Institute for International Criminal Investigations

MURAD CODE PROJECT

February 2026

Survivor's Guide to the Murad Code

Your rights and choices when asked to share information about what happened to you

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Introduction to this Guide

This Guide is for survivors of sexual violence and was co-created with survivors. It started with a survivor asking the question, “why is all the guidance and advice for the people who come seeking our information, and why isn’t there any guidance for us to help us respond to their requests?”

If you are a survivor of sexual violence, people may come to you seeking information about what happened to you. They may do so for different reasons, such as to raise awareness about what is happening, to use in criminal or other legal proceedings, to increase understanding through research or to advocate for justice and human rights. People seeking information from you should follow professional standards. However, it is helpful for survivors to know what these standards are and how to check if someone seeking their information is following them, to keep themselves safe and in control and to ask that their rights are respected and upheld.

This Guide is to help you find support, make choices and decisions, find the path that is right for you and to recognise and assert your rights along the way. It is based on the Murad Code[1] and the Survivor Perspectives Resource[2] – two parts of the Murad Code project, which aims to promote survivors’ rights when people want to collect and use information about sexual violence from, or about, survivors. The Murad Code is a code of conduct reflecting minimum standards for safe and respectful practice for gathering and using this kind of information. It is now available in 15 languages and is widely recognised as an important set of international standards. The Code takes its name from Nadia Murad, who is a Yazidi survivor of genocide and who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work advocating for other survivors.

[1] The Murad Code’s full title is the Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Use of Information about Systematic and Conflict Related Sexual Violence. Many forms of sexual violence are included in “systematic and conflict-related sexual violence” (SCRSV). The term includes conduct that is directly or indirectly linked to an armed conflict or when part of systematic, repressive, structured, or political violence, and when such violence is used to terrorise or destroy communities. It also includes but is not limited to sexual violence which amounts to the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Although the Murad Code primarily focuses on “systematic and conflict-related sexual violence”, this Guide uses “sexual violence” for practical reasons. The Guide can assist survivors of SCRSV, of sexual violence which does not fit that definition, and of other forms of crimes and violations, including of gender-based crimes.
[2] The full title is In Our Own Words: Survivor Perspectives for Those Gathering and Using Information About Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

The aim of this Guide is to help survivors understand and use the Murad Code as a tool to protect your rights when people first approach you and ask you tell them about what happened to you. It will:

- help you understand who might ask for your information
- provide guidance and advice about your rights reflected in the Murad Code
- guide you on where you can find support and further information
- arm you with questions you can ask anyone who wants to interview you
- alert you to potential risks and signs that they are not conducting themselves in line with the Murad Code.

Importantly, it will also provide you with advice from other survivors who have shared their information before. It is meant as your Guide which you can dip into and return to for the sections you need when you need them.

This Guide is intended as a starting point. The idea is that survivors and organisations or individuals supporting them can build on this Guide with additional information and resources that are useful for their specific circumstances. We encourage organisations and individuals supporting survivors to take parts or messages from this Guide to create tailored, translated materials which amplify the advice and allow it to reach survivors everywhere. This Guide is accompanied by some examples of tools that have already been used by different communities and designed by survivors in different countries around the world.

While we hope that people seeking information about sexual violence will respect survivors' rights in the Murad Code, we recognise this is not always the case yet. We know that, realistically, some actors in some places will not respect the Code or survivor rights, even if you ask them to. However, we recommend that survivors at least try and ask people about whether they follow the Murad Code and promote survivor rights; doing so may help survivors to know whether they are dealing with someone who has their rights at heart or someone who does not. If not, then survivors can make informed decisions about whether to work with that person or not.

The following symbols appear in the Guide:



Your Rights



Things to Ask



Murad Code Provisions



Risks



Survivor Voices



Tools



Who Can Help



Need for Localisation



More Information

We use a traffic light system to help you recognise when a person seeking your information shows behaviours or responses that may:



signal their commitment to keeping you safe and in control, in line with the Murad Code (green light)



signal that some caution is required when deciding whether to proceed and work with them because it's unclear how they will keep you safe and in control (amber light)



signal when there are clear signs of potential risks and harm, and when you should consider saying no to the person or stopping the interview or other interaction with them (red light)

This Guide has been co-designed by six survivors from five different countries. They have been through the journey of sharing their story, and have learned to ask questions, set boundaries and take control of interactions with those seeking their information. Their hope, and ours, is that this Guide will accompany you and help you make informed decisions, with the benefit of their wisdom and lived experience. We know that it is not always easy to say no or walk away from people seeking your information, but we encourage you to consider the advice in this Guide in case it can help you.

What are My Rights?

Anyone can be a victim of sexual violence regardless of age, gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, ability or sexuality. It may have happened recently, or years ago. It is a serious crime. It should be your choice whether to talk about it, and if it's possible, to report it and pursue justice if you wish. It's your story, and it is up to you if, and with whom, you wish to share it.



