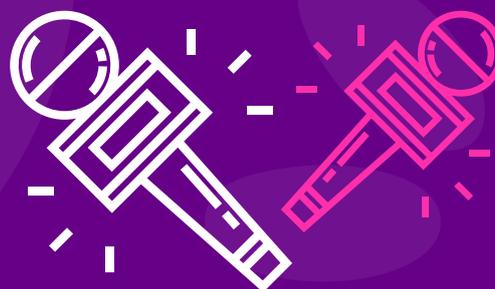




Cymorth i Ferched Cymru  
Welsh Women's Aid

## Guidance for journalists reporting on sexual violence



### Why is this important?

Sexual violence can be an emotive and challenging topic to report on and read about. Doing so in an accurate and trauma-informed way can tackle stigmas and stereotypes within society, while also ensuring that survivors who identify with your article can access much needed support- by getting this right, you could improve and save lives.



#### Consent

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Within the legal boundaries that sometimes dictate certain language choices in reporting, the correct terminology around consent, is vital.

'Sex' requires consent which is freely given by all parties. If consent is not given (for example but not limited to if someone is asleep, if they are coerced into consenting or if they are too intoxicated to give consent) the action is assault and/ or rape. It is important that this is reflected in reporting, when legally possible. For instance, to say "the man had sex with her while she was asleep" would be incorrect, the woman in this scenario has not consented, so the action was not 'sex'.



#### Choosing non victim-blaming language

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Sexual violence happens because a perpetrator chooses to enact it- it is never the fault of the survivor or a consequence of a survivor's circumstances or actions. Steer away from unhelpful stereotypes around sexual violence that contribute to a culture of victim blaming. For instance, a pointed focus on what the survivor was wearing, if they were drinking or had taken drugs, their physical and mental health, or framing their behaviour as problematic or a cause of the assault e.g. walking alone or being attacked at night/ in a remote area.



## Terminology around age

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It is crucial that any reporting about survivors of sexual violence uses the correct terminology, working within the legalities that surround language. For example, if a survivor is under the age of 16, they are a child not a “young woman”.



## Intersectionality and sensitivity

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Be mindful of your framing of the violence in question and try to always be sensitive to the circumstances of those surviving it. Some types of sexual violence have particular stigmas and stereotypes surrounding them, such as FGM\*- insensitive, or inaccurate reporting can perpetrate these further. If you are unsure about how to discuss a particular type of violence, contact an expert organisation for their advice. If they are a national organisation, they will likely have a media officer or an expert who will be happy to talk to you- it's better to ask the question and work with those who can help you.

Remember that some survivors have more privilege than others in how easily and freely they can communicate with the press about their experiences. This can be a consequence of age, race, disability, sexuality, complex family circumstances etc. Some survivors will have additional barriers and anxieties around communicating with you, but this doesn't make telling their stories any less important or valid. Allowing the time to build trust with interviewees, ensuring an understanding support system is on hand and working alongside specialist services can go a long way in helping.



## Sexual violence is a spectrum

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It's important to remember that sexual violence is not just the most extreme violations of rape, but also includes sexual harassment, groping, inappropriate touching and much more. So-called 'low level' harmful sexual violence behaviours can be incredibly traumatic, for survivors to both experience and read about. Treat all acts of violence with the same gravity and do not excuse any behaviour, even if you don't deem it the worst or most serious type of violence.



## Interviewing a survivor

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Speaking out about sexual violence is a big decision. If you are interviewing a survivor, it's important that you both keep in mind and value the time and emotional toll they are giving you.

Be compassionate but sincere in your approach and questioning and make sure you respect any boundaries they put in place around time commitments, methods of contact or questions they would not be comfortable in answering. Our resource on interviewing survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence has more advice on how to conduct an interview in a trauma-informed way.



## Do not speak to a (alleged) perpetrators character

Try to avoid any language that speaks to people's personal opinion of the (alleged) perpetrator. Comments such as "a neighbour spoke to how he was a gentle and polite man" "employees at his company said he was a hard worker""family have described him as a dedicated father" perpetrates myths on what constitutes abuse and who perpetrates it. They are also irrelevant to the violence that took place, and can generate bias, undermining a survivor's experience.



## Avoid sensationalised headlines

Although word count and a need for engagement is always pressing, avoid using graphic language or details within headlines. Do not sexualise the behaviour- this is a trauma not salacious, so ensure an accurate portrayal of what occurred is given. Taking a quote used in court as a headline removes all context and so has the potential to perpetrate sexual violence myths and unhelpful cultural attitudes towards survivors. If your article will be shared on social media platforms, be mindful about how audiences might respond to the headline, and the impact this may have on the survivor.



## Warn readers about details of sexual violence

Reading details on sexual violence can be particularly traumatic and triggering. If it isn't possible to place a specific 'trigger warning' ahead of your article, make sure to put in a line informing readers that the article will contain graphic or upsetting details, so they can prepare and make a choice about reading on.



## Signposting to support could help someone in need

When reporting on sexual violence it is vital to signpost to support. Support is available for survivors, regardless of how long ago the violence happened. Consuming content on this topic could trigger unexpected, strong emotions and it is responsible to provide your audience with a place to turn to.

The Live Fear Free helpline is a Welsh Government funded 24/7 helpline, offering compassionate support and advice to survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as well as concerned others, such as loved ones, neighbours, colleagues and professionals.



**Llinell Gymorth Live Fear  
Byw Heb Ofn Free Helpline**

**0808 80 10 800**

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Call: 0808 80 10 800

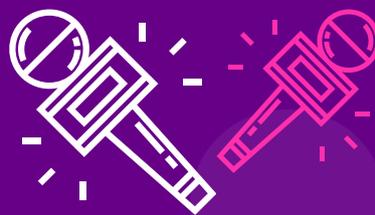


Text: 07860 077333



Webchat: [gov.wales/live-fear-free](https://gov.wales/live-fear-free)

\*FGM- Female genital mutilation – please see [welshwomensaid.org.uk](https://welshwomensaid.org.uk) for more information.



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Welsh Women's Aid**

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