



Australian Government
National Office for Child Safety



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA

NEWS AND MEDIA
RESEARCH CENTRE

ENGAGING WITH MEDIA ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

ENGAGING WITH MEDIA ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Attribution

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For further information contact: nmrc@canberra.edu.au

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND TERMINOLOGY

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Canberra and the National Office for Child Safety acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution they make. We also acknowledge all First Nations Peoples who may engage with these Guides.

Acknowledgement and thanks

We acknowledge and pay our deep respects to those people who have been impacted by child sexual abuse and any people that may be impacted by this document. We thank the victims and survivors, advocates, service providers and media professionals who gave their valuable time and insights to contribute to the development of the Guides.

A brief note on terminology

In these Guides we use the term ‘victims and survivors’ to describe people who experienced child sexual abuse. In line with a trauma-informed approach, we acknowledge that as part of the informed consent process, victims and survivors have the right to define their identity and the terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ can for some be considered as existing on a continuum of recovery. We also recognise that some people may not identify with either of these terms.

Content note

This document includes material about child sexual abuse and its portrayal in media that some people might find disturbing.

Where to get help

These Guides may bring up strong feelings and questions for many people. Help is available if you or someone you know has experienced, are experiencing, or are concerned a child or young person may be at risk of harm including child sexual abuse. If you need assistance or support, the National Office for Child Safety Support Services page (<https://www.childsafety.gov.au>) provides a list of dedicated services.

Bravehearts – 1800 272 831

Blue Knot Foundation – 1300 657 380

SAMSN Survivors & Mates Support Network –
1800 472 676

1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800

13YARN – 13 92 76

QLife – 1800 184 527

INTRODUCTION

These Guides have been developed to support and empower those with lived experience of child sexual abuse in their interactions with the media.

Child sexual abuse has long been hidden from public discussion and media have a powerful role to play in 'breaking the silence' about abuse - now and in the past - within our families, online, and in organisations. When media organisations or journalists report on child sexual abuse, they are taking your story and sharing it with the wider public. This can be empowering, provide a sense of justice, encourage others to come forward, increase community awareness and generate much-needed legal and policy change.

But engaging with the media can have unintended consequences and cause further harm and trauma. We know that news media reporting has stigmatised, sensationalised, minimised and at times misrepresented the experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. It is a brave and profoundly life-changing thing to go the media, and the decision should not be taken lightly.

Child sexual abuse is a widespread issue with significant individual and social consequences. It is estimated that more than one in four (28.5%) Australians have experienced child sexual abuse.¹ Abuse can leave lasting impacts including on mental health, relationships, education, employment and finances.

Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Media and *Engaging with Media about Child Sexual Abuse: For Victims and Survivors* (the Guides) have been developed by the University of Canberra in partnership with the National Office for Child Safety in the Attorney General's Department. These Guides have been developed with a trauma-informed approach that starts from the principle that media reporting should do no further harm. Along with a review of related guidelines and analysis of news media reporting from April 2020-March 2022, we consulted on the draft Guides with people with lived experience, stakeholders across the child safety sector and with media professionals.

Our consultation program was based on the principles of collaboration, choice, empowerment and safety. We thank the victims and survivors, advocates, service providers and media professionals who gave their time and insights to contribute to the development of the Guides.

“You own your story. It is up to you how much of it you tell and what motivates you to tell. To feel safe, and to achieve your desired interview aspirations, ask yourself what you want out of the interview.”

(Hetty Johnston AM, Founder, Bravehearts)

Participants provided thoughtful, impassioned and practical feedback that illuminated the complexity, challenge and possibility of this topic at the societal, institutional and personal levels.

The Guides acknowledge that the burden of child sexual abuse does not fall evenly across the community. Some voices and experiences are heard more clearly than others and some groups may be disproportionately affected. Special consideration has been given to the needs and sensitivities of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates, children and young people and their support networks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people with disability, LGBTQIA+ people, and people living in regional and remote communities.

This Guide is primarily for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who want to tell their story to a journalist. We acknowledge that there are times when a victim and survivor may be the subject of a news report without engaging with a journalist. In addition, we acknowledge that families, friends, colleagues and the wider community are also impacted when a story of child sexual abuse is told in the media. Information for family and friends is included in this Guide.

Importantly, this guidance for victims and survivors sits alongside the companion *Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Media*. Reading the Guides together can give you a better idea of what good practice for media looks like.

KEY PRINCIPLES



ENGAGING WITH MEDIA ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

KEY PRINCIPLES



PREPARE

Take time to prepare before sharing your story

It is an important and personal decision for someone to decide to share their story. There are some key things to prepare and questions to ask before deciding if this is the right path for you. Are you ready to go to the media? What is your motivation or desired outcome? Do you have the right support?



CONSENT

You have the right to be informed before giving a journalist consent to tell your story

It's your right to know what will happen when you tell your story and once it is public, noting that things can change during the editorial process and the final outcome might look different. This includes fully understanding the legal impacts.



