



A guide to meaningful

survivor engagement

***“Feeling overwhelmed how my life has changed from believing I was going to be killed by my partner to informing laws, surrounded by the family I was once isolated from.”***

Words of a survivor, who shared her story as part of the discussions surrounding Northern Ireland’s domestic abuse bill (2021)

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# Introduction

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Funded by the CAF Covid 19 Emergency Fund, the four Women's Aid Federations (Welsh Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, Women's Aid Federation of England) and Imkaan, the only UK-based, umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls, have been working to create and develop survivor engagement opportunities in our work. The objective was to develop practices to enable diverse survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) to have increased opportunities to influence local practice and national decision-making.

We have been working in partnership to produce this resource as a best practice guide for anyone in the VAWG sector who would like to begin or develop adult survivor engagement in their work.

This toolkit has been created utilising our experience of working with adult survivors. We recognise that young people's participation is as valuable but requires many other considerations including safeguarding which we have not incorporated within this toolkit.

One of the important lessons that we have learned is that there is no "one size fits all" approach to survivor engagement.

This resource is intended as a guide to help you think about survivor engagement but is by no means claiming to provide a formula that will work for any organisation or project.

Ways of engaging survivors vary across organisations and tasks and are subject to fluctuation and change. We aim to take a trauma-informed, needs-led approach to domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, placing survivors at the heart of our work and building responses around her needs and the strengths and resources available to her. We have learnt that when needs change, our approaches often need to change too.

Effective, safe survivor engagement takes time. Building internal procedures, recruiting a diverse range of survivors who have faced different experiences and inequalities to participate, ensuring support is in place, recruiting and supporting staff all takes time, work, and dedication. But we believe the efforts are well worth it. Engaging survivors in our work, hearing their voices, listening to their experiences, and understanding their perspectives brings us invaluable knowledge and inspiration. Survivors are the experts of their own experiences, and every experience is unique.

# Meaningful engagement

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This section aims to provide guidance and practical tools for organisations working with survivors to ensure meaningful engagement throughout their work. Meaningful engagement involves active collaboration with survivors, where possible, at every stage of the process, from planning and decision-making to implementation and evaluation. By adopting this approach in your survivor engagement work, a sense of ownership, empowerment, and inclusivity can be fostered within the groups you are working with, leading to more effective and sustainable interventions.

This section also outlines key principles and provides practical strategies for meaningful engagement. There may be cases where adopting these principles may not be feasible, but we recommend they are implemented as best practice.

## Setting the foundation

**Establish a survivor-centred approach:** Ensure that survivors are at the heart of your organisation's mission, vision, and values. Acknowledge their expertise and lived experiences as invaluable resources for shaping interventions and policies.

**Create a safe and inclusive space:** Develop an environment where survivors feel safe, respected, and supported. Establish confidentiality protocols (see chapter on confidentiality) and other policies (safeguarding, confidentiality, professional boundaries, equality and diversity) to safeguard survivors' wellbeing.

**Build partnerships:** Collaborate with survivors to enhance your understanding of the diverse needs and perspectives of survivors.

## Planning and decision making

**Engage diverse voices:** Include survivors from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities in planning and decision-making processes. Consider language accessibility, intersectionality and any additional accommodations required (see chapter on inclusivity and diversity).

**Conduct needs assessments:** Involve survivors in the identification of needs, priorities, and gaps in existing services. Use a participatory approach, such as focus groups or surveys, to gather insights and recommendations.

**Co-design interventions:** Facilitate a survivor-led design process to ensure interventions are tailored to their specific needs. Engage survivors in thought-sharing, problem-solving and developing a solution, ensuring their ideas are valued.

## Implementation and service delivery

**Support survivor leadership:** Create opportunities for survivors to take on leadership roles within your organisation/project/campaign. This is dependent on your specific project/organisation. Enable survivors to actively participate in consultations, talks, events, and any other activities related to the campaign/project.

**Foster peer support networks:** Facilitate safe spaces for survivors to connect with and support one another. Encourage the formation of survivor led support groups, mentoring programmes or online communities where they can share experiences and learn from each other. It may be useful to involve other organisations to moderate these spaces.

**Continual feedback:** Establish accessible, inclusive, and effective mechanisms for ongoing feedback from and to survivors, for example through online surveys or regular catch-up meetings. Regularly seek survivors input on programme effectiveness, accessibility, and areas for improvement. Make adjustments based on feedback received where possible. If not possible, it is important to be transparent with the group as to why.

