

# Guidance on Safety

## Do No Harm

One of our Authentic Voice Principles is that using Authentic Voice must Do No Harm. When we talk of harm, we mean this in the broadest possible sense. Harm refers not only to the risk to a person from perpetrators of domestic abuse (though this should always be addressed) but harm can also occur from a lack of appropriate support around sharing Authentic Voice. As a result, you should consider participants' safety and wellbeing for all Authentic Voice work.

## Safety

Authentic Voice work should address safety throughout all activities, including before, during and after the work ends. Where a person identifies any potential safety issues in sharing their experiences, it is the responsibility of the service to work with the person to find the best and safest way to use their voice.

Where someone is currently experiencing domestic abuse, it may be extremely difficult for contact to be safe, and in turn for participation work to be safe. In scenarios like this it would be best practice to signpost to specialist domestic abuse organisations to provide more appropriate support. It should be recognised that even if the relationship ends, the abuse may not, and risk can be fluid. This should be built into any safety planning as standard.

## Wellbeing

It is vital to consider the wellbeing of survivors engaging in Authentic Voice work. This will be individual to each survivor, but will include consideration of the following themes (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Clarity of role for the survivor
- Clarity of role for professionals partnering with the survivor
- Clarity of role for the support person
- How much a survivor can influence
- How survivors will be valued, including payment and acknowledgment for their work
- Risk of triggering or re-traumatisation
- Risk of vicarious trauma in working with other survivors whilst holding personal trauma
- Risk of experiencing harm as a result of poor inclusion or accessibility
- What support is in place for this work
- How much work a survivor is doing
- Where a survivor's occupation may impact, or be impacted by, the work
- Where survivors are working as both survivors and professionals on a piece of work, its impact on the above considerations

## Ways to support survivors' wellbeing

This is a helpful way to start these conversations **with** survivors and is not an exhaustive list. As with all safety planning, this will be completed with survivors, not on their behalf.

- Working with survivors to create an enquiry form for requests for Authentic Voice input – this will ensure that survivors have the information they need prior to accepting a piece of work
- Developing clear roles and responsibilities for people providing support and professionals partnering with survivors
- Providing formalised support (see Support Frameworks section below), recognising that more support may be required on particular pieces of work
- Including 'no go' areas that the survivor does not want to work on or discuss on the Risk and Decision Log
- Providing vicarious trauma training
- Ensuring accessibility is threaded throughout all work to ensure inclusion (see chapter 2 of the Toolkit – Authentic Voice for all)

Risk and recovery are not static or linear; the dynamic nature of both means that safety should be an ongoing consideration throughout a person's Authentic Voice work.

## Safeguarding

Be clear in all Authentic Voice work about your safeguarding policy and procedures. This should be made clear to survivors before they share their voice. This should be revisited on regular occasions to ensure safeguarding is everybody's business and a core thread running through the work you do.

## Risk

Risk is dynamic and can change over time. For this reason, we suggest that risk is assessed frequently, and in different ways, throughout a person's AV journey, so that risk can be managed.

### Risk assessment throughout AV

#### Starting AV

- DASH Risk Identification Checklist (where appropriate – this is discussed further below)
- Risk and Decision Log

#### During AV

- Project Risk Assessments

#### After AV

- Review Risk and Decision Log to determine any further support required

## Starting AV

### When is a person 'ready' to share their Authentic Voice?

This is individual for every person and should be explored with them when they express interest in AV and throughout their AV work. Sharing AV can be emotionally difficult, this can vary on different projects and for different people at different times in their lives. This is why it is fundamental that there is a clear support framework in place.

It is important that we don't exclude people, who are closer to their experiences, from AV work; it is our role to create structures which can safely support individuals in this situation. It is important to work with the person to create clear boundaries. Whilst it can be tempting to want to fix everything when people are going through some difficult experiences, it can also be exhausting and lead to feeling disenchanted. Work with the person to identify something small and specific at first to build in success and achievement.

Also consider different models of AV, which may suit the person better. For example, a panel model where there is parallel/peer support available, may be more beneficial for a person than an individual model that requires more intensive engagement.

## General Safety

When a person first expresses interest in Authentic Voice, it is good practice to discuss their current risks and, where appropriate, complete a DASH Risk Identification Checklist. This clarifies what risks there are for the person sharing their voice and means that you can safety plan around these risks with the person. However, use your professional judgement to assess if this is the best option: it might do more harm than good where someone's experience is not recent or where they have recently completed a DASH. If you are not familiar with the DASH, please seek out training ([link in training website](#)).

