

Survivor Task Force Media Toolkit



FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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OUR MISSION:

The Survivor Task Force (STF) is a collective of empowered Colorado survivors and their loved ones who share their perspectives with the goal of educating the public and ending the stigma of addressing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. STF seeks to promote healing and prevention of sexual violence within Colorado communities.

*Thank you for your interest in
CCASA's Survivor Task Force!*

Participation in the STF is open to anyone who identifies as a survivor of sexual violence or as the partner or family member of a survivor of sexual violence. Members are not required to publically identify themselves as a survivor. Each person contributes to the Task Force in their own way. Please note that this is not a support group and the STF is not an avenue to change the outcome of a specific case. STF members should be at a place in their healing processes at which they have received supportive services and are able to positively contribute to CCASA's mission.



HOW TO PREPARE TO SHARE YOUR STORY:

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape issued an extensive pamphlet about survivor's sharing their stories. "Speaking out publicly is not right for everyone. No one should be pressured to tell their story. Survivors are heroes whether they speak out or not. Speaking out can mean many things – it can mean putting your story on paper for yourself in a journal entry, telling one trusted person, speaking at a national conference of advocates, or testifying on legislation at your state's legislature, for example. Whether you are considering disclosing to a trusted individual or speaking publicly about your experience, this pamphlet can provide you with some guidance.

There is no right way to tell, no right time to tell, and no right decision whether to tell. There are many different levels of telling. Telling a counselor, a friend, a family member, telling publicly, telling in writing will all feel different. You may tell with detachment, anger, sadness, or occasionally, even humor (Bass & Davis, 1988)."

Before sharing your story publically it is important to reflect on how sharing your story will affect you. There are several areas to consider prior to agreeing to sharing your story with the public including these items provided by CounterQuo.org:

Your words will likely live forever. Expect that anything you say or write in any public forum – on video, radio or print – will likely end up on the Internet.

You become accessible to everyone from your past, present and future.

Once you are on the Internet, anyone searching your name can find your comments and learn your story. This includes any family member (whom you may not want to tell about the sexual violence you lived through), employers, potential romantic partners, old friends and more. Consider how comfortable you are with having that information and label of you out there for all to see.

Anonymity is not guaranteed. Even if you choose to share your experiences anonymously, those who wish to uncover and expose your identity may be able to. You can become "outed" and will then have to deal with consequences from that.

Anyone can comment on you, your statements and your experiences. Many online forums have comment sections. Along with positive and supportive comments, you may also get negative and nasty comments, even threats against you. These can be quite upsetting. *Your assailant - or friends or acquaintances - may decide to tell their version of the story in public also.* Consider that if you tell your story, you may be opening the door for others to dispute your experience, and for there to be a virtual trial.

The media may not be your friend.

"If a journalist were completely honest with a source about what it means to be interviewed for this sort of story, it would go something like this: you are going to tell me about the worst day of your life, because you think there is value in sharing that story with the rest of the world. You need to trust me, but you need to know I am not your friend. I will seem as sympathetic as I can be, but I will also note the exact moment you start crying so I can write about it. I will ask questions that might make you uncomfortable. I will call other people and tell them what you're saying about them. I will open you up to the judgment of the entire world. And then I will walk away. And if you aren't ready to deal with that, you shouldn't talk to me."
- Libby Nelson, vox.com, December 5, 2014

There is no such a thing as a risk-free interview or encounter with the media.

There are always risks, even if you are 100% prepared for the interview and the potential consequences. There is an unbreachable power dynamic between the journalist and the interviewee, even though social media has leveled the playing field somewhat.

You will not have full control over how you are portrayed, or even what you say.

Journalists will edit your words. They will choose what to share with their audience based on the angle or story they wish to convey. Your message, your point of view, even some facts you relay might not come out as you said or intended them. Even if you are speaking live on television, it is possible that the way you and your experience are portrayed will not feel true, and might even show you in a negative light.

Protecting your emotional, mental and physical health is paramount.

On the day of an interview, check in with yourself, and be honest. You will need to decide whether you are in a good enough mental and emotional space to speak to a journalist at any particular time. If you think that talking with a journalist might stir deep emotions and memories that you are not ready to handle or relive at that moment, do not go through with the interview. If you do participate in an interview, consider having a support person with you.

