

# Your Story, Your Voice, Your Choice.

## *A Resource Guide for Sharing Your Story*

Whether you choose to tell your story publicly, or just write it down for yourself, storytelling is one of the many powerful tools available to help you heal, seek justice, and demand change.

This packet is intended to serve as a resource to help you weigh your options and make informed decisions about how and where to share your story in a way that serves YOUR goals and self interests.

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\*Adapted from “Sharing Your Story: How to Think Through Your Options: by the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and “My Story, My Terms: A Workbook for Survivors” by the Women’s Justice NOW, and “Survivors Speak Out” created by the National Women’s Law Center and Know Your IX.

# 1. Self Check In - Are you ready to share?

Sharing your story publicly can be an incredibly **powerful** experience, but it can also be a challenging one. Here are some questions to consider when determining if you're ready.

- 1. Do you understand and accept that what happened to you was not your fault?*
- 2. Have you sought support to help you process your feelings, and do you have a strong support system in place to help you navigate the challenges and emotions that come with sharing?*
- 3. Have you considered the impact that making your story public will have on your physical safety and emotional well being?*
- 4. Have you thought about the financial and emotional costs of being sued or threatened with a lawsuit?*

**If you answered no to any of these questions, that's ok!**

Acknowledge and honor your emotional needs and consider quieter spaces that allow for more privacy and healing. Journaling, creative writing, art therapy practices, writing workshops, and survivor support groups might be more appropriate beginnings of your storytelling journey.

Remember: there are many ways to pursue healing and justice that don't include publicly sharing your story.

Whether sharing publicly or engaging in more private spaces, it's a good idea to make a plan for how you are going to take care of your mental health throughout the process

Use the space below to list out the **individuals**, **groups**, and grounding **activities** that you have at your disposal.

My safety plan:

## 2. Set Your Goals - Why do you want to share?

An important step in deciding whether and where to share your story is to reflect on your motivations for sharing.

- **Are you interested in raising community awareness about a particular aspect of your experience?**
- **Maybe you'd like to connect with other survivors to support and inspire each other in shared healing.**
- **Is there a particular piece of legislation you're passionate about and want to use your experiences to help inform and educate your legislators?**
- **Will owning your truth and speaking it publicly help you achieve a sense of accountability, power, and justice?**

Focusing on a particular key aspect of your experience, like **barriers** to reporting, your experiences navigating the legal system, the harm of **self-blame**, or the impacts that **positive responses** to disclosure, can make for effective and impactful storytelling.

Storytellers who are motivated by positive goals, like supporting others or advocating for change, are more likely to report positive story sharing experiences.

My storytelling goals:



## 2. Weigh Your Options - Where can you share?

There are many different platforms in which to share your story, each with its own **benefits, risks, and privacy considerations**. It's important to weigh your options and really think about the personal, social, and professional impacts of sharing in different spaces.

*Ask Yourself:*

- How will I feel when this story is out in the world?
- How can it affect my personal and professional relationships?
- If there are other people involved in your experience, how will this story impact them emotionally, personally, or professionally?
- Will sharing my story publicly put me at risk of legal retaliation and if so, have I taken steps to prepare for that potential?

There are steps you can take to **protect your privacy** when sharing publicly (using a pseudonym, having your image/voice altered for media interviews) so think about your own privacy concerns and weigh the risks involved.

Sharing your story anonymously can protect your privacy, but there is always a chance that someone will recognize you, or your abuser, based on the details you share  
- even if you don't name them.

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If you have concerns about the potential for legal liability, please consult an attorney to help navigate those risks.

## If you are involved in ANY type of formal legal proceedings-

! Anything you share publicly can become part of the formal proceeding and may disrupt your goals in that process.

- Speak to an attorney before sharing your story publicly on ANY platform .

### 4. *Self Advocacy - informed consent is key!*

You are the only person who has a right to tell your story, however the amount of control you have over how and where your story is told varies based on the platforms you utilize.

Wherever and however you choose to share your story, having clearly defined **goals, boundaries, and supports** in place will empower you to navigate the experience with confidence and purpose.

#### When working with the media:

You have a right to set conditions for the interview (time and location, advance access to the questions, set boundaries about what you will and won't discuss, and identity protections).

You can request that an advocate, attorney, or support person be present and you should take breaks when necessary. You have a right to refuse to answer any question and it may be helpful to have a polite refusal ready ("I'm sorry, but I don't want to talk about that").

A verbal agreement to speak "off record" isn't legally binding so it's best not to say anything to a reporter, on or off camera, that you don't want made publicly available.