## Evaluation and learning

**Participatory evaluation:** Engage survivors in the evaluation process to assess the impact and outcomes of interventions. Use inclusive evaluation methods such as storytelling, participatory video, or arts-based approaches to capture narratives and perspectives.

**Knowledge sharing:** Share evaluation findings and lessons learned with survivors in accessible formats. Ensure that the knowledge generated is shared back within the VAWG sector, contributing to collective learning and improvement.

**Recognise and celebrate contributions:** Value the contributions of survivors at all stages of the process. Express gratitude and recognise their expertise, highlighting the importance of their involvement in creating positive change.

Meaningful engagement requires a shift from traditional consultation models, where survivors are purely used for information gathering, to genuine collaboration and partnership with survivors. Implementing the principles and strategies outlined in this section will demonstrate the commitment of organisations to ensuring that survivors have a meaningful voice in shaping interventions and policies, leading to more effective, survivor-centred, and sustainable outcomes. We have not always got it right but aim to learn from mistakes and continue to build a stronger approach to survivor engagement.

**Remember - true engagement is an ongoing commitment, and continuous learning and adaptation are essential to create lasting change.**

# Survivors' safety to engage

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If a survivor is working with your organisation for the first time, and they will be identifiable as a survivor and involved in in-person or public activities, it is important to discuss any safety concerns, and how best to support their wellbeing.

Before encouraging survivors to be engaging publicly and sharing their experiences, ensure they have reflected on safety considerations. For example, Women's Aid's [Breaking the Silence](#) resource which provides some guidance on things to consider before engaging.

Please see the survivor safety discussion form (found in the Annex) which contains some questions to prompt an initial conversation around safety and wellbeing with a survivor if she is considering engagement. Whilst we know that the survivor is the expert in her experience, it is also important to remember that survivors will be at various stages of recovery, and survivor engagement work will not necessarily be helpful for everyone and in some cases may impede recovery from trauma.

When assessing a survivor's safety and wellbeing for engagement work, consider if their involvement may include group engagement. Please note there is an additional question and points on the survivor safety discussion form around group work. It is important to consider if the survivor is safe and able to engage with other survivors and staff safely, within boundaries and with empathy.

If there are safety or wellbeing concerns surrounding a survivor's involvement with your organisation, discuss these with her and explore options to mitigate these e.g. anonymity in media work, ensuring not in any photos or social media posts, or arranging to meet in a different location/online. If you remain concerned, please follow your organisational policy, and discuss your concerns with your manager/safeguarding lead.

It is important to remember that circumstances change, and to revisit the safety discussion form with the survivor if they continue to engage with in-person or public activities. The timeframe to revisit this discussion will depend on individual circumstances, for example, an event such as prison release dates may highlight the need. However, we suggest as a minimum that you revisit this conversation annually.



# Survivors as professionals

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Women engaging with Women's Aid, Imkaan, and any of our member organisations have indicated preference of being referred to as 'survivors' or 'experts-by-experience' as opposed to 'victims', as the latter implies passivity. These terms recognise women's agency, and that they possess an expertise which needs to be at the centre of all conversations regarding domestic abuse and VAWG.

Lived experience not only illustrates a point in a more relatable way than statistics can do alone but can also bring essential actionable constructive criticism on how professionals and systems can do better.

For some women, presenting details of their lived experience can be a cathartic and empowering process of turning their 'pain into power' through sharing and contributing to much-needed change. However, survivor engagement does not have to involve women detailing their experiences, with some women preferring to engage in a way that does not involve disclosing that information.

As a woman's value derives from all her identities (including but not limited to that of 'survivor'), any of her skills, interests or experiences can be utilised when contributing to a variety of engagement projects, if she wishes.

Please note, this does not mean benefiting from free input/expertise. Instead, this could be an opportunity to work alongside, and potentially pay, an expert-by-experience who also has experience of, for example, being a health professional or a web designer, or has an interest in writing and public speaking.



# Working together agreement

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The purpose of a working together agreement is to establish an agreed-upon code of behaviour for group meetings with survivors so that everyone feels safe and able to participate; and to make sure you meet the purpose of your meetings as effectively as possible. It can be a useful tool to help promote a collective sense of belonging in a group and establish boundaries around how the group operates. All members should sign up to this agreement.

This tool should be created in collaboration with group members with their suggestions and needs included. The tool should be reviewed, for example six monthly, to ensure it reflects the dynamic needs of the group.

The agreement should be read out at the beginning of meetings before discussions start. If using online platforms, it can be posted in the chat function. As good practice, this agreement should be used in internal meetings with survivor groups, but also external engagement sessions as it can help promote the ethical and meaningful framework that VAWG services promote when working with survivors.