The Sexual Violence Survivor's Bill of Rights

1. No one has the right to abuse you or anyone else.
2. No one deserves to be assaulted or abused.
3. You have a right to stop the abuse that is happening to you or anyone else.
4. You have a right to pursue healing and justice for the abuse that has happened.
5. Sexual violence is wrong. The abuser is wrong. People who protect the abuser are wrong. **YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME.**
6. You did not destroy the family or betray their trust by speaking out about your abuse. The perpetrator destroyed the trust of the family every time he/she committed an act of abuse.

The Rights of the Interviewee

You Have the Right...

- To courteous treatment by the interviewer and his or her staff.
- To inquire about the questions the interviewer intends to ask – although you may not always receive them.
- To research the interviewer and other interviews he or she has conducted.
- To refuse to answer questions that are pejorative or insulting – but do so in a courteous manner despite the situation.
- To request a tape of the interview – although note there may be a charge associated.
- To know the context in which your interview will be used – but there is no guarantee that it will always be used in the way you are told on the front end.
- To know what other guests will appear with you and what points of view they represent.
- To ask to have a difficult or confusing questions rephrased.
- To videotape or record the interview yourself, especially if it is taking place outside of a studio.
- To say “I don’t know, but I will find out for you” – then get back to the reporter with the appropriate response in a timely manner.

You have the right:

1. To decline an interview.
2. To have the services of a professional victim advocate/crisis counselor on site before, during, and after taping.
3. To select the time and location for interviews.
4. To request a specific reporter.
5. To decline an interview with a specific reporter even though you have granted interviews to other reporters.
6. To decline an interview even though you have previously granted interviews.
7. To release a written statement through a spokesperson in lieu of an interview.
8. To refrain from answering questions with which you are uncomfortable or feel are inappropriate.
9. To know in advance the direction the story about you is going to take.
10. To only speak with one reporter at a time.
11. To demand a correction when inaccurate information is reported.
12. To ask that specific photographs or visuals be omitted from broadcast or publication.
13. To be informed of all other guests who will appear on the show, along with each guest's full background relative to the issue.
14. To know in advance what questions will be asked.
15. To request measures that will guarantee your anonymity (e.g., silhouette screens, disguises, electronic voice alteration, pixel and fog screening, etc.) or decline to have your picture taken for a newspaper interview.
16. To not have the television show air in specific markets and locations that may jeopardize your personal safety.
17. To be informed of the original air date and any subsequent airings of the show as soon as practicable.
18. To tell your side of the story.
19. To file a formal complaint against a journalist.
20. To grieve in privacy.

(National Center for Victims of Crime, 2000)

Here are some important questions you may find helpful in deciding when, where, and how to share your story publically:

1. What motivates you to go public? What do you hope to gain? What could you lose?
2. Can you achieve your goals through another means?
3. Is someone or something internally/externally pressuring you to disclose your abuse history? Who and/or what is pressuring you?
4. Are you going to use your real name or a pseudonym?
5. Will you wear a disguise of some sort?
6. Will the perpetrator be in the audience? Will your perpetrator's friends or loved ones be there?
7. Is there a chance that others will exploit you or your story? Are there safeguards available to protect against exploitation?
8. Will speaking out publicly hurt you in your present or future career, social life, or family life (including your spouse and children)? Are you willing to take that risk?
9. Have you thought about safety issues? What are they for you?
10. Would telling sever ties to your family that you would like to preserve?
11. Could you live with the possibility of being excluded from family gatherings (i.e. holidays, weddings, funerals)? How would you deal with the loss?
12. Would telling sever ties to friends with whom you would like to stay connected? How would you deal with the loss?
13. What if responses from people are hostile? Are there ways to get grounded as a way to protect against victim-blaming comments and reactions from others?
14. How might you cope if everyone around you denies your experiences and refuses to believe you?
15. How would the anger you might face from others impact you?

16. What if your audience had no reaction? How would that feel?

17. How would you process and manage your own anger and/or other feelings?

18. What support system is available to you before, during, and after the event?
Are friends, family, coworkers, community members, advocates/counselors or
members from communities of faith available?

