

Child Sexual Abuse



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It is important that the voices of victims and survivors are heard.

If we want to make real and effective changes within this area, we need to listen to those who have first-hand experience. They can tell us if current policies and professional practice meet their needs. They can help us understand the real-life impact, what could have helped and what needs to change. By really listening to them, and acting on what they tell us, we can make a difference.

This guidance, written by victims and survivors themselves and based on their own experiences, is an aide memoire for professionals supporting victims or survivors who are prepared to speak openly about their experiences.

The most important thing to take away is that each victim or survivor is an individual and has their own specific needs. What works for one, won't necessarily work for another.

Arrangements need to be flexible to respond to these individual needs.

Plans should be agreed and documented at the start of the working relationship and be regularly reviewed throughout the timeframe of any engagement.

Most organisations are trying to do their best and find their way with working with victims and survivors. I hope they'll welcome this guidance to help them strike the right balance. Having the right voices can lead to change and it's a real necessity.

It is important to understand how difficult it is for survivors to share the most painful parts of their lives with strangers.



Not just a story – a note about the language we use

Please do not refer to a victim or survivor's experiences as a story. It can feel like there is an inference made about the truth of what is being shared, whether intended or not, which can leave the victim or survivor feeling that their experience is doubted or not taken seriously. Refer simply to their experiences and their knowledge to avoid the risk of taking away from the reality of the situation and minimising the trauma they have suffered.

It's not just a story, it's reliving what happened. There needs to be a care system in place.

Throughout this guidance we refer to 'victims or survivors.' This is because not all people with lived experience of CSA identify with one particular term, some refer to themselves as a victim which places the emphasis on the trauma inflicted on them by the perpetrator(s), while others refer to themselves as a survivor to emphasise that they have come through the ordeal to the other side. If we are unsure how to refer to somebody, we should ask them what their preferred term is.



Right place, right time?

Consider whether a victim or survivor is in the right place in their lives and in their recovery journey to be doing this type of work. They may be willing and eager to share their experiences because it feels helpful, possibly even therapeutic, to know that they are making a difference. However, the question you need to answer is 'are they ready?' There is the potential for the experience to be traumatic and even harmful in certain circumstances. Each time the abuse is discussed it involves some level of reliving and re-traumatisation. We must do no further harm and therefore we need to assess and monitor carefully and continually whether it is appropriate for the them to engage in the work.

With each new engagement, there must be a detailed assessment which includes: their recovery journey, age, how long has passed since the abuse, their access to support, their wellbeing (physical, emotional and mental) and whether any adjustments are required in light of this information. This assessment process should be dynamic, involving regular conversations with the victim or survivor to check how they are feeling about the work, including whether they need any additional support and if they wish to continue. There may come a time when they tell you they want to limit or stop sharing their experiences, and we should respect that decision completely.

Don't ignore
suspicions, if it feels
like the survivor isn't
ready or is finding it hard,
discuss it with them.

If the victim or survivor isn't in the right place they really shouldn't be doing this. It should be the first thing on everyone's minds.





Motivations

The first thing we need to understand is the reason for a victim or survivor sharing their experiences. Do not invite somebody to speak at an event or wheel someone out just to tell a "sad" story in an attempt to put a face to the horror and reality of child sexual abuse, or to drive home the message of why we do the work we do. It's a form of trauma tourism. A victim or survivor is more than the abuse they suffered, and they have much more to say than just telling us what happened from start to finish. Given the opportunity, they can explain the context of specific issues around what happened, the longer impacts, the policy changes which need to be made, and the lessons that can be learned. To make real and lasting changes to practice we should not limit victims and survivors in the information they want to give us, we should listen to everything they have to say if we truly want to learn.

I am motivated by a desire to save kids from the pain I still go through, revenge won't stop me crying. But real actions will. Sometimes the truth can be painful to hear, especially if a survivor is explaining downfalls from your organisation in the past. But without hearing where it went so wrong, it can be hard to fix in the future.