Please find in the Annex an example of an agreement that can be edited to suit the needs and wants of groups.



# Preparation before and after engagement

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It is important to consider survivor safety and wellbeing at every stage of their engagement. Whilst different types of engagement may require different approaches, the following checklist provides some tips and things to consider:

## Before the event

- **Safety:** Have you taken steps to ensure that participation is physically and emotionally safe for survivors, such as carrying out risk assessments and talking through any concerns a survivor may have?
- **Support needs:** Have you checked with participants in case they have any access or support needs? It is important to ask this question well in advance to ensure sufficient support is put in place in good time.
- **Venue:** Have you booked an accessible, safe, and welcoming venue? Consider all forms of disabilities, ensure women are not being asked to travel back to an unlit area, consider ease of travel and if the site is a comfortable and welcoming space for everyone.
- **Resources and activities:** Are your resources or planned activities accessible to all participants? Be mindful of those with disabilities, learning difficulties, literacy levels, and for those whose English is not their first language.
- **Childcare:** Have you taken steps to ensure women with children are able to attend? Can you cover the cost of childcare? Be mindful of school times and holidays, and that in most circumstances it is not appropriate for children to come along to the engagement.
- **Travel:** Have you arranged who will cover the cost of travel and how participants will be reimbursed? Discuss travel arrangements with participants in good time. Can you book travel in advance as opposed to asking people to make payment upfront and then be reimbursed, as waiting for expenses is often unaffordable for many people? How confident does the survivor feel making the journey? Could you offer to meet her at the nearest station?

- **Date and time:** Have you thought through the best days and times of the week to arrange meeting/event? Be mindful of times of childcare/school hours and holidays, work commitments, religious holidays, planned transport events such as strikes/engineering works. Be clear about timings of when the event will start and finish.
- **Refreshments:** Ensure that refreshments provided cater for all dietary requirements.
- **Data and confidentiality:** Have you thought through how you will safely store any data you collect? Discuss consent and confidentiality with participants including their need for anonymity and ensure that no photographs or identifying information is shared about those for whom it would not be safe, or they do not feel comfortable with sharing.

## After the event

- **Survivor follow up:** Check in with participants after the event to ensure they got home safely, thank them for participating and check any potential additional support they might need.
- **Full circle of communication:** Have you updated participants on what came from their input? What did you do with the information they shared; did anything change as a result? A full circle of communication is essential to ensure survivors feel valued and understand how their engagement impacts on the work your organisation is doing.
- **Reflections:** Provide opportunities to gather reflections from participants on the process E.g. what worked well/what could be improved (including giving the opportunity to do this anonymously). Provide opportunity for yourself/ staff to reflect and debrief. Consider how these reflections feed into learnings for future survivor engagement.
- **Staff support:** Be mindful of the possible emotional impact on you when doing engagement work, and the impact on colleagues, this includes recognition that some staff are also survivors. Do you know where to go for support if you feel you need it? For managers – remember to check in with staff members after engagement, and during supervisions.

# Opportunities to engage: hybrid models

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**Tackling barriers to engagement:** There are many reasons that accessibility and isolation may affect participation. Across the UK there are areas where rurality can impact on survivors' abilities to access and engage with services. This can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation and being sidelined from events. To help tackle this, services can look to adopt a hybrid approach to working.

This can include prompting the use of hybrid options for meetings where people are able to take part online as well as in person, depending on their preference. This can require forward planning to ensure the technology is set up and working. Things to consider:

- Can all participants access and know how to use Zoom/Teams (other online platforms)? If not, offering a tutorial on these is helpful.
- Do those joining remotely have access to a laptop and adequate internet?
- Is the WIFI connection good?
- Is there a screen and projector available?
- Are there adequate microphones for those in the room to use?
- Does everyone in the room have access to a laptop to have their cameras on during the meeting?
- Is the room/seating set up in a way to include those joining online (no backs to cameras)?

Lastly, it is useful to allocate someone to monitor the screen/chat to ensure that online participants are able to ask questions and engage in discussions equally to those in the room.

As a participation worker, or someone considering engagement work with survivors, it is important to discuss the different options to engage in meetings and establish what works best for them. If you are online, do a test trial with survivors beforehand to see if the technology works and agree on boundaries for support during the meeting. For example, if someone were to leave the chat you may have an agreement that yourself or a colleague will check in with that person. The same should be offered to those present in the room discussing support available before, during and after the meeting.