19. Which support people agreed to be available before, during, and after the
disclosure?

20. Can you realistically imagine both the worst and best outcomes that might
result? Could you live with either one?

Take Good Care of Yourself After Sharing Your Story

- **Debrief with a counselor or friend.** Talk about how the speech/interview went and how you felt while giving it. What went well? What would you change? Did you feel safe? Did you feel supported? Did giving the speech have the result you wanted? Would you consider speaking again?
- **Be prepared** for audience members to come up to you afterwards. Some people may want to congratulate you. Others may want to share their own experiences of sexual violence with you.
- **Be aware** that not every speaking occasion will have the same effect on you. After some events, you may feel wonderful. But the next time, you may break down or feel depressed or overwhelmed.
- **Still not comfortable speaking publicly about your story?** Some survivors find taking baby steps helpful. Use the following suggestions as stepping stones to speaking out, or find a level where you feel comfortable and stay there.
- **Volunteer** at your local rape crisis center. Sometimes, speaking publicly about the work the organization does can help you become more comfortable speaking in public about your victimization.
- Contribute a story or poem to your rape crisis center's newsletter.
- Create a web page with your thoughts and feelings about your victimization.



Never forget that YOUR story always belongs to YOU.

CCASA Media Talking Points on Sexual Assault in Colorado



Media professionals often report on sexual assault cases. This fact sheet is designed to assist media professionals in appropriately framing this sensitive issue.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault occurs when someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Sexual assault often does not involve physical injuries (NSVRC, 2011).

How Prevalent is Sexual Assault?

- According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men in Colorado have experienced sexually violent crimes in their lifetime (NISVS, 2010).
- More than half (51.1%) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance; for male victims, more than half (52.4%) reported being raped by an acquaintance and 15.1% by a stranger (NISVS, 2010).
- Studies show that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of 18 (CDC, 2006).
- Over 50% of transgender individuals are survivors of sexual violence (FORGE, 2005).
- Persons with disabilities are sexually assaulted at rates that are more than twice the rate for persons without a disability (US Bureau of Justice, 2009).

Considerations for Survivors

No survivor of a sexual assault in Colorado is required to pay for a sexual assault medical forensic exam ("rape kit") regardless of whether it is reported to the police. However, there may still be medical costs outside of the exam kit that the victim is responsible for paying. Colorado's Victim Compensation Fund or the Sexual Assault Victim Emergency (SAVE) Payment Program may be able to assist with those costs.

- All survivors in Colorado, regardless of reporting to the police, should have access to counseling and victim advocacy support. Survivors may contact the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) to learn more about the resources in their community.
- Each survivor is afforded basic rights in the Criminal Justice system through the Victims' Rights Act, CRS 24-4.1-101 through 24-4.1-304 .

Interviews

Guidelines for Talking to the Media

Some survivors of sexual violence choose to speak to the media about their assault. They find media attention helpful, beneficial, and in their best interests.



Others prefer privacy. **The choice is ultimately yours.** A sexual assault advocate can help you weigh the pros and cons in making that choice. Some important questions to ask yourself and members of the media prior to consenting to an interview are:

- Will the/a perpetrator be part of the program?
- Will you have to sign a contract or an agreement? What will it say?
- Will you be paid? Do you think this will affect your conscience or credibility?
- In what markets and locations will the interview appear?
- Will you wear a disguise or have your appearance and voice altered?
- Can you see an advanced copy of or have input into the final version of the interview or article?
- Is there a chance the media will exploit you or your story?

There are two kinds of questions for which you should prepare answers before consenting to an interview.

1. **Questions you are most likely to be asked.**
2. **Questions you are most afraid to be asked.**

INTERVIEWS:

Interviews are a business transaction – not a casual conversation.

