CREATING SURVIVOR-CENTERED MEDIA:

How journalists and 'true crime' content creators can make a story victim-centered, trauma-informed, and powerful

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Who this guide is for

This guide is for anyone who reports on or covers crime cases. It is for the journalists who find themselves on the "crime beat" and want to become more trauma-informed in their reporting and interviewing. It is for the producers of TV shows and documentaries who want to tell victims' stories fairly and compassionately and are seeking clarification about what being trauma-informed means. It is for podcasters who consider themselves "true-crime aficionados" and want to ensure their product doesn't cause long-term harm to victims and their loved ones.

How to use this guide

This guide is not meant to replace any codes of ethics. Rather, it is meant to complement your product, whatever it is. While it may make sense to review it cover-to-cover (and we certainly hope you will at some point), we have tried to provide you with topics in the table of contents that are easily navigable and can be digested piecemeal. We have also included tip sheets for quick reference.

Whenever you have questions, we encourage you to contact us at the National Center for Victims of Crime. We are always happy to provide additional guidance and may even be available to participate or provide perspective on victims' issues for your content.

Why this matters

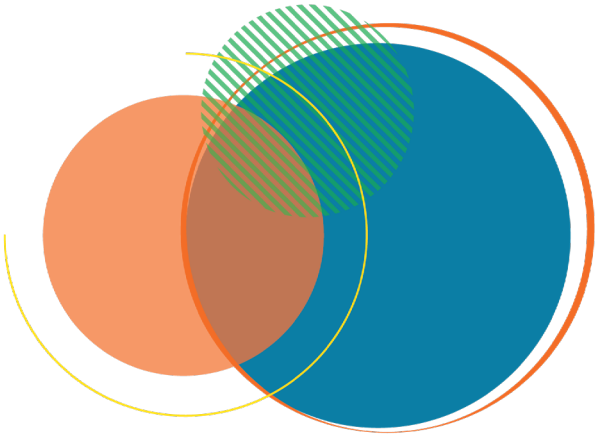
While coverage of crimes is crucial to public safety and information, "true crime" and crime coverage have become a phenomenon and a billion-dollar arm of the entertainment industry. Before the era of social media and constant coverage, crime and crime victims/survivors were already exploited by news media, politicians, and the entertainment industry. Now, crime victims may face the possibility of 24-hour coverage and access to the worst moment of their lives while trying to heal. They may be bombarded with public scrutiny or subjected to graphic descriptions and photos of their victimization for the simple act of turning on the TV. And it doesn't stop there. The prevalence of social media and the availability of information on the internet often means victims and survivors risk constant retraumatization, simply by scrolling through their social media feed or even when applying for jobs.

The media have a job to do, and the public has a right to be informed. But equally true is that victims and their families have a right to be treated fairly by media and deserve both privacy and dignity to mourn their losses and begin to heal.

There is no timeline for trauma, and intrusions into victims' privacy, displaying graphic images of crime scenes, and encouraging speculation about the cause or perpetrator of a crime, no matter the intentions behind the reporting, can all cause permanent harm to a victim's sense of safety and their preservation of dignity even decades later.

However, not covering certain cases or ignoring crimes can lead to greater harm, such as unsolved cases. Content creators, streaming services, and even journalists who choose to cover "true crime" must balance the rights and needs of victims with the public's need to know. Entertainment and profit should never be part of the equation when it comes to telling the story of trauma.

As was our goal in 2000, our goal in this publication is to establish a clear vision amongst the press, media, and all true crime content creators, regarding crime coverage and its impact on victims and how it can provide the opportunity to victims to share their story in a trauma informed manner.



THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS VICTIMLESS TRUE CRIME.

Far too often, the emotional trauma suffered by both victims and survivors is intensified by inappropriate media coverage.

—Crime Victims & the Media, NCVC 1990

Chapter 2 GATHERING THE FACTS AND DOING RESEARCH

GATHERING THE FACTS AND DOING THE RESEARCH

TALK TO VICTIMS

When possible, you should always go straight to the source — the survivor or their family member. Efforts should always be made to center the lived experience of the survivors in your stories, even if they may not tell the exact story you are hoping to tell. This isn't always an easy task, but good journalism and responsible storytelling require effort. Survivors may not be ready to talk, or they may be advised not to speak with media by attorneys or law enforcement. If you are unable to speak with a survivor, this should be made clear in your reporting.

