



University of  
Nottingham  
Rights Lab



# A survivor's guide to media engagement



This survivors' guide can be used whenever you are approached by a journalist or charity with **media interview opportunities**. It contains a list of questions you might want to put forward before agreeing to take part in any form of media advocacy, to ensure you have all the information you need to know that it is safe to do as and that the opportunity presented **aligns with your boundaries and values**.

Advocating for yourself can be difficult and intimidating at first. We would **advise working with a trusted charity** such as Karma Nirvana who have safeguarding experience to support you through this process.

### **Guiding principles:**

- Taking part in media advocacy is your decision.
- You should never feel pressured to speak out unless you want to.
- You have the right to stop or refuse an interview at any time. This is your experience.
- Always put your safety and emotional wellbeing first.
- Only share what you are comfortable with and feel safe sharing.
- Do not rush into media interviews – many survivors wait years before choosing to share.

*Top tip: remember there are many ways to draw on lived experiences and your expertise to bring about positive social change without having to speak publicly. If engaging with the media is not right for you right now, see the 'Other ways to share' section on pages 10 and 11.*



## If a journalist approaches you **directly**:

Sometimes journalists may approach you over social media, email, or through a place where you are receiving support. Here are some things to consider before agreeing to interview and to help you to manage the opportunity:

- You do not need to answer their questions right away, even if they have a tight deadline. This is your decision; you should never feel pressured to share.
- Thank them for the opportunity, say you need to be allowed time to decide. Ask them for their contact details and when they need to hear back from you.
- If you are approached via telephone or in person, ask them to follow up the request for interview in an email or in writing with more detail about what it would involve.
- It is important to ask questions about the opportunity to fully understand what it is the journalist is looking for and to make sure it is something you want to be involved in. Use the questions in this guide to get as much information as possible.
- Do use support offered by VAWG and HBA organisations. You can request that interview arrangements be done through a charity like Karma Nirvana, who can ask the questions below on your behalf.

## If a **charity** approaches you:

- You should not feel pressured to say yes to an engagement, even if it comes from an organisation you are currently receiving support from. You can thank them for the opportunity and say you will need time to decide.
- If you haven't done so already, you can ask to go through a safety risk assessment with someone in the charity.
- You can ask the person who is working with the journalist to ask the media questions in this guide, so you have the information you need to make your decision.
- Check that the charity's values align with or own and make sure you would be getting what you want out of this media opportunity:
  - How does the charity talk about HBA and those impacted?
  - In what capacity would I be interviewed? As a survivor with experience, as someone this charity has supported, or as an expert or campaigner?
- There are certain things I wish to speak about. Will I be able to shape this opportunity in a meaningful way?
- Does the charity have key messages you would like me to mention?
- Are there any topics or words the charity wants me to avoid using?

## Media interview questions

You can put these questions to journalists to get important information up front about what the media opportunity is, what it will involve and whether it is in line with your boundaries and values. Always ask for agreements to be followed up and sent to you by email so you have the information confirmed and in one place.

Remember this is your experience and your decision. Take your time deciding and put your wellbeing and safety first.

### Understanding the opportunity

These questions will help you understand the journalist's timeline and angle.

- When is your deadline?
- Why are you covering this story now? E.g. police report, new charity data.
- What is it that you wish to know or learn by interviewing me? What sort of questions would you be asking?
- What does this interview involve, how long would it last?
- Are you looking for a few quotes or an in-depth narrative?
- Who else are you interviewing?
- When do you expect the piece to go out?

### **If this is for a TV or radio story:**

- Will it be a 'live' interview or a 'pre-recorded' interview? (If it's live you can request either one that feels more comfortable).
- What is the name of the presenter or person interviewing me? Can I have a pre-interview\* with them so we can get to know each other a bit?

\* A pre-interview happens before any on-camera or recorded interview and gives you time to get to know the person who will be interviewing you and mention any topics you'd like to discuss. It can help set the tone for the interview, and hopefully take some of the nerves out of it.



*Top tip: Search what the journalist has covered before. Do you like the way they have reported sensitive issues in the past?*

*If the piece is behind a paywall, you can ask for a few examples of their previous work to give you an idea.*



## Communicating your boundaries

Your boundaries and safety should be the top priority. It is best to communicate any boundaries and concerns you have from the start so that the journalist or charity know the conditions under which you would be willing to engage.

The journalist may not be able to meet all of your conditions for participation, or they might say that they cannot promise you what you're asking for. This could be for a number of reasons, including newsroom codes, time pressures or what they require for this particular piece.

Whatever the reason, only agree to do an interview if you feel safe and comfortable and know that you can stop at any time if it doesn't feel right anymore. To communicate your boundaries, you might want to ask:

- **If you do not wish to be identified:** Am I able to undertake the interview anonymously? How would we work to ensure my identity stays hidden? (See Anonymity information in the Appendix).
- I would feel safer doing my interview in a certain location and/or time. Would this work for you?
- I would be more comfortable talking to a female interviewer, is this something that can be arranged?
- I am happy to talk about some areas, but do not want to go into certain details – is that still going to work for you?
- I would like to see the questions I'll be asked in advance – is that something you can do?
- I would like readback rights\*\* before the piece goes out with the ability to suggest edits for my safety and wellbeing. Is that possible for you to guarantee?

