

From the Front of the Room

TIPS FOR SURVIVOR SPEAKERS & VICTIM ADVOCATES

It is critical to amplify the voices of survivors, especially those from traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups, in our efforts to end domestic violence. Historically, storytelling has been a powerful tool for those who are oppressed in naming their struggles, seeking healing, and inspiring action for social change and justice.

For survivors who are ready and able to share their stories, public speaking can:

- Be an important part of healing from trauma
- Help one reclaim control of their own experiences
- Connect survivors to domestic violence intervention and prevention efforts on the local, state and national levels



TIPS FOR SURVIVOR SPEAKERS

As a survivor, are you considering whether or not to share your experiences with others in a public forum? Below are several considerations that can inform your decision.

Your safety & well-being is priority: Telling one's story is an act of courage, but no survivor should feel pressured to do so. It's important to weigh both the benefits and risks of sharing your story publicly, as it may impact both your own well-being and that of your loved ones.

Your story matters: The wisdom you have gained from your unique experience of both survivorship and help seeking is valuable. You deserve to be compensated for your time and expertise.

Ongoing risk from the person who abused you: The person who abused you, or their friends and family, may hear about your presentation. If you have any concerns about current or future safety risks, including whether any personally identifying information will be kept confidential, explore these with an advocate.

Impact on children: Depending on their ages, your children may or may not be aware of many of the details of the abuse you experienced. Because children react differently to learning about abuse, you will want to consider what impact sharing this information publicly may have on them.

Emotional impact: Speaking about traumatic events that you have experienced may produce strong emotional and physical reactions for you. Victim advocates can provide support in preparing your presentation and can help in processing the range of feelings that might arise for you.

The decision of when, where, and with whom to share your story is yours alone, and telling your story once does not commit you to retelling it every time an opportunity presents itself.

A WORD OF CAUTION

If you have a pending legal case that involves the person who abused you, you should be mindful of how information that you might share could be used as evidence. It's recommended that survivors with an open court case not share their story publicly as the unintended consequences for you or your children could be too great. It may be best to consult with a lawyer before sharing.



TIPS FOR ADVOCATES

Telling one's story is often difficult, especially for trauma survivors. Thoughtfully planning for survivors' safety and overall well-being as they tell their stories is critical. Advocates are in a unique position to provide support around:

Risks & benefits: Helping survivors weigh the risks and benefits of telling their story publicly, including the impact that speaking may have on their children, family members, and community circles such as their workplace, school, and place of worship.

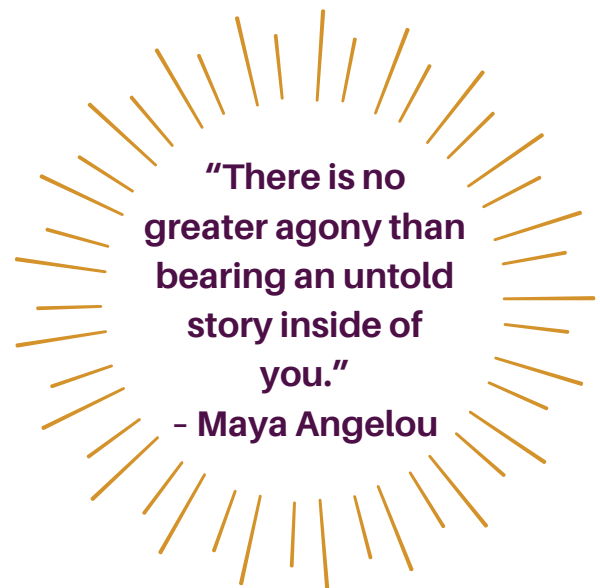
Confidentiality: Addressing and strategizing around confidentiality issues if the survivor speaker wishes to remain anonymous or has concerns about their identifying information.

Sensemaking: Helping the survivor sift through the details of their experiences and summarize the circumstances of their abuse and resilience.

Valuing survivors: Offering compensation, validation, and appreciation for the survivor speaker. It takes courage and resilience to share one's story publicly. Providing compensation to survivor speakers who participate in speaking events is not only ethical, it can also represent a tangible resource in their path to healing and safety, and is a concrete way to show survivors that their time and expertise is valued.

Safety planning: Engaging in safety planning with the survivor before, during and after the event, including anticipating any potential risks that media involvement may generate.

Key takeaways: Considering and addressing the unique issues that impact specific populations (survivors who have been charged with a crime, male victims, survivors with disabilities, just to name a few) when preparing survivors for speaking engagements.



Giving voice to the pain and suffering, as well as to the strength and resilience that survivors carry is powerful. In addition to helping survivors heal and reclaim control of their own experiences, storytelling has the power to deepen people's understanding of domestic violence and to promote collective action and social change. In fact, storytelling is the foundation upon which the movement to end domestic violence has been built and sustained, and the stories of survivors and advocates are the very threads that weave our movement together.

For more information and resources to support survivors' storytelling, see the NRCDDV's *From the Front of the Room* publication series, available at vawnet.org, and email us at nrcddvTA@nrcddv.org.