THE MEDIA

Understand how media and journalism works

Knowledge is power. Different forms of media operate in different ways and having a better understanding of how media works will help you know what to expect.



BOUNDARIES

Be clear about your boundaries and conditions at the start

You have the right to manage how your story is told. This includes how much you share, when you decide to tell your story, and where and how you engage with the journalist.



SAFETY

Look after your safety and seek support and advice

Only engage with media if you feel physically and emotionally safe. It can help to activate your personal and professional support networks.

What is trauma?

Trauma is the psychological, physical, social, emotional, cultural and/or spiritual harm caused by exposure to an event, or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening.

It impacts an individual's sense of self, safety, social connection and ways of coping. For this purpose, 'trauma' can be defined both in terms of an event/s causing harm, and the harm that exposure to that event/s causes.

Paton, A., et al. (2023). *Minimum Practice Standards: Specialist and Community Support Services Responding to Child Sexual Abuse*. Canberra: National Office for Child Safety.²

What is trauma-informed practice?

Trauma-informed practice is framed within several core principles: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and respect for diversity. Based on the foundational principle of 'Do No Harm', it is a practice that everyone can adopt, rather than a form of 'treatment'.

Putting these principles into action for journalists, trauma-informed practice:

- Understands how stress and trauma can affect the brain and the body, and that 'symptoms' can be a way of coping.
- Considers what has happened to the person (not what is 'wrong' with the person).
- Is sensitive to the victim and survivor's experience when conducting the reporting process.
- Collaborates with the victim and survivor as an expert in their own experience.

Based on Blue Knot Foundation: Becoming Trauma Informed – Services.³

PREPARE

KEY PRINCIPLE: TAKE TIME TO PREPARE BEFORE SHARING YOUR STORY

It is an important and personal decision for someone to decide to share their story. There are some key things to prepare and questions to ask before deciding if this is the right path for you. Are you ready to go to the media? What is your motivation or desired outcome? Do you have the right support?

Take the time you need before you decide. It is a brave and profoundly life changing thing to go the media, and the decision should not be taken lightly.

Talk to people you trust and who support you. Friends, family or professional advocates can help you talk through your decision.

Here are some questions you can ask before deciding if this is the right path for you:

- Why do you want to talk to the media? What do you hope to achieve?
- Are you ready to go to the media?
- What personal and professional supports do you have in place?
- Do you feel adequately supported to engage with the media?
- Who else will be impacted?
- Are you comfortable with your family and friends, and others, reading your story?
- Are there any legal problems with telling your story? (see 'Legal Considerations and Support' on page 22).

“

I often offer to send people similar stories I've done if they would like to read it and feel comfortable doing so.

”

(Media)

“

I would say going to the media is life changing around something like this. Because every friend you have, ... your parents, it really is life changing. It really is a very, very profound decision for any person to make. And I would hope the media understand that.

(Victim and survivor)

”

If you decide to share your story, you may wish to consider the following:

- Think carefully about how you want to tell your story and where you want to tell it.
- It's a good idea to do some research before making up your mind about which media outlet you want to go to. Research the media outlet and the journalist: Has the journalist written similar stories with sensitivity? Are they a safe journalist to share your story with?

Anonymity is always an option for you if you decide to tell your story.

“

There are so many journalists out there, who do you even go to or which publisher or newspapers or TV essentially are more receptive, more ethical ... You should ask yourself, look for the stories they've written.

(Victim and survivor)

”

If a journalist has approached you for a story, you may wish to ask

- Why are they doing this story?
- Why do they want to talk to you?
- Who else will they be talking to?
- What is the angle of their story, and where do you fit into that?
- (If it is for TV or radio) Will the interview be live or pre-recorded?
- How will the story be published (newspaper, online or on TV or radio)?
- Do they know when the story will be published or aired?

CONSENT

KEY PRINCIPLE: YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE INFORMED BEFORE GIVING A JOURNALIST CONSENT TO TELL YOUR STORY

It's your right to know what will happen when you tell your story and once it is public, noting that things can change during the editorial process and the final outcome might look different. This includes fully understanding the legal impacts.

- Informed consent means knowing and understanding what might happen if you tell your story.
- The journalist who speaks to you should have an understanding of informed consent and will ask if you give consent to being interviewed. Note that this applies to journalists who are interviewing you and doesn't include court reporting. This type of reporting is subject to legal constraints (see 'Legal considerations and support' on page 22).
- Telling your story publicly can empower you if managed carefully, but it can also cause further harm, stigma and trauma for victims and survivors, and their families and friends.
- Although you have agency and control at the start of the media process, at some point your story will become the media's property, and it will then be out in the public realm for others to share or comment on.
- The final publication may be different to your expectations and once your story is public, other outlets may reproduce it and may not treat it with the same respect.
- The nature of social media means others may make hurtful comments. You have a right to ask the media outlet to turn off comments on online stories, and you can manage your social media profile to minimise the impact on you (see 'Social Media' on page 15).
- Any images or interview footage may continue to be used after your story has been published.