Anonymity

Victims and survivors have the right to anonymity set out in law. They can choose to waive their right at any time. When we are working with victims and survivors there must be a discussion at the start of the process to confirm their wishes around anonymity. This is not as straightforward as 'yes' or 'no'. A person may have waived anonymity previously but still wish to remain anonymous for a particular piece of work. There are levels of anonymity which need to be considered and accommodated. For example, they may be happy to speak at an event where they are seen by the audience and known by their first name but want to remain anonymous in an interview which leads to a nationwide media article. This is a very personal decision and may be based on many factors such as being recognised in their local area or facing pressure from others who do not want them to speak out.

After waiving my anonymity to tell my experiences, I received threats from someone that made me scared for my life. Requests for anonymity need to be taken seriously.

Anonymity requirements should be checked multiple times during the process, and we should make it clear that they can change their mind at any point. There are multiple options for anonymity which should be explored during the discussion. These include using an alias, first name only, no details of their location/education/employment, using an actor, shadowing out during filming, using a voice actor. On virtual platforms there is the option to change their name, keep their camera turned off, and/or keep their microphone turned off and use the chat function to input.



Victims and survivors are experts by experience. We must be mindful that victims and survivors often aren't employed to do this kind of work full-time, but rather they fit it in alongside their regular lives. They may take time off work using annual leave entitlement, take unpaid leave, or squeeze it in around their normal work hours which, of course, increases their working day. They may need to arrange alternative childcare or other caring responsibilities. This type of work can be emotionally draining at the best of times, and even more so if it involves fitting it in around other commitments. We must ensure that they are fairly compensated for all the work they do, just as we would with any other professional. This includes, but is not limited to, any of the work discussed in this document such as speaking at an event, doing interviews, taking part in a consultation group or for the preparation and use of a case study. We should make payment for this work as soon as reasonably possible after the work is carried out.

We should also agree to cover all travel, accommodation, food and any other reasonable expenses incurred by them (and the person supporting them) in carrying out this work. Being mindful that we do not know other peoples' financial circumstances, we should not assume that they can afford to make payment and wait to be reimbursed. Where possible we should arrange payment of costs up front, particularly large costs such as travel and accommodation. Where this is not possible, these costs must be reimbursed as soon as possible afterwards to minimise the amount of time that people are 'out of pocket.'

It's not about the money, it's about showing respect.

Think about the value of lived experience. The most important/memorable thing delegates will take away from an event or training session will be the words the survivor says.

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.





It's easy to get swept up in the idea that you're doing this to get a positive out of what happened, especially at the beginning. It can be quite hard to advocate for yourself.

There should never be any pressure for any victim or survivor to be, or remain, involved in a piece of work.

When an invitation is made, we must show them that they are entirely in control of their involvement and that they can stop at any time and for any reason, whether that is the week before an event or 10 minutes into a presentation. They have the right to protect themselves and withdraw consent whenever they want or need to. If they feel unable to speak up this may echo feelings of being silenced as part of the abuse. This is why it's so important that we empower victims and survivors to have a voice, and also demonstrate that we are listening and supporting their decisions.

Some victims and survivors find it helpful to have somebody with them, for example a friend or support worker.

If this is the case, that person should be included in all arrangements for the victim or survivor. Others prefer to work alone as they feel more comfortable talking openly or separating this work from their dayto-day life. We should ask about this at the start and take it into account during the planning stage.

Where possible we should arrange for one person to be the main point of contact.

They should be the person to make all arrangements, provide regular updates and generally keep in touch with the victim or survivor. This enables them to build a working relationship and feel comfortable engaging with this work. It also prevents confusion and the potential for mixed messages or not knowing who to speak to about a specific issue.

We should ask victims and survivors if they have any specific boundaries.

For example, if there are specific topics that they will or won't talk about and whether they feel comfortable taking questions at an event or meeting, and what type of questions. This is very important as it reduces the risk of awkward, and potentially traumatising, moments. This should be discussed at the start and these boundaries must be respected at all times.

I feel like I am treading on eggshells when telling my experiences - I am not only protecting the identity of those who didn't protect me but also protecting myself from those who are desperate to silence me.