There may be certain words you would prefer the journalist to use to describe you or your experience. For example, you may wish them to use the word 'survivor' rather than 'victim'. It is worth talking to them and asking if they can accommodate or add some nuance to the language printed.

\*\*Readback rights are when you can read the areas of an article or piece where you are mentioned and quoted before the piece is published. Some journalists allow this to check for accuracy. If readback rights allow you to feel safe enough to agree to interview, some journalists may agree to this, but it is best to agree this with them before any interview takes place.

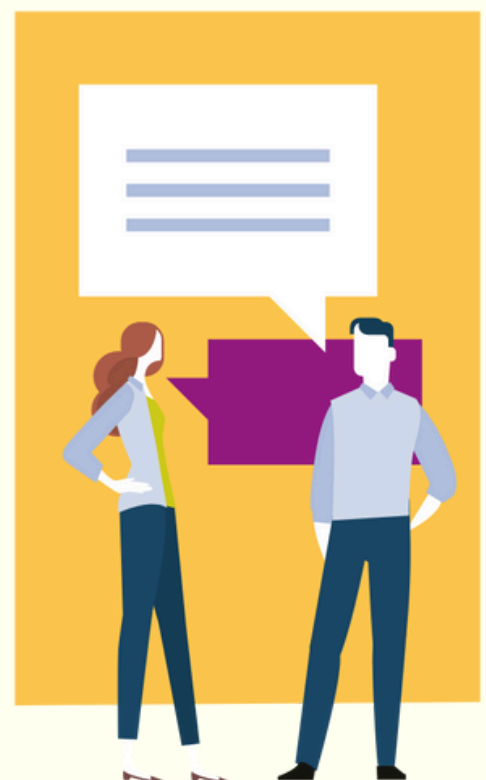
## Support on offer

In some cases, media outlets offer support to their interviewees. This depends on the size and type of media outlet as well as their deadline, budget and team resources. You might want to ask:

- If travel is agreed: Could you cover my expenses? E.g. travel, accommodation, food.
- If taking part in interviews affects wages: Could you cover loss of earnings?
- Is there a safeguarding point of contact at your outlet who I can connect with if concerns come up? If not, can you talk me through how you will manage risks?

You are more likely to get a higher level of support if you are working with UK TV or radio journalists, particularly if you are part of a longer piece, such as a documentary. Due to Ofcom regulations, some independent film companies and channels have editorial teams to support you as a contributor through the process.

- Are you Ofcom regulated? If not, are you signed up with another regulator?
- Do you have a therapist on your team who I could talk to should I need one?
- What support do you offer contributors pre and post transmission?
- What aftercare is there for me once a piece has gone out?
- Can I have support and advice on how to deal with social media after transmission?
- Have you covered a story about HBA, or gender-based abuse before? How did you manage that safely?
- Do you have an editorial team who will work with me through the process? If they are freelancers, how will you ensure what we agree now will be delivered if they move on?



## Corroborating questions

It is less likely you will need to use questions in this section, but if you are working with documentary filmmakers or an investigative journalist, they may need to corroborate evidence.

This means that journalists need to fact-check information they get from their sources against other forms of evidence. This ensures that their work is fully researched and as accurate as possible.

If you are taking part in a documentary, or a journalist is doing an investigative piece, here are a few questions you can ask to understand from the beginning if this will be part of the process. You can then decide if this is the right opportunity for you, your safety and emotional wellbeing.

- Will you be needing to corroborate evidence to support what I am saying about my personal experiences?
- If so, how will you work with me to do this?
- What kind of questions or evidence would you need to ask me?
- Would you need to talk to, or contact other people and if so, would you work with me to agree this in advance, ensure I am safe, and my wellbeing is priority?
- If you choose to be anonymous: how will you gather evidence without revealing my identity?



## Appendix and further resources

### Anonymity

Your safety is key and must always come first. This guide covers things you can ask journalists for to keep your identity hidden within their articles and programmes, known as anonymity. Ensuring safety is complex and goes beyond anonymisation, and even those choosing to be identified will still require safety measures. We recommend working with a trusted organisation with safeguarding experience, if you can, to help you navigate and make the experience as safe as possible for you and anyone else involved.



Some survivors feel safe enough to be identified and choose to be named in interviews, while others do not. There are many reasons why someone might not wish to be identified. Some survivors choose to remain anonymous because they fear alienation from friends, family, employers or their community should they speak out.

Others do so in case abusers retaliate, punish or silence them for speaking publicly and causing further physical or mental harm. Anonymisation is also a line of defence to protect you from legal action in libel courts.

Whatever decision you make, and whatever your reason is, this is your experience, and you have every right to choose to remain anonymous if you wish to speak publicly.

Careful consideration needs to go into anonymisation with journalists, because disguising someone's identity completely can be difficult to achieve. We recommend working with a trustworthy charity organisation who have safeguarding resources to act as an intermediary.