# Remuneration

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Whilst it is recognised that securing appropriate and recurrent funding within the voluntary sector can cause limitations, meaningful engagement must be properly resourced to allow for the significant capacity it will require of your organisation. Furthermore, project longevity is conducive to building trusting relationships that determine positive engagement experiences for those involved. Importantly, funding and budgets should also take into account the value of a participant's time and expertise, ensuring that no one is out of pocket for engagement-related expenses.

**Below are some pointers that may be helpful**

Budgets considerations for your **organisation**:

- Suitable staffing hours and capacity
- Long-term sustainability of the project

Budget considerations for **engagement meetings**:

- **Refreshments:** If meeting in person, consider the time at which you are meeting as it could be a good opportunity to eat together. Sharing a meal can encourage relationship building. If meeting virtually, it could be an option to post some biscuits and tea bags ahead of the meeting time - a simple way to demonstrate your value of attendees' time and effort.
- **Childcare:** We know that a lack of childcare provision can act as a huge barrier for women wanting to engage and therefore it should be considered within budget allowances.
- **Team building and social events:** Meeting with other women may be an important reason for individuals choosing to be involved with the project. Therefore, facilitating sessions that are focused on socialising is a great way of recognising everyone's efforts, prioritising the groups wellbeing, and helping everyone to feel part of a community.
- **Recognition of engagement:** Typically, participants are offering their expertise, time, and efforts free of charge. Therefore, it is important to recognise this commitment. Some organisations may have a standard compensation policy per meeting, whereas others work more ad hoc. For voluntary organisations, it could be an idea to link in with local businesses to discuss the possibility of donations.

**Budget considerations for participating individuals:**

- Travel expenses/mileage
- Payment for internet/electricity when meeting virtually
- Overnight stays and subsistence
- Compensation/payment
- Accessibility costs where applicable, for example, hiring an interpreter or a sign language signer.
- NB: Budget considerations regarding accessibility will vary per individual. Therefore, be sure to include this in any engagement registration process. Ask how attending meetings, either online or in person, could be made easier for the individual. Likewise, if written material needs to be translated.

Payment for participants is something that should be carefully deliberated before establishing policies within your organisation. For some individuals, compensation may be greatly appreciated, whereas for others, despite no obligation to participate, they may be choosing to engage as a way of 'giving back' to the organisation and therefore receiving payment may feel contradictory for them. A policy of some organisations may be to recognise engaging experts-by-experience as volunteers, therefore volunteering policies should be referred to.

Due to these inevitable differences, a suggestion may be to have some 'non-negotiables' in place to establish equality, for example, a policy that states participants should not be out of pocket for engagement-related expenses and therefore will be reimbursed. By contrast, 'additional compensation' (with the aim of acknowledging the worth of individual contributions) could work differently by providing individuals with the choice to opt-in for payment that may be offered per individual project, for example, taking part in a focus group, guest speaking at an event, or being interviewed by a researcher or journalist etc.

Payment options could include cash, cheque, bank transfer, or if using gift vouchers, it is important to ensure that they are for easily accessible shops or services that survivors can use. However, it is important to be aware that payments may be treated as earnings and could impact benefits or be subject to tax. Gift vouchers may also be considered as 'miscellaneous income' and therefore, individual organisations should seek clarity with their local tax office.

Lastly, it is important to not make decisions for individuals, therefore having a variety of options for those not wanting to receive payment may be helpful. For example, donating to a charity in their name or putting the money aside to pay for refreshments at the next meeting.

Within the voluntary sector, it is common to be approached by external agencies and government bodies that want to benefit from engagement with women who have lived experience of domestic abuse. Therefore, a suggestion would be that these agencies cover the costs for any engagement they require. This would involve following the policies your organisation already has in place regarding remuneration and could also include the request of an honorarium for any administrative tasks you have taken on to facilitate their engagement.

In conclusion, whilst the approach to payment and recognition may differ for each organisation, it is important to be consistent and transparent with whichever approach you decide upon.





# Safeguarding and staff wellbeing (trauma-informed support)

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## **Trauma-informed, strengths-based, needs-led support for survivors and the professionals that work with them**

Seeing survivors in their wholeness as individuals is key, beyond their survivor identity there are many other identities - parent, professional, artist, teacher, community member to name a few. Every individual will have their own skills and experiences. Tapping into this wealth of experiences can be a healing and empowering experience. It also amplifies the scope of survivors.

Many have experienced trauma not only in relationships or in their own home, but by the very institutions that were meant to protect them when they asked for help. Anger, frustration, and anxiety are all extremely natural responses. We need to ask ourselves not what is wrong with someone but consider what may have happened to them to cause a response.