### Safety in Authentic Voice

Once the person's general safety needs are addressed you should complete a Risk and Decision Log with them. This is a document that specifically considers the risks associated with sharing Authentic Voice.

When a person is thinking about sharing their voice, these are considerations to discuss:

#### Who might be harmed?

- The person sharing their experience
- Their family/friends
- Others within an AV group
- Other survivors

#### What risks need to be considered?

- Risk of physical and/or emotional harm from perpetrator(s) increasing
- Risk of physical and/or emotional harm from other family or community members
- Risk to children, other family members or community members, both physically and emotionally
- Risk to ongoing court proceedings (criminal, civil or family court)
- Risk of perpetrator(s) raising a defamation claim against you
- Risk to wellbeing as a result of being triggered
- Risk to access to services
- Risk of backlash in the community or on social media
- Risk of harm from lack of support
- Risk of harm from failure to create a safe space for people to share their Authentic Voice

This is not an exhaustive list of potential risks, and risks should always be explored with the person using their Authentic Voice. You should complete a Risk and Decision Log with all survivors at the outset of their Authentic Voice work, and revisit this at least quarterly and at any point where risk changes.

Where there is a change in risk, you should consider completing a further DASH Risk Identification Checklist, ensuring the person's safety plan is up to date (see our safety planning tool here), and making appropriate referrals for specialist support.

### **Safety when there are ongoing court cases (including family court cases) or active criminal investigations**

If the person with lived experience has an active criminal investigation or court case, it is fundamental that nothing you do could jeopardise the outcome of this case. Be aware of notes you make about a person's experience that could be requested as evidence. Also, public facing work where a person describes their lived experience or identifies themselves as having been impacted by domestic abuse relevant to the case can be used to discredit a person in court.

## **During AV**

You should complete a Project Risk Assessment with survivors for each project and event they are involved in. We have options for in-person events, online events and project work. It is important to consider both ongoing risks, and risks from specific pieces of work.

In completing these documents, make sure you are considering the ways harm can be caused more widely. In addition to the potential risk from perpetrators, work with the survivor to understand how they might feel before, during and after the piece of work.

Some considerations when completing these documents:

### **Role of the survivor**

- Is it clear what the survivor is doing as part of the event/piece of work? What is the remit of the work they are doing, and is this clear to the survivor? Consider the risks and value of asking survivors to rate work, rather than be involved in the creation of work.
- Is it clear when this will happen, and how they will participate? Does this clash with other important dates for them?
- Does the survivor have any questions about this?
- Who will be present at events? What has been put in place to ensure that the survivor is comfortable with who is attending?
- Is it clear what will be paid, and how payment works? Are expenses paid? Do you need to arrange for transport and accommodation
- Will paid involvement impact the participant's immigration status or benefits claim?
- Has there been agreement on photographs/screenshots and their usage?

### **Confidentiality**

- Does the survivor need a disclaimer about their confidentiality needs?
- Do you have confirmation about whether the event will be recorded?

### **Media**

- Will there be any media involvement in the work? (See our Media Risk Assessment in the Communications and Media section)

### **Impact and Reach**

- What is the intended impact and outcome of the work?
- How will the survivor know their voice or experience has had impact?
- How will the survivor be acknowledged in the work?
- Who is the audience, and where will they be? E.g. will the audience be national, or local?
- Will the work be recorded and disseminated? If so, where will it be disseminated and to whom?

### **Accessibility**

- Is the work accessible? Consider not just physical accessibility, but how the work can meet the needs of survivors who have been marginalised or have different accessibility needs. More information can be found in our 'Who and Why' section.

### **Support**

- What support is in place? Is there at least one person present specifically for the purpose of supporting survivors? Is this enough support for the number of survivors who may be there (including survivors attending in a professional capacity)?
- Is the survivor happy to take questions? Who is in place to monitor chat functions online, or to step in when questions are asked the survivor is not comfortable answering? Have you established what the anticipated boundaries are for the survivor?
- Is there a quiet space for people to take time out?
- Have you arranged pre-briefs and debriefs?

## After AV

When a person comes to the end of their AV involvement, you should revisit the risk and decision log again. It is especially important to consider any support needs and how these can be met.

Ellen has experienced domestic abuse from her ex-husband, who is also the father of her two children. You have been approached by a conference where the topic is domestic abuse and mental health and have been offered a spot for someone in your group to speak. Ellen would like to share her insights but is frightened of the possibility of her ex-husband finding out she has done this. Ellen fled to safety, and charges against her ex-husband are currently going through court.

What are the risks here?