1. Respect boundaries — including real property boundaries

- Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort of survivors. Pursuing the news is not a license for aggressiveness or undue intrusiveness. Do not show up at someone's home; instead, consider leaving a card and a note in their mailbox—they will appreciate your respect. Similarly, be considerate when attempting to make contact through electronic means. You may be given a victim or survivor's phone number through friends or family, or easily find their social media profile or email address online, but that does not mean it's ethical to inundate them with calls, text messages, or social media messages. If you message someone, be polite and sympathetic, and immediately say who you are, who you represent, and what your intentions are for their story. If they don't respond, don't keep trying. If they decline, simply thank them and tell them you'll be available when and if they decide they want to talk. You can also ask if they'd like to designate a family member, friend, or other representative to speak on their behalf. But remember: No means no.

2. Tell the whole story

- Let survivors lead the way in your storytelling. You may not consider certain parts of their narrative to be useful, but they should feel able to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable sharing.

3. Don't romanticize or sensationalize the event

- This is someone's real experience. Don't make it worse than it has to be. Remember that we are talking about real people who lost real loved ones or whose lives were changed forever. Remember that what you're covering is already sensational; adding to that to entice clicks or views only harms family members. For example, a headline along the lines of "1 dead after bloody shootout leads to fiery wreck" is sensational; "1 killed in shooting, wreck" is not. Save your details for the story, and then share them respectfully.

4. TALK TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AND OTHERS

- Don't speculate, and check your facts! Be sure to get your information from sources with direct knowledge of the situation. And remember, just because you can publish something doesn't mean you should. If you get information from a source but law enforcement hasn't made it public, find out why. It could be that publishing such information would have a negative impact on a criminal investigation or the victims/survivors themselves. Always weigh the public's need to know against the potential harm that comes from publishing information related to victimization. Honestly ask yourself: Does this detail do any good, or will it just make people more likely to read or tune in?

- If investigators refuse to talk to you or provide you with any new information, clearly state that in your reporting or content; that way, it's clear to your audience what is and isn't coming from authorities.

- Learn what theories are invalid so you can attempt to debunk or not spread them.

- Use these discussions to gather public information.

5. Talk to the attorneys representing the victims when and if possible.

- These professionals typically know what they can/can't/should/shouldn't say, they often speak in very quotable sentences, and they can provide background information that won't jeopardize their clients. Creating a good relationship with a victim's attorneys can also lead to a journalist being given notices about updates/upcoming legal developments, etc., which, in turn, can lead to less reactive reporting and more thoughtful reporting.

Chapter 3 ENGAGING VICTIMS IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED MANNER

ENGAGING VICTIMS IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED MANNER

When to approach victims/families

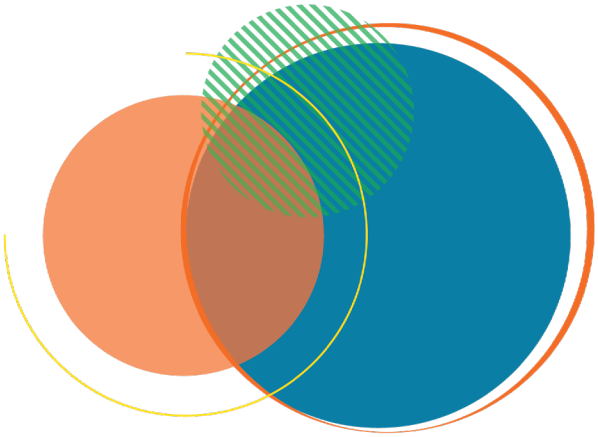
We recommend familiarizing yourself with, at the very least, the Dart Center's **"Trauma & Journalism"** guide and the **"Media Crime Victim Guide"** from the Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime. Recognize that, especially in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic experience, survivors or victims' family members may not be ready for an interview. If they do grant an interview, they may still be in a state of shock. When they finally have time to pause and reflect, they will remember which journalists treated them respectfully and which didn't. Here are some general tips.

1. **Clearly identify yourself and show some empathy.**

   - Tell the survivor or family member that you're a reporter. Tell them that you're sorry for their loss or, if they survived, for the trauma they endured. Ask them if they're comfortable talking with you.

