

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



This guide is for human rights activists, advocates, journalists, filmmakers and others who are filming and conducting interviews with survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) for human rights documentation and advocacy. The following tips will assist you in ensuring that your approach, questions, and conduct throughout the interview respect the dignity and human rights of your interviewee.

GETTING STARTED

When you approach survivors of GBV and ask them to share their stories, it is essential to treat their experience with compassion and sensitivity. Consult an experienced interviewer, mental health professional, and/or existing video testimonies to help prepare your interviewing approach, questions, body language, and tone. Before filming, ask yourself: is video the best way to attain your goals? What are the potential security risks - does your interviewee want to be shown on camera? How will your video be used?



INTERVIEWING

- **PREPARE** your questions ahead of time and share with your interviewee
- **RESPECT** the interviewee's refusal to discuss uncomfortable questions
- **AVOID** directly or indirectly blaming the survivor for their experience, do not intentionally ask questions aimed at provoking an emotional response
- **BE CONSCIOUS** of word choice: rape is not sex, and some interviewees may not be comfortable speaking directly about sexual violence. Ask what they would like to identify as, a victim, survivor, neither, or both?
- **CREATE** open ended questions - encourage the interviewee to incorporate the question into their answer

- To help ensure ethical interviewing and your interviewee's agency, it is important to obtain informed consent - that the interviewee understands and consents to how and why they are being filmed, and the intended use of such footage.

INFORMED CONSENT

- **INTRODUCE** yourself to the interviewee and let them know who you work with and why you are filming.
- **AVOID** creating an environment in which the interviewee may feel pressured to consent.
- **EXPLAIN** that consent can be withdrawn at anytime and filming may be paused or permanently halted whenever they choose.
- **CONSIDER** choosing a gesture or safe word to signify a pause or halt.
- **ENSURE** the interviewee understands the scope of the project by asking them to explain in their own words .



When you explain the intended use of the footage, remember that once a video is shared on the internet, you cannot control how and when it is further shared. This can be done in writing and on or off camera.

SECURITY

- What is the safest location for the interview? Ask for your interviewee's input.
- Make arrangements for your interviewee's and your own safe travel to and from the filming location.

- Discuss security threats with interviewee.
- Do you need to protect your interviewee's identity?
- What other information, ie names, locations, occupations, etc, needs to stay confidential?



BEFORE

- Gather, prepare, and test equipment in advance especially microphones and audio recorders
- Bring extra batteries and memory cards



- If needed, try to help find childcare arrangements
- Prepare a comfort kit of tissues, snacks, water and a mirror for your interviewee
- Identify support options and ask if there is anyone the interviewee would like present
- Turn off or set to silent all devices

DURING

- Direct interviewee where to look - at the camera or you
- Stay silent - use nonverbal listening cues to signal acknowledgment of what they are saying
- Respect the interviewee's limits
- Keep camera steady or use a tripod
- Film ethically - unless filming for evidentiary purposes, do not film wounds scars or injuries

AFTER

- Get your interviewee's feedback
- Revisit safety and security measures
- Clarify next steps
- Offer support options for interviewee, interviewer, and team
- Share the final video and stay in touch, honor the interviewee's wishes
- Preserve: maintain and store your footage securely

MORE
RESOURCES

visit the **WITNESS** library for:

- Case Studies
- Obtaining Informed Consent
- Concealing Identity
- Video Advocacy Toolkit
- Activists' Guide to Archiving Video
- Video Series: Interviewing Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

library.witness.org

GBV Guide Tipsheet - v1.0 - USA



SEE IT
FILM IT
CHANGE IT