## **Being trauma-informed**

Trauma-informed practice is a strength-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasising physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both the providers and survivors: creating an opportunity to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. A trauma-informed approach needs to take an intersectional approach to understanding the multiple disadvantages that individuals might face when accessing services involved in engagement activities. When it comes to professionals, it is vital to have the support and wellbeing at the forefront of the mind so that they do not struggle with burn out or vicarious trauma. Managers must take steps to ensure support and wellbeing for staff working with survivors is paramount. It is important for the professional and survivor that they are understood and not judged. A trauma-informed approach acknowledges that not all survivors wish to identify themselves and recognition that many staff members are survivors themselves.

## **Strengths based**

A key belief of the strengths-based approach is the idea that women are experts in their own lives. A strengths-based approach is an empowerment model, of a supportive relationship, which can increase the women's power in personal and interpersonal areas. The empowerment model uses approaches and methods which ensure that the power is in their hands and theirs alone.

**Needs-led**

Although needs-led work is predominantly the domain of the frontline service providers, there are important lessons from needs-lead work as it centralises the survivors' experience. Tailoring the needs of the survivor will always help frontline workers create trust and safety between the working partnership. There is nothing more empowering than seeing a woman stand on her own two feet after overcoming the adversity they have experienced.

The points below are to name a few:

- Be heard - listened to
- Have empathy
- Not be judged
- Be respected
- To be understood

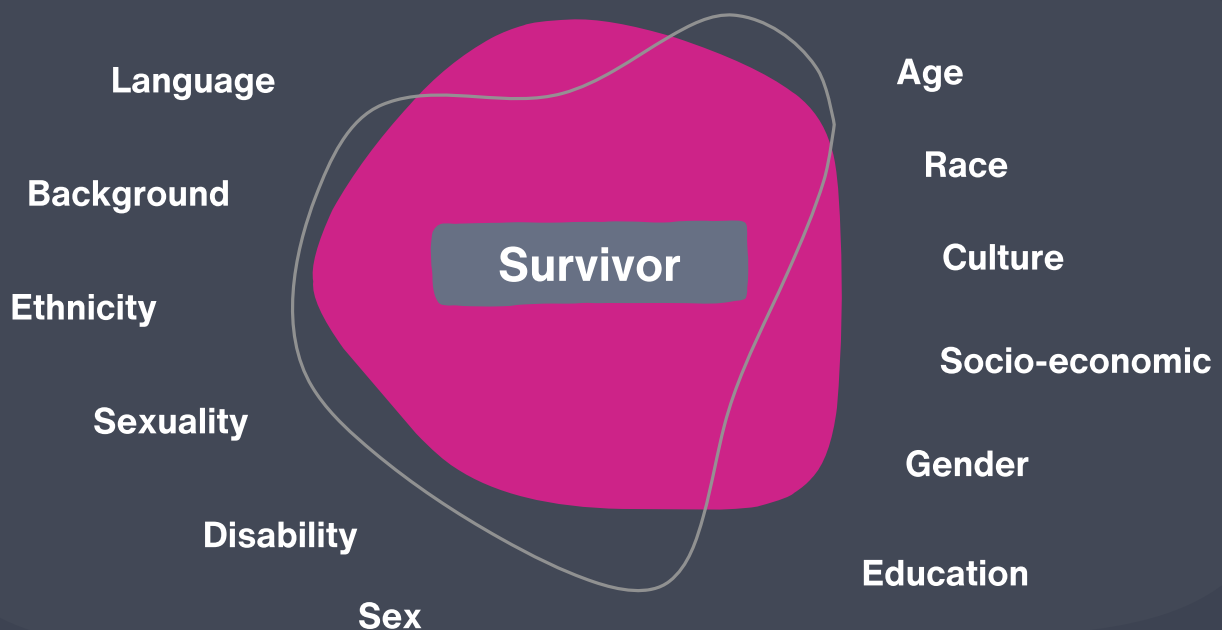


# Inclusivity, diversity and accessibility - intersectionality

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## Intersectional approach

Intersectionality is the understanding that people's identities and social positions are uniquely shaped by several factors at the same time, creating unique experiences and perspectives. These factors include, but are not limited to; race, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, class, nationality, and faith. It is important to recognise that Black and minoritised women face multiple forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and other factors. In order to work from an intersectional approach, you need to understand the interconnectedness of these identities in shaping the experiences of women from Black and minoritised communities. For example, institutional racism within the agencies, may prevent Black and minoritised women from seeking support or reporting their experiences.