- You have the right to be supported.
- You have the right to be taken seriously and treated with dignity and respect.
- Your information should be kept private and confidential unless you have agreed specifically to its use or sharing.
- You have the right to change your mind.

> ***Survivors ... should know their rights and understand what standards they can expect from information-gatherers.***

In some countries, some actors are required to explain your rights to you before any interview.

The following numbered paragraphs explain your rights in relation to people who ask for your information to use or share it. Each one includes survivor advice, Murad Code provisions which show how someone seeking your information should behave if they respect your rights, and other useful information and resources that you might find helpful.

1. You are in control of your story

> ***My story is my power. My story belongs to me. I decide when, how and with whom to share it.***

Principle 2.2 Respect a survivor's choices
Principle 2.3 Survivor control over their information

You have the choice to agree or not to each and every aspect of the interaction, for example, to share your information, to allow any photos, videos or other recordings and if and how your information can be used.

> ***My story should never be used without my consent or for someone else's gain.***

NOTE: There may be national police officers, courts or other authorities who can require you by law to provide certain information. In these circumstances, you can ask for free legal advice so you can know and protect your rights.

2. You have the right to be fully informed....

> *I have the right to be fully informed about who is asking and why and how my contribution will be used.*

You can

- Ask about who they are and why they want your information.

You should

- Receive honest, realistic information about potential results and risks of sharing your information.

Principle 2.2 Respect a survivor's choices

There is more information about this in the section below on **How the Conversation Should Start – Informed Consent** (page 33).



Respect and dignity mean different things for different people. Basic forms of respect include: using respectful language, being grateful for and valuing your time and your efforts, being present and attentive, focusing on you as a person and not just as a source of information, taking the time to understand your concerns and perspective, and showing concern for your well-being.

You know when you feel you are not being respected. Some survivors have described the following examples:

- being rushed
- those engaging them being distracted and not focused on survivors or what they are saying, including looking at their phone, laptop or another device
- being made to wait a long time
- being asked the same questions unnecessarily and repeatedly
- being interrupted or spoken over the top of
- use of disrespectful or blaming language or disrespecting local accepted behaviours or customs
- being spoken to in a patronising, dismissive or overly critical way
- being treated as a case rather than a person
- having their feelings minimised.

Principle 3.2 Dignity and respect

If you are feeling disrespected, you can ask for a break or you can decide to leave or to ask the other person to leave.

> *One sign of respect is when I first sit down and am told that I have full freedom to say what I want or not say.*

> *I have the right to be treated with empathy and dignity, if not, I won't talk.*



4. You can ask questions

It's really important to ask questions! An experienced person seeking your information who is well-intended will welcome your questions and will be prepared to answer any questions you may have.

> ***Information-gatherers (journalists, etc) should expect to be 'interviewed' by survivors first – this means survivors can understand if someone is likely to cause harm.***



If someone is not comfortable with your questions or not prepared to answer them, you should be careful about proceeding.

Asking questions is the best way to be informed, and the best way to understand someone's intentions and attitude.



- You can **ask anything you want**, at any time, before, during and after you speak to someone.
- You can **ask for explanations** about what is and will be happening.



- If you have any concerns or worries about speaking to someone, about the location, timing or anything else about the process or what will happen afterwards to you, your family and other people and to your information, it is very important that you raise these concerns.
- Your concerns should be taken seriously, and the person should be able to reassure you with clear answers, measures or plans to deal with those concerns.
- If you remain concerned, listen to your heart and your gut, and remember…

6. You can always say no!

- You do not have to speak to someone or do an interview if you don't want to (except for a law enforcement or justice officials using official legal powers to make you attend an interview or hearing).
- You should express your wishes – let them know that you do not want to speak, to do the interview or to otherwise participate. There should be no negative repercussions from saying no.
- You can **change your mind anytime**, even during or after the interview or other interaction.



NOTE: depending on the intended use of the information you share, if you change your mind some time afterwards, the information may be published or shared already, and so it may be harder or impossible to reverse that. For example, a journalist may write up a story and publish it within a day or two.

If you feel uncomfortable, are not being treated well or if you don't like what they are saying or doing, **you can stop the interview or other interaction and leave or ask them to leave**. You can also ask for a break or ask them to come back later.



Principle 2.2 Respect a survivor's choices
Principle 2.10 Honour withdrawal of consent



NOTE: In some circumstances, law enforcement or other justice actors may require you to do an interview or go to court. They may have legal powers to make you go. It is important that you let them know if you do not want to or if you have concerns about doing so. You can also ask for free legal advice to understand your rights and options.



In many settings, there should be free legal aid and legal representation for victims of crime. If you are not sure where to find this help, often women's organisations, survivor networks or other human rights organisations have good contacts and know who have the right expertise.

7. You can choose where, when and with whom the interview or other interaction takes place

> ***Survivors should be able to choose a safe space, where they feel comfortable talking. Safe spaces look different for every survivor. Some prefer to be in nature, others in a quiet place.***

- You decide **where and when the interview happens**.
- You can choose **who is in the room**, including the interviewer and interpreter.
- You should be able to **choose whether you speak to man or a woman**, and who is present in the room if you wish.