2. **Don't be pushy. If they say no, accept that.**

   - It's OK to leave a card with your contact information on it and tell them that you'll be ready to hear their story when they're ready to tell it. It's also OK to politely explain that you want to give them some space and ask if anyone can speak on their/their family member's behalf. For example, maybe there's a cousin or uncle who can act as a family spokesperson.



3. The same rule above goes for electronic communication, too.

- If you find yourself in possession of a victim or survivor's phone number, don't inundate them with calls and texts. Be compassionate, and take no for an answer. It's fine to tell them they can reach out to you when they're ready, but don't keep checking. They'll remember your politeness — or your persistence after being declined. Similarly, don't continue to send messages on social media if your initial inquiry is ignored or declined; victims and survivors should not be made to feel as though they need to delete their social media accounts to avoid being contacted by reporters or content creators.

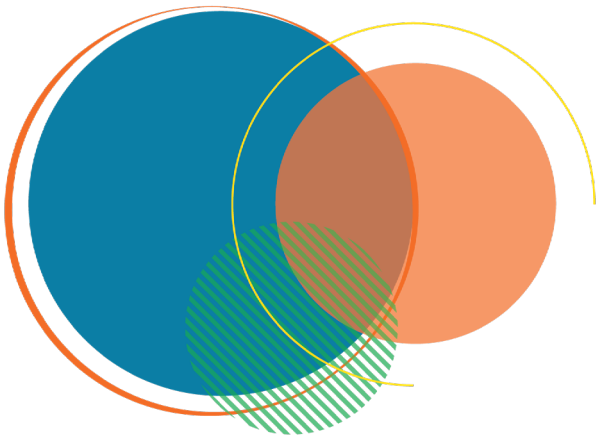
4. Do not bombard a victim or family member with equipment and multiple personnel.

- No one wants to open the door to see a microphone and news cameras, but they might be receptive to a reporter explaining their intentions.

5. This is not an easy job, so don't act like it is.

- Give yourself time and space to think clearly and assess the situation. There is no "one size fits all" technique for approaching and interviewing a survivor or victim's family member, just as no two victims are the same. Some people will want to share their stories; others will want privacy and may never want to go on the record. Some may want privacy now but will be receptive to requests later. If you notice what you're doing is making someone uncomfortable, back off. If they grant you an interview, treat them with respect and empathy. This may be a routine day on the job for you, but they're giving you time during what may be the worst period of their life. Recognize that level of trust and return it by being present, transparent, and responsible.

- We recognize there are times that a victim or their family member will not want to engage with news media, but you, of course, still must present the story. In this situation, we recommend focusing only on facts that you know and that are relevant to the case. For example, while a victim's occupation/lifestyle may be interesting, it may not be relevant to the victimization and does not need to be printed. The Golden Rule is always relevant here — report on others as you would wish to be reported on.



Empathy is the glue that connects us as humans, and that is not to be confused with sympathy. I encourage reporters to engage with empathy through C.A.R.E: Center the victim, Avoid wild speculation, Research responsibility, Engage with empathy.

— Julie Murray, advocate for her sister Maura Murray, who disappeared in 2004

HOW TO INTERVIEW A VICTIM IN A TRAUMA-INFORMED MANNER

How to conduct a trauma-informed interview

1. Engage with empathy

- Provide the victims with the information and questions before the interview so that they can prepare. While this may be against protocol for some journalists, consider this: You're not interviewing a public official accused of corruption, a celebrity talking about their newest endeavor, an athlete after a game, or a CEO talking about an earnings report, you're interviewing someone who's likely not used to media attention and has just experienced trauma. Anything you can do to help them feel at ease will improve your interview — for you and them.
- Allow the victim to set the time and place of the interview.
- Offer to give them some information about yourself before you begin.
- Do not ask questions intended to provoke a certain response. Ask genuine questions and be prepared for any response. DO NOT ask questions designed to get a victim or family member to cry or show a particular emotion for the sake of showing/describing it in your story. Consider asking if the victim or survivor would like to have a family member, friend, or other representative accompany them to the interview. That support system could make a world of difference for them, and in turn, make for a better interview for you.

2. Be genuine

- "How are you feeling?" is a tactless question, even if well-meaning, especially in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event. Instead, ask, "How are you now? How are you handling this?"
- Don't ask "gotcha" questions or questions to which you already know the answer just to get the soundbite or quote you want.
- Don't offer help to the victim unless you can deliver on your promise.

3. Do not make assumptions about a victim, their family, their relationships or their experience. Survivors of crime are unique.