The most important thing for each is:

For the Interviewee: Maintaining Control of the Message

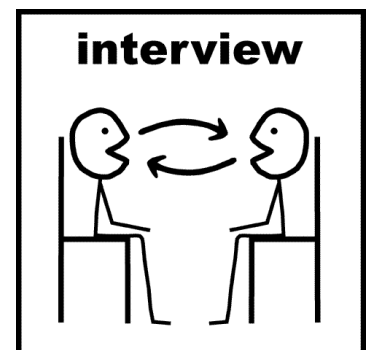
For the Interviewer: Finding the Story

The Interview Checklist

- ◇ Are you familiar with the show you're appearing on/the outlet you are speaking with – the host/journalist, the format, and what is expected of you?
- ◇ Have you rehearsed all possible questions and your answers?
- ◇ Can you explain clearly in 85 words or less the major point you want to get across?
- ◇ Is your delivery style anecdotal and conversational, or preachy and too full of details?
- ◇ Are you able to support your opinions with evidence?
- ◇ Do you know your audience? Remember, it's the reader/viewer, not your interviewer.
- ◇ Are you prepared to listen before you speak?
- ◇ Are you ready to answer any questions without resorting to “no comment?”
- ◇ Are you prepared to restate your major point(s)? To get these points in twice or more is ideal – but you must find a way to make them memorable.

- Listen and digest first – Then respond
- Answer the question and bridge to a key message
- Summarize and repeat key messages
- **Buying Time:** When asked a difficult question, or one that you are apprehensive to answer, consider the following bridges:

- ◇ **“I’ve never been asked that before...”**
- ◇ **“You’ve raised an interesting point...”**
- ◇ **“That’s a question on a lot of people’s minds...”**



Fielding Questions

- Listen and digest first – Then respond
- Answer the question and bridge to a key message
- Summarize and repeat key messages
- **Buying Time:** When asked a difficult question, or one that you are apprehensive to answer, consider the following bridges:
 - ◇ “I’ve never been asked that before...”
 - ◇ “You’ve raised an interesting point...”
 - ◇ “That’s a question on a lot of people’s minds...”

Consider an interview as an opportunity to discuss specific issues on your mind.

Instead of merely reacting to the journalist's questions, remember you want to introduce your key messages into the conversation at every credible opportunity. Listen carefully to each question; pause for a beat if you need to. Think about the question, the issue being addressed, and answer with your own words and information.

Try not to give short, reactive answers to questions. Answer each question directly (in a positive way that suits your purposes) and, whenever possible, bridge to your key messages.

Stay away from saying “I think” or “I believe” to preface your remarks. They water down the impact of the point you are making and make you seem less confident.

Flag your key messages. Call attention to them with signal phrases like:

- “Something we haven’t talked about before...”
- “What’s really interesting about all of this is...”
- “What’s really important here...”

- “The critical point...”
- “Something I’d like to emphasize...”

When confronted with an uncomfortable question, politely explain why you can’t give her specifically what she asked you for. Instead, tell the journalist something you are comfortable revealing (something closely related.) In particular, you can respectfully decline to go into the details of the assault itself if it doesn’t advance your key messages or your emotional well-being.

However, don’t be evasive and remember never to say “no comment.” Don’t decline to answer a question unless you explain why you can’t respond. Audiences believe that interviewees who say “no comment” have something to hide.

If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t guess. Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know” and tell the journalist you will try to find out.

Reporters often look for drama and conflict in a story. Consequently, journalists might do more than their share of searching for negative drama and conflict. But reporters will make good use of the positive as well.

Tips for Television & Radio Interviews

Cardinal Rules:

1. Know what you want to get across – no more than three main points
2. Know how to phrase these points in a concise, compelling and clear manner.
3. Try to express these points in the first minute of the interview.

DO...

- Keep your answers short and to the point. (*Rule of thumb: 5-12 seconds for TV; no more than 30 seconds for radio*)
- Be clear, direct, and declarative – state the most important facts first.
- Talk naturally – be yourself.
- Take time to consider the question and gather your thoughts before answering – don’t rush. The “silence gap” allows you to think before answering and conveys authority.

- Maintain the “viewers’ perspective” – speak in terms of what the viewer would want to know, rather than just what your organization wants you to convey.
- Keep eye contact with the interviewer, not the camera.
- Sit up straight – relax but don’t slouch.
- Use your hands when you talk – it keeps you animated.
- Keep a glass of water nearby.
- Breathe normally and deeply – you will feel more relaxed and secure.
- Wear simple clothes without too many patterns.
- Make sure your legs and feet are in an “attractive position” when on camera.
- Check your “grooming” – hairspray can be your best friend for television interviews as can be heavy make-up.
- Some recommended clothing options (not gender specific): grey or blue suits, white or light blue shirts, solid or minimal pattern ties. Good Colors: Blue, grey, orange, red and purple. Suits or blazers with dark skirts and light colored blouses.