Principle 9.3 Create a supportive environment
Principle 9.5 Who attends the interview

> ***A safe space is important. You do not want anyone to listen or walk in. Explain who else will be there, if you need to bring someone else.***

8. You can ask how they will protect your safety, your privacy and confidentiality

You have the right to confidentiality and privacy (*to keep your identity and information secret or hidden from others*). The person must advise you if there are any limitations on their ability to keep your information confidential.

> ***My story is not content. My story is part of my life. Every decision to record it, share it or read it carries responsibility toward me as a person, and toward my safety, dignity, and future.***



If someone tells you that they can 100% guarantee safety and confidentiality of your information, be careful! No one can truly guarantee that.

See below for guidance on what you can ask about this and what answers you can realistically expect from people who are serious about protecting your information.



Principle 2.9 Be clear on limitations



NOTE: You should know that some actors are required by law to report or disclose information to others, such as some professionals who may have to pass on information about a crime to the police (often called 'mandatory reporting laws') or police who may have to show the lawyers representing an accused person the information they have about a crime (known as 'disclosure obligations').

In those circumstances, the person asking for your information should tell you this BEFORE you share any information with them. You should also ask this BEFORE you agree to provide any information to them.

Here are some questions you could ask to find out more about confidentiality and privacy:



- *"How will you keep my information safe and confidential?"*
- *"Is there anyone that you are legally required or might be ordered to share my information with?"*

You should be given honest, realistic information about any risks from sharing your information. A good answer to your questions about confidentiality should include:

- An explanation of measures they take to protect your identity and separate your personal details from any record of your story. For example, using initials or code names instead of your full name, blacking out identifying details in any records.
- An explanation about how they keep your information off the internet and off computers or hard drives which are connected to the internet or work networks to protect it from unauthorised access.
- Keeping the details of your informed consent with your information. This means that they can check every time they intend to share your information whether or not you agreed to that specific use or sharing.

This could look like this:
"Alice Akobi said that at 5am in the morning after the attack started, three men wearing red bandanas with guns arrived in Maran village." (*no protection, gives name and village where she lives*)
"AA said that at 5am in the morning after the attack started, three men wearing red bandanas with guns arrived in Maran village." (*using initials, but still reveals where she lived*) OR
"[redacted] said that at 5am in the morning after the attack started, three men wearing red bandanas with guns arrived in [redacted] village." (*blacking out any identifying information*)

Privacy also extends to your physical privacy and ensuring that meeting places and communications are discreet, private and confidential.



Principle 7.8 Build confidentiality protections
Principle 9.4 Ensure privacy



If you are interested in learning more about confidentiality, these resources may be useful:

- UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict: Best Practice on the Documentation of Sexual Violence as a Crime or Violation of International Law (2nd ed), 2017 ("International Protocol"), pp. 111-115
- UNHCR, Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, May 2015 (for a detailed guide on the kinds of measures and steps which are required to protect your data)
- UNFPA & Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, Gender Based Violence Information Management System Manual, 2017, pp. 22-25 (including how to code personal information).

You also have the right to have your safety and well-being prioritised.

You have the right to be safe, and to feel safe. You can ask questions about how the person can keep you safe and what the risks are from talking to them. You should raise any concerns you have with them.

You should expect someone to have thought about and planned for your physical and emotional well-being. They should be able to describe measures and plans they have in place to keep you safe during the interview, and to keep you safe from any risks or repercussions from talking to them. This includes your physical safety, your physical comfort and needs, and your emotional well-being, especially given that they are asking you to recount something traumatic.

Here are some simple questions you could ask about security:

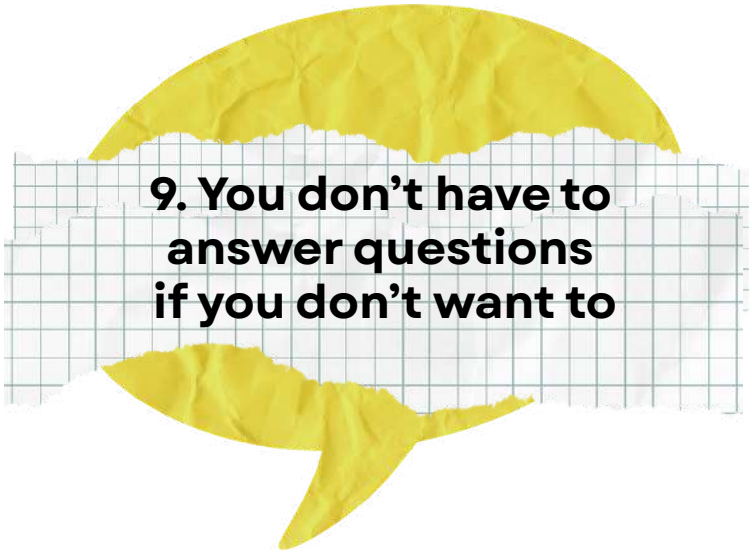


- *Is there any danger to me or my family from talking to you?*
- *How can you keep me safe?*
- *What if something happens after we speak because we met? How can I reach you in an emergency?*