The benefits and considerations of telling your story

BENEFITS	CONSIDERATIONS
It's your story and you might find it empowering to share.	The interview and publication process may be distressing and intensify trauma, but if you are prepared and have support on hand, the process may be easier.
Media coverage can help to raise awareness of the issue by educating the public about the crime of child sexual abuse.	The responses to the story from friends and family can be unpredictable, so consider communicating with them throughout the process.
It can inspire others to come forward.	The online environment means your story will be on the internet forever and it is very unlikely a media outlet will agree to taking the story down if you change your mind later.
It can help others make sense of their own experience.	You're not obliged to help others if it comes at your own expense.
It can influence public policy, and lead to legislative reform.	Policy and legislative change takes time and many voices.

Legal reminders

- Journalists may need to get legal advice when reporting your story. You have a right to ask about this advice and what it means for the story.
- If you're appearing before a government inquiry or commission, check with the organisers about whether your testimony or evidence is public and could appear in the media.
- If you're providing evidence in court, you may like to seek advice on whether your evidence will be made public.

“

... you quite often will get people six months, 12 months after publication, say look, I've moved on with my life. I don't want that story to be out there anymore. And that's a much trickier thing to then decide to scrub it from the record.

(Media)

”

THE MEDIA

KEY PRINCIPLE: UNDERSTAND HOW MEDIA AND JOURNALISM WORKS

Knowledge is power. Different forms of media operate in different ways and having a better understanding of how media works will help you know what to expect.

Journalists follow an established set of principles and practices that may conflict with your purpose in sharing your story. Journalism is bound by legal restrictions, but journalists are also bound by their media outlet's policies. Sometimes journalists can't publish something because of their organisation's legal advice, or because of what their editor or managing editor decides.

Journalism can be published in several formats: broadcast (TV, radio, podcasts, online videos), online (articles, videos, online radio) and print (newspapers, magazines). Ask yourself which one you might feel safer or more confident with:

- Print media or pre-recorded interviews are good for when you are starting out.
- Live-to-air TV or radio interviews are suggested for those who are more experienced with media.

How journalism works

The primary role of a journalist is to report on a story. Journalism is a time-driven and competitive industry and how your final story looks may not be what you expect.

- A key principle in journalism is public interest and a strong reason for why a story is told. If a story is in the public interest, it means that it is information that the public needs to know. This is different to "interesting to the public" (for example gossip or celebrity news).
- There are different forms of journalism you may encounter:
 - o Court reporting: covering the court rounds. This form has very strict legal restrictions. It can be presented via newspapers, online, radio or TV.

“

... if we can demystify each community for each other - what motivates them, what their concerns are, what pressures they're under - the more they understand about each other, the more productive that relationship is going to be and the less stress for everybody.

(Nina Funnell, journalist, #LetHerSpeak founder and survivor advocate)

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- o Daily reporting: also known as “hard news” reports facts about a news story with little emotion or background. This is the routine news and can take the form of print, radio, TV or online.
- o Feature reporting: a form that gives more context to a story. This type can include background, analysis and emotion, all based in a factual account. Feature articles are not part of the daily news but will report on current events with more depth and can be published in newspapers, magazines and online.
- o Investigative journalism: a deep investigation of an issue often taking months or years and typically a longer form of journalism. This can be in newspapers, magazines and online, or broadcast via television or podcast.

- Sometimes journalists ask people for comment on a story they are doing on another case. Keep in mind that you are not obligated to comment if you don't want to, but you can also ask how the comment will be used.
- The “news cycle” means when something is published. A story may come out the next day or the next week, depending on the publication and what other news is happening. Ask the journalist when your story is due to come out but be aware that this can change.
- Any images that are used in your story can be used in future stories.
- Journalists are not obligated to give you a copy of the final story, but there is no harm in asking. They may choose to share a copy.

How the media might approach your story

When victims and survivors approach the media, their stories are not always told. This is not because the journalist doesn't want to or doesn't believe you, or that your story isn't important.

There are many reasons a story may not be told, including legal limitations and internal policies.

- If you tell your whole story to a journalist, it may not all be shown or published. Your story might not suit their angle, or they may only include a soundbite or single line. Always ask the journalist how they will be using your interview or comment.
- “Right of reply” and checking facts of a story are key principles of journalistic practice. This means that others may be interviewed for their perspective and for fact-checking including family, friends, co-workers, neighbours or the perpetrator. This is not because you are not believed.
- The journalist interviewing you and writing the story will not have the final say in how the story is written or what headline or images will be used. This is the role of others in the newsroom such as editors, news editors, sub-editors and managers and they may choose a different heading and/or a different angle than you expect.

