

SELF-CARE FOR SURVIVORS SPEAKING IN THE MEDIA

Having your voice heard in the media can be a powerful moment but it also can be very challenging. Here are a couple of tips for having your boundaries respected and taking care of your heart in the process.

BEFORE

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- 1. Identification & safety:** If you want a conversation to be off the record, say so before anything else -- you may not be able to ask retroactively. Determine beforehand if you want to disclose your identity (and the pros/cons of choosing/not choosing to do so). Also think through how you want to be identified (e.g. as a survivor, victim or person who was subjected to violence). It's your choice. Confirm the way you want to be identified one or two times, in writing, with the reporter before agreeing to an on-the-record interview. If you are currently in legal proceedings, you may want to consult with a lawyer before posting on social media or doing media interviews.
- 2. Request media training:** Media outlets sometimes offer pro bono media training for organizations and communities. You can also check in with your local violence against women agencies to see what resources and training they offer.
- 3. Logistics:** Ask if the interview will be live or pre-recorded (this may help with answering hard questions). Ask where, when, and in what formats the story will be published. Find out if anyone else is being interviewed (e.g. will the perpetrator be featured as well?). Lastly, request that they ask your permission first if the interview will be used in any context other than what you originally agreed to.
- 4. Format:** If the interview will be broadcasted, know that you can ask for voice alteration or facial blurring effects so you are unidentifiable. If the interview is being broadcasted live, you can ask for a delay in case you need to take a break.
- 5. Take notes:** For radio and television interviews, producers will do a pre-interview with you that usually provides the theme of questions that will be asked during the interview. Take notes during the pre-interview so that you have a chance to think through your talking points.
- 6. State your boundaries:** While this can't always be accommodated, ask if it's possible to see the questions ahead of time. Be clear about topics that are off-limits and share this with the producer. Even if they push you to speak about a subject, remind yourself that you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.
- 7. Practice:** Talk through your speaking points with someone you trust or in front of a mirror. You can tape yourself if want to hear what you sound like. Think about how you might respond if you are asked the questions you do not feel comfortable answering (e.g. "I prefer to focus on these issues instead of ..."). You can also practice asserting boundaries with the journalist, thinking through what to say if you feel triggered or unsafe.

8. Harassment: Work with a trusted friend, counsellor, or legal advisor to prepare in advance how you will address any harassment, including on social media, that may arise as a result of the media coverage.

9. Make a self-care plan: Interviews can be scary and exhausting but knowing you have a plan to centre and recharge after can help get through the hard part. Talking openly about violence you have been subjected to can be challenging. Think through what self-care practices you already employ. Use these during the prep for the interview to center yourself beforehand.

DURING

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- 1. Pause:** Take a breath to slow down the interview and give yourself a moment to pause to think about how you will answer questions. It's ok to ask what the interviewer means by a certain question.
- 2. Repeat the question:** When answering the reporter, restate the question to extend your thought processing time. Ensure that you are clear on what is being asked of you.
- 3. Breathe:** Remind yourself there is no rush, your words are important, and your voice is needed in the conversation. If the interview is being recorded and you don't like the way you answered a question, ask if you can answer again.
- 4. Have support present:** If you find it useful you can request a trusted friend or advocate to come with you to the interview. They can sit with you in the space while you are interviewed.
- 5. Reframe:** If an interviewer asks you a question you do not feel is relevant to the story you want to tell, you can always reframe the question (e.g., "Although that is important, I'm more interested in discussing x)."

6. Ground yourself: Do a ritual that will make you feel present during the interview: eating a meal before you speak, holding an object that makes you feel safe (a stone, a piece of jewelry), drinking water, praying, meditating, or sitting in a quiet place.

AFTER

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- 1. Celebrate:** Make sure to congratulate yourself for the huge step you are taking to own and share your story. No matter how the interview went, celebrate yourself!
- 2. Practice self-care:** Sharing traumatic stories, no matter where we are at with our healing, has an impact. You may want to take breaks from social media or ask a trusted loved one to monitor your social media mentions for a few days. Ensure you practice loving kindness with yourself as you navigate all the different feelings that can emerge.
- 3. Ask:** For a correction within the story if there is a mistake.¹ If there is no follow up, you can file a complaint with the media outlet through their public editor or ombudsman. If you are unsatisfied with the follow up, you can contact your local press council to make a complaint.
- 4. Inform:** Let people in your close circle of support know you are going to be in the media. Let them know what support you will need from them in the next couple of days.
- 5. Connect with supports:** Have someone to debrief with after the interview and in the coming days as the story is out in the public.
- 6. Give feedback:** Check in with the producer, writer or journalist about your experience. You can provide suggestions for ways they can create safer spaces for survivors in the future.

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WORKS CITED

1. Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime. (2015). *When the Media Calls*. <http://crcvc.ca/publications/if-the-media-calls/>

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