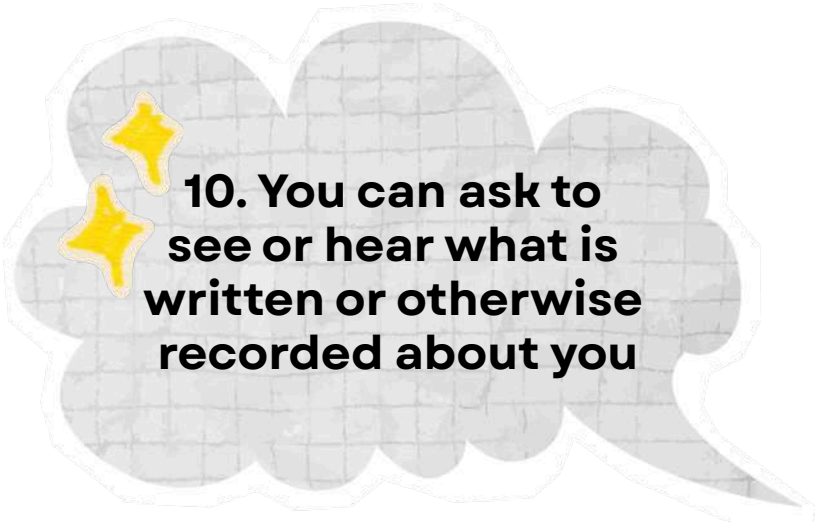
There are more questions and information about your comfort and emotional well-being in the section below on **How the Conversation Should Begin – Informed Consent** (page 33).



Principle 1.4 Prioritise survivor safety



- You can **choose not to answer any questions** that make you uncomfortable.
- You can **take your time** and go at your own pace.
- It's normal not to remember everything.



- You can **ask how your information will be used** and who will see it.
- You can **read what is written or hear or watch what is being recorded** about your story.
- You can ask to review what they want to publish about your story before publication. After they have gathered your story, they may summarise it or decide to focus on only some parts of the story; it may be important for you to review that before publication.
- If you have agreed to be photographed or filmed, you should be able to review photos or videos that are intended to be published about you.

11. You can refuse photos or recordings

- You do not have to agree to **photos, videos, or voice recordings**.
- You can ask them to delete any of these things if they took them without your consent.

12. You can ask for information about support

- You can ask about **information or a referral about support or help before, during or after the interview**, like medical, psychological or social support.
- You should **be reimbursed** for costs like transport, food and water and childcare.

13. You can use the Murad Code

> *If we are very clear about our safety, and how we want to be treated, that will force documenters to respect us.*



You can refer to Murad Code provisions to assert your rights. We understand that not all survivors will feel comfortable doing this. We have highlighted some key Murad Code provisions in this Guide, but you may want to refer to other provisions from the Code too.



See the rights tool for survivors, **10 Important Things to Remember Before, During and After an In-Person Interview,** developed in consultation with survivors. A similar tool for remote interviews (by phone or over the internet) will be published soon.[3]

[3] The tool is available in various languages at https://www.muradcode.com/survivor-rights-tool.

Finding Support and Allies

Many survivors find it useful to speak or listen to other survivors. In some places, there may be formal or informal survivor networks which connect survivors with one another.

> ***Are you a survivor of sexual violence? I am one too. You are not alone. I have been through it as well.***

Some of the reasons for this advice from survivors are the following:

- Survivors may understand survivors best.
- Someone may have experience of dealing with similar issues as you and be able to give you good advice.
- You will have a supporter - someone who can help you decide if and how to share your information.
- There can be strength in numbers. Consider taking your supporter with you for all meetings and interviews. They can help you assess the situation and help support you to insist upon your rights.

> ***Survivor groups matter because they help us feel, often for the first time, that life can be rebuilt after trauma. Connection restores hope, dignity, and a sense of the future. ... supporting one another across different life circumstances, reminding each other that recovery is possible and that none of us has to carry this alone.***

> ***It's okay to feel scared. However, talking to other survivors may help to see that healing is possible and we don't have to face this alone.***



If you are an individual or an organisation supporting survivors to use this Guide, it is important to find more information about what is available locally and further afield for survivors so they can understand where to find suitable support and allies. Not all services or support will be appropriate for all survivors, particularly in settings or for certain people at heightened risks. Assess first!

The Murad Code requires that people who seek your information should have made a list of trusted support services in the local area, and that they should ensure that you can access such support. They should also know of emergency services who can help if you become distressed or need urgent help.



