



A WITNESS

VIDEO FOR CHANGE



GUIDE

CONDUCTING SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This guide is part of WITNESS' Video for Change how-to series on filming safely, effectively and ethically. It's based on the best practices established over our 20 years of training and supporting human rights activists in 90 countries to use video. This guide is for human rights activists, advocates, citizen journalists, citizen filmmakers and others who are filming and conducting interviews with survivors of gender-based violence for human rights documentation and advocacy. Have ideas for how this can be enhanced?

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CONDUCTING SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF **SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Are you planning to film an interview with someone who has experienced sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV)? This type of interview, along with all human rights-related interviews, requires special consideration and preparation. A fundamental principle of using video for human rights is doing no harm, directly or indirectly, to your interviewee in the process of capturing their story. As a guiding principle, always ensure that your approach, questions and conduct before, during and after the interview respect the dignity and human rights of your interviewee. The following tips will assist you in this process.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Before you proceed with interviewing a survivor of SGBV, take time to understand and consider the impact that this violence can have on an individual. SGBV affects everyone: women, men and children and it is a traumatic experience for survivors. The effects of SGBV differ for every individual and can be long-lasting and variable over time. Common effects include (but are not limited to): physical injuries, illness and psychological issues such as shock, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In addition, there are societal attitudes and stigmas that, along with security risks, can silence survivors and prevent them from speaking out about their experience. When you approach survivors of SGBV and ask them to share their stories, it is essential to treat their experience with compassion and sensitivity. Involve your interviewee in decisions made about the interview and respect their contributions and perspectives. The goal is to leave the interviewee feeling empowered for having shared their story with a present and

compassionate individual. Conversely, a rushed or interrogative interview that doesn't take the interviewee's situation into account could leave the interviewee feeling re-victimized or exploited. Always keep consideration for your interviewee at the heart of your interview preparation and conduct.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN, ASK YOURSELF

WHY? Why do you want to use video to capture this story? Is video the most appropriate choice?

WHAT? What are the potential security risks you may be bringing to your interviewee, their community and yourself by using video in your project?

HOW? How are you going to use this interview? First-person interviews have often been used to make advocacy films aimed at persuading decision-makers, as a primary source of documentation for reports; as evidence in truth and reconciliation processes and in mobilizing movements to reform laws, policies and behaviors.

SEE HOW SURVIVOR INTERVIEWS HAVE BEEN USED TO PUSH FOR CHANGE

Interviews with survivors of SGBV can be a powerful force for change, allowing survivors to speak out and share their stories with those who may be in a position to make a difference. Before you begin your project, it is a good idea to watch videos that include testimonies from SGBV survivors to familiarize yourself with various issues, styles and approaches in using video on this topic. Check out the below videos from past WITNESS partners and trainees to see examples of how video interviews can be used to advocate for human rights change.



Our Voices Matter: Congolese Women Demand Justice and Accountability



Hear Us: Women Affected by Political Violence In Zimbabwe Speak Out



No Longer Silent: Women from Northern Uganda Demand Livelihood and Psychosocial Support



You Must Know About Me: Rights Not Violence for Sex Workers in Macedonia

EVALUATE SAFETY & SECURITY RISKS

SAFETY AND SECURITY QUESTIONS TO ASK

WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC RISKS?

Video can bring new and unique safety and security risks to those involved in creating it and there are often specific and heightened risks for SGBV survivors. Conduct an assessment of the potential risks for you, the interviewee, their community and others involved in the project. Risks areas include: risks to individuals (such as violence, arrest, detention), risks to equipment

(threats to camera, equipment, offices) and digital security risks (threats to data, files, footage, mobile phones and communications). See [here](#) for tips on creating a safety and security plan. For more on physical and digital security, see the Front Line Defenders [website](#).



DO I NEED TO PROTECT MY INTERVIEWEE'S IDENTITY?

First, ask your interviewee if this is needed. If so, share options for concealing identity during filming, such as filming your interviewee with fabric obscuring their face, out of focus, against a window or from behind. You could also avoid filming your interviewee's face, or film only their hands. Faces can be blurred on YouTube or with editing software, which can also distort voices.

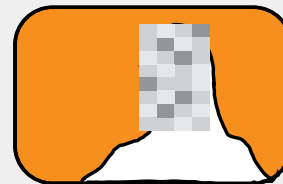
If you are doing a concealed-identity interview, advise your interviewee to not mention locations, people, organizations or anything else that could be used to identify them. Create a plan for secure footage and materials storage, meetings and communications to prevent an outsider from determining the identity of your interviewee.