## Working With Black and minoritised survivors

This section is designed to provide practical guidance for organisations working with Black and minoritised women who are survivors of violence. Imkaan defines Black and minoritised women as belonging to communities including African, Asian, Caribbean, and Latin American, defined in policy terms as 'BME'. Black and minoritised survivors have unique needs and experience unique challenges. This section also aims to offer strategies for empowerment, support, and advocacy to Black and minoritised women. By centering the experiences and perspectives of Black and minoritised women, organisations can create more inclusive and effective interventions.

### Here are some things to consider:

- When working with Black and minoritised women, recognise that race/ethnicity, and racism and discrimination, compound experiences of violence and abuse and the barriers women face in accessing safety and support. It is important to acknowledge this straight away. Also acknowledge and have a conversation around the demographic of the group.
- Is the group representative? Which demographics are under-represented? To ensure that it is a safe space, outline that there is zero tolerance on racism and have this mentioned in your group agreement.
- Are you a signatory of the [Anti-Racism Charter](#) for the VAWG Sector?
- Do not ignore race. Have anti-racism learning sessions for the whole survivor group early on. Ensure that all materials, services, and communication are available in accessible formats for the communities you serve. Some women may not be literate in the written language they speak so consider having interpreters if required.
- Consider having a subgroup for the Black and minoritised women to have a safe space to talk about racism. This should be facilitated by a Black and minoritised woman.
- Create an environment where Black and minoritised women's voices and expertise are valued and amplified.
- Having to explain racism takes a toll on Black and minoritised women. Do not rely on Black and minoritised women for education on race and racism and ensure white women in the survivor group are supported in unlearning white supremacy. Collaborate with specialist by and for Black and minoritised organisations to provide support if necessary.

**VAWG does not discriminate neither should we when we ask a survivor to engage**

By taking an intersectional approach you are enabling all the needs of every individual in the room. This is the way to take a more holistic approach to engage and does not enable further abuse or re-traumatisation. Taking this approach helps us to understand how our survivors are perceived in society but also to help shape meaningful change. It helps us to understand the barriers survivors face to obtaining care and support, but also complex traumas and oppressive systems that have a further effect on the individuals, learn the tactics and the abuser will go to, to further control to prevent victim-survivors seeking help or being believed. By addressing larger issues and educating others we can all work together to help structurally combat gender-based violence and challenge all the social norms surrounding domestic abuse in all its forms.

**Language barriers**

If there are women who are not fluent in the language of your organisation, ensure that all resources are translated and distributed in the language/s of the survivors. Interpreters should be available should the survivors want/need them. Encourage women's participation by letting them know that they are able to participate in their preferred language and that language is not a barrier to being part of the group. When hiring interpreters, hire professionals. Do not use survivors' friends or family to interpret for them.

**Disabilities**

Including women who are d/Deaf, partially sighted, or blind - ensure that you establish if the individual would need BSL interpreters or a support worker and ensure they are present when necessary. Some survivors may need help to voice their points, so take time to identify any needs they may need to communicate. When choosing interpreters they should be strangers and not known, to prevent breaches of confidentiality. It is important that when identifying suitable candidates to interpret that the individual is a part of that discussion and is happy. Never assume that they are.

**There are a vast range of disabilities**

Before we can support women affected by these types of disabilities it is vital that we understand the dynamic and complex needs to ensure we are able to meet them. Education on the different forms of disability is crucial for professionals working with survivors, as is tailoring the delivery to each individual's needs.

### **Inclusion and keeping it meaningful**

Tailoring service engagement to ensure it meets all women's needs is always going to be challenging, but identifying the needs in the very first instance is vital. Further needs are likely to be identified within engagement work so this needs to be reevaluated often. For more information on effective inclusion, please refer to the [Welsh Women's Aid Survivor Toolkit](#).

Although the needs may change quite dramatically with every survivor and the layers of the trauma, the process to build trust and understand these needs does not. It is for this very reason we must tailor our approach to engagement and design it to every single person.



# Data and confidentiality

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This chapter aims to provide guidance and practical tools for organisations to ensure the appropriate handling of data and confidentiality. Data management and confidentiality are essential in building trust with survivors as well as maintaining safety and privacy. This section will outline key considerations and provide sample templates for consent forms and best practices for data management.

**Data management and security:** It is crucial to develop (if none exist already) clear policies and procedures regarding data collection, storage, and access. You need to ensure compliance with relevant data protection regulations and laws such as the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and local legislation.

**Secure data storage:** Safeguard survivor data by implementing robust security measures. This includes encryption, secure servers, restricted access to sensitive information, and regular backups to prevent data loss. If data is collected on paper files, ensure that files are stored away and locked.