- Sexual assault is considered by many to be the most violent crime an individual can survive. Survivors may already be stigmatized and face prejudices regarding the crime. Do not make assumptions in interviewing them.
- Diverse populations often face speculation regarding lifestyle and victim blaming. Assume nothing about their background.

4. Developing trust

- Be honest about what you can and **CANNOT** do.
- Ask permission each step of the way. Do you plan to record? Ask first. Do you plan to take photos? Ask first (and not at the last moment). Be clear about the kinds of things you plan to publish. If they've allowed you into their home, explicitly ask permission about whether you can describe or show images of the scene. For example, if you're interviewing a homicide victim's parent and you see an old photo of the victim in the home, ask if you can photograph/describe it instead of just assuming. In addition to being polite and a gesture of goodwill and trust-building, such an act may encourage the person you're interviewing to share more stories that enrich your reporting.
- If a victim asks you to steer clear of certain questions, respect that request.
- Explain "off the record" in terms the victim can understand and remind them that it is an option. If it is not an option, bluntly tell them that the conversation is on the record and that they need to get your consent each time before a statement is off the record. Ask the interviewee to explain their understanding to you to ensure clarity verbally.
- GENUINELY offer to give the victim/survivor/loved one a heads up before the story airs/publishes so that they're not caught off guard and can take time to prepare mentally. In addition to it being polite and a nice gesture, it will also help them trust you, potentially leading to future stories initiated by them and/or them letting others in the survivor community know that you are a trustworthy and caring journalist.

Why do a trauma-informed interview?

Engaging victims in a trauma-informed manner is crucial to ethical and conscious reporting and storytelling. Trauma can fundamentally alter brain function (and there is an entire research library of the neurobiological effects of trauma).

During a traumatic incident, survival response may cause one to focus on some details and not others. Trauma responses might make it difficult to remember details later or to access the emotions to the victim felt at the time. Traumatic brain injuries can also impact memory.

The do's and don'ts that may hurt the investigation and the victims

- ☑ **DO** think twice before asking victims/survivors to return to the scene of trauma.
- ☑ **DO** listen to more than just the police (above is an example of something that can happen).
- ☒ **DON'T** extrapolate on theories that have not been proven.
- ☒ **DON'T** publish private information about a victim that could lead to their identity/street address/etc. becoming public.
- ☒ **DON'T** take liberty with facts — especially in crime cases and social media because this can spiral into an abyss of gossip and conspiracy theories. Remember, you can't control what other people do with the information you publicize. As a journalist or content creator, you have a wider audience and an air of authority, whether or not you realize it. Always ask yourself, "What harm could come of this?" before publishing speculation or your personal "theory" about a case.

Media does not view all survivors as survivors. (The media coverage) did not encompass the truth of who my son was. To them, he was Black, male, felony record and somehow contributed to harm that he experienced and was seen as not worthy of being a victim. My challenge was reclaiming his humanity in that space.

— Lisa D. Daniels, founder of the Darren B. Easterling Center for Restorative Justice, created after the murder of her son Darren and in response to the unfair ways in which he was depicted in news coverage

"Newsrooms don't necessarily teach you how to talk to victims and survivors of crime. Build trust. We all want people to talk to us; working around them and their comfort will create the best conversation."

— Dash Coleman, National Center for Victims of Crime communications team

Chapter 4 CRAFTING YOUR STORY

CRAFTING YOUR STORY

The power of words: How to frame a story to be factual but not harmful

Always remember the human toll of the words, images, and soundbites you publish. This applies to headlines, book titles, and the names of shows, podcasts, and even individual episodes. As you know, some people may never read beyond a headline or title. But sensationalizing a crime or traumatic event for the sake of enticing viewers or listeners is unethical. It may cause distress for survivors, especially if those survivors agree to participate in your content. As mentioned above, stories about crime and trauma are inherently sensational; there's no need to make them more so. Ask yourself: Am I describing this accurately and responsibly, or is my intention to get more attention for this story? Further: How would you want to see a crime or traumatic event described in a headline or title if you or a loved one were the victim? For editors and publishers: Another thing to remember is that sensationalizing a headline or title can undermine the trust that your reporter or producer has built with victims.