SILHOUETTE



FILM HANDS ONLY



BLUR IN EDIT

WHAT ELSE ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE NEEDS TO STAY CONFIDENTIAL?

Ensure understanding by all involved parties (interviewee, camera person, interviewer, focal point, allies) on what can and cannot be shared publicly about the interviewee and project. Ensure that any information collected about the

interviewee, including real names, locations, origins, occupations, family information, health information (for example, HIV status) and other personal information stay confidential.

WHERE IS THE SAFEST LOCATION FOR THIS INTERVIEW?

Ask your interviewee where the interview can most safely be conducted. Make your presence as discreet as possible before, during and after filming to avoid inquiries that may expose your

project or your interviewee. Make appropriate arrangements for your interviewee's and your own safe travel to and from the interview location.

BEFORE INTERVIEW DAY

RESEARCH AND PLAN

Ensure that you need to film these interviews. See if interviews exist already that you can request permission to use (from ally organizations or service providers for example), which may allow you to avoid putting this potential strain on interviewees altogether. Make a clear plan for what you will do with this interview when complete. If SGBV is a new issue for you, conduct research and speak with SGBV organizations to familiarize yourself with this topic.

IDENTIFY INTERVIEWEE

When possible, rely on existing work and relationships with interviewees, a trusted organization, service providers or other allies. Learn as much about interviewee beforehand as possible.

PREPARE INTERVIEWEE

As you meet your interviewee, share details about your project: its goals, process, motives and involved parties so they have time to assess and evaluate if and how they want to participate. Ensure your interviewee understands that participation is entirely voluntary and no payment will take place. Encourage your interviewee to ask questions. Have a conversation about potential safety and security risks to the interviewee.

BUILD TRUST

Spend as much time as possible with your interviewee before the interview. The more of a relationship you have with your interviewee, the more comfortable they will be, which allows for a better interview. Have they been interviewed about their experience before? What did they like or not like about that process? Empower your interviewee by inviting them to contribute ideas and make decisions about their interview.

DEVELOP QUESTIONS

Develop a list of questions and put them in order before interview day.

CHOOSE A SAFE INTERVIEW LOCATION

Secure a location that is quiet, safe and provides confidentiality for your interview. Ask your interviewee where will be best for them.

IDENTIFY INTERVIEWER

Ideally, have two people conduct the interview - one to film and another to ask the questions. If possible, offer male and female interviewers and allow interviewee to pick which will make them more comfortable.

BEFORE INTERVIEW DAY

IDENTIFY SUPPORT OPTIONS

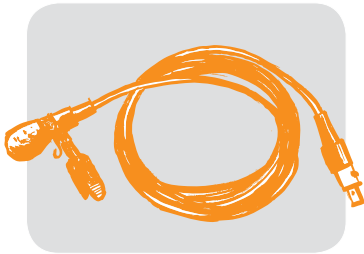
Ask if there is anyone your interviewee would like to have present during the interview for emotional support. If possible, obtain contact information for a trained counselor or a sexual assault advocate that the interviewee can speak with after the interview.

SCHEDULE INTERVIEW

Let your interviewee choose a time and date that is best for them. Ask if they need any specific arrangements (such as childcare). Share a realistic time estimate in advance and stick to it. Most interviews take a few hours to conduct and you should also allow time for conversation after the interview. Ask if there is someone they do not want present during the interview, so in case that person shows up you will know to reschedule.

GATHER, PREPARE AND TEST EQUIPMENT IN ADVANCE

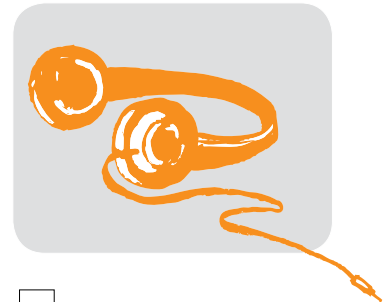
Prior to interview day, charge and prepare all of your equipment. Depending on what you have available, this includes: charged batteries, a camera with correct date and time settings, microphone, headphones, extra memory cards, pen and paper for essential information and a tripod to hold camera steady. Do a test run to ensure all of your equipment is working.



