

SECTION 5

Sharing Your Story, On Your Terms

This workbook was designed to meet every individual where they are in their healing process. This is in no way intended to influence people with where, how, or even if they should or should not share their story out loud. Deciding to share your story is a completely personal decision. You are in the driver's seat. **The following sections are here IF you have turned to this workbook because you are passionate about sharing your story to inspire political or social action.**

Some ideas for sharing your story in political and social contexts are:

- * Encouraging others to seek help with their experience of sexual violence, by sharing your personal experience of recovery and healing, or highlighting challenges you experienced to improve services and resources to help survivors.
- * Educating elected officials, leaders of institutions, policymakers, and others about the issues surrounding sexual violence and the needs of survivors.
- * Speaking to the general public or the media to humanize the issues of sexual violence, reduce misconceptions and myths about sexual violence, and provide firsthand knowledge about your experience.

Before you shape your story to tell it publicly, be sure to consider how and when you want to share it and to think through the possible outcomes of doing so. The next section, *Making an Informed Decision About Telling Your Story, On Your Terms*, can help guide you.

How do you tell a story for social change?

Everyone has their own ways of writing and telling stories for social change. There is no one-size fits all when writing about social inequities. Below are some guiding questions to ask yourself that will help you focus your goals.

- * What is the message I want to share?
- * Why is it important that we have more spaces to talk about this?
- * Why is it critical that action needs to be taken?
- * What does the action I want to inspire look like?
- * How can I use my writing or personal story to give a face or name to the statistics?
- * How can I write about this issue without it sounding too much like a lecture (ie. not talking **at** people but **with** people)?
- * Am I speaking from my heart, and is this my authentic voice?

Tips for telling your story publicly

Telling your story publicly can be challenging, but it can also be a release, a part of your

healing, or an empowering experience. It can be helpful to remember that the injustice you are speaking about is bigger than you - and while our stories are intimate, vulnerable, and about us, they are also a part of a much wider structural injustice. Our stories are our testaments to how the personal is still political.

For those of you that plan on speaking at public events, there is a world of public speaking tips that can help you. Below are some key tactical tips to support you in speaking at public events where your intention may be to share and also spark action.

1. Be clear on what you want to share, and practice sharing

Sometimes dipping your toes in the water can prepare you for the plunge! Make sure you have spent some time feeling comfortable with sharing your story, and remind yourself of any commitments you made on what you will and won't share. Then, try sharing your story with loved ones and trusted, supportive friends before speaking in a larger public forum. This can help put you at ease and help you get comfortable telling your story. It can also help to reduce any anxiety you may have.

2. Have a storytelling plan in place

Experienced presenters will often have markers in mind to help propel them through their presentation. This means being clear on the beginning, middle and end of your story. Think of this as your own personal story map that will give you a clear direction for where your story needs to go and help you get through any moments in which you add or forget something (in the case where you aren't reading prepared remarks from a page).

3. Practice in front of a mirror or a recording device

While it may seem vulnerable, practicing in front of a mirror or recording yourself on camera can support you by helping you become aware of your body language, tone, and speed. Practicing in this way will help you identify what unintentional mannerisms you may want to change and which ones you may want to embrace. Sometimes you may notice that your body is trying to communicate through your movements. Go with the flow. Your body is trying to support you in communicating your message. Don't be afraid to welcome its support fully and find ways to have it become a part of your practice.

4. Practice with distractions

It can be helpful to practice with distractions - i.e. maybe have the tv or stereo on in the background. This will support you with staying on topic, no matter what kind of movement or background noise there may be in the audience.

5. Be intentional with your tone and projection

Get in touch with what emotions you want to convey and find the places in your story where it feels natural to bring them out. While practicing, it may be helpful to note or highlight places in the margins where you want to stress or project something in a different tone. Practicing your tone and projection in this manner will support you with accessing the emotion naturally when you share your story.

6. Speak slowly and incorporate silence

When speaking publicly, our adrenaline can often kick-in making us unaware of how fast we may be speaking. Practice speaking slowly. Almost unnaturally slowly. Record yourself as you practice as it will help you hear your speed, but keep in mind that on

the day you may naturally speed up. Thus, it's important to practice speaking sl-ow-ly and to embrace silent pauses. The words you are saying are important and needed. It's critical that they get to be heard and that you fully believe that they deserve to be heard.

7. Embrace any nerves and anxiety

Keep in mind, most people, no matter how seasoned they may be at public speaking, get nervous. It is natural to feel nervous before, during, or even after you speak. This in NO way means you will do poorly. That adrenaline rush can often just mean that you care about the subject you are speaking about. The rush can also support you in feeling more alert and present. It can be challenging for many of us to share parts of our experiences that are so intimate, personal, and vulnerable to a room of people. Try to view any nerves and anxiety as strengths instead of thinking of them as things there to harm you.