We should keep in touch regularly, not just to provide updates, but also to check in, and make sure that they are ok.

For the victim or survivor, knowing that the organisation cares about their wellbeing and is ensuring that they are ok to continue at all stages of the work, is a source of support. For us, this forms part of the ongoing assessment process mentioned in the purple box on page 4.

We should provide regular updates on progress during the course of a project.

This ensures that the victim or survivor feels confident that things are still moving forward. If a decision has been made to pause or end the project early, this should be communicated along with the reasons for the decision. It is unfair to them, having spent time and effort to contribute, for everything to suddenly stop and no further action to be taken without an explanation.

Too many times I have spoken to someone about taking part in an engagement which leaves my head in a whirl for days afterwards and I have even postponed trips to take part, only to find I never hear from them again.

It's important to understand how difficult it can be for a victim or survivor to share their experiences, even if they have done so many times before.

We must respect and listen to what has been shared. Let them know what we have done, or what action we have taken as a consequence of the information they have given to us. Share the impact that they have had by sending them the positive feedback received and/or explaining how policies and practices have been changed as a result. Generally, they are doing this work to raise awareness and influence policies and practice in this area, therefore being able to see evidence of the difference they have made is important.

I thought I was doing a good thing to share my experience but I just felt used.

'Thanks' go a very long way.

During the course of the work and particularly when it comes to an end, we should ensure that we show our appreciation for their work. This could be a phone call or a letter on headed paper to say thank you and, share the impact they have had. It may seem small, but it might mean a great deal to that person.



Speaking at events

Before an event, we should be meticulous with our planning. We need to explain the purpose of the event and the whole agenda for the day, including who will be attending, who else will be presenting, the general gist of other people's presentations (providing a copy of their slides would be ideal), and information about the venue (either physical or virtual). This enables the victim or survivor to feel confident in knowing how the day will go and planning their own presentation.

We should consider, and discuss with them, whether they would prefer to attend in person or virtually, with arrangements made at the earliest opportunity.

If virtual, the links to attend the platform should be provided as soon as possible, and a test run offered prior to the event, either the day before or immediately before the event.

If attending in person, we should arrange travel and accommodation as soon as possible. We need to be mindful that this can be stressful and take their needs into account. For example, they may prefer to travel by train so they can relax and listen to music or to drive so they have some time alone. It can be very stressful going to somewhere new and there is always the possibility of running late or getting lost. We should try to minimise this, perhaps by offering to meet them at the train station and walking to the venue together and providing a mobile number to contact if there are any issues. If there is a need to travel a long distance, accommodation should always be offered, as this separates the stress and tiring nature of travelling from the event itself, giving them chance to relax and either prepare for the event or recover afterwards. Overnight accommodation may be needed the night before and/or the night after the event.

Meeting with the organisers the night before a conference is a nice thing. It adds a bit of fun and means you aren't running around all stressed and alone the morning of the event.



We must check if the victim or survivor would like somebody to come with them to provide support.

If so, make the same travel and accommodation arrangements for them too. We also need to ask the victim or survivor whether they would prefer this person (or one of the organisers, if appropriate) to be on stage with them, or close by when they are presenting, and plan accordingly.

It can be daunting to present at new locations.

We should discuss the practicalities of the presentation well ahead of the event. If it is a large venue and microphones are to be used, consider if it will be a static, handheld or lapel, and explain the arrangements, for example if a sound engineer will set up a lapel mic. Ask if they prefer to use a PowerPoint and let them know if they need to send it to a specific person beforehand. Confirm if they need to bring their own laptop or have the presentation saved on a USB drive. Check how they would prefer to give their presentation. Do they prefer to sit or stand? Have notes? Use a lectern or table? Then discuss these requirements with the event organiser or venue.

It is extremely important that we check whether a victim or survivor agrees to a presentation being recorded and publicised in any way, either during or after the event.

