

# Guidance on Consent

Authentic Voice work is deeply personal and can come with significant risks for survivors. We have discussed general safety considerations in the Guidance on Safety section of this Toolkit. Here we will provide more detail about the ethical considerations of consent and what constitutes valid consent.

## Why is consent important?

Domestic abuse is characterised by control; some perpetrators will use personal knowledge of the survivor to wield this control. It is vital that we do not perpetuate this power dynamic in the work we do. Survivors should always have control over what they share, who this is shared with and what is done with the information they have shared.

For consent to be valid it must be:

- Informed
- Able to be withdrawn
- Freely given i.e. without pressure or duress
- For a specific timeframe and purposes

## Informed Consent

Consent is meaningless if survivors do not feel informed about what they are consenting to. In addition to consent forms, it is good practice to provide further information on the project in an accessible way. It's good practice to create an information sheet which details the following information, and which can be both read out to a survivor and provided in writing for the survivor to keep (if this is safe). It's important to consider how a survivor's situation may change and impact on their feelings about consenting; for example, when working with a young person who is sharing their story online it is helpful to explore how they will feel about their experience being publicly available in a few years' time.

Survivors will be informed:

- That they do not need to participate in the work, and can stop doing the work at any time
- That they can withdraw their consent (see below)
- That they will not need to answer all questions
- About the intention of the piece of work
- How the information they provide will be used
- How they can be informed of the impact of their work
- Who the audience of the work will be

## Withdrawing consent

It must be made clear from the outset that a survivor can withdraw consent, and how they can do this. In addition to completing a consent form survivors will also be given information about the project which will include:

- Details of who the survivor can contact to withdraw consent
- Details of when consent can no longer be withdrawn
- Assurances that withdrawing consent does not impact on access to services
- The timeframe for when consent can no longer be withdrawn should be reasonable and based on the piece of work.

### Example – Media Interviews

Media interviews will not usually have a long period between the interview being completed and being published. In this case, work would be done with the survivor prior to completing the interview, and an agreement created with the journalist to share the piece prior to publication and a deadline set when it will be put into publication. Once the piece is published, it will be widely available.

### Example – Research Interviews

Research interviews will generally have a longer period for survivors to withdraw consent, but there will be a point where the information has been analysed and it is no longer possible to remove this.

## Freely given consent

It must be clear that there will be no negative impact on the survivor for choosing not to participate in the piece of work. Think also about who is asking the survivor if they would like to participate; we know that there are sometimes situations where survivors talk about feeling 'indebted' to services, or where they might feel uncomfortable rejecting an offer from a senior member of staff. It is good practice to set up an enquiry process so that enquiries can come into a central point rather than individual survivors being put on the spot and feeling indebted or pressured into saying yes to getting involved. An example enquiry form is included in this toolkit.

## Specific timeframe and purposes

### Example

A survivor would like your website to host a blog detailing their experience. After exploring the possible impact of this with them, you should agree a maximum period of time you will host the blog (with the understanding that it can be removed at any point if consent is withdrawn), and if the person is happy with their words and experiences being used in other ways, such as in consultation responses. Consider how the survivor may feel if they unexpectedly saw their experience, for example in a publicity campaign.

Be clear on how long you will keep information about a participant, and what you will use this for. Depending on the piece of work, you may ask for consent to contact the survivor in the future for any further follow-up.

## Confidentiality, anonymity and safety

The safety and anonymity of all survivors will be prioritised. Consent forms and information sheets will clearly set out confidentiality and its limits, and this will be clearly explained at the beginning of all pieces of work, ensuring informed consent. Care will be taken to ensure that information which could lead to the identification of a person sharing their voice is not included in publications. The only time that we would be obligated to share personal information relating to an adult is if they are at immediate risk of harm, there is a concern about terrorism or money laundering or if an individual disclosed information which suggested a child or 'vulnerable adult' has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed. Participants can be informed and can ask about Safeguarding policies at any time during the work.

## Data management

All data collected will be stored in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act and 2016 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).