“

I guess I'm at a point in my recovery and my work with SAMSN where I think, who cares what I look like, what I sound like, so my confidence is gaining over time. Anything live is still scary, live radio or TV is like oh, full-on. So there are gradients, and I think that in terms of my experience, I'd want to impart to somebody else, you might just want to start out small. Do a pre-record. Yeah, don't go for the big TV interview upfront.

(Craig Hughes-Cashmore, CEO, Survivors & Mates Support Network)

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“

...if you're dealing with someone over a long period and they're very vulnerable, you really do care for them, or I care for them. But you're not, you know, you're not their friend. You're not their counsellor. You cannot be their primary support. Because you're actually not equipped to do it. It's not just that it's not my job – I don't have the tools to provide that support in a way that is constructive or beneficial in the long-term.

(Journalist)

”

Journalism's News Values

“News values” guide the types of stories journalists report on. Examples of news values are:

Impact	Information has impact if it affects a lot of people.
Timeliness	Information has timeliness if it happened recently.
Prominence	Information has prominence if it involves a well-known person or organisation.
Proximity	Information has proximity if it involves something happening somewhere nearby.
Conflict	Information has conflict if it involves disagreement.
Unusual	Information may involve something unusual.
Currency	Information has currency if it is related to some general topic a lot of people are already talking about.
Negativity	Bad news.
Exclusivity	Information is exclusive if one news outlet publishes it first.
Human interest	Stories about human experience.

Defining and measuring the prevalence of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is a crime. While there is no universal definition, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse defined child sexual abuse as 'any act that exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes that are beyond their understanding, are contrary to accepted community standards, or are outside what is permitted by law'.⁴

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS)¹ estimates that more than one in four (28.5%) Australians have experienced child sexual abuse. Those who identify as females were twice as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse compared to males (37.3% of females compared to 18.8% of males).

The ACMS found that child sexual abuse rarely happens once and it often co-occurs with other forms of child maltreatment. Most victims and survivors of child sexual abuse (78%) reported that the abuse occurred multiple times. Around four in ten victims and survivors (42%) experienced child sexual abuse more than six times. Around one in ten victims and survivors (11%) experienced it more than 50 times.

The ACMS further identified the profound impacts of child maltreatment, including on mental and physical health outcomes. When compared with people who have not experienced child maltreatment, those who experienced child maltreatment: are more likely to have a mental disorder (48%), compared with around one in five (21.6%) of those who did not experience maltreatment; are three times more likely to have Major Depressive Disorder (24.6% compared with 8.1%); are 3.9 times more likely to have self-harmed in the past year; and are 4.6 times more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.

For more information on the ACMS see <https://www.acms.au>.

BOUNDARIES

KEY PRINCIPLE: BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR BOUNDARIES AND CONDITIONS AT THE START

You have the right to manage how your story is told. This includes how much you share, when you decide to tell your story, and where and how you engage with the journalist.

Setting boundaries and conditions

- Consider your boundaries – what you are happy to talk about and what you are not. You have the right to share none, some or all of your story – it's up to you what you decide to share. Talk with the journalist as to what is safe territory for you. This can also be discussed with people you trust such as family, friends and/or advocates.
 - Here are some other ideas to consider as part of your conditions before talking with the journalist, noting that you may not have control over these in all situations:
 - How do you want to be named: your name, anonymous or a pseudonym?
 - Do you prefer to be described as a victim, a survivor, or something else?
 - Ask the journalist if you can record the conversation for your own record (e.g., on your phone).
 - Do you want to check any quotes that are used?
 - Do you want to see a final copy of the story? This may not always be possible but you can discuss it with the journalist.
 - Do you want to suggest particular images to be used? What are your boundaries? What images are you comfortable with and what images would not be appropriate?
 - If a story is published online, consider whether you want to ask to have the comments closed.
 - It is worth exploring if an outlet has a process for a formal agreement for the terms of the interview/story – if so, seek advice from others (media professional or advocate).
- While journalists can be empathetic and good listeners, their role is not a therapeutic or legal one. Be clear on personal and professional boundaries with the journalist from the start.
 - You may become close with a journalist over the period of the story, but a journalist is not equipped to support you in a therapeutic way.
 - You can establish clear boundaries regarding how and when you engage.
 - Consider having a support person to accompany or advise you.

“

To feel safe and to achieve your desired interview aspirations, you must take control by requiring pre-agreed boundaries of questions and answers. Consider getting an advocate to assist you.

(Hetty Johnston AM, Founder, Bravehearts)

”

SAFETY

KEY PRINCIPLE: LOOK AFTER YOUR SAFETY AND SEEK SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Only engage with media if you feel physically and emotionally safe. It can help to activate your personal and professional support networks.