This includes publicity produced by the organisation hosting the event and individual attendees. We need to confirm whether the victim or survivor agrees to photos being taken, videos made, or being named as somebody attending or presenting at the event. It is common for attendees to post on social media during events, therefore this must be checked prior to the event and confirmed to the attendees immediately before the presentation to ensure that the victim or survivor's wishes are honoured. We must remember that this is not only important in terms of anonymity, but it may be a particularly sensitive issue for somebody who has experienced image-based child sexual abuse.

We need to consider how the event will be promoted, and whether this will be kept within our own network or sent to a wider audience, for example on social media. All wording involving the victim or survivor and their presentation should be agreed in advance, and we should also discuss whether an image will be used and, if so, ask them to provide the one they would like to use.

If there is the possibility of journalists attending the event, for example if you are launching a product or are hosting high profile speakers, you need to consider this in the planning stage. You may not know if anybody from the media will attend until the last minute, but you need to talk to the victim or survivor about the possibility of this happening and discuss their preferences around being approached by a journalist, being named, photographed, quoted or even referred to.

Being given my own private space at the event allowed me an escape before, during and after the event. When opening up to a large group of friends and strangers, having that retreat was crucial for my mental well-being and my ability to actively engage with the event.

Safe space for the victim or survivor to go to at events.

During the event, there should always be an identified safe space for the victim or survivor to go to if they need time alone or to speak to somebody for support. They should be shown this space on arrival and let them know they are free to use it whenever they want or need to.

Questions to victims and survivors when they present at events.

Questions can be an important part of the learning from victims and survivors when they present at events. However, sometimes they can also feel intrusive, personal, and bring up thoughts and feelings which have the potential to be traumatic for the victim or survivor. We should discuss this prior to the event to see whether the victim or survivor feels comfortable answering questions at all and, if so, whether there are certain topics they wish to stick to or avoid, whether they would like questions to be pre-screened, and check that somebody will be facilitating the questions and will step in and respond if the question is inappropriate or if the victim or survivor does not want to respond.

Organisers should always allow some time for the victim or survivor to relax and get settled following arrival at the venue and prior to their presentation.

It can be very stressful to start presenting very shortly after having arrived when faced with unfamiliar surroundings and possibly still feeling flustered or stressed from travelling. Having time to look around the venue and sit down with a drink could make a big difference. Being met outside, given a coffee and a chance to settle my breathing was really helpful.

We should plan for this beforehand and ask what their preferences would be. We need to be flexible as those agreed plans might change if the victim or survivor needs additional time or space.

The offer of some time, company or conversation afterwards is sometimes great - but don't be offended if I want to run away and lick my reopened wounds.

Following the presentation, we should check in with the victim or survivor and arrange a debrief.

Ask how they are feeling about the presentation and how it went, whether they felt ok about answering any questions that were asked, if there's anything that they would like to talk about or feel they need some support with.

After the presentation it can be overwhelming to be in a room full of people who may approach to speak and ask questions. Victims or survivors may be happy to go straight in to talking to people, or they may need some privacy to have a quiet moment to gather their thoughts. We should plan for this by asking what they preferences would be and making any necessary arrangements.

She checked in on me and let me know it was ok to contact her if I was struggling or even just to talk about the good parts. It really helped.

Aftercare doesn't end when the event is over.

There should always be a familiar person for them to speak with, who can provide any additional support, if and when it is needed. Where there is media or social media coverage of the presentation or event, this is even more crucial. We should check in with them regularly throughout their involvement and follow up afterwards to see how they are and if there is any additional support that can be offered. Ideally, this would be immediately after the presentation or event, the following day, and the following week. Our general monitoring and support, as part of our assessment mentioned earlier in the purple box on page 4, should then continue as required.



Supporting the victim or survivor throughout media contact process.

Where media requests are deemed appropriate, we should remain involved throughout the project, attending any meetings or calls and being the main point of contact between the media and the victim or survivor. It can be overwhelming and even distressing if, once the introduction is made, the victim or survivor is left to deal with the process by themselves. We should support them by being with them every step of the way.

Having one person from their team who was in constant contact regarding the progression of the filming, editing and roll-out made the entire task far less daunting and maximised my feelings of being supported through the process.

This allowed me to feel confident enough to open up and engage more.