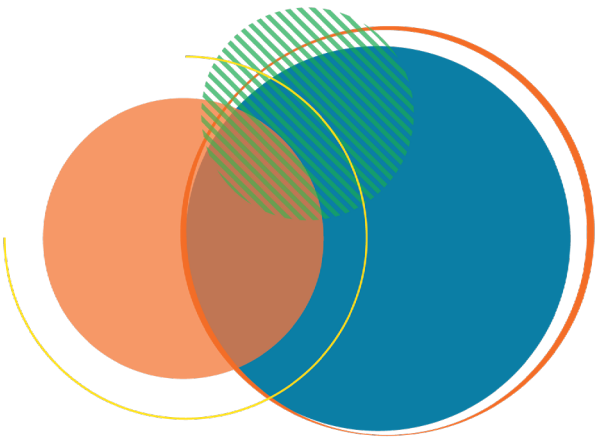
- Using the "anniversary" of a crime as a story idea may be retraumatizing to victims. If you must produce such a story, be sure to involve the victim or a representative in your reporting. Make every effort to involve them, and if they don't respond, consider that they may not want to revisit the topic publicly. If you still decide to go forward, make a genuine effort to tell them when the story or program will be published. Think twice about using the term "anniversary" in reporting on crime and trauma. While accurate, many people associate anniversaries with happier events, so keep in mind that no matter what, a victim or a surviving family member is reliving trauma on this date and that it's only being compounded by public attention. Truly ask yourself and your producer or editor: Is there real value in publishing "anniversary" content about this particular tragedy, or are we just doing it to fill space? Answer how you would feel if you or a family member were in the victim's place.

- Remember that just because you can publish something doesn't mean you should. Freedom of the press is vital, and open records laws are crucial for keeping governments and other public agencies accountable. But earnestly ask yourself these two questions: How would I feel if I was the victim/surviving family member? Does publishing this really serve the public? For example, sometimes law enforcement will decline to publicly identify the name or age of a juvenile victim of homicide. In some states, open records laws would allow journalists or content creators to obtain that information anyway. But obtaining that information and publicizing it on principle alone, rather than because it's genuinely necessary, can cause more harm than good. Always consider the impact on the victim/surviving family members and perform due diligence to ensure that the information you publish will not harm an investigation. In coverage of older cases in which court records may be public, ask yourself the same questions: Does airing gruesome details presented in trial really serve anyone, or is it just a way to get viewers?

- Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures. Remember: "Do no harm." Consider all aspects and consequences of publishing certain information and photos, such as addresses or any information that may lead to a person's privacy being disrespected. Again, you can't control what your audience does with the information you provide. What may seem well-intentioned to you can provide someone else with the tools to harass or otherwise invade the privacy of a subject in your story.

- Remember that every victim or surviving family member's voice is unique. Mass violence affects multiple people, even entire communities. And some "true crime" stories cover the victims of serial killers. If you're covering a crime with multiple victims, be sure that you're getting multiple perspectives from those who are affected. It's irresponsible to assume one victim or survivor speaks for all. Don't use language like "victims' families say" as a catch-all when you're only including some family members/survivors' comments. Be transparent that you've only talked to some victims/family members and state whether you could/couldn't contact others — and explain whether or not you made the effort. The victims and your audience deserve to know the limits of your reporting and research.

- Remember, language plays a significant role in how we communicate, and in immigrant communities, language and cultural barriers may change how an issue is discussed. This does not mean the family is in any less pain.



“There is no recipe to heal and I hate the term anniversary. I have just learned how to cope when it arises.”

— Dion Green, survivor of the 2019 Oregon District mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio

Chapter 5 RELEASING THE STORY — AND THE AFTERMATH FOR VICTIMS

RELEASING THE STORY — AND THE AFTERMATH FOR VICTIMS

No one wants to learn through the news that a family member has been the victim of a crime, especially homicide. It's protocol for most law enforcement agencies to notify next of kin before publicly identifying a homicide victim, so it's best to follow their lead in this part of the reporting process. We encourage you to wait for official notification from authorities before broadcasting or publishing a victim's name, even if you've learned the identity independently. Again, how would you want to be treated if your family member was the victim? Take special care fact-checking law enforcement/coroners/other authorities about victims' identities as well; they make mistakes like everyone else. Ensure the victim's name is correctly spelled, and follow up with research. This can be especially important to avoid accidentally "deadnaming" transgender victims. If that happens, reporters must make corrections. Remember, the victim you are covering is a person, not just a story, and deserves to be treated with dignity.

