



Survivor Speaking Tips

Telling your story of sexual violence can be incredibly empowering. Breaking the silence, for some, is a major milestone in their healing. For others, it is not a necessary step. The decision to share your story is only yours to make. There is no right or wrong choice.

If you are in the process of deciding whether or not to share your story, it is important to carefully consider the impact—positive or negative—it may have on your healing. It takes courage to share your story, but it also takes courage to refrain. Use the guide below to help decide whether telling your story is the right choice at this time.

Considerations for Sharing Your Story of Sexual Violence

1. Always keep your healing a priority.

Sharing your story will likely bring out emotions you thought were gone. Ask yourself whether telling your story will help or hinder that process. Be honest with yourself and respect where you are in your journey. There is no right or wrong answer, only your answer.

Questions to ask yourself:

- *How does sharing my story fit in my journey towards healing? How does it not fit?*
- *What are some next steps in my healing process after I share my story?*

2. Know what you are and are not willing to share.

Although you have made the decision to share your story, this does not mean you have to disclose every aspect of your experience. You are in control of what you share or don't share. Writing out your story can help you determine the details you are and are not willing to share.

Questions to ask yourself:

- *Are there people in my life I do not want to know my story or know that I am a survivor?*
- *Would sharing any part of my story put myself or someone else in danger?*

3. Be prepared for assumptions and questions.

Myths about rape and sexual assault continue in our culture. You may find that your audience members ask questions or respond based on these false beliefs. You may feel offended by a particular question and/or find the question overly personal or judgmental. Don't feel like you need to directly answer these types of questions. You may wish to share how the question made you feel. This might help the questioner learn to undo their biases. It can also help to prepare a phrase such as, "That is more than I am willing to share," or "I believe you have enough of an understanding without talking about _____," that you can use when asked questions you aren't comfortable with or choose not to answer.

Questions to ask yourself:

- *Am I prepared for the questions people may ask after hearing my story?*
- *Am I prepared to tell my story to an audience who may be unfamiliar with sexual violence, and may hold false beliefs and stereotypes of survivors of sexual violence?*

4. Remember your reason for speaking.

Before sharing your story, carefully consider your motivations for doing so. Remember, you are in control of your story, and *you have the right to accept or decline any opportunity to share.*

Questions to ask yourself:

- *Why do I want to share my story?*
- *What hopes do I have around sharing my story?*

5. Plan for support and self-care.

It may help to plan ahead for how you'll take care of yourself before, during, and after sharing your story. Consider inviting a support person to be with you at your presentation. They can help you talk about how it went. It can also be really helpful to have a plan for who you'll contact if something comes up in the days or weeks after sharing your story. You might ask your support person to get in touch with you in the week after just to see how you're doing. Sexual assault advocacy centers offer 24-hour crisis lines which can also be a resource.

Questions to ask yourself:

- *Do I have a support system and self-care plan in place?*
- *Are there parts of my story that are still triggering to me?*

Role of an Advocate

Perhaps you are already working with an advocate. If not, your local sexual assault advocacy center is a great resource and has advocates who can provide free and confidential support. You can always speak with an advocate to help prepare you for publicly sharing your story. MNCASA can assist you in reaching an advocate, or you can find one at rapehelpmn.org/find-help.