I was left to my own devices and made some massive mistakes. Support and guidance should be mandatory and available long after an event.

Media requests should be carefully assessed before we involve a victim or survivor.

We should check whether it is appropriate both generally and for a particular person, considering their knowledge and experiences. This is especially important if there are any ongoing or foreseeable legal proceedings which may be complicated by any reports in the media. This is not intended to silence any victims or survivors who do wish to speak out before or during legal proceedings, as it can be a way of raising awareness and holding people to account, but to highlight that this needs to be very carefully considered and discussed with the victim or survivor.

If there are ongoing or foreseeable legal proceedings it is very important to carefully consider whether any media engagements are appropriate.

Things reported in the media can end up being included within the proceedings and the victim or survivor being questioned about what has been reported.

For victims and survivors who wish to maintain anonymity, either fully or partly, they must be given all of the options available to do so. They should also be able to review this and see how it will actually look when it is published, to reassure them that the level of anonymity is appropriate and feels comfortable.

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.

Where possible, any audio recordings or filming should be pre-recorded to enable editing to be carried out.

Something may be said or alluded to during an interview which, on reflection, the victim or survivor does not want to be included and made public. We must ensure that they feel comfortable and confident that they are in control of their own information.

I said that I didn't want the filming to take place near my home and they immediately agreed to change the location and make sure nothing identified where I'm living. It was such a relief and made me feel more comfortable working with them because they understood what I needed.

Where a victim or survivor has set boundaries, for example around anonymity or their willingness to discuss certain topics, this absolutely must be respected.

There should never be any pressure or trying to convince them to change their mind, for example if they say no to filming of their face, the film crew should not later try to convince them to film 'just' parts of their face which would not identify them. We should always be present if interviewing or filming is taking place, and we must step in if we see any boundaries not being respected.

The narrative of media engagements is often that of a 'damaged victim with a sad story to tell'.

This is inappropriate and there are many victims and survivors who would like to have more control over how they are presented and the narrative of the article or video. We should empower them in discussions with the media representatives to ensure their voice is heard and influences the work.



Language is a very important consideration.

It often ties in with the above point around narrative and using terms such as "damaged" "poor victim" and "brave survivor" are not appropriate. Neither is any language which could be considered victim-blaming, for example "had sex with" instead of "raped", "child pornography" instead of "child sexual abuse material" or "child sent topless images of themselves" instead of "child groomed and manipulated into sending images". We must review the final article, interview or recording, and have discussions around the use of language, asking for changes to be made where necessary.

The changes we had agreed that I could make to the article were ignored and the newspaper published a version that didn't match my police statement which my barrister noticed. Them going back on our agreement could have cost me £50,000 in legal fees if I had lost my case because of this.

In every case, the victim or survivor should be able to review the content of the media before it is published to ensure that they are happy with what has been included and how it is presented.

Any amendments they request should be actioned and they are entitled to have the final sign off. We should request this during the initial discussions and ask for a written agreement that this will take place.

I was asked to give the name of my perpetrator and I said no because there are other victims and I wouldn't want them to recognise his name and be impacted by something I'd decided to do. The journalist repeatedly pushed back and said they needed to fact-check what I'd told them. I felt like they didn't believe me or what I'd said, it was really upsetting.

A journalist said they thought I was lying because some physical details had changed since the incident happened and he said it just couldn't have happened how I said it did.

It was awful.

Fact-checking guidance

Whilst fact-checking is often carried out by journalists, when this is done in relation to victims and survivors it sometimes comes across as not believing what they have said. It is never appropriate for the media to pressure them for additional details under the pretext of fact-checking. In these situations we would need to discuss with the media what is and is not appropriate to ask for. We also need to support the victim or survivor as they may find this a very difficult experience. We should reassure them that they are believed and do not need to provide any information they do not want to.

I wasn't given any
guidance on how to ignore
negative stuff or not be
baited by trolls. I still have
no idea how to engage
with social media properly.
You need to warn us and
be there to support us if it
does happen.