- Be careful not to blame victims. It is never the victim's fault that they were victimized. Scrutinize your story before publishing to ensure that you are not implying otherwise. Before you start your work, ensure you do not go into your reporting with that mindset. For a common example: What a victim of sexual assault was wearing before being attacked is not an excuse for the assailant's behavior; people should be free to dress how they want without fear of assault. Mentioning how the victim was dressed implies it was somehow their fault. The same logic applies to any crime — scams, robbery, you name it. Similarly, think twice about using common tropes and terms that could inadvertently imply fault, such as saying someone "fell victim to" a crime.
- Before you publish, consider reaching out to the victim/family and reading their own quotes back to them. You probably recorded the interview anyway, so it's not like you have to worry about them claiming they didn't say something. But if they feel like you've taken something out of context, you can offer to reframe their quotes correctly, ultimately making your story more accurate. This is a kindness that will help them feel prepared/trust you more and also will likely not break your outlet's rules about sharing stories before publication.

"If your publication bars reading back exact quotes, you can still paraphrase the substance and context of how you're quoting someone so they can correct mistaken interpretations, ask for privacy, or at least get prepared for how they will appear in a story."

— Mark Obbie, journalist covering criminal justice, violence prevention, and crime victims

SPECIAL GUIDANCE FOR BREAKING NEWS

While we always encourage responsibly and ethically involving victims, survivors and their families in your journalistic reporting or content production, we recognize the realities of breaking news coverage. Often, new reporters or, in some cases, just photographers or videographers, are sent to the scene of a victimization. This is a far different situation than approaching a survivor or family member for in-depth coverage. Still, there are steps you can take to reduce harm and be respectful.

- **Take care not to show or report anything that could identify a victim, especially in the case of homicide or sexual assault.**

We recognize that methodical approaches can be especially difficult in situations of mass violence. Certainly, there's a need for the public to be informed of developments, there's typically a sprawling and chaotic scene on the ground, and there are demands for updates to be published as quickly as possible. In these situations, you must take care not to speculate. As there are often crowds and staging areas for family members, we encourage you to be careful not to take advantage of people's pain. While some may be more than willing to talk, remember that no means no if someone declines. In these situations, you must always weigh the public's right to know and the greater good against the real anguish being felt by victims, survivors, and their family members. There is certainly value in showing and reporting on the impact of the immeasurable harm caused by mass violence. However, you must take care not to be exploitative. In these situations, people at the scene are often scared, traumatized, and experiencing immense grief. Always avoid showing gore just to draw attention to a story; remember, mass violence is inherently sensational, so there's no need to dramatize it even further. Ask yourself: Is the image you're publishing/the question you're asking exploitative or designed to elicit a certain type of emotional response from the person you're featuring, or is it doing a public service?

We also recognize that in fast-moving, breaking news situations, information presented by authorities often changes. We encourage you to quickly correct the record. Always remember that victims of violence are not just statistics; they're people like you. You would also do well to recognize that they are not the only ones harmed by mass violence; such events impact entire communities and even generations of families. While there is an urgent need to report in real time, we encourage you to follow up later in an ethical manner. The people affected should not be made to feel as though they were exploited for a breaking news story and then forgotten about. When it's time to conduct follow-up reporting, we encourage you to take advice from the rest of this guide about how to go about approaching, interviewing victims and survivors and responsibly telling their stories.

For more tips on covering breaking news involving mass violence, we encourage you to visit ***this guide from the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma.***

Chapter 6 CARING FOR YOURSELF: AVOIDING BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

CARING FOR YOURSELF: AVOIDING BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

A victim's trauma is their own, and none of us can ever truly understand how another person feels. You may not be a victim yourself, but you're still covering a criminal victimization. In many "true crime" or journalistic circumstances, that means you're covering a traumatic event. Vicarious trauma is real, and it's something you need to educate yourself about.

If you cover crime, you may constantly be exposed to emotionally draining scenarios. You may constantly interview people on their worst days. You may be reading or seeing horrific details about a crime for your reporting. If you're in the news business, you may be doing this while working long hours and then having to sanitize it for viewers/listeners. You may not have time to fully process what you're seeing and experiencing because you're focused on the job at hand. Still, there's a real possibility that it will catch up to you, resulting in burnout, stress, compassion fatigue, or worse impacts on your mental health.