**Informed consent:** Develop consent forms that clearly explain the purpose, use, and potential risks associated with collecting and using survivor data. Ensure the forms are written in plain language and easily understandable by all survivors. Allow space for questions that may come up. (See the Annex for templates of consent forms).

**Voluntary participation:** Emphasise that survivor participation is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw consent at any time without consequence. Provide alternative options for participation, if available. For example, providing feedback on resources.

**Consent for data sharing:** If data will be shared with external organisations or researchers, seek explicit consent from survivors. Clearly outline who will have access to their data, the purpose of sharing, and any safeguards in place to protect their privacy.

**Anonymisation and de-identification:** Remove personally identifiable information from data sets whenever possible to protect survivor privacy. Use unique identifiers or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality during data analysis and reporting.

**Survivor support and information sharing - providing information:** Clearly explain to survivors how their information will be used internally, not shared externally and the steps taken to ensure their privacy. Offer survivors the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification about data management practices.

**Regular review and evaluation:** Regularly review data management policies and practices to ensure they align with the evolving legal and ethical standards. Update policies as needed and communicate any changes to staff and survivors. Use exit evaluation mechanisms when a survivor who has been engaging leaves the group.

## Confidentiality

**Confidentiality policies:** Develop and communicate clear policies regarding confidentiality to all staff members, volunteers, and partners. Clearly articulate the boundaries of confidentiality e.g. safeguarding concerns and the consequences of breaching it.

**Secure communication channels:** Utilise secure methods of communication, such as encrypted email services/databases or secure messaging platforms, when exchanging sensitive information with survivors or between staff members.

**Sharing limitations:** Inform survivors about any legal or ethical limitations on confidentiality, such as mandatory reporting of certain types of violence or situations where there is a risk of harm to self or others.

**Support services:** Ensure that survivors are aware of the support services available to them, both within your organisation and in the broader community. Provide referrals to appropriate professionals or organisations when necessary, for instance contacting [Imkaan](#) for specialist by and for Black and minoritised VAWG organisations.

**Evaluation of practices:** Assess the effectiveness of data protection measures and confidentiality protocols through regular internal audits or external evaluations. Use feedback from survivors to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes.

Data protection and confidentiality are critical aspects of working with survivors. By adopting the practices outlined in this toolkit, organisations can ensure that survivor data is handled ethically, with the utmost respect for privacy and confidentiality. Remember to regularly review and update your practices to adapt to changing requirements and maintain trust with survivors.



Thanks for taking the time to consider the points we have raised in this resource. Points that we believe are crucial in developing and supporting meaningful engagement.

**England** (Women's Aid) - [Link](#)

**Imkaan** - [Link](#)

**Northern Ireland** (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland) - [Link](#)

**Scotland** (Scottish Women's Aid) - [Link](#)

**Wales** (Welsh Women's Aid) - [Link](#)

*imkaan*

women's aid  
until women & children are safe

 scottish  
women's aid  
changing attitudes changing lives

Women's Aid  
FEDERATION  
NORTHERN IRELAND

 Covid-19  
support  
fund

  
Cymorth i Ferched Cymru  
Welsh Women's Aid

# Annex

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## SWA Survivor Reference Group working together agreement

The purpose of our working together agreement is to establish an agreed-upon code of behaviour for the Survivor Reference Group meetings so that everyone feels safe and able to participate, and to make sure we meet the purpose of our meetings as effectively as possible.

- Attend how you feel comfortable where hybrid options are offered.
- Virtual attendance - having cameras on is encouraged, however it is fine to switch on/off when needed and use the chat function if preferred to contribute to discussions.
- Respect the agenda and value the time together.
- Only one person speaks at a time – let people finish.
- If a challenge is needed, please do it respectfully.
- Be mindful of language and try to avoid acronyms or explain those – we cannot always assume that everyone has a shared understanding of everything on the agenda.
- There are no silly questions – we want there to be openness and safe discussions in the group.
- Be mindful of not using language that may be perceived as racist, ageist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, classist, cissexist, or in any other way oppressive (if you have any questions around any of those terms, please ask).
- At the end of external meetings/consultations there will be an optional 15-minute call for members of the group to attend as a debrief space.
- We recognise that individuals will have their own triggers and aim to create a safe space for discussions around pieces of work. If you need to leave the call, please know the Group Coordinator will contact you after to check in and can offer signposting to additional support if needed.