If you wish to hide your identity, here are a few things to consider:

- **Pseudonym:** You may wish to use a pseudonym, otherwise called a fake name, rather than use your real name.
- **Minimum personal details:** If you wish to remain anonymous the journalist will still need a few details to describe who you are to their readers, listeners, or viewers. The fewer personal details are included, the less likely you will be identified. E.g. '28-year-old mother in the Northwest' is a phrase that keeps details to a minimal, whereas the phrase '28-year-old accountant, who recently moved to Stockport with her two children' reveals your job, your recent activity, the number of children you have and specific location so it will be easier to identify you.



- **Avoid jigsaw identification:** If you have done media interviews before, or may intend to do more anonymously in future, ask the journalist to copy the anonymised minimal personal details that are already in the public domain and avoid adding any new information that might lead to identification.
- **Readback rights:** You can also ask for read-back rights to see how they describe you to screen out identifying details that may come up in your quotes or in areas where they have chosen to elaborate in such a way that might reveal your identity.
- **Photography:** Silhouette photography is when light is shone behind the person's head so their face cannot be seen. Blurring your face thoroughly in images is another way to anonymise.

A third option is pixilation of your face, however with the right technology and effort pixilation can be reversed, so this is less secure than the other two options.

Bear in mind also that someone might still be able to identify you if you are wearing distinctive jewellery, clothes or have other personal markings pictured such as tattoos or birthmarks. Careful consideration needs to go into this with any journalist, charity intermediary or safeguarding officer.

- **Audio:** You can ask for your voice to be disguised with a 'voice over' or have your voice technically distorted with voice pitch. Though voice over will mean the interview is less impactful for an audience, it is usually more effective than technically induced distortion because it isn't reversible.
- **Your location:** Journalists may want to capture you in your day-to-day environment, where you are living, spend personal time or in your area of employment. This is to build a picture of who you are and allow the audience to feel a personal connection.

You need to consider where you will be photographed very carefully to ensure that images and film clips are not taken in places which would allow someone to identify who you are and your location.

Image geotags and metadata identifying location should also be removed, as these are all identifying markers.

We advise working with a charity intermediary safeguarding officer, if you can, to help set boundaries with the journalist.



- **Filming you:** As well as applying the measures mentioned in photography and audio, filming you presents a few other risks to identification. The way someone gestures or walks, the location in which the filming is taking place, any jewellery or distinctive markings such as a tattoo or birthmark – all these things may be particularly distinctive to you and can all reveal identity.

To anonymise you in film you can agree to the following measures to keep your identity safe:

- Filming in another location where you do not work, live or spend personal time.
- Wearing a wig during interview and any filming or photography.
- Avoiding film clips of your gait – the way you walk.
- Not showing any distinctive personal physical features, clothes, jewellery or belongings.

Background information interview: in cases where you have reason to trust the journalist, want to help them but feel unable to provide an anonymised interview, you may wish to offer them a 'background information' interview instead.

A background information interview is where the interviewee shares information about personal experiences and knowledge without being featured in any media work.

This allows the journalist to research and investigate the subject. It is usually more relevant to investigative journalists and documentary film makers.



## Other ways to share

Not everyone wants to share their lived experience publicly, but they wish to do so in other ways. There are many ways you can do this to bring about positive social change. Here are a few ideas.

**Karma Nirvana** have a Survivor Ambassador Panel to enable survivors to come together in a safe space to share their experiences, reduce isolation and develop a community. Panel members also can also get involved in organisational campaigning to help raise awareness of HBA, and shape policy and practice.

[Follow this link](#) to learn more and join the panel!

**The Domestic Abuse Commissioner** website has lots of resources to help you access meaningful ways to bring about change. Here are a few links you can look at.

- [VOICES Newsletter](#) sign up!: polls, focus groups, DAC review (March issue)
- [VOICES page](#) – stay connected to policy and influence change
- [Lived Experience Matters](#)

**Survivor Voices** is a survivor-led organisation that harnesses the expertise of people affected by abuse in order to transform society's response.

[Changemakers](#) for anyone wanting to be part of Survivor Voices' community of survivor activists, changing society's response to abuse and trauma.

[Researcher Community](#) offers information on good practice for abuse-survivor-researchers and for the inclusion of abuse-survivors in research.

[Survivor Writer group](#) led by survivor authors, this writing group is for survivors seeking support with their writing, whether it is a memoir, blog, poetry, journaling, articles or any type of writing, for your own use or publication.

## Other tools and guides

Here are other resources and guides developed which you may find useful as a survivor who is considering sharing your experience.

### Women's Aid

Women's Aid created their own guide for women who have experienced domestic abuse and wish to share their experience.

- [Breaking the Silence](#)

### Survivor Alliance

Survivors Alliance is an international, US-based not-for-profit, made of, by, and for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking. While these guides are not specific to HBA, they may still be useful tools for those who may wish to share difficult lived experiences.

- [6 C's of becoming an advocate](#)
- [Transforming Trauma into Treasured knowledge](#)