This type of vicarious trauma can creep up on you over time, or it can be immediate, such as when covering a mass-violence incident. Those who work in a deadline-driven environment may not even have time to process what they've experienced before being given a new assignment. It's essential that you take care of yourself. If you work for a larger organization, inquire about whether the organization includes referral services for mental health and advocate for yourself to get the time you need or to shift assignments.

"Creators who are providing true crime stories as entertainment should not view their ethical obligations as somehow less than what journalists are held to. In fact, because of their impact, we would argue this increases that obligation both to the public and to the survivors whose stories they aim to spotlight."

— Renée Williams, CEO of the National Center for Victims of Crime

Chapter 7

A SPECIAL NOTE ON "TRUE CRIME" CONTENT FOR PODCASTERS, YOUTUBERS, AND STUDIOS ALIKE

A SPECIAL NOTE ON "TRUE CRIME" CONTENT FOR PODCASTERS, YOUTUBERS, AND STUDIOS ALIKE

While there is no universal standard of ethical behavior for reporting or creating content, there are some common-sense and courteous steps you can take. We encourage you to take a look at the following code of ethics, which comes from the Radio Television Digital News Association, and adopt a similar set of ethical standards for your own work: Journalism's obligation is to the public. Journalism places the public's interests ahead of commercial, political, and personal interests. Journalism empowers viewers, listeners, and readers to make more informed decisions for themselves; it does not tell people what to believe or how to feel.

- There is no timeline for trauma. Use your best effort to request permission to cover a story and engage with the victims or their families for accuracy.
- Even if the victim is deceased (and has been for decades) they still have family members and friends.
- Using old graphic pictures, videos, and other recordings can still impact victims' families. Stop and think: Would you like to see graphic photos of a crime in which a family member was involved shared publicly?
- Reenacting a murder scene can do damage to that victim's family.
- Do NOT glamorize an offender. Ted Bundy was not "charming".
- Remember that victims and families can't just turn off this story at the end of the day.

Ensure that your story is accurate and victim-centered

1. **Take responsibility for and pride in the accuracy of your work.**
2. **Do not assume what a victim was thinking.**
3. **Do not delve inappropriately into a victim's past or use euphemisms to describe a victim, this can lead to victim-blaming behavior.**

4. **Verify all information (online encyclopedias, social posts, etc., are not reliable sources of verification).**

   - Take special care to ensure that the story you are creating is based on facts and provides context. Do not over or under-simplify a victim or their story.
   - You should be able to verify each source you use. Your listeners have a right to make their own decisions and form their own opinions based on facts.

5. **Use original sources whenever possible and avoid third-person commentary.**

   - Interview people involved in the case or who otherwise have direct knowledge of the facts.
   - Someone would not be featured because they have "studied" the case or "been obsessed with" the story.

6. **Consider the long-term effects of your story. If news on a case you have previously covered changes the accuracy of your information, pull the show or amend it with a clarification. Let your audience know.**

Help guide your audience

7. **DO NOT PROMOTE UNSUBSTANTIATED CONSPIRACY THEORIES.**

8. **Encourage your audience not to speculate, post "armchair detective" commentary, etc., and not engage with/elevate that content via social media if they're tagged. Remember, sometimes law enforcement cannot release information to a family, so a family member seeing false information could be damaging. Their pain should not be anyone's entertainment.**

9. **Encourage your audience not to contact victims' families or law enforcement unless specifically requested/permitted.**

10. **Remind your audiences that there are victims involved and they have a right to heal.**

11. **Remember that you could be sued for libel/slander/defamation.**

POST NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In producing this guide, we conducted roundtables and interviewed several victims whose stories fascinated the public for years. Their willingness to open up to us and share their stories again gave us profound insight into what crime survivors need and their experiences.

Their stories have been told and mistold countless times. If you'd like the truth, or to read their stories from their perspectives, please visit **victimsofcrime.org.**

- Lisa D. Daniels
- Kim Goldman
- Dion Green
- Nela Kalpic
- Julie Murray
- Norma Peterson
- Kathy Kleiner Rubin
- Bill Thomas

We were also incredibly humbled to be guided by a set of journalists, content creators, media advocates, and academics who consistently focus their work on compassionately telling victims' stories in a trauma-informed way. They have our deepest gratitude:

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- Mark Obbie
- Danielle Slakoff
- Tanya Stephan
- Paula Woodward