

Maintaining the Safety and Confidentiality of Survivors Who Participate in Outreach, Public Speaking, Advocacy, and Media Work

Guidelines Adopted in August 2015 by the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force

1. Survivors should have a network of peer and agency support available to them when considering public speaking, advocacy, and media work.
2. Survivors whose criminal and/or civil cases are open should not speak to the media or share details of their case in public.
3. Survivors should receive proper and adequate media and public speaking training and have adequate time, preparation, and support before, during, and after the speaking engagement. This should include a discussion of the relative control survivors will have over how their stories will be presented in various settings.
4. If the survivor wishes, nonprofit organizations working with survivors should screen public speaking requests and should serve as a point of contact for survivors.
5. Survivors should not be pressured in any way to speak publicly about their ordeal and event organizers should leave room for survivors to change their mind about speaking publicly, even on the day of the event.
6. For public speaking events and panels, a speaker stipend for the survivor should be requested to help off-set the cost of travel, time off work, child care, etc., and to demonstrate respect for the survivor's time and energy.
7. To the extent possible, special conditions or requests made by a survivor (for example, using an alias, not interviewing on camera, and avoiding certain questions) should be documented and communicated with event organizers/media in advance. If the survivor is represented by an attorney, the attorney may be best suited to negotiate special conditions or requests.
8. Social service or advocacy staff should debrief with survivors after the event to assess how they are feeling and if they need additional support to process any feelings or memories; peer support should be encouraged.
9. Provide opportunities for mentorship between survivors, where experienced public speakers and presenters are available for those with less experience.
10. Do not assume that survivors will be more interested or comfortable speaking publicly in their native language or to individuals or groups that share the same cultural community or background.
11. Work with survivors to identify their own goals for public speaking, advocacy, and media work.

CAUTION: Avoid Sensationalism and Other Risks

Collaborating with the media can be a very effective outlet for spreading the message of public awareness but it also comes with specific risks that must be considered by the organization. These include the possibility of sensationalism, misunderstanding, increasing danger for the client, re-traumatization of the client, and jeopardizing the case.

For example, in one case, a news article about a client's victory in her civil case against her trafficker travelled back home to the Philippines, causing community and family members to believe that she had won a large settlement and was now rich. But this was far from the truth. In fact, she had yet to see one penny of settlement money since her traffickers were appealing the decision. This caused significant emotional strain on the client.