Principle 5.6 Know about available support
Principle 7.7 Ensure appropriate support

Here are some questions you can ask a person who is seeking your information:



- *What do you know about local survivor networks and support organisations?*
- *What do you know about free legal advice and representation for me?*
- *If I need or would prefer support outside my community and the local area, what do you know about national or international networks or organisations?*
- *Have you checked if they are accessible, safe and otherwise suitable for me?*
- *Can you share your list with me?*
- *Can I bring a support person with me for our meetings?*



A person seeking your information should clearly explain what support options exist and help you access them if you choose. If they do not have any information about available support services, the person has not done the necessary preparation to ensure your safety and well-being. If you ask, they may go and do this preparation. If they won't, consider whether you wish to work with them or not. You have the right to decide at any time whether to continue, pause, or stop, without any negative consequences.

Depending on where you are living, there may not be available services, or they may be some distance away. It is expected that, at a minimum, the person seeking your information should be able to tell you about and help you access services that provide safe and accessible medical care, psychological and community-based support, and legal and protection advice.

Unfortunately, the reality is that these services are not always available everywhere. If they are not available where you are living, and using suitable services that are further away is not possible, the person seeking your information should explain that to you so you can decide whether you still want to speak to them without being able to access this support after. It is also important that there is someone you can talk to after any interview or retelling what happened to you. If you do not have a trusted family member or friend, how can they help put you in touch with someone you can trust to talk to if you need to.



Talking about what happened to you may bring up difficult emotions. Your well-being is the priority. Having some form of support afterwards is often important for your well-being. It is also important to consider whether there is someone you trust that you can talk to after an interview, who can provide support. The person seeking your information should only proceed if safe, appropriate support is available before, during, and after the interaction. This may include professional services and/or someone you trust who can support you afterwards. If the person who asks you for your information can't help you to access this kind of support, think about whether you still want to proceed.

There are different routes for you to find out about services in your local area, or further away if local services are not suitable. You know your community and your situation best – you have a good sense of caution about what might be safe or not – if you are concerned, try to do some research or find out from people that you trust the organisations who have been helpful and provided safe spaces for people in similar situations, even if those are further away or online. Here are some ways you might be able to find out more:

- **Depending on your own situation, it may be best to try to find an organisation in your community that works well for you.** This may be an organisation supporting survivors, or human rights or women's rights organisations. Even if they don't work specifically on sexual violence, they may know how to connect you safely and privately with trusted organisations that do.



Principle 6.10 Community-based sustained support

- **Survivor networks can be a good place to get trusted information about which services are good and safe.** They will usually have tried these services before and know if they are trustworthy and appropriate. This may not be a network that specifically focuses on sexual violence but may relate to other forms of crimes committed during conflict.

- **If you have access to internet,** you may find resources and support through searching online. For example, there are some humanitarian data sites which often contain service mapping:
    - Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), Humanitarian Data by Location (Country Datasets) (also see FAQ on HDX)
    - OCHA, ReliefWeb Response (including locations).

- **In some places, there are locations where you can access multiple services all under one roof – these are often referred to as 'one-stop shops'.** Organisations like the United Nations (UN) often set these up as part of a humanitarian response. A local government may also provide these.
- If there is a humanitarian response by the UN in your area, there may be a map of services which can support you. This is sometimes called 'referral pathways' and UN employees may be able to provide a list of these services and their contact details to you.
- There may also be state-run or state-associated clinics or services available in your area. Contacting your Ministry of Health or Social Policy might help you identify those. *NOTE: Depending on your location and the country you are in, it can be harder to vet or understand the safety or confidentiality of these types of services.*

Some basic questions you could ask when contacting a service provider for support:



- *How do you ensure confidentiality and safety for your clients?*
- *With whom do you share information about clients? Are you obliged to share any information about your clients with anyone?*
- *Are your services tailored to me?*
- *Are your services survivor-centred and trauma-informed? How?*
- *Are there any costs associated with your service?*



You can read more about this at the following resources:

- International Protocol, pp.97-102.
- Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility
- UNHCR data per country which can include service providers: Countries (look for '3Ws': Who, What, Where maps)
- How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area: a step-by-step pocket guide for humanitarian providers[4] (but contains some useful advice and tools for mapping/finding support).

[4] This resource is a companion guide to the 2015 IASC GBV Guidelines (available at www.gbvguidelines.org).

There are some international survivor networks which have local branches or work in many communities. If you don't know how to find support and allies in your community, you might be able to reach out to one of them to help connect you with someone trusted nearby.

- Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation
- Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence (SEMA Network)
- Global Survivors Fund

In some places, there are Infographics or QR Codes you can scan to access contact details for local survivor networks, survivor support organisations, pro-bono survivor legal representation, as well as a full range of vetted, accessible support services, medical assistance, psychological and social support.



Who Might Ask You for Information?

There are many people doing different kinds of jobs who may approach you to ask you about what happened and ask you to share your story and information.

It is important to know who you are dealing with, why they want your information, what information they actually need, and for what purpose they intend to use it. It is also important to understand how they will store and protect your information. This can determine whether your information ends up in the public domain or shared with others. It can also help you decide whether or not you want to speak with them.

Who Seeks Information from Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict?



