Survivors & Media

Survivors will sometimes have roles in stories whether they choose to or not. Prepare them.

Deciding whether to talk to media: A survivor’s choice

Questions to consider:

- What does the survivor hope to achieve by speaking with the media? Is there an immediate need or goal?
- Will talking to media help or hinder a law enforcement investigation?
- What type of story is it? Breaking news? Feature? Long-term or in-depth series?

Let survivors know:

- What information them could be in police reports or other court records so they aren’t caught off guard.
- That their social media accounts and those of loved ones will be reviewed. Help them make those private, if they want to.
- To prepare for media contacting them or showing up. If they do not want media knocking on their door repeatedly, help put a simple sign up declining interviews and asking for privacy.
- You can help craft a statement that can be shared with all media or asks for privacy.
Preparing survivors to talk: Reduce trauma, promote healing

“What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have,” – Oprah Winfrey, 2018

What to know:

- Reporters may have done research on social media and reviewed public records related to the case or story.
- Reporters may include information from police whether or not a survivor or family feels this information is accurate.
- A provided image or photo may be re-run or re-aired.
- Reporters may talk to other witnesses or even a suspect or perpetrator or their attorney.
- Reporters are doing a job. They may be kind or fair. They may be friendly, but they are not friends.
- Reporters will ask tough questions. A victim or survivor does not have to answer all questions. They can decline to answer questions they feel are not appropriate.
- Law enforcement, prosecutors and/or defense attorneys may see or read interviews and consider statements made publicly by survivors.

Victims/Survivors can ask questions, too:

- When and where will the story appear?
- What types of questions will I be asked?
- What types of details will be included?
- How will I be identified or not identified?
- What photos or footage will accompany the story?
- Can the interview take place where I choose?
- Can I see examples of past stories the reporter did?
- Ask for follow up contact information for reporters and editors.
- Can I change my mind?
- Can an advocate or support person be with me?
Other ways to help:

- **Practice.** If a victim thinks they want to do an interview with a media outlet, practice with them first. See if they feel comfortable or ready.
- **Suggest** that a victim to write out their own story or make notes on points that are important for them to get across if they get nervous. A short chronological timeline is especially helpful.
- **Discuss** ahead which details a victim/survivor wants to share.
- **Practice** on a cue that a victim can use -- such as raising a palm in front of the face -- to signal that they need to stop the interview or to take a break.
- **Remind** victims/survivors to communicate concerns about immediate safety or the safety family or friends.
- **Suggest** sharing therapeutic art or writing. That may be helpful for a reporter to understand a victim/survivor’s journey.
- **Offer** a comfortable and safe space for an interview.
Engagement: Unpredictable, uplifting or both?

Readers, viewers and listeners can support survivors or leave them feeling questioned

- Television and online media share stories on their own websites and also on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram. That often means people can “comment” on them.
- Know whether a media website has comments and whether the comments are anonymous or require names.
- Know that if comments are anonymous, law enforcement can still subpoena them.
- Ask whether comments online and on social media channels are monitored, moderated and whether racists, misogynist or inaccurate comments are removed quickly.
- Survivors/victims can request those comments be monitored or that they be shut down if the responses are not appropriate.
- Advocates or families can choose to respond to comments, though that can be a rabbit hole. Generally, it is better if responses are not personal but tackle larger myths, misconceptions or issues.
- If an agency professional is responding, state your name, profession and include links to factual information if possible.
Preparing a reporter: A better experience for survivors and a better story

- Remind reporters that their physical reactions, cues and questions may be interpreted by survivors in a variety of ways. Simply nodding helps.
- Remind reporters that survivors or victims of trauma may have difficulty telling a story in a linear or chronological fashion. That is normal.
- Explain that each victim reacts and copes differently to trauma. Some may cry, others may seem flat, some may be nervous and almost giggle. All of that is normal.
- Advocates may feel more comfortable if they can talk “off-the-record” to a reporter ahead of an interview to discuss sensitive information. This should be done with the survivor’s knowledge.
- Remind media the impact of repeatedly showing graphic or violent images or repeating descriptions.

Aftermath

*Touch base after story or piece runs. Encourage victims to give feedback if they are comfortable.*

- If there is a development in the story, let the reporter know.
- Suggest the “next” story to a reporter who did a decent job of covering a news story. Suggest themes or “down the road” follow ups.
- If a reporter makes a mistake, request that it be corrected online or in print. Let the reporter how you know the information is inaccurate and provide the accurate information.
- If you use social media channels, share stories that were fair and accurate. If a story were particularly cringe-worthy, consider commenting on that as an agency.
Forge relationships: *Find partners and engage*

- **Invite** reporters to your trainings -- not just your fundraisers -- so you can learn together.

- **Offer** lunchtime “brown bag” sessions to help reporters, editors and news directors understand your role in working with victims/survivors.

- **Provide** clear and up-to-date statistics and data on victims/survivors you serve.

- **Speak up** if you see something incorrect in print or on television. Ask for confirmation that an error will be corrected. If you don’t hear back, contact someone higher up like an editor or producer.

- **Share perspectives** by having agency staff or victims/survivors write “letters to the editor” or use social media to provide context, correct misperceptions or *applaud appropriate and sensitive coverage*. 
Build trust with local media

When you spot journalists in your community who make an effort to “get it right” you can:

- **Reach out** to talk about myths or misconceptions about trauma or the individuals you serve.

- **Be** an “ear to the ground” who can note patterns and changes outside of government and police stats.

- **Ask** trustworthy reporters which journalists they trust.

- **Share** relevant research or information on sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking or violence prevention as an FYI.

- **Offer** opportunities to broaden context and share survivors’ experiences when media is focused on a high-profile case or issue.

- **Reward** media who treat victims/survivors respectfully.

- **Suggest** agency expert for a television or online Q&A to add context to stories.
Be a trusted conduit

Bridge gaps between media and survivors

When survivors have information or concerns but do not want to speak to media, you can reach out:

- To correct errors
- A fact or anecdote for a story.
- With safety concerns or requests
- A statement from a victim/survivors.

Remember to:

- Be clear on the source of the information
- Understand media/news cycle deadlines
- Discuss ahead any agency protocol for media contact.

Create a form for victim/survivors to fill out if they are willing to share parts of their stories or experiences with the public. Provide a range of options and let them know they can change their mind at any time.