

# Survivors Voices: Survivor Writing Group Info & Guidelines



## **Who are Survivors Voices?**

Survivors Voices is a user-led voluntary organisation for survivors of abuse and violence, and those who support them. Our aim is to foster recovery from abuse and trauma through encouraging peer support and championing the voice of survivors in public policy and practice. We recognise all experiences of abuse, as a child or as an adult. *(We use the term ‘survivor’ as a shorthand to refer to people who have experienced abuse or trauma in childhood or adulthood, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect, bullying, intimate partner violence, coercive control, narcissistic or spiritual abuse. We find this term helpful, as it moves from the being a ‘victim’ to a ‘survivor’ who is in the process of overcoming what was done to them).*

Based in the UK with a national reach, Survivors Voices is a project of Reshapers Community Interest Company, a not-for-profit/social enterprise. Please see our website for more about Survivors Voices’ other activities [www.survivorsvoices.org](http://www.survivorsvoices.org) and Facebook page [@survivorsvoicesuk](https://www.facebook.com/survivorsvoicesuk).

## **Our Values and Principles**

We operate from core values of trust, respect, and inclusion. You can learn more about our values on our website. The principles in our Charter [From Pain into Power](#) (*click to download*) underpin all our work; the core principle is that everything we do needs to look unlike and be the opposite of abuse. Our survivor writing groups follow the principles in our Charter. In joining a group, we ask you to agree to support our values and principles.

## **Survivor Writing Groups and Events**

Breaking the silence of abuse through creative writing and story is a powerful tool for healing and change. Our writing groups and events provide a safe, inclusive and supportive space for anyone who has experienced abuse and trauma to hear other survivors’ voices, and use some simple creative writing exercises and constructive feedback to discover and develop their own.

## **Writing Group Guidelines**

### **Respect**

We are here to learn from each other and it is OK for each of us to have different experiences, views, problems and solutions. Please accept the contributions of others with the same respect that you would like them to give you, and honour the choices they are making. Be respectful of yourself and others by talking with people not about them. Please offer support, suggestions and constructive feedback that builds and encourages, not advising or dismantling. We are committed to being inclusive and anti-discriminatory and anyone who uses offensive or discriminatory language or behaviour will be asked to leave.

### **Safety**

In the group space each of us is responsible for our own safety and participation. During the meeting, there is *no pressure to talk about your experiences of abuse*. Only share what you feel comfortable with and don’t ask others for personal details. While there is nothing to be ashamed of in your story and it may be important for you to write about it, for safety it is important that we don’t regress into our past trauma. For that reason please be mindful of graphic details of abuse that may be triggering, and provide a trigger warning before sharing, as we want the group to feel





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as safe as possible. It is impossible to avoid all triggers as they are unique to us as individuals. If you find something triggering it is ok to say so (*"I find that x causes this reaction in me"*) and to do whatever you need to keep safe. Take time out if you need to (someone will check to see how you are). Please let someone know if you decide to leave early. 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.

### **Confidentiality**

Our participation and discussion here is private and confidential to the group. It is fine to talk about topics that arise in the group with your therapist or supporters; but please preserve other people's anonymity. Please don't disclose the names of any participants outside of this group. Please be aware that if you share something that clearly identifies a child or adult is at risk of significant harm, our safeguarding responsibilities come into play; see our Safeguarding policy for full details. The facilitators will keep your contact details securely in accordance with GDPR and will not share them without your permission, except if required to by law or for safeguarding.

### **Plagiarism**

Any work written and shared by members of the group is the copyright of the person who wrote it. Please do not share, quote or republish anyone else's work outside of the group without their permission. Any member who plagiarises another member's work will be removed from the group.

### **Support**

Our writing groups are not intended to be 'therapy' or 'counselling', or a substitute for professional or medical help where needed. We see this group as a helpful accompaniment, but recognise that at times the group discussion and interaction may raise issues that need therapeutic support.

So we ask that anyone joining the group has whatever support they need to keep themselves safe. Some support information is on our website, including other peer support groups, helplines and support services specialising in abuse and violence, and how to find a therapist.

### **Online safety**

We have adopted online safety guidelines built on the experience of other online peer groups:

- The zoom link is confidential to this group and must not be shared with anyone else.
- Please ensure you are in a private space where the group will not be overheard by anyone else in your household. Consider your own safety by thinking about what is in view of your camera. We can supply you with a zoom background if you prefer.
- You can change your zoom name to a nickname if you wish.
- We will not record sessions and you must not record them or save the chat either. Only the facilitators can share screens. We will save group work created in chat only for the purpose of sharing it with the group.
- Please make sure you are dressed appropriately for a public group.
- No self-harming or drinking alcohol during the meeting.
- Please arrive a few minutes early to the 'waiting room' so we can start on time. Once we start we will 'lock' the room. Please email [connect@survivorsvoices.org](mailto:connect@survivorsvoices.org) to get in if you're late.
- Please have your camera on to keep this a safe and relational space, unless this is impossible for safety or medical reasons (please discuss this with the facilitators first if this is the case). It's fine to switch it off temporarily if you need to.





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## ***Boundaries and Concerns***

We seek to set boundaries that enable us to participate well and keep safe. People aren't vetted before attending but everyone is asked to agree to these guidelines before attending, and to provide their full contact details to the facilitators. Please think carefully about contacting people outside of the group and your boundaries to be safe and comfortable with that. Some of us have forged strong friendships through survivor groups, but it does take time to build trust and confidence in each other.

We will take whatever action is appropriate to address any behaviour that breaches these guidelines or threatens personal safety. We will ask someone to leave, or refuse further attendance, if necessary. If you have a concern about someone's comments or behaviour during the group and it isn't possible to address this directly with the person concerned, please inform our facilitators who will try to resolve the issue. If you are still unhappy please see our complaints process, details are via the Survivors Voices website.

At the first meeting of each new group we will agree these guidelines and add anything else that would help the group to work together safely and well.

## **This is your space**

We hope you will feel able to fully participate to get the most from both giving and receiving peer support. All our facilitators are volunteers and are here as peers for support too. Please help to keep this a safe and friendly space and help us all to feel at home here.

This is a democratic group so we value your feedback about these guidelines and the way we run this group. You are welcome to make suggestions in the group, or speak to the facilitators after the session or email [connect@survivorsvoices.org](mailto:connect@survivorsvoices.org)

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**Please email us with your contact information and to confirm that you agree to follow our guidelines and principles, or book through our online system. We'll then send you the zoom link.**

In the email please provide your full name, email address (for Zoom invite) and mobile number (for emergencies).

Your contact details will be stored securely according to GDPR requirements and will only be shared with the facilitators. All our facilitators are approved volunteers with Reshapers CIC, our parent company. We will only use your details to communicate with you about group meetings and other Survivors Voices events and resources that you might be interested in; and to provide contact information to essential services in the event of a risk of harm to yourself or others. We would always try to do this with your consent.