Humanitarians

For aid, support & protection

- Aid organisations & NGOs
- Refugee registration (UNHCR, IOM)
- Service providers
- Protection specialists



Researchers

For studies & analysis

- Academic institutions
- Local research organisations
- International research bodies
- Policy institutes



Journalists & Media

For news stories & reporting

- Print, broadcast & digital journalists
- Documentary filmmakers
- Local fixers
- Media intermediaries



Medical Personnel

For care & assistance

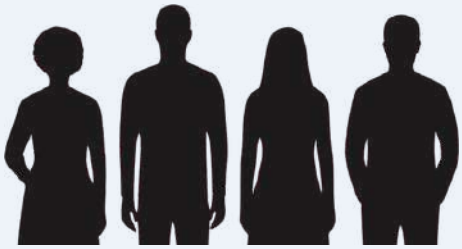
- Doctors
- Nurses
- Medical professionals
- Health service providers



Civil Lawyers & Victims Representatives

For legal claims & representation

- Local human rights lawyers
- International legal representatives
- Victim representation organisations
- Legal aid providers



Survivors

Psychosocial Counselors

For care & assistance



- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Counsellors
- Community workers



Human Rights Monitors & Reporters

For documenting abuses

- Local & international HR defenders
- UN monitoring bodies
- Human rights organisations



Transitional Justice Mechanisms

For truth, justice & reconciliation

- Truth commissions
- Reparations programs
- Reconciliation initiatives
- Accountability mechanisms

Criminal Investigators

For prosecutions of perpetrators

- International criminal investigators
- Local law enforcement
- Forensic experts



Military & Peacekeepers

For security & situational awareness

- UN peacekeeping forces
- Military personnel
- Security sector actors
- Protection of civilians units



Civil Society Organisations

For advocacy & policy change

- Local advocacy groups
- International advocacy organisations
- Women's rights organisations
- Community-based organisations



Principle 4.2 What is our role and purpose?

It is important to consider why you might want to share your information and what your goals are for doing so. Ask yourself, "What do I want from this? What do I need right now? Psychological support? For the truth to come out, for the public to know what happened?" It is always best to work with people whose objectives are the same as your own.

Some people may claim that sharing your information with them will get you closer to your goals – such as healing, justice, reparations, truth-telling or other outcomes – but it is important to try to assess whether these claims are realistic. What are the different options you have that may help you towards your goals? What outcomes have these processes – or similar processes – achieved in the past?

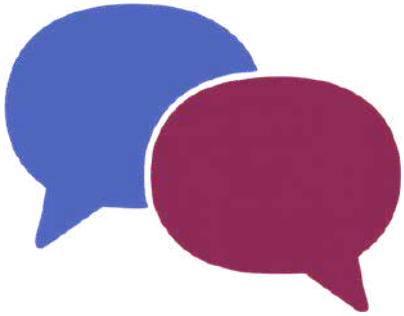
If available, you can also take advice from other survivors, supporters, allies or advisers that you trust about how talking to a particular person might impact your own objectives and priorities.

For those interested in reading more about different avenues for accountability and justice, you can find more information in the following resources:

- International Protocol, chapter 3 on avenues for accountability, pp. 28-39.

What people asking for your information can and cannot do for you

No one should promise you food, money, aid or support in exchange for your information. You should not have to 'sell' your story or exchange it for help. Any support or help should be offered independently or separately from any request for you to share your story. **Equally, if someone has provided you with something you need or a service, you do not 'owe' them your story or are obliged in any way to give them your information.**



Principle 2.7 Do not offer benefits in exchange for information

Importantly, you should not be put to any expense to share your story. Someone who wishes to meet you to collect your information should be prepared to pay the expenses you have to attend a meeting, such as travel expenses, food and water, childcare, etc.

While they can provide expenses, most people will not be able to pay you for your time when they are gathering information for certain purposes, such as criminal justice, research or journalism, as this could look like 'buying' your information, which may lead to others questioning whether the information is true.

NOTE: This is not the same situation as survivors choosing to undertake activism, advocacy, speaking events and other professional roles to raise awareness about sexual violence or their situation. In these circumstances, a survivor is sharing their expertise and should receive renumeration for their professional services and advice or contributions.



The Murad Code applies to everyone gathering or using information about systematic or conflict-related sexual violence. The only people it doesn't apply to are those treating your health conditions that do not share your information with anyone and use your information only for your treatment. Anyone else seeking to gather or use your information should apply the standards in the Murad Code.



Questions you can ask about the identity and purpose of the person asking you for information:



- *Who are you? Where are you from? Which organisation? Have you worked on these issues before?*
- *What is your/your organisation's role and purpose?*
- *Why do you want to speak to me?*
- *What will you do with my information/story?*
- *I have told my story before; can you not use that instead?*



If you are still not sure who the person is or how they want to use your information, it may be better to say no.



Remember you can always take the time to seek advice about the person, their purpose and how they intend to use your information. Seek help from your supporters and allies.

Are You Ready to Talk and Are You Well Prepared?