The 3-Minute Rule

Here's how national and international poetry slam artist and co-creator of this workbook, Roxanna Azari, deals with public speaking anxiety: the 3-minute rule.

People don't believe me when I tell them that I am shy. They always say things like 'Yeah right. You just performed in front of 1,500 people.' They don't know the amount of self-doubt, anxiety, and self-bullying that happens in the background leading up to the moment I step on stage. But that's my truth. As a teen, I created a system for myself. I called it my '3-minute rule.' I honestly still use it all these years later. What I tell myself is that for 3 minutes all my fears, anxieties, and worries are not as important as the message I am here to share. I say, the topic I am here to talk about today is much bigger and more important than my fears. So I negotiate with myself - I say for 3-minutes...all those fears need to take the back seat. I reassure myself that all the fears are welcome back after - but for those 3 minutes, they can't be more important than the social issue at hand. Now that I perform more and more, the 3-minutes have increased to 2-3 hours.

No matter where on the spectrum of comfort you fall when it comes to speaking and sharing your story, Roxy's 3-minute rule may be a tool that can support you. The tool encourages you to connect with your impact and message - it acknowledges your fears are there, but it reminds you that your message is far more important.

8. Command the space

Try your best to be confident in your vulnerability:

- * Know your message and stay connected to why sharing your story is important.
- * Own your story. Know that it is a powerful contribution to this movement.
- * You, your experience, and your story matter. Speak with the intention that your words are here to move people to action.

9. Make eye contact

Maintaining eye contact while speaking about something deeply personal can be difficult, but it is a powerful way to connect with the audience members who will feel you are talking directly to them. As difficult as it may be - prepare yourself by practicing looking up and around so that it can feel more natural the day of your share. Remember that eye contact helps create a connection.

Finding places to share your story on your terms

Below are some suggestions for places to share your story on your terms when you are looking for public platforms to share.

* **RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network)** has a Speakers Bureau that connects survivors with opportunities to share their stories and educate the public through speaking events, school events, and media interviews.

Contact: rainn.org/join-rainn-speakers-bureau or speakersbureau@rainn.org

* **Take Back the Night.** Many colleges, universities, and rape crisis centers sponsor “Take Back the Night” rallies at which student survivors speak about their victimization. The Take Back the Night Foundation lists organizations across the country that hold events.

Contact: takebackthenight.org or your local college or university’s women’s center

* **The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)** has a list of local anti-sexual violence organizations. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and many rape crisis centers host events during the month honoring sexual assault survivors. The events include rallies, press conferences, and workshops.

Contact: 1-877-739-3895 or nsvrc.org/organizations

* **Rape Crisis Centers.** Volunteer at your local rape crisis center. Many rape crisis centers encourage survivors to become prevention educators or ask for their assistance in workshops and trainings.

Contact: Call RAINN affiliate at 1-800-656-HOPE

* **Crime Victims’ Agencies.** You may also find it helpful to connect with these agencies where you can learn about special events and programs that could lead to speaking opportunities.

Contact: The Office for Victims of Crime at ovc.ojp.gov/news

* **Elected Officials.** If there’s a specific policy concern you may have or even a proposed law to address gender-based violence, consider reaching out to your local elected officials. Your story can be a powerful tool in getting legislation passed or in getting your legislator’s attention and moving them to action. Telling your story is a key part of effective advocacy.

Find your representative: ballotpedia.org/Who_represents_me

* **Organizations & Campaigns Accepting Online Stories.** You can also submit your written story online to any of the following organizations that collect and share survivor stories (consider whether or not you are comfortable using your full name, a pseudonym, or your initials):

Out of the Shadows’ mission is to raise awareness and educate and activate the public on sexual assault and abuse issues.

Contact: outoftheshadows.today/share-my-story

Darkness to Light is dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse

Contact: d2l.org/get-involved/share-your-story

Break the Silence Against Domestic Violence serves victims, survivors, and families affected by domestic violence

Contact: breakthesilencedv.org/share-a-story

World Without Exploitation is a website dedicated to ending human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, collects stories of survivors of these abuses

Contact: worldwithoutexploitation.org/share-your-story

Survivor Stories NOW is an online campaign collecting stories to illustrate the need for a strong Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)

Contact: survivorstoriesnow.org

Explore

- * Speaking Out From Within: Speaking Publicly About Sexual Assault, Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) @ pcar.org
- * Your Voice, Your Choice: A Survivor Media Guide, Prince Edward Island Rape and Sexual Assault Centre @ peirsac.org
- * Visions, Values, and Voice: A Communications Toolkit @ opportunityagenda.org
- * Storytelling for Social Change by Frameworks Institute @ frameworksinstitute.org/storytelling.html
- * Story Circles @ <https://roadside.org/program/story-circles>
- * Guide on Developing Your Own Public Narrative @ <https://roadside.org/porgram/story-circles>
- * How to Build a Story Bank @ https://www.thegoodmancenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/free_range_2012_06.pdf