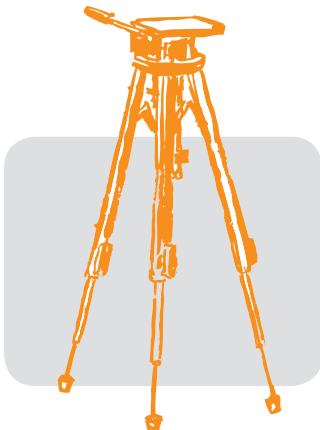
MICROPHONE



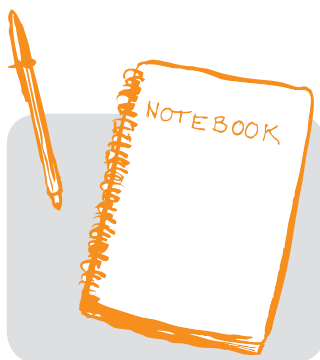
EXTRA MEMORY CARDS



HEADPHONES



TRIPOD



NOTEBOOK & PEN

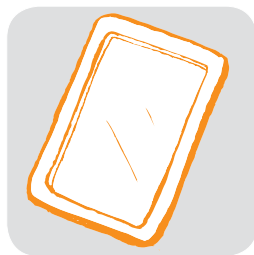


EXTRA BATTERIES

PREPARE A COMFORT KIT FOR YOUR INTERVIEWEE



TISSUES



MIRROR



SNACKS



WATER

WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER?

Depending on the languages spoken by you and your interviewee, you may need to find a trusted and qualified interpreter. Ask an organization that works with survivors of SGBV or another ally for a recommendation of a qualified individual who will be an appropriate choice for this situation. Before interview day make sure you meet with the interpreter to go over the interview questions, appropriate terminology and any applicable security concerns. Keep in mind

that your interviewee might be more comfortable with an interpreter of a specific gender.

On interview day, it is essential that your interpreter never speaks over your interviewee. Ask interpreter to wait for 5 seconds after the interviewee finishes speaking before translating and ask interviewee to wait 5 seconds after interpreter finishes translating before continuing. This will help facilitate the editing process.

PREPARING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preparing a list of well thought-out questions in advance is an important step in conducting a successful interview. This is especially important when interviewing survivors of SGBV – you want to be prepared on interview day and avoid wasting your interviewee’s time or asking them to repeat their story unnecessarily. Take the time to create questions in advance that will create an effective interview and respect the dignity and comfort of your interviewee. Once you have your list of questions, put them in a logical order that will support a natural flow for the conversation and share them with your interviewee in advance of interview day.

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

CREATE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Avoid questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”. A good way to ensure a complete answer by your interviewee is to ask questions that begin with prompts:

- Please describe your experience.
- Can you tell me about...?
- Explain what was said...

QUESTION ETHICALLY

Avoid directly or indirectly blaming the survivor for their experience or implying that they could have prevented, avoided or resisted the incident. Avoid offensive, rude or shaming language. Do not intentionally ask questions aimed at provoking an emotional response from

your interviewee or revealing something they would prefer to keep private. In your questions and approach, avoid reinforcing incorrect perceptions about SGBV, such as that survivors are to blame for the acts committed against them or that SGBV is inevitable.

INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS



- What were you wearing on the evening that you were raped?
- Why didn't you have someone accompany you?
- How is it possible that you don't know who raped you?

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS



- Tell me about the events leading up to the assault?
- What did you do after this attack?
- What are your hopes for the future?

BE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR WORD CHOICE

The words you use are important. Be accurate - ‘rape’ is not ‘sex’. Realize, however, that some interviewees may not use the word ‘rape’ as they may not be comfortable speaking directly about sexual violence. Work with your interviewee to determine the best approach,

framing and language for their interview. For example, do they identify themselves as a victim, a survivor, neither or both? Whatever they decide, respect this in the interview and in your final video.

SETTING UP ON INTERVIEW DAY

HELP YOUR INTERVIEWEE GET COMFORTABLE

Allow time for coffee or tea to help the interviewee be at ease and to chat about other topics beforehand. Ensure that everyone in the room is introduced to each other. Review the process with your interviewee and determine once more if any question or topic is off-limits before you begin the interview.

PLAN FOR PAUSES AND BREAKS

Ensure that the interviewee understands that they can stop the interview at any time, whether for a pause or permanently.

BE AWARE OF TIME

Confirm the time interviewee has available and avoid going over time.

PREPARE FOR GOOD SOUND

Turn off or unplug background noise (including all cell phones in room, fans, air conditioners, televisions, refrigerators and radios). Use headphones to check sound and make sure your microphone is on if you are using one. If you're using a clip-on microphone, ask permission to place it on the interviewee before you do so, or have your interviewee do it with your guidance.