- You can seek support at all stages of the process: before you decide to reach out or respond to a journalist; after you make the decision to share your story; while telling your story; and after the story comes out.
- If you are considering or decide to speak to the media, seek support and guidance from any of the following:
 - advocates and support groups.
 - health and medical professionals.
 - legal professionals, police and government agencies.
 - friends and family.
 - peer support network.
 - advocacy organisations who offer media support services.

Managing disclosures

Many victims and survivors who tell their stories through the media receive disclosures from others, which can be challenging and overwhelming. Advice from other victims and survivors who have managed this includes:

- provide a list of support services in your social media profile.
- if you have an email, include an automatic reply giving numbers for support services.
- close your social media off for private messaging.
- have a public and a private profile.

Social media

Social media is a place to find support and a community, but it can also be a place for bullying, trolling and victim-blaming. There are several strategies to help manage social media:

- Understand how social media platforms work.
- Set accounts to private and/or manage privacy settings. Close off comments on your accounts.

“

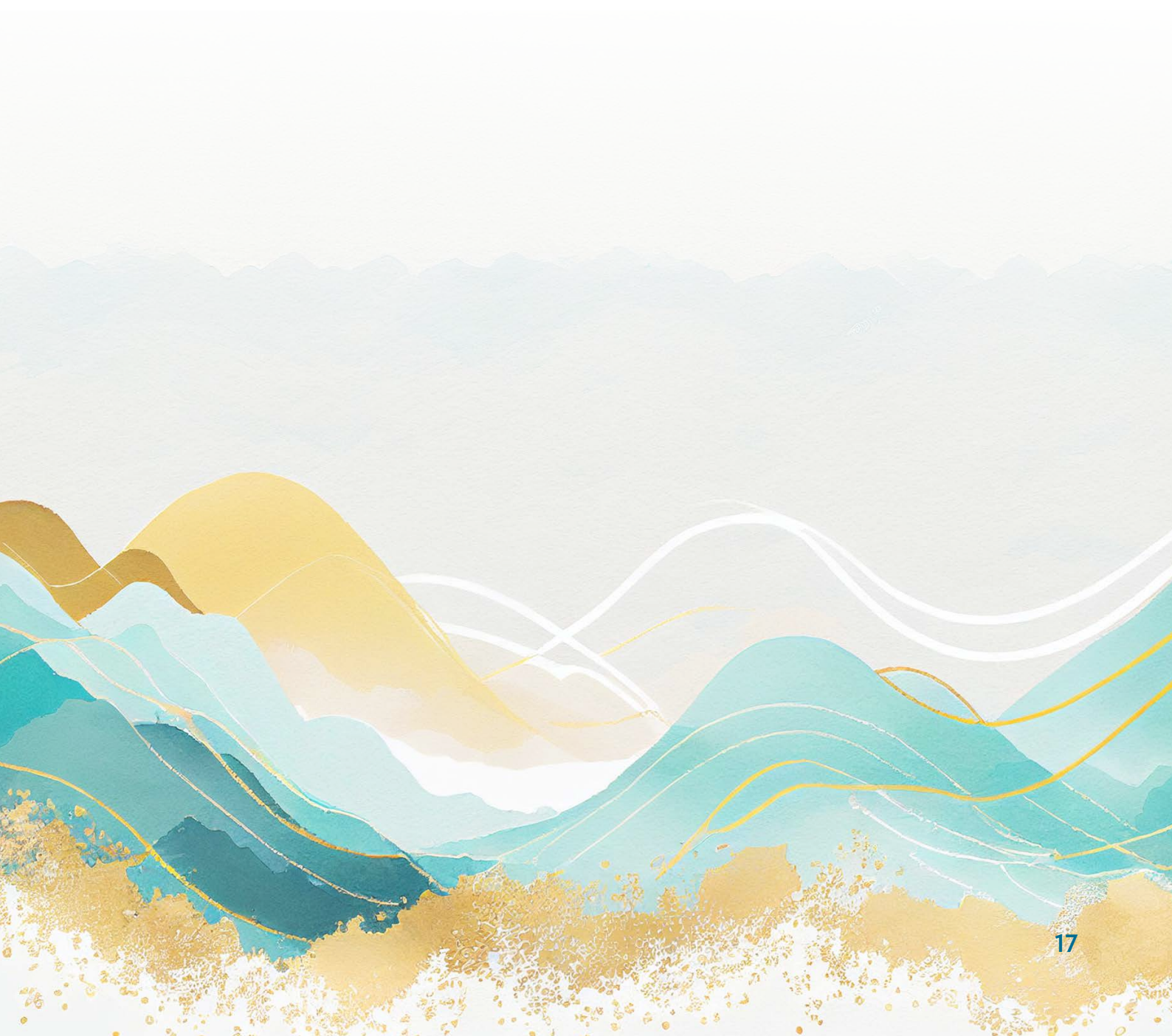
Once you do go public you get a lot, a lot of disclosures from the public and I know people are not prepared for the volume of disclosures that you get and it's through your social media channels. So it's like your private space, so you might still have a private profile. So you're not only dealing with everyone knowing your stuff, but also then obviously you want to respond as well to someone else who is disclosing ... and then you've got this great responsibility to respond appropriately.