Engaging with media and help with negative responses

For victims and survivors engaging with media we need to prepare them for the potential for a piece to go viral or be picked up by the national press, and for the possibility that there could be a negative response, for example online trolling on social media. For those who are unprepared this is a shocking and distressing outcome to their attempt to raise awareness and do something positive. We must be there to guide and support them if it does happen. It would be helpful to have somebody in contact with them at every stage of the process, including once the media has been published, to check how they are and if there are any issues they need help with.

Aftercare after media engagement

Providing the opportunity to have someone to speak to afterwards for support is a good idea generally. Often victims and survivors can feel used and dropped once journalists move on to the next big story, with little aftercare to ensure that they are ok. We can help them by remaining in contact to provide support and, where appropriate, there may be additional work that we are able to do that helps to further their messages.



Attending consultation groups and meetings for professionals

When we are running consultation processes, focus groups or projects which involve victims and survivors, there must be a clear purpose of what we are hoping to achieve, a plan of how the process will happen and an end date. It can be incredibly frustrating for victims and survivors to attend meetings or groups which seem to drag on without any resolution or concrete outcomes, and it can be very disheartening when they are using their time and energy hoping to make a positive difference. By setting out clear goals, plans and an end date it not only helps them to see the progress and final outcome, but also to compartmentalise their involvement from other commitments in their lives.

You should ensure that there is a source of therapeutic support in place for the victims or survivors within the meetings or groups. Discussing these experiences can be emotional and triggering. It is vital that they are able to access support and speak to somebody as soon as they feel they need to. The persons providing support should be available before, during and for a time after the meeting(s), and the participants should be made aware of exactly how they can reach out to them for support.

If there are documents that need to be considered prior to a meeting, victims and survivors should be given sufficient time to read them. We must take into account that they often have other work and personal commitments outside of this type of work, and therefore the earlier we can provide any documents the better.

During meetings there should be more weight given to victim and survivor voices. Often there may only be one victim or survivor present and, while it is welcomed that they are included, this is not representative, and organisations should be aiming to hear many voices and experiences. While victims and survivors often do know of other cases and other people's experiences and can speak on this, we would benefit from increasing the number of those who can have an input.

There needs to be a concrete outcome to any consultation process or project. Victims and survivors want to see that their hard work and input has had a real impact, as this is often why they became involved in the first place. We must make sure we communicate this to them.



Written case studies

We must have a discussion with the victim or survivor at the start of the process around consent for using the case study. Some will want us to seek consent to keep it on file or re-use it in the future. Some will be happy to consent to any and all use and will not want to be updated if it is used anywhere else or at any time in the future. This is an individual decision. The discussion and the decision made should be recorded and adhered to going forward.

We should carefully consider, and discuss with the victim or survivor, how the initial interview will take place. It may be more comfortable to meet in person, in which case there are considerations around travel,

accommodation, timing and venue, all of which are discussed earlier in this guidance. If it is more comfortable to speak by phone, the interviewer should make the call to avoid additional phone charges for the victim or survivor. The interview is likely to be quite detailed and therefore sufficient time should be allowed to enable the victim or survivor to tell as much, or as little, as they want to. It may be necessary to arrange multiple interviews if this would be more comfortable for them. The interviewer should be flexible, and the timing should be worked around the victim or survivor and what works best for them.

It is extremely important that we ensure that the victim or survivor can review the written case study and have the final sign off. They will not be there to explain, elaborate or answer questions for the reader so it is vital that it is correct the first 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:

Thank you for trying to comprehend - I really hope you never TRULY do.

Tim

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

sammy

Thank you for taking the time to listen and learn. Working in partnership with survivors can make real change in communities. Please constantly refer to this guidance when working with someone with lived experience. We want to share our experience and you as organisations have a huge impact on how easy, or difficult, that can be for us. We have given you the tools so please use them.

Megan

Courage isn't the strength to go on, it is going on when you don't have strength – Napoleon Bonaparte.

Emma

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

It's sometimes the hardest and loneliest battle to go through — especially when reliving through events and interviews. Please support us while we're doing this.

Jamie

Please let our words, our pain be the glue to fix those who are broken.

Paul

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

Nicole



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