THINK ABOUT LIGHTING

Unless you are deliberately trying to conceal the interviewee's identity, ensure that the main light source is behind the camera.

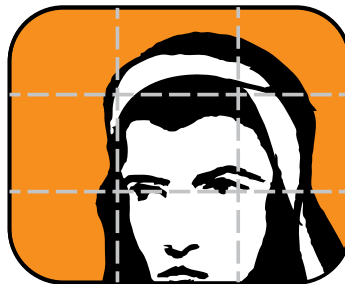
SETTING UP ON INTERVIEW DAY

FRAME THE SHOT

Use a tripod or flat surface to hold the camera steady. If you are not obscuring the interviewee's identity, frame your interviewee's eyes two-thirds of the way up and over in the frame and ensure that they are facing and speaking into the empty space of the frame. Always leave space in the shot below the interviewee's mouth and chin for any needed text (such as subtitles). It's better to miss part of interviewee's forehead than their chin.



**CORRECT MEDIUM
CLOSE-UP**



**INCORRECT
CLOSE-UP**



**CORRECT
CLOSE-UP**

SET CAMERA ANGLE AND EYE-LINE

Ensure that the camera lens is exactly at the interviewee's eye-level. Do not film from above, as this can make your interviewee look smaller or weak. Make sure that your interviewee's eyes are looking just off to one side of the camera (on the side with talking space) and that the interviewee is not looking directly at the camera.

SHOW INTERVIEWEE THEIR IMAGE

Once you set up the camera, show your interviewee their image on your camera or in a mirror to ensure that they are comfortable with how they appear.

OBTAIN INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Obtaining your interviewee's informed consent is essential before you proceed with the interview. Informed consent is the interviewee's agreement to be filmed and can only be provided after they understand how the video will be used and who will see it. Ask your interviewee what the worst-case scenario for them might be (such as their perpetrator or community seeing the video and recognizing them) and share potential strategies for mitigating these risks (such as concealing their identity while filming, during the edit or using a pseudonym). It is especially important to make clear that if this video goes online, anyone may be able to see it now or in the future – and the reach of the video may be amplified through social media. If the incident is in relation to a criminal case, depending on the jurisdiction, the footage could be subpoenaed – check with a legal professional if this is the case.

You can document informed consent on paper or on-camera. Documenting consent on-camera allows for the consent and important security information to stay with the footage. To document informed consent on camera, follow the below as a guide.

Begin with an off-camera conversation to establish that your interviewee understands the purpose of the project and the implications of their involvement, how the video will be used and shared, who may potentially see it and that they are participating on a voluntary basis. Explain that they can rescind their permission in the future, but with online realities it is not always possible to remove materials from the internet.

NOW TURN THE CAMERA ON AND ASK:

- 1. Please state your name and the date and location of this interview.
- 2. Do you understand what we are doing? Please explain in your own words.
- 3. Do you know who may see the video and how it will be shared?
- 4. Can we show your face and use your real name and voice in this video? Are there any other restrictions to using and sharing this interview that we need to be aware of?
- 5. Are you aware you can refuse to answer any question and can stop the filming process at any time, in order to ask questions, take a break or to stop completely?
- 6. Do you consent to your interview being used in this manner?

INTERVIEW DAY: CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

DOCUMENT INFORMED CONSENT

Record interviewee's consent on camera following informed consent process.

BEGIN INTERVIEW

Using your question list as a guide, conduct the interview. Pay attention to what your interviewee is saying and adjust your questions or their order accordingly.

STAY SILENT

Remain absolutely silent while your interviewee is speaking – don't say 'yes' or 'mmm-hmmm.' Use non-verbal cues such as eye contact and nodding your head to show you are listening. Make sure anyone else present at the interview stays silent as well.

STAY CALM WHILE INTERVIEWING

Listen to interviewee actively and with empathy. Do not show shock or horror at their stories. If you show discomfort, you will make your interviewee uncomfortable.

BE PATIENT

It takes time for stories to come out. Be aware that the story may seem to have 'gaps' - it is common for details to be lost in traumatic experiences like SGBV. If you feel that an essential detail is missing, go back to it - but do not push your interviewee.

RESPECT INTERVIEWEE'S LIMITS

Remind your interviewee that if they are tired or uncomfortable, they can stop. Pause after difficult moments for your interviewee. If your interviewee begins crying and needs to stop the interview, give time and space for them to compose themselves and offer the option of continuing another time if needed.