(Victim and survivor)

”

- Carefully select the accounts you choose to follow and whether those accounts can also see your profile.
- Consider asking an advocate or other support person to monitor social media on your behalf.
- Take a break from social media.
- The ABC has a guide on how to prepare for what may happen on social media: Preparing for exposure to a larger audience.⁵

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE



ADVICE FOR TAKING PART IN A MEDIA INTERVIEW

It is your story to tell.

It is brave to talk to the media and most journalists who interview victims and survivors are aware of that and will be empathetic. The following advice will help when you are engaging with journalists.

Before the interview

- Check if the journalist is reputable and works for a reputable media organisation.
 - o How have they approached other victims and survivors and written other stories?
 - o Can other victims and survivors vouch for them?
 - o Ask to look at their other work.
- Develop a list of the key issues that you would like to talk about during the interview, and your key points for each issue.
- Practice answering questions with a support person. Talk about your exit strategy. You might like to ask a friend or family member to come and get you or give you a call after an amount of time has passed. Or you may tell the journalist that you have another appointment.
- Organise to have a support person or advocate with you during any interview and meeting.
- You can choose the date, time, length and place of the interview and ask if you can see the questions. Journalists are not obligated to give questions ahead of time, and many journalists can't give the questions as they may evolve throughout the interview.
- You should consider letting people who may be affected (including family and friends) know you are giving an interview.
- Consider seeking advice to understand the legal implications of what you may say. knowmore provides free legal advice and support to survivors of child sexual abuse. You can contact them at <https://knowmore.org.au/> or 1800 605 762.
- Tell the journalist how you would like to be described. Do you identify as a victim or a survivor, both, or neither?
- It's a good idea to clarify what "off the record" means for you and the journalist, as it can mean several things:
 - o Do you mean that what you said can't be used at all?
 - o Do you mean it can be used but don't say that I said it?
 - o Do you mean that the journalist can use the information to investigate further?

“

Be prepared before media interviews, you must be truly informed ... For the media, this is a story, for you it's a very traumatic lived experience, you have the right to protect yourself and your mental health. It's okay to say no to anything you don't feel comfortable with.

(Sonya Ryan, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Carly Ryan Foundation)

”

During the interview

Below are some basic tips to help you make the most of your interview opportunity:

- Use pauses and take a deep breath to think about what you are going to say and take a break if you need to.
- Remember your key points, and your boundaries, and stick to them.
- If you find some of the questions difficult or emotional, you don't need to answer. You can also ask the journalist to repeat or clarify the question.
- If you don't know or can't recall the answer to a question, don't try to guess. You can provide additional information after the interview.
- Be prepared for interviewing techniques such as:
 - Multi-part questions: these can be confusing, so answer the parts you are comfortable with. You can also ask the journalist to repeat parts of the question.
 - Interruptions: you can continue with your answer even if the journalist tries to interrupt with another question.
 - Paraphrasing: you can correct a journalist if they've misrepresented anything you've said.
 - Silence: silence does not need to be filled and can sometimes be used by journalists as a technique to make someone continue to talk.

After the interview

- Ensure you are safe and have a support person with you.
- Ask when the story will be published or broadcast, noting this can be subject to change.
- When the story is published, you may have a range of reactions. Seek counselling or support if you need to.
- Arrange to do something nourishing for yourself on the day your story is released. Turn comments off on social media, be with friends, supporters or a professional network.
- Manage your expectations – a story may not turn out the way you want.
- You can seek a correction if there is incorrect information in the published story.

“

In going to the media, outcomes are not always smooth and predictable. You may not be able to control the entire passage of your story, but if you focus on what you can control, the path is always easier. Aside from locating a trusted counsellor, take care to let your closest friends and family know what you are going to do before you engage. Ease them into a conversation about their privacy and how you'll navigate that. It is devastating to think you've done the right thing but that the cost has been to alienate those you love.

(Alison Quigley, Doctoral Candidate in Law and advocate for victims and survivors in sport)

”

INFORMATION FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Speaking to the media

You may be asked to speak to the media about, or on behalf of, a victim and survivor. After checking that you are able to speak on behalf of the victim and survivor, you may take part in an interview, front a press conference, or read out a statement with the victim and survivor by your side.

Here are some extra considerations to help you with talking to the media.

- Remember you are sharing someone else's story. Where possible, seek their permission before engaging with the media.
- Speaking with media may impact on your relationship. Where possible, talk this over with the victim and survivor.
- Seek support and guidance for yourself if you need to.
- Understand how journalism and the media works.

Interviewing

Here is some extra guidance that will help you if you are a family member or friend of a victim and survivor.

Before the interview

Preparation is key.

