

Sharing the Message of Human Trafficking: A Public Awareness and Media Guide



Sharing the Message of Human Trafficking

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Introduction

Human trafficking is a very real and devastating form of abuse that affects women, men, and children from all walks of life. Human trafficking, especially the trafficking of women and children, is not a new issue. Human trafficking has plagued our communities for centuries yet has gone largely unrecognized and unaddressed. It is only within the last decade that the media, multi-disciplinary professionals, and concerned citizens alike have taken note of this social justice issue. Due to this increased interest, an unprecedented number of people are engaged in efforts to combat human trafficking. While most involved in the anti-trafficking movement are well intentioned, often times the behaviors and actions undertaken by these allies are harmful to the very survivors they are trying to serve. Within the anti-trafficking movement, more and more survivors are being used as propaganda. They are asked to share their stories in order to raise funds or awareness with little thought to the effects of such exposure. In addition, rather than being recognized and/or compensated as experts and leaders in the anti-trafficking movement, survivors are being taken advantage of in the pursuit of a story that has emotional pull.

As allies and partners in the anti-trafficking movement, we must do better. The complexity and scope of this issue demands collaboration – no one person can do it alone. However, we must be thoughtful and intentional in the ways we engage and utilize survivors in the anti-trafficking movement. We must move beyond rescuing and focus instead on providing survivors with a safe context to achieve their full potential. Whether through direct service efforts or community awareness campaigns, we must ensure our practices help transition individuals from being a victim to a survivor, to an overcomer, to a leader in whatever capacity they may choose. This guide is intended to assist survivors, social service agencies, and media representatives as they thoughtfully consider how survivor stories should be written and portrayed in the media and used within the anti-trafficking movement as a whole. As allies in the anti-trafficking movement, we must act with integrity and ensure that our good intentions are backed-up with thoughtful consideration. All communication should aspire to:

- Demonstrate **RESPECT** for Victims, Survivors, Overcomers, and Leaders.
- Build **TRUST** that has been lost due to previous abuse and exploitation.
- Exhibit **BOUNDARIES** and **DISCRETION** in a manner that puts the needs of Victim, Survivor, Overcomer, and Leader first.
- **EDUCATE** by addressing the injustice rather than exploiting the Victims, Survivors, Overcomers, and Leaders in the anti-trafficking movement.
- **RECOGNIZE** the **EXPERTISE** of Victims, Survivors, Overcomers, and Leaders.

To Victims, Survivors, Overcomers, and Leaders

It takes incredible courage and strength to confront your history of abuse and exploitation. Thank you for your willingness to use your expertise and past experiences in the anti-trafficking movement. In whatever way you choose to be involved, you are an essential part of the solution to ending human trafficking.

When done with careful consideration, sharing your story can be a powerful and healing experience (Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Douglas, 2013). However, if done too soon or without proper preparation the effects can be quite negative. Before deciding to share your story for any purpose, it is important to thoughtfully consider the questions, as well as pros and cons, below with a trusted mentor, family member or service provider.

1. Are your experiences of abuse and exploitation the primary message of “your story?”
2. Are you aware of, and/or have you embraced, the positive and/or happy components of “your story?”
3. Are you sharing “your story” because you want to or because you feel that you have to?
4. Are you sharing “your story” for your benefit, or for the benefit of the person or organization that asked you?
5. Are you comfortable with anyone or rather, everyone knowing “your story?”
6. What are the parts of “your story” that you feel comfortable sharing?
7. What are the parts of “your story” that you feel uncomfortable sharing?
8. How will you handle the situation and/or what will you say if someone asks you about these issues that make you uncomfortable?
9. When sharing “your story,” what is the primary message you want listeners or readers to walk away with?
10. When sharing “your story,” what behaviors, situations, or circumstances might make you feel respected and empowered?
11. Who is it that you trust and can call in order to process stressful situations that arise due to the sharing of “your story?”
12. How might you confront or educate a person who uses the information about “your story” in a manner that causes you and/or those you care about to feel uncomfortable?