For example:

- Ellen could be located, and suffer further harm
- Her words could be used to discredit her evidence in court
- Her ex may try to sue for defamation
- How might the children be impacted
- Are there any family court proceedings ongoing that could also be impacted
- Is the date of the conference around any major dates (either in court, or dates that could be triggering)
- How is talking about her experience publicly going to impact Ellen
- Might Ellen be impacted by other speakers
- Ellen might be engaging with an attendee (for example her mental health worker)

You would be led by Ellen about the particular risks in her situation.

How might Ellen use her Authentic Voice safely in this situation?

Given the ongoing court proceedings, it is unlikely to be appropriate for Ellen to speak publicly at the conference. However, she could contribute to the conference in different ways.

Things to consider:

- Is the event open or do attendees need to register
- Can the organiser share the list of attendees with you and Ellen to determine if there is anyone attending who could identify her experience
- Is the event in person, online, or a hybrid of the two
- Is the event going to be recorded
- Can Ellen attend with her camera off and change her screen name, or use an anonymous account set up for this purpose
- Can she contribute her experience anonymously (bear in mind identifying details that should be removed)
- Can she provide suggestions around what sessions are run at the conference

## Support Frameworks

Authentic Voice is personal and calls survivors to draw upon their own experiences of domestic abuse. This can be emotionally difficult and may risk impacting mental health and wellbeing; at times a person may not anticipate using their lived experience will impact on them emotionally. It is therefore essential that there are frameworks available for support.

We have developed a Pre-Brief/Debrief document which has practical points to employ at each of these stages.

It is important to take the time to build good relationships with people sharing their Authentic Voice. We begin with safety planning, which is built on the trust of a survivor disclosing relevant information about their experiences to work together in keeping safe.

### Pre-Meet

Prior to an event or project, arrange a pre-meet with the survivor and relevant parties. This can include conference/event organisers, consultation co-facilitators and staff with responsibility for a project or piece of work. This is an opportunity to be clear on what the boundaries of the piece of work are, what the expectations are of each party, and to discuss how the survivor will be recompensed and acknowledged for their work. It is important that the survivor is given an opportunity to ask questions. Good practice would be to collect as much information about the project beforehand; this allows the survivor to be prepared for any questions or potential triggers.

### Pre-brief

A pre-brief occurs immediately before a piece of work that a survivor is involved in. The meeting is an option to ensure that everything is in place for the survivor to fully engage in the work, and to discuss any concerns or queries. Where events are taking place online, it is also an opportunity to conduct a technical check to ensure that the survivor is able to engage with the work. Technical checks should be scheduled with extra time to rectify any issues.

## **Debrief**

Debriefs occur immediately after a piece of work that a survivor is involved in, or as soon as the survivor is available if they are not available immediately afterwards. It is an opportunity to reflect on how the work went, and any areas for improvement. It also provides space for someone to take some time to wind down after work which may have involved delving into a very personal and potentially traumatic space. Some people like to set aside more time after this where they are not going back into their daily tasks. It can also be worthwhile to have a longer-term debrief. This allows for more space to reflect on how the work went.

## **Support Person**

Every person sharing their lived experience should have a single point of contact within an organisation who they keep in regular contact with. We recommend that this is at least quarterly, with more check-ins depending on the individual situation and work the person is doing.

Where a person is attending an in-person event, there should always be a named person present. This may be the survivor's usual support person, or another person they have a trusting relationship with. This should be the named person's only role at the event. Depending on the way your organisation carries out Authentic Voice work, the support person may be from a specialist service.

## **Clinical Supervision**

It is good practice to have access to Clinical Supervision available for people who are engaged in longer term Authentic Voice activities. This provides an independent reflective space facilitated by an experienced mental health practitioner to reflect on the impact of the work. This applies to both survivors and participation leads, but especially survivors in professional roles as well.

## **Employee Assistance Programme**

Check if you have an Employee Assistance Programme in your organisation, and whether people sharing their lived experience (including colleagues) have access to this. This can include both therapeutic and legal support.

## **Peer Support**

As well as professional support, it is essential to consider the importance of peer support. Being the only known survivor in a room with professionals can be an isolating experience and may impact on a survivor's wellbeing. To redress what can feel like a power imbalance, it is important to view survivors not only as individuals, but as groups of peers who can support each other. You should consider how to do this safely, considering confidentiality and group dynamics. We have developed a confidentiality tool that can support this (see below).

## **Data Protection**

All information about people sharing their lived experience should be stored according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and information sharing protocols. Consider any possible conflicts of interest in your organisation. For example, if a survivor is accessing services from your organisation whilst engaging in Authentic Voice work, are case files and files related to their AV work kept in separate confidential locations. This should be expressly addressed prior to work beginning.