- Liaise with the victim and survivor if possible to ensure they are comfortable with what you are going to make public.
- Be clear about why you are doing an interview.
- Identify key messages (2-3) that you or the victim and survivor would like to bring up during the interview.

During the interview

You control what you say to the media.

- If you can, tell the journalist how the victim and survivor would like to be described. Also make clear if and how you would like to be identified (e.g., pseudonym, anonymous, name, relationship, etc.).

After the interview

- Ensure you are safe and have a support person if you need one.
- Make sure the victim and survivor has a list of available supports.
- Talk with the victim and survivor and let them know how the interview went.

“

Contemplate the message you want to convey and the words you will use to respond. Then stick to that 100%. Do not be diverted - no matter what! Consider having an advocate to help you.

(Hetty Johnston AM, Founder, Bravehearts)

”

“

It can be really challenging to be put on the spot and articulate the grief and the trauma you're feeling, whilst in the depths of despair; essentially, in re-traumatisation. I think that is the nerve-wracking thing when doing media. As a family we walk away from an interview and someone would ask us, how do you think it went? And we would have no idea, we couldn't remember what we had said, or even what questions we were asked only moments after the interview - that's a big feeling. We would sit down to watch the news or to read the newspaper and feel incredibly anxious because we had no recollection of what we had said during the interview. It was another feeling of losing a sense of control and worrying if we had done Zoe justice when speaking to journalists.

(Amanda Duncan, Founder of The *Two Sisters* Campaign)

”

Would you like to be an advocate for other victims and survivors?

Often service providers and other child sexual abuse support workers find themselves in the position where they act as intermediaries and advocates on behalf of victims and survivors in their interactions with the media. Victims and survivors may also like to become advocates.

While there is currently no specific guidance on how to become an advocate for child sexual abuse victims and survivors, if you would like to take on this important role, you can contact the support groups noted at the end of this guide and enquire. Some of the skills you may need include:

- How to provide support and counselling.
- An understanding of how the media works.
- High communication skills both with victims and survivors and media.
- Strong public speaking ability.
- An ability to build relationships with those who have experienced child sexual abuse and their families.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SUPPORT

This section does not provide legal advice. It is recommended that you seek legal advice before talking to any media.

- There are legal parameters around telling your story to the media. If a story is the subject of legal proceedings, the law is very strict as to what can be reported.
- Going to the media could impact you later if you decide to go to court.
- If you are ready to tell your story, seek your own, independent legal advice if possible.
- Larger media organisations have an internal legal team that checks stories before publication for defamation, contempt of court, etc., to ensure they are not in breach of the law. This may mean that something may not be published. You should still seek your own legal advice.
- Once someone is identified in one article, it could be taken by other publications as permission to name the victim and survivor in all reporting.

During a trial

- If a legal trial is happening, a journalist can only report on what happens in court and cannot include other information as it may prejudice the case.
- Journalists have a legal responsibility to give a fair account of what happens in a courtroom.

Some terminology

Allegedly:

There are some terms, such as allegedly, that a journalist must use in court reporting. Allegedly is used in reporting to distinguish when an allegation has been made but has not yet been tested in court.

Defamation:

Something that is published that damages a person's reputation or holds them up to ridicule.

If a reporter is offensive or harassing in any way, you can file a complaint to the news organisation.

If you find something offensive that has been published or broadcast, you can go to:
the **Australian Press Council** (newspapers and magazines)
(<https://www.presscouncil.org.au/complaints/make-a-complaint>)
or the **Australian Communication and Media Authority** (broadcast)
(<https://www.acma.gov.au/complain-about-something-tv-or-radio>).

LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

knowmore – <https://knowmore.org.au> or 1800 605 762

knowmore provides free legal advice and support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. This includes people who have experienced child sexual abuse in non-institutional settings, and people who were sexually abused in an institution or any organisation that was involved with children. knowmore also works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including Stolen Generation survivors. knowmore's services include legal advice and assistance, support services, financial counselling, and culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Youth Law Australia – <https://yla.org.au> or 1900 950 570

Youth Law Australia provides free, confidential and trauma-informed legal and practical information, advice, help and referrals to young people under 25, their advocates, and supporters.

Community legal centres

You can seek legal advice from community legal centres across Australia. Community legal centres provide general legal assistance to people living in a defined geographic area. Some centres also provide specialised services in a specific area of law. You can find a list of community legal centres at <https://clcs.org.au/legal-help>.

Legal Aid Commissions

Legal Aid Commissions provide a range of services, including information, legal advice and representation in courts and tribunals. Information and services including telephone advice are often free of charge.

There is a Legal Aid in each state and territory:

- ACT – <http://www.legalaidact.org.au>
- New South Wales – <http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au>
- Northern Territory – <https://www.legalaid.nt.gov.au>
- Queensland – <http://www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/Home>
- South Australia – <http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au>
- Tasmania – <http://www.legalaid.tas.gov.au>
- Victoria – <http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au>
- Western Australia – <https://www.legalaid.wa.gov.au>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are funded for the delivery of culturally appropriate and safe legal assistance services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services. More information can be found on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (<http://www.natsils.org.au>) website.