Often survivors are approached when it is the right time for the person seeking information – because they are filming a documentary or writing a research article, for example. But that doesn't mean it is the right time for you. And it doesn't mean you have to agree to talk immediately.

One aspect of this is whether you are psychologically ready or in a good place to be able to revisit your trauma.

> ***It's not a priority to talk to documenters first. We need care first. We need to invest in services first, receive support, like medical, mental support first.***

> ***The reason for telling your story has to come from within you. If it's hard to find that reason, it may simply mean it's not the right time yet.***

Another aspect is whether you have prepared yourself, so you are in the best position possible to protect yourself and your rights. Consider some of the following preparations you could take:

- **Read this Guide** and the Murad Code!
- **Get advice** from other survivors on how to prepare.
- **Have you told your story to someone before?** You may want to think about whether the old statement or document could be shared, rather than having to recount painful memories again.
- **Prepare for afterwards:** after retelling what happened, it can again bring to the surface memories and flashbacks, even nightmares – similar to the time immediately after the violence occurred. You need to be aware of this possibility and think about who your support is in the days following the interview, who can you debrief with/talk to afterwards, how can you look after yourself and give yourself care to manage some of that.

This is particularly important if you must travel away from home to provide your information, for example, at the nearest town or the capital city, or even to a court in another country. Who will be with you for the travel and in the unfamiliar place? Even if there is support while you are away, it is important to be prepared for things at home afterwards. Often an interview is part of a much longer journey of recovery.



NOTE: Telling your story multiple times can be painful. Each time brings the risk of re-traumatisation and bringing back some difficult symptoms (like flashbacks or nightmares).
In addition, each time we tell someone about events, our account changes a little, quite naturally or as a result of being asked different questions or looking at things in a different way.

Sometimes if there are multiple versions which are a little different from each other, this can complicate legal cases if you are seeking your rights or seeking justice against the perpetrators.

Have you considered what might happen if someone in your family or community learns about your story if it is published? Think about whether you should use your own name or insist on using a code name ('pseudonym') and ensuring identifying information and details are not published. Once things are on the internet, they may remain there for a very long time. If your family, including your children, don't know – be very careful about anything being published which can identify you.

Self-care

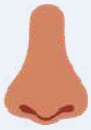
> ***The process was about forgiving myself rather than blaming myself for what happened and how I reacted. I learned to give myself grace and practice self-care as I healed.***

> ***Telling my truth was for my own sake, not for anyone else's, it was to show myself that I am brave enough to share the truth.***

One of the best things we can do to prepare is to learn about self-care and ways that we can manage our trauma and times when we feel distressed, discomfort or overwhelmed by the situation. Here are some grounding exercises to try out and some links to other resources so you can find something that works well for you. You do not need to do all of these. Choose one that feels right. You can also ask the person who wants to gather your information for grounding techniques before, during or after you speak to them – this is part of their role in caring for you.

1. **The 5-4-3-2-1 (or five senses) exercise**: Naming the things mentioned here can help bring you back to the present and situate yourself back in the safety of the room. Work through the following 5-4-3-2-1 exercise.

Grounding Techniques for the Senses

5	Things You Can See	
4	Things You Can Touch	
3	Things You Can Hear	
2	Things You Can Smell	
1	Things You Can Taste	

2. **Anchor yourself**: Start by saying who you are, how old, where you are from, what time and day it is and where you are right now. For example, *"My name is Maria and I am 35 years old. I am from Kherson. It is 9:05am on Monday 21st September 2022. I am sitting with Sofia, my friend, in her office."*

Then describe things you can see around you. Concentrate on full descriptions of size, colour, shape, use and where they are placed/what they are touching. For example, "*I can see a red pencil, which is small and used. It has gold lettering on the side and a small eraser on the end which is dark from use. The pencil is sitting on a notebook which is white and lined. It has many pages and is almost full with writing. It has writing in black ink and in pencil.*"

3. **Drop your jaw**

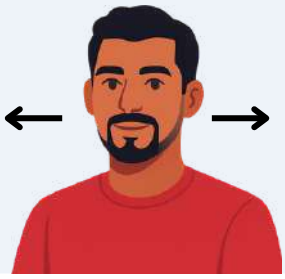
Drop Your Jaw
Grounding Technique

1.



Think about your jaw and let it relax and loosen.

2.



Move it from side to side.

3.



Then let it drop open. Imagine it dropping to the floor.

4.



Let your tongue rest in the bottom of your mouth. Take a deep breath in, and then out.

4. **List your favourite things: list three of your favourite things from these categories**

Favourite Things
Grounding Technique

List your favourite three things in each category



Food or tastes



Places



Colours



Songs or music



Flowers



Things in nature

You can find more information about grounding exercises and self-care in these resources: SARSAS self-help guides.

How the Conversation Should Start – Informed Consent

If someone approaches you to ask you to share and use your information (or even if you go to them because someone told you about them), there are some basic steps which should begin that conversation. Every information-sharing process should start with “informed consent”.

