

Authentic Voice Principles

How have these principles been created, and who are they for?

These principles have been co-created by survivors and professionals, some of whom also have lived experience of domestic abuse, for:

- People who are working or engaging with survivors (including colleagues with experience of domestic abuse) to safely support the sharing of their voice
- Survivors who are or are considering sharing their voice to know what they should expect from organisations and individuals they are engaging with.

We use these principles to underpin all of the activities we undertake and they can be used as a framework for planning.

Do No Harm

- Harm can occur as a result of what we do, or don't do
- Risk is recognised and addressed with the survivor
- Authentic voice work is trauma-informed

Harm can occur as a result of what we do, or don't do

It is essential for everyone involved to be aware of the risk of harm to survivors, their families, and communities in sharing their Authentic Voice. Risk and harm vary for each person and may come from perpetrator(s) of the abuse, the community, and services. A do no harm approach to prevent re-traumatisation and increase the positive impact on survivors sharing their experience and expertise, recognises how what we do, or fail to do, can cause harm. The harm caused by not applying this approach can emotionally, physically, financially, and legally harm survivors, their children, and families. It is our responsibility to make sure we have considered the wide range of factors that could cause harm and put in place the right conditions for survivors to be able to use their voice safely, to maximise the positive impacts of every interaction.



I always question "Will this make my perpetrator **more angry**?" SOMETIMES feels I dont have the space to say what I really think and feel because it is not safe'

Survivor

Risk is recognised and addressed with the survivor

Risk should be assessed with all survivors before engaging in Authentic Voice, and then for each piece of work engaged in. Survivors are likely to be the experts in identifying the potential risks to them and their families. Safety planning should be undertaken with survivors, not for them or on their behalf. Survivors are likely to have their own ways to keep themselves safe, and any extra safety planning should build on these strengths.

Authentic voice work is trauma-informed



This isn't easy, and it can often be upsetting when you learn more about the systems that were meant to keep you safe, or the process you should have got, but didn't. I knew I was let down, but I didn't know just how badly.

Survivor

Services must seek to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives, to make sure that they do not cause harm to survivors working with them. For some survivors, engaging in this work will be emotionally challenging which may vary for each person and on different projects. It is important that we work with survivors in a trauma informed and person centred way from the very beginning of their involvement. This means ensuring support is available and can be flexible around the needs and strengths of the survivor. This means offering informed choice about how to take part, making sure survivors are kept up to date and given a clear idea about what they can influence, the time work will take, and who they will be working with.

1. Trauma informed practice - an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological, and social development.

2. Person centred approach - ensure that we see people as unique individuals with valuable gifts and contributions. In relation to domestic abuse specifically this approach supports survivors to make informed decisions about their pathway to success and recovery.

Expert by Experience

- Survivors and professionals bring knowledge which is vital in responding well to domestic abuse
- No 'them and us'
- Survivors are valued and compensated for their expertise

Survivors and professionals bring knowledge which is vital in responding well to domestic abuse

Survivors are experts from their experiences and should be respected as such. To respond effectively to domestic abuse, it is vital that services and professionals listen to, learn from, and partner with survivors. By doing this, we can create real change that is rooted in survivor experience and expertise, alongside professional knowledge. When working with survivors, it is important to recognise that every survivor, and their experience, is as unique as they are.

No them and us



The system felt like something 'done' to me, and not with me.

Survivor

To work together in an equitable and authentic way, it is important to remember that there is no 'them and us'. There is great power in challenging the idea of what a survivor of domestic abuse looks like. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone and our responses to domestic abuse must reflect this.

The organisation must recognise that it is very likely they will have staff who have experience of, or have been impacted by, domestic abuse. Survivors are multi-faceted and can occupy many spaces.

Survivors are valued and compensated for their expertise

In recognising that lived expertise is as important as learned expertise, it is important that survivors are valued and compensated for their work. Ideally this would involve payment but may also involve offering training and other opportunities. This reflects that the survivor is bringing their knowledge and drawing on their own experiences, which may also be emotionally difficult. Always think about how payment might affect a survivor; some people cannot accept payment if it would affect their benefits, their immigration status or create an issue with their employment. Different ways to value the work should be available.

Speak Your Truth

- Survivors are not spokespeople for organisations they work with
- Survivors can choose what they share, when they share, and who they share with
- Survivors recognise the impact their voices may have on others

Survivors are not spokespeople for organisations they work with

Survivors sharing their authentic voice involves a rebalancing of power, moving away from professionals being the experts in survivors' lives, to recognising that survivors are the experts in their own experiences. For some survivors, using their voice is an opportunity to take back power from a situation where power was used on/over them or taken away from them entirely.



Domestic abuse is so individual, so personal but then at time it feels like they've (perpetrators) have all read the same handbook.

Survivor

Honouring this means that organisations should not expect survivors to stand for their views or agenda. Survivors should not be negatively impacted or have access to services and opportunities taken away from them for speaking their truth when it does not line up with the organisation's agenda. This is different from if a survivor breaches agreed policies, like a Code of Conduct.

This also means that survivors should not be expected to represent other people's voices. They are experts in their own experience, and this may mean opinions differ between survivors. There are times when survivors agree for elements of their voice to be shared by another survivor, but it should be clear what they are agreeing to be shared, and when.