KEEP CAMERA STEADY

Never move the camera or adjust the angles while your interviewee is speaking. If you want to move closer, wait until they have finished their response (before you ask next question) to move the camera.

FILM ETHICALLY

Unless you plan to use this for evidentiary purposes, do not film the interviewee's wounds, scars or injuries. This could cause your interviewee to feel re-victimized. Do not ask for details you do not need and only film what is needed.

CAPTURE EMPOWERING IMAGES

Ensure as much as possible that you film strong and empowered images of your interviewee and images that show who they are as an individual, such as them doing something they enjoy.

CONDUCTING UNPLANNED INTERVIEWS

When you are conducting an interview with a survivor of SGBV, ideally you plan, research and prepare yourself and your interviewee well before interview day. However, if an interview opportunity that you haven't planned for arises - for example if you meet someone who wants to share their story but you will not have a chance

to see them again - you won't be able to take all of the steps outlined in this guide. In these situations, here are the essential elements to keep in mind to conduct spontaneous interviews more safely, effectively and ethically.

SAFETY, SECURITY AND INFORMED CONSENT

Ensure your interviewee understands who you are, how this video will be used and who will see it. If this is going online, make sure they know that anyone could potentially see their interview. In particular, the interviewee should know that if the footage is shared publicly it could be seen by their community or by their perpetrator or others who could retaliate. Ask interviewee what

security risks they might face to help determine if they would like to participate and whether they need their identity concealed (see Concealing Identity Tips on page 3). Obtain interviewee's informed consent on camera by asking your interviewee to share in their own words the purpose of the interview and to provide how they would like to be identified on camera.

LOCATION

Move to a quieter location and ask your interviewee where the safest area will be. Ensure

that there are not individuals around to overhear in order to protect your interviewee's privacy.

FRAMING AND SOUND

Move away from background noise as much as possible. Get close for the best sound, and use a microphone if you have it. Film your interviewee from their shoulders to the

top of their head and keep the camera stable using a tripod or other flat surface. Have your interviewee look slightly off to one side of the camera and not directly into it.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' and instead ask questions that begin with 'what', 'how', 'tell me' and other prompts. Be respectful of their limitations and

stop if needed. Stay silent while your interviewee is speaking. Ensure your interviewee has the last word in an interview – ask them what else they would like to add.

AFTERWARDS

Exchange contact information so you can be in touch with each other after the interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

GET YOUR INTERVIEWEE'S FEEDBACK

Ask your interviewee about how they feel about the interview and how the interview process was for them— what worked and what didn't. Get their suggestions on how the process could be improved for the future.

REVISIT SAFETY AND SECURITY MEASURES

Ask the interviewee if there is any part of their response that they would rather you not use for safety or other reasons and respect their decision if so.


CLARIFY NEXT STEPS

Discuss what the next steps are in terms of communication, process, expectations and their involvement. Whatever commitments are made, ensure these are upheld.

SUPPORT OPTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEE

Share with the interviewee the possibility that difficult feelings and memories may surface following the interview and encourage them to reach out to trusted individuals or counselors for support. Provide contact information for a counselor or sexual assault advocate if possible.

SUPPORT OPTIONS FOR INTERVIEWER AND TEAM

Witnessing personal stories of trauma can be challenging, and can result in something called secondary trauma. Learn about secondary trauma and be on the lookout for signs. For more information, explore this New Tactics dialogue on [Being Well and Staying Safe](#) and its accompanying resources. 

SHARE THE FINAL VIDEO

When possible, share the final edited interview with interviewee so they can review it for accuracy and any security concerns.

STAY IN TOUCH

Keep in contact with your interviewee to share updates on progress - where the video footage is being shown, how viewers are responding and what impact the video and their story is creating.

PRESERVE

Maintain and store your footage safely, and securely store clear records on safety considerations and consent. See the [Activists' Guide to Archiving Video](#) for more. 

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GUIDE

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

CHECK OUT THESE AND OTHER WITNESS TRAINING RESOURCES



BEST PRACTICES FILMING GUIDES



INTRODUCTION TO VIDEO ADVOCACY



VIDEO FOR CHANGE TOOLKIT



FILMING TIPS AND TECHNIQUES VIDEO



CONCEALING IDENTITY TECHNIQUES



CASE STUDY VIDEOS

We thank all of our partners who shared their experiences and learning with us in order to create materials like this, and all of the individuals who reviewed this resource and provided feedback.