Following are a few pros and cons of sharing “Your Story”:

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aid in personal healing and growth • empowering to others • provide hope for other survivors • educate and raise awareness about human trafficking, labor and/or sexual abuse and exploitation • agent for change in the current legal/justice system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no control over who hears your story • loss of privacy in current/future personal and professional life • story can be accessed by future employers, admission representatives, significant others etc. • vulnerable to judgment by peers, employers, educators, family etc. • can be traumatizing to relive past experiences of abuse/exploitation • story might be manipulated/interpreted by the media and/or others in unanticipated or unapproved ways |

To Social Service Agencies/Not-for-Profits

Story is a powerful medium. A well told story can make an issue like human trafficking personally relevant to those who hear it. Such stories encourage action in ways that facts and figures may not. However, it is the responsibility of social service agencies and not-for-profits serving survivors of human trafficking to protect the well-being of these survivors. This includes understanding if and when it is appropriate to share a survivor's story.

It is important that agencies reflect on why they are considering using a survivor's story. Is sharing the story therapeutic and beneficial for the survivor or is it a way to seek benefits for the agency? Even raising awareness about human trafficking, though noble, is not a sufficient enough cause to share a survivor's story when doing so harms the survivor in any way (Countryman-Roswurm, 2012; Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Lloyd, 2013). When a survivor re-tells their story, he or she relives that past trauma. This can be emotionally overwhelming especially if the survivor suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2011; Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women, 2012).

Beyond the emotional ramifications, there can be both short and long term consequences of sharing a story with the media. That survivor will be vulnerable to judgment and will no longer have control of who knows about their past experience (Countryman-Roswurm, 2012; Lloyd, 2013). Because of technology, individuals will have access to this information for years to come. This means future employers, college admissions boards, etc. will have full access to the survivor's past. Family members and those close to the survivor will also deal with these ramifications (Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2011; Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women, 2012). Ultimately, there is no cause significant or important enough to jeopardize the emotional and physical well-being of a survivor (Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Lloyd, 2013). Survivors of human trafficking have overcome exploitation and they should not be further commodified by those trying to help (Countryman-Roswurm, 2014; Douglas, 2013).

Agencies thinking about having a survivor share their story should consider several questions:

1. Why am I asking this survivor to share their story?
2. Is there another way to accomplish this same goal?
3. Who benefits more from telling this story, the survivor or my agency?
4. Where is this survivor at in their recovery process? Will re-telling their story cause emotional harm or be re-traumatizing?
5. Are they developmentally, mentally, and emotionally, able to consider the consequences of their story?
6. What affects might this have on the survivor both long and short term?
7. Is the survivor aware of these long and short-term effects?

8. Does the survivor have the proper emotional and social support to cope with possible side effects?
9. Is the survivor being manipulated or do they feel pressured in any way to share their story?
10. How is the survivor being compensated for their time and for sharing their story? Are they being compensated in a manner that you would expect for sharing your expertise?

To Media Outlets

Media representatives play an important role in protecting the well being of trauma survivors who choose to share their story (Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women, 2012). Based on facts included or emphasized, journalists determine how a story will be framed and what the important issues will be (Tiegreen & Newman, 2008a; Tiegreen & Newman, 2008b). When this is done well, stories can effect public perceptions and opinions in a positive way (Chicago Taskforce on Violence Against Girls and Young Women, 2012). However, if reporting is not approached with thoughtfulness and intentionality it can be harmful to the survivor.

Tips for Reporting on Human Trafficking:

- Consider the potential risk for the survivor in discussing their experience.
- Consider conducting a confidential interview and putting safeguards in place to protect the survivor's privacy (i.e. blurred picture, pseudo name).
- Prepare for the interview by researching causes and impacts of human trafficking.
- Recognize the survivor as the expert on his or her own experiences.
- Be cognizant of the language used during the interview and when reporting.
- Recognize the survivor's right to say no and to refuse to answer questions.
- Set good ground rules. Let the survivor know how long the interview will last and what questions will be asked.
- Have a conversation with the survivor regarding the parts of "their story" that they feel comfortable and/or uncomfortable sharing.
- Encourage the survivor to bring a trusted friend, family member or service provider to provide support during and after the interview.
- Let the survivor read or view the story before it is published to ensure that it is representative of their personal experience.
- Direct readers or viewers to relevant resources on human trafficking within the community such as the Wichita State University, Center for Combating Human Trafficking or Wichita Children's Home.

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