## **When working with a nonprofit organization:**

Collaborating with a nonprofit organization whose mission and values align with yours is a powerful way to **amplify your voice, raise awareness, and effectuate change.**

Survivor informed organizations who ask survivors to share their stories should engage potential storytellers in ongoing consent conversations so they are fully informed about what they are agreeing to, exactly where their testimony will be shared and for what purposes, and of potential consequences of sharing.

- There are many reasons organizations invite survivors to tell their stories – stories that connect mission to real world impact can be important tools for fundraising, education/training, and policy work. Whoever you're working with should be transparent about **why** they are interested in your story, **where** it will be shared, and **who** the intended audience will be.
- Your consent is REVOKABLE and TIME LIMITED. You have a right to change your mind about sharing your story – FOR ANY REASON and AT ANY TIME. Your consent should be documented and include an agreed upon termination date: you may be ok sharing your story today, but you may feel differently in the future.

Survivor centered organizations should not only **honor** your autonomy they should actively **advocate** for it.

In the space below, write down what elements of your experience are you **willing to share**, and how including them in your story directly support the specific goals you defined earlier. Include a list of elements that are “**off limits**” to the public,



## 5. Resources - finding places to share your story

**LOTUS Legal Clinic** – Provides no cost, comprehensive legal and support services exclusively to survivors of sexual violence and human trafficking (labor and sex). Our attorneys help survivors understand their legal options, and provide the tools and support to seek justice and healing on their own terms. Through writing workshops, advocacy training, poetry publications, community events, and more, LOTUS creates unique and engaging opportunities to center the expertise and voices of those who have experienced sexual harm and/or human trafficking in its anti-violence work. *Contact Heather@lotuslegalclinic.org for more information.*

### **“Unspoken Conversations with Candace” podcast.**

Candace Sanchez is a survivor, author, life coach, motivational speaker, and podcast host on a mission to change the narrative on taboo topics and inspire others to use their voices because they matter! <https://candacesanchez.com/podcast/>

**Ex Fabula** - presents storytelling workshops, Story Slams and Community Collaborations where people listen to each other, feel heard, and grow in empathy and understanding. <https://exfabula.org>

**Woodland Pattern** - Nonprofit gallery, book center, and performance space that hosts workshops and readings, including their annual Poetry Marathon & Benefit. <http://woodlandpattern.org/>

### **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)**

Storytelling 101-RAINN <https://rainn.org/share-your-story/survivor-storytelling-101/>

RAINN's story gathering initiative: <https://rainn.org/show-support/share-your-story/>

### **Take Back The Night – Survivor Podcast**

The Dear Katie Podcast features survivors of sexual assault, rape, and abuse; supporters; authors; celebrities; and agents of change about their survivorship and support. Learn how their journeys can help all survivors and their supporters. <https://takebackthenight.org/podcast/>

**Me Too Movement** – Healing Justice Practice Spaces Tool Kit, self-guided learning modules to support integrative mind and body healing. <https://metoomvmt.org/>

**Braver Collective** - Braver Collective creates and shares accessible, reliable, trauma-responsive and shame-free online spaces dedicated to survivor voices, where we can all find acceptance, hope and our next, best step to heal.  
[www.bravercollective.org](http://www.bravercollective.org)

**Surviving The Mic** - Surviving the Mic (based in Chicago) is a Black, femme, and non-binary led organization of survivors whose mission is to amplify and support the power of the voices of survivors of harm. Free virtual writing workshops every third Thursday of the month from 3-5pm via Zoom.  
[www.survivingthemic.org](http://www.survivingthemic.org)

**The National Survivor Network (NSN)**- NSN is a values-based membership association of survivors of human trafficking from all over the United States and abroad working together using an inclusive, evidence-informed, public health, human rights, harm reduction approach.

### **Local Support Groups**

**The Women's Center (Waukesha)** – Offers a variety of support services for survivors of sexual trauma including one on one counseling, survivor support groups, and virtual book club. [www.twcwaukesha.org](http://www.twcwaukesha.org)

**HIR Wellness** – Serves Indigenous and underserved communities through trauma recovery, intergenerational healing, and post-traumatic growth for individuals and families affected by sexual assault, domestic and intimate partner violence, human trafficking, loss by suicide and homicide, and community violence. Art therapy, restorative healing groups.  
[www.hirwellness.org](http://www.hirwellness.org)

**Aurora Healing Center** – Provides emergency care, counseling, emotional support and forensic nursing. Providers work together to help survivors receive the individualized care and services they need to feel whole again.  
<https://www.aurorahealthcare.org/healing-advocacy-services>

**RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center** (Madison) - provides a variety of services to survivors of sexual violence including individual and group support services.