



Survivors Voices Safety Guidelines

We encourage everyone to reflect on what helps you to stay safe and feel safe - both in the self-help group setting and outside of it (e.g. phone calls, emails, Facebook group). We all have different experiences and expectations of people, and new situations may be outside of our experience or comfort zone. We may be vulnerable and not able to protect ourselves well, easily triggered by others or putting ourselves or others at risk through our behaviour.

We expect that the vast majority of people who will contact Survivors Voices will be genuine survivors wanting to meet others for mutual support, just as in other survivor services. Some other organisations working with survivors have, however, had contact with people with harmful intentions and who have caused problems for survivors and supporters. We do not want anyone to be scared by this, but we ask you to think carefully about these safety and confidentiality guidelines, so that Survivors Voices can be as safe as possible for you and everyone else.

Responsibility for safety- for everyone involved in Survivors Voices

We all have a responsibility to do whatever we can to keep ourselves safe. We have a responsibility not to say or do anything that may put others in danger (for example by passing on personal information inappropriately). Others can try to support us to do this if we find it difficult. We also have a responsibility to report any abuse involving children or vulnerable adults.

There are two kinds of risks - the internal risk from ourselves, because of our vulnerability or our state of health at any time. Also the external risks from other people, those whose vulnerability or behaviour may be a trigger for us and those that may actually wish us harm.

Reducing the risks

The experience of abuse and trauma often leads us to be vulnerable. Many of us will struggle with mental and physical health issues and at times we may be too fragile to share in a group with other survivors. Please be aware of your own health and assess whether it is safe for you to attend before each group meeting or gathering. You may have a supporter who can help you to decide this.

Things we can do to manage our own 'internal' risks:

- Follow the Survivors Voices Group Guidelines to protect ourselves and others. Try to be sensitive to other members triggers. Do not engage in self-harm type behaviour during group sessions/gatherings.
- Be aware of our own vulnerability and fragility and be honest with ourselves and others about it. Seek help and support when we need it.
- Tell a trusted supporter we are attending a gathering that may be challenging/upsetting. Arrange to speak with them afterwards to debrief.
- Use self-care and grounding techniques before, during and after the group e.g. a relaxing bath, a walk in nature, soothing music, cuddle a favourite toy, mindful colouring.
- Respect our own and others' personal boundaries. Do not touch/hug unless asked to do so. Listen as well as talk. Accept as well as offer support. Be aware if you start to try to 'rescue' someone or angle for them to 'rescue' you. It is not healthy or appropriate to expect a peer to rescue you.
- If things are triggering or upsetting during the group time, do whatever you need to keep safe. Take time out if you need to. Use a self-care technique. Please let someone else in the group know if you decide to leave early.

Others may pose a risk because we are vulnerable and fragile; or more rarely because of some bad intent. The following guidelines will help us to reduce the risk from other people for whatever reason:



Survivors Voices Safety Guidelines

- Do not share personal contact details (full name, address, telephone number etc.) until you have got to know someone well and have good reason to believe you can trust them.
- Be aware of anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may discuss your feelings about the situation with the group facilitator or someone else you trust. Trust your instincts and be cautious until you can check it is safe.
- Notice if anyone tries to 'rescue' or 'counsel' others, especially when they appear to be in chaos themselves. It is not healthy for peers to do that.
- Be very careful if anyone asks you to meet someone outside of the group who they claim will be able to "help" you. (If you decide to meet someone else, please take precautions such as checking out who they are, informing someone else.)
- Notice if anyone tries to find about survivors you are in contact with in a way that seems negative and manipulative. Respect the confidentiality of other people.
- Be careful if anyone does not respect your boundaries, especially if you have already expressed them clearly and politely but to no effect (e.g. if someone shares lots of details of traumatic abuse and doesn't stop when asked.)
- Beware of anyone who leaves you feeling guilty if you do not contact them often or who you feel manipulated by. Be careful if someone is making a big demands on your time and passing responsibility to you for 'saving' them.
- Beware of anyone who makes threats or promises to try to get you to do something you do not want to do.
- If you are aware of having dissociative parts of yourself please do what you can to support, reassure and keep those parts of you safe
- Please use Survivors Voices complaints procedure to raise any concerns you may have about your experience with the group or any aspect of Survivors Voices work.

Remember:

You are not responsible for helping every single person.

We all have the right to choose what feels comfortable for us.

Try not to allow yourself to be manipulated and put under pressure.

Trust your instincts, and protect yourself if something does not feel right.

Take care of yourself and ask for support if you need it.