

WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF TRAUMA GUIDE

While shedding light on human consequences of traumatic events is a journalistic duty, you have an obligation to represent their trauma in a professional and non-exploitative manner.

- Acknowledge that people affected by traumatic events may not be reliable sources. Witnessing traumatic events, or fear of injury or death can significantly affect perceptions and judgments. Try to thoroughly double-check facts, names, times and places before exploring victims' and survivors' feelings.
- Never name a survivor without that person's explicit and informed consent. The use of a first name only or a pseudonym is not always enough to hide someone's identity. Consider obscuring certain identifiers that would indirectly reveal the person's identity.
- Trauma victims/survivors are often psychologically and emotionally vulnerable; approach them with care and respect. Take your time in introducing yourself and explaining to them why you would like to interview them. Do not rush and begin your interview before making sure that they are ready and comfortable to receive your questions.
- If the trauma victims/survivors seem frozen and unable to talk, do not exert pressure to conduct the interview or to explore certain details they are not willing to share with you. Respect their privacy and consider the asymmetric power dynamics between the victims/survivors and the journalists. If you forced them to speak about traumatic details, you might trigger symptoms that are very similar to the original assault or violation they have witnessed.
- Acknowledge and be aware of your own feelings when reporting traumatic events and experiences, keep a healthy distance with the victims and survivors. The inclination to "over-empathize" can be dangerous and can negatively affect both your interviewees and your reporting.