Survivors can choose what they share, when they share, and who they share with

Some survivors find real value in sharing details of their experiences of domestic abuse, whilst others prefer to focus on using their expertise to challenge poor practice, highlight good and give expertise on how responses to domestic abuse can be improved. This should be an informed choice made by the survivor when they are ready to, highlighting who with and when they do this.

Speaking about personal experience at a small training session may be very different to speaking to the media. Organisations must discuss and agree consent with the survivor, and survivors must be able to choose to withdraw it if they do not want their voice to be used.

Survivors recognise the impact their voices can have on others

Survivors have the power to be able to speak their truth in their own way and this comes with responsibility. Survivors have a responsibility to consider how their words and actions can affect others, just as other experts do. It is important to set clear boundaries, developed with survivors, to ensure that everyone is working in a space which is safe for all.

Heart and Start

- Survivors' voices are included at the very beginning and involved through to the end of all work
- Create not rate
- Survivors are informed of the impact of their work, and are safely acknowledged

Survivors' voices are included from the beginning and involved through to the end of the work

Survivors' voices are vital in creating real change and as such should be involved from the beginning of planning any new, or potential, project. This means all work is built on the knowledge of survivors rather than trying to find a space for it later. Survivors should be involved throughout, in whatever capacity works best for individual survivors, making sure the needs of survivors are at the heart of what the project aims to do. When a project or event ends or changes course, survivors should be kept updated on the impact of their work and what happened as a result.

Create not rate

Heart and start is the best practice model of Authentic Voice, and reflects that survivors are partnering with professionals to develop a project together, rather than being asked to rate or 'sign off' the work of professionals which has not been created with survivors. It is important to be clear about what is heart and start (survivors and professionals working together) and survivor-led (a survivor or survivor group leads a project with the support of the organisation). Not all work will be co-creation, and it is important that is not 'sold' as such.

On survivor-led projects, it must be clear from the beginning what the organisation can offer in terms of support and resources.

Survivors are informed of the impact of their work, and are safely acknowledged



Tell me what has changed. Feedback on what difference I have made is part of my recovery journey.

Survivor

Survivors should always be acknowledged for the work they have done, in a way that is safe and easy to access for them. Survivors should also be kept updated on how their work has made a difference. Work can make a difference in a number of ways; it might be that another survivor has commented that they were encouraged to act after hearing the story of a survivor, that a professional or service has changed the way it responds to domestic abuse, or that a law is changed.

Equality and Diversity

- Anyone can experience domestic abuse, and our experience is affected by our different identities
- Services find ways to access the voices they are not hearing

Anyone can experience domestic abuse, and our experience is affected by our different identities

Domestic abuse can happen to regardless of how old you are, your ethnicity, whether you have a disability, your gender, or any other way we identify or are identified. People's lives are complex, and experiences of abuse will differ depending on individual identities, and the communities we live in.

Society is not equal, and its systems perpetuate inequity, discrimination, and oppression which mitigate against equity and inclusion. This means domestic abuse impacts on people from different communities disproportionately and the same multiple barriers which prevent some survivors from accessing culturally competent support also prevent some survivors from being able to speak and be heard.



We know that victims/survivors of domestic abuse whose immigration status is insecure are often trapped in a situation with additional barriers, such as fear/mistrust of the authorities, threats by the perpetrator to exploit the insecure immigration status, and lack of access to basic resources and work.

From SafeLives response to Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report, March 2021

It is the responsibility of services to ensure they provide opportunities and the right support for people with voices that are not being heard. To reach those voices, it may be helpful to work with organisations already connected into their communities.

Services find ways to access the voices they are not hearing

People are not hard to reach; systems can be hard for people to find their way around or are not set up to be easy for everyone to access. To hear the authentic experience of survivors, services must remove barriers which stop people from being able to take part. They should also make sure there are enough resources available to do this work and create safe spaces where there is clear guidance for how people collaborate and work together.

Caring

- Services and survivors work together to understand the potential emotional impact of sharing their voice
- Services give choices in the support they offer survivors; survivors share responsibility in taking care of themselves
- Survivors and services learn and develop together – nobody knows everything



I feel like a phoenix rising from the flames

Survivor

Services and survivors work together to understand the potential emotional impact of sharing their voice

Authentic Voice is personal and calls survivors to draw upon their own experiences. This can be emotionally demanding and may risk a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. It is essential that there are structures available for support. This begins before the survivor starts any Authentic Voice work: have you explored areas that may be triggering, or may be 'no-go' areas? This should reflect the trauma-informed approach reflected throughout the toolkit.

Services give choices in the support they offer for survivors; survivors share responsibility in taking care of themselves

In recognising the potential risk, services should explore with survivors what support they already have in place before any Authentic Voice, and offer a choice of extra support, for example, peer support spaces, group, or individual clinical supervision. This is in addition to a dedicated support person in the organisation. There should be a clear expectation that each survivor will be having some form of support, which is funded by the service, to reduce the possible harm to their wellbeing from the work.

Support and information are offered before, during and after the survivor uses their voice. This gives space to talk about what went well, and what was difficult, and if there are any further supports needed.

Together, the service and survivors create a culture which is safe and supportive, supports education, growth, and learning, and reflects all the Authentic Voice principles.