DON’T...

- Stammer or say “um” or “ah” – just pause, take a breath, and finish your thought.
- Fidget.
- Become contentious or defensive. Despite the interviewer’s question, stay calm –
remember, your reaction will stay on tape forever.
- EVER say “No comment...”
- Make any comments before or after the interview that you wouldn’t want on tape
– you never know when the recording actually starts and stops.
- Interrupt the interviewer – and if the interviewer tries to interrupt you, hold your ground and finish your thought.

- Frown or keep too intense a look on your face.
- Be drawn into an argument – DON'T lose your temper.
- Ramble – if you find yourself saying “Getting back to the point...,” you've gone too far.
- Use jargon – speak at “an eighth-grade level”
- Bluff on an answer – if you don't know the answer, be honest and say you will find out.
- Exaggerate.
- Use jokes – but do, however, feel free to use humor.
- Be overly familiar or falsely humble.



Appearance Counts

Remember, your appearance is just as critical as the preparation and delivery of your comments during an interview. **Appearance is important because you do not want to distract from your important message while being interviewed. The cameras and microphones will amplify any bold colors or shiny jewelry.**

Appearance tips for on-camera interviews:

- Wear understated clothes so as not to distract
- Wear appropriate “business” attire, but remember who your audience is
- Don’t wear white
- Ideal colors: yellow, orange, light red, medium blue, medium red, light blue, bright green, magenta, gold
- Your appearance should reflect warmth, personality and compassion
- Don’t wear dark glasses
- Don’t carry bulky items in your pockets
- Keep your jewelry understated – and avoid dangling earrings (as culturally appropriate)

Always consider your body language...

An effective spokesperson makes use of body movements to convey appropriate emotions.

The following gestures and expressions are considered positive and convey interest and self-confidence:

- Always pause before answering questions.
- Look people in the eye.

- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward.
- Make hand movements that occur naturally as a supplement to what you are saying (but avoid gestures that block your face).
- Listen intently to what other people have to say.

Overcoming Nervousness

Nervous emotions before an interview are natural.

Tips for overcoming nervousness:

- Think of these emotions as your way of “being prepared” – and use that adrenaline to give you strength.
- Practice some relaxing exercises before your interview – i.e. rolling your neck, stretching, etc.
- Take several deep breaths, blowing slowly out of your mouth
- Stand naturally with your feet shoulder-width apart, and let your hands hang loose and relaxed. Then shake your hands and arms, letting the vibration work itself into the rest of your body.
- Be prepared for the interview – the more prepared you are with a few key points to cover, the better you will feel beforehand.
- If appropriate, spend a few minutes “chatting” with the interviewer



Testifying during legislative session



In preparation for all legislative testimony, STF members will review their story with the CCASA Policy Director prior to the day of testimony delivery. This is not to edit the content of their testimony rather than to enhance the effectiveness relating to

Here are some important points to focus on for effective testimony:

- First hand experience has the greatest impact
- Use three distinct parts when telling your story
- Give a BRIEF history on what brings you there to testify as a survivor
- After describing the outcome of your experience, focus on the shortfalls or improvements that should be considered (Policy Team will help you focus on this section of your testimony).
- End with an “emotional” appeal for the support of your position.
- Outline your story in advance, type and print it out so it is easy to read
- Preparation in advance is recommended so you can be as clear and concise as possible due to time constraints. Using an outline can help you stay on point and keep eye contact with the Committee at the same time.
- Wear comfortable clothing, get a good night's sleep, practice grounding techniques if necessary, such as deep breathing.
- Day of try to arrive as early as possible prior to the scheduled hearing time. Stay in touch with the policy team via text/email.
- Try to limit your testimony to three minutes.

Resources:

BarefootPR, barefootpublicrelations.com, Media Training Guide– General Overview, Level 2 Advanced Training and On-Camera Practice, 2018

Counterquo.org **Your Voice, Your Choice: A Survivor Media Guide**; February 2015

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, pcar.org, **Speaking Out from Within: Speaking Publicly About Sexual Assault**