging with the media and seek appropriate advice before deciding anything. Ensure you have the right support should you decide to go ahead.



Financial

It is really important that you do not undervalue the contribution that you can bring to any event, consultation or professional meeting. Victims and survivors very often feel a sense of guilt around “financially gaining” from a traumatic experience that has happened to them. This is not what you are being paid for. You are being paid for your expertise which is as a result of these experiences which include not only the incident(s) but the professional responses that followed. Other people contributing to these events receive either a salary from the organisations involved or charge a speaker’s fee. You are equally entitled to financial compensation. This needs to be agreed at the outset of any engagement.

I’m uncomfortable accepting money for my experience so I always give the money to child abuse charities.



Fees and expenses

You will feel more confident talking about money if you have already worked out what you think you should be being paid for different types of work. We suggest the following:

1

Have a one-off fee for speaking at conferences and events (half day and full day rate) and an hourly rate for other types of work.

2

Talk to other organisations/victim and survivor groups to benchmark rates of pay within your area/region/country.

3

For high value ticketed events where organisers charge a lot of money for tickets, you can feel confident about asking for a fee that covers all of your time including preparation, travel, and presentation. For smaller charities you may need to negotiate a smaller fee that reflects their income.

4

Be realistic about how much time the work will take. Remember to include reading and thinking time as well as meetings. If the meetings are in person remember to include your travel time and costs.

5

If you are speaking to the media on behalf of an organisation, the organisation should cover the cost of your time and travel.

Don't be afraid to stand firm and tell them that you need to be paid for your expertise, time and effort.

You can make decisions on a case-by-case basis. You might choose to say: "Thank you, but I can't afford to work for free" if you believe that an organisation is able but unwilling to pay you. Some projects may be especially close to your heart, or offer alternative benefits, so you feel ok about charging a small fee or no fee at all. This is for you, and you alone, to decide based on what works for you at that time.

People expect me to do things for free because I am a survivor of exploitation, which is exploitation in itself. I am still a human being doing a job so should be paid like everyone else.



Timing

In most cases this work will only be one part of your life and you will have lots of other commitments that might include your main job(s), family and caring responsibilities. Not to mention the importance of having time to yourself to relax and focus on you. When you're busy it can be really difficult to fit extra things into your schedule. Organisations wanting to work with you should be aware of this and should be willing to make the arrangements most convenient to you. It is ok to ask for plans to be changed so that they work better for you. Sometimes it isn't possible, but don't feel obligated to push yourself and your schedule to the limits to accommodate something if it just won't work. It's always ok to say: "thank you for the opportunity but unfortunately I can't do it this time".



This guidance has been written by and in collaboration with
a group of victims and survivors

They each would like to share a message with you:

Greek proverb

*A society grows great
when the old plant trees
in whose shade they
will never sit.*

Emma

You are empowering change by sharing your story and whilst it can all seem daunting you should be proud of how far you have come. Embrace all the feelings that come with sharing your lived experience, the highs and the lows, your past doesn't define you, you are just using it to help make the world a safer place for children.

Megan

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter – Martin Luther King.

Sammy

What happened to me may have broken me at times, but it never defined me. I tell my story not for sympathy but to give strength to those who have the power to stop this from happening to others.

Paul

Do not harm yourself hoping to save others, we need you whole. Together, we really are changing the reality for generations of people. Take comfort in the fact that you/we can find each other and stop this rubbish.

Tim

It's sometimes the hardest and loneliest battle to go through – especially when reliving through events and interviews. But there are people around you who will pick you back up and be there for you – don't be afraid to use them.

Jamie

It took a long time to come to terms with my experience and a lot of self-introspection, but I had this fire in my soul and passion. I wanted my power back – it's my story for me to tell and not someone else's narrative.

Sarah

*Speaking out about
child sexual abuse is so
important because abuse
thrives on silence..*

Nicole



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