CHILDREN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

The voices and views of children can help to break the stigma around child sexual abuse and children have a right to be heard. Not talking to children can silence the profound impacts of child sexual abuse. However, their right to privacy must be respected and the child's best interests must always be considered.

Someone is legally a child until the age of 18.

Different States and Territories have different laws for reporting on children and when they can be named.

Any decision to speak with the media about a child, or to facilitate a child's engagement with the media, should be guided by the principle of "best interests of the child".

A child has a right to privacy, even if the parent or caregiver has given consent. Like all victims and survivors, children and young people have a right to participate in decisions that impact on them. You should talk to them and explain what could happen if their story is shared.

Informed consent is required from a parent or caregiver before a journalist can interview a child. It is important that consent is also sought from children and young people directly. Children should always be interviewed in the presence of a non-offending parent or caregiver.

It is often difficult to understand the ramifications of what will happen if a child's story is told publicly. Clear information from the journalist can help you make an informed decision. Ask the journalist about any consequences when discussing informed consent.

Ask to see any quotes or images that may be used.

WHERE TO GET ADVICE, SUPPORT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Support services

These Guides may bring up strong feelings and questions for many people. Help is available if you or someone you know has experienced, are experiencing, or are concerned a child or young person may be at risk of harm including child sexual abuse. If you need assistance or support, the National Office for Child Safety support services page (<https://www.childsafety.gov.au>) provides a list of dedicated services.

Child sexual abuse support and advice

Bravehearts: 1800 272 831 or www.Bravehearts.org.au

Blue Knot Foundation: 1300 657 380 or www.BlueKnot.org.au

Survivors & Mates Support Network (SAMSN): 1800 472 676 or www.Samsn.org.au

PartnerSPEAK (peer support for non-offending partners): (03) 9018 7872

National Redress Scheme: 1800 737 377 or www.NationalRedress.gov.au

Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) Inc: 1800 008 774 or www.Clan.org.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

Kids Helpline (for children and young people aged between 5–25): 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au

13YARN (crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples): 13 92 76 or www.13yarn.org.au

Beyond Blue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

QLife: 1800 184 527

ASKIZZY (for people with disabilities, carers and their families to connect with services across Australia): <https://askizzy.org.au/disability-advocacy-finder>.

For more information on media reporting

Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA): <https://www.meaa.org>

Media Diversity Australia: <https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org>

Australian Press Council: <https://www.presscouncil.org.au>

OurWatch: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au>

The DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma: <https://dartcenter.org/asia-pacific>

Mindframe: <https://mindframe.org.au>

Disability Reporting Handbook: <https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/disability-reporting-handbook>

Indigenous Reporting Handbook: https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ReportingonAboriginalandTorresStraitIslanderPeoplesandIssues_QuickGuide_A.pdf

Reporting on Gender Identity: https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/research-resources/guide-for-media-reporting-on-gender-identity/1434036552-1650953507/guide_for_media_-_gender_identity.pdf

Media Changing the Story: [https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2021_docs/Media_Changing_the_Story_Media_Guidelines_for_the_reporting_of_DFSV_in_the_Northern_Territory_\(1\).pdf](https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2021_docs/Media_Changing_the_Story_Media_Guidelines_for_the_reporting_of_DFSV_in_the_Northern_Territory_(1).pdf)

Further information

If you want further information about child sexual abuse, including statistics, please see:

- **National Office for Child Safety:** <http://www.childsafety.gov.au>
- **The Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report:** <https://www.acms.au>
- **The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse:** www.nationalcentre.org.au
- **Media Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse in Australia, 2020-2022:** www.canberra.edu.au/nmrc-media-guides
- **Media Guides for the Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse: Consultation Summary:** www.canberra.edu.au/nmrc-media-guides

References

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- 2 Paton, A., Parsons, V., Pitts, C., Adamson, K., Bromfield, L., Horch, G., Herbert, J., Hovane, V., and O'Leary, P. (2023). *Minimum Practice Standards: Specialist and Community Support Services Responding to Child Sexual Abuse*. Canberra: National Office for Child Safety.
- 3 Based on Blue Knot Foundation: Becoming Trauma Informed – Services: <http://blueknot.org.au>
- 4 *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017*, Final Report: Our Inquiry – Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Volume 1, p.9
- 5 ABC's preparing for exposure to a larger audience: <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/d0556f81016d4e836d1e843e4ad9bd8e>





ENGAGING WITH MEDIA ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

For more information please contact:
The National Office for Child Safety at
<https://www.childsafety.gov.au>

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This guide and its companion guide, *Reporting on
Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Media*, are available
online at <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/mediaguides>