# Useful resources

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- The Lundy model of child participation - [Link](#)
- Youth Voice Toolkit - [Link](#)
- Golden Rules For Participation - [Link](#)
- VAV - One Voice at a Time - [Link](#)
- Young Expert Group (YELLO) Response to Call for Views on the Children (Scotland) Bill - [Link](#)
- Voice Against Violence - [Link](#)
- Research Integrity Framework (Women's Aid) - [Link](#)
- Responsible Reporting Matter (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland) - [Link](#)
- 'Hear Her Voice' (Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland) - [Link](#)
- Breaking the Silence (Women's Aid) - [Link](#)
- Survivor Engagement Toolkit (Welsh Women's Aid) - [Link](#)



# Survivor safety discussion form

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## Introduction, consent and confidentiality

It is important to explain the purpose of the conversation. You are asking the survivor to share personal details about their lives, and they are likely to feel more comfortable doing this if they understand the reasons you are asking such questions. It is also important to clearly lay out the limits of confidentiality.

## Safety and wellbeing discussion prompts

### How safe do you currently feel?

Example prompts:

Are you living free from violence and abuse and for how long?

Do you still have any contact with the person who was abusive? And type of contact e.g. face to face etc.

### Notes

### Do you have any on-going concerns about your safety?

For example:

- on-going abuse,
- on-going court case,
- unsafe child contact arrangements,
- release date from prison,
- or the person who was abusive knowing or finding out your address.

Are there any safety concerns about any friends or family?

### Yes/No

### Details

**How ready do you feel to use your experience to [campaign for change/ take part in research/ fundraise etc]?**

Explore the impact of re-telling their story/ being identified as a survivor, and emphasise their safety and well-being is the most important thing, the importance of setting boundaries and prioritising self-care.

Explore the possible impact of engaging with the subject of abuse, even if not they are not going to be identified as a survivor or tell their personal story – how do they feel engaging with the subject may trigger them and what support/coping strategies do they have in place to mitigate any impact?

Are they aware of support available?

**Notes:**

**Do you think that working with (your organisation) would increase any risks to your safety or affect your wellbeing? Explore impact of perpetrator/friends/ family/children/colleagues becoming aware;**

- possible impact on mental health and re-traumatisation.
- and if they have any concerns about use of drugs or alcohol as a coping strategy etc.

Ensure discussion is supportive and non-judgemental, and explore their awareness of drug/alcohol support services if relevant.

**Yes/No**

**Notes:**

### **How can (your organisation) support you to ensure your wellbeing and safety whilst working with us?**

Explore means to mitigate any concerns raised, and suggestions from survivor to support their wellbeing.

It is important to be clear about what support you can realistically offer and to be transparent if the survivor raises support needs that you do not have the capacity to provide.

### **Details**

### **Safety/ wellbeing measures:**

- Requires anonymity?
- Danger areas to avoid?
- Topics to avoid?
- Explore support network (friends/ family/ support services), and coping strategies.
- Share resources around safety including online safety, and resources for self-care.

### **For use if engagement will include group work:**

How do you feel about interacting with other survivors of domestic abuse in group settings?

Explore survivor's thoughts and feelings on hearing about other survivors experiences and what support does she have in place should this become triggering.

If the survivor is interested in joining an existing survivor engagement group, you could use this time to talk through the group agreement and explore aspects such as how she tends to respond to disagreements / conflicting viewpoints etc.

(your organisation) is committed to inclusive, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice and we aim to ensure our survivor engagement work includes women who experience intersecting forms of oppression (for example, experiences of racism, ableism, homophobia, classism and/or ageism). This space can be used to explain this to survivors interested in engaging and ask their thoughts on this.

**Are you currently receiving support from any services?**

For example, domestic abuse support service, counselling, mental health support, support for your children.

**Yes/No**

**Notes:**

**[Signpost to local service]**

**As you know, situations can change so it is important you feel you can tell us if your situation has changed in any way that affects your safety or wellbeing.**



### For media work

In most circumstances, taking the lead from the survivor following the above prompts around safety and wellbeing is sufficient. However, for media work, particularly if not anonymised, it will be important to ensure you have a clear picture about the possible impact media work could have on a survivor's safety and wellbeing. Therefore, these additional questions may be needed.

Have you had any contact in the past year with the person who abused you?	
Do they know where you live?	
Where do they live?	
Have they made any recent attempts to stalk, harass or threaten you?	
Do your children have any contact with them? (how old are the children?)	
Are your children aware of the abuse you suffered?	
Are your family (i.e. parents, siblings, etc.) aware of the abuse you suffered?	
Are there any critical events you experienced with your abuser you think we should be aware of?	
Has the person who abused you been convicted of a domestic abuse related offence against you?	
Are you involved in any on-going family or criminal court proceedings?	



**As you know, situations can change so it is important you feel you can tell us if your situation has changed in any way that affects your safety or wellbeing.**