What does “informed consent” mean? That the person wishes to collect and use your information should make sure that:

- You have all the information you need to make a decision about whether to talk to them or work with them.
- You are making that decision on your own, free from any pressure or coercion.

Key ingredients for “informed consent” process

1. You are clear about who they are and what organisation they are from.
2. You are clear about what they wish to use your information for.
3. There is a two-way conversation, and you are encouraged to ask questions and raise any concerns.
4. They explain the benefits and risks for you, and you discuss with them any other safety, privacy, well-being, etc, concerns that you may have.
5. You understand how they will protect your privacy, confidentiality and safety.
6. You don’t feel any pressure to say yes.
7. They give you time to make up your mind.
8. You know how the interview or other interactions will take place (where, who, when, duration, topics, recordings/photos/videos) and you have some influence and choices on this.
9. You feel that you have all the information you need to decide.
10. They give you time and space to go away and get advice if you want to.



Principle 2: Respect Survivor Control and Autonomy

More information about informed consent can be found in the following resources:

- Synergy for Justice, Syria Supplement to the Second Edition of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, November 2023, pp. 124-134
- UNFPA, Guidance on informed consent for gender-based violence communications, August 2025.
- WHO, Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies, 2007, p. 22.

At this stage, it is most important for you to ask questions and raise any concerns you have. This is your initial conversation to help you decide whether to proceed or not.

> ***I asked questions before I agreed to speak. How they answered told me a lot about their experience and their respect for survivors.***

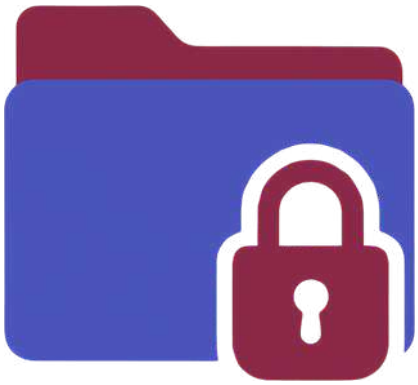
There are example questions below which can help you get the information you need and help influence where and how the interaction will take place.

Where will the meeting take place?

- *Where can we meet that is safe and private?*
- *Who will be there?*

Who else will be there?

- *Who else will be there? Why?*
- *Can I have someone with me?*
- *(If you would prefer to meet a man or a woman), would it be possible for a woman/man to interview me? Is there a male/female doctor available? Is there a male/female interpreter available?*
- *(If you don't understand them clearly or you speak different languages), is it possible for us to use an interpreter who speaks my language/dialect and that I am comfortable with?*



About privacy and confidentiality:



- *How will you ensure that my story is not shared without my agreement?*
- *Who will have access to my information?*
- *Do you have to report anything I say to someone else?*
- *How will you store my information safely? How will you hide my identity?*
- *What will you do with my information?*



Watch out for the following warning signs in the how the person answers; if you see any of these, you may not want to continue: they are unable to give detailed answers, they show signs they have not thought about it or are not prepared, they give any guarantees of 100% privacy and confidentiality, they cannot explain their measures and safety procedures in simple terms, or they show any impatience with your questions.

About safety:



- *What are the risks for me to talk to and otherwise work with you?*
- *How can you keep me and my family safe?*
- *What if something happens? How can I reach you in an emergency? What can you do if there is an incident or something happens?*



Watch out for the following warning signs in how the person answers – if you see any of these, you may not want to continue: they are unable to give detailed answers; they show any sign that they have not thought about it or are not prepared; they give any guarantees of 100% safety; they cannot explain their safety procedures in simple terms; they show any impatience with your questions, or they show unwillingness to give you contact details or respond to you after your meeting is finished.

More information about informed consent can be found in the following resources:

- International Protocol, pp. 84-118.

About the process:



- *How will we do this?*
- *How long will it take?*
- *How can you help with my childcare responsibilities during that time?*
- *Can I take breaks?*
- *Can I tell you my story in my own words first, before you ask me any questions?*



Watch out for the following warning signs in the how the person answers – if you see any of these, you may not want to continue: any sign of impatience with your questions or are rushing you; anyone who tells you they have a set of questions that they need to ask in order, or that they just need you to answer all of their questions; if they won't allow breaks and they are not helpful or respectful about your concerns or commitments such as child care responsibilities.

About the record of the interview:



- *How will you keep a record of my story?*
- *Is this a statement which can be used directly in courts?*
- *How can I check that what you have noted down or recorded is accurate and does not contain information that should be protected?*
- *Will I have to tell my story again?*
- (If they request or take a photograph or make a video or audio-recording), *why do you need to do that? How will you use it?*



Watch out for the warning signs in how the person answers: if they cannot answer your questions with careful, considered answers with sensible reasons, you may not want to continue.

NOTE: you can say no to audio, video or computer recordings. You can refuse to sign something if you cannot read it or understand it or if you don't feel comfortable.

Set your terms!

You can ask to set any ground rules or terms that you wish. For example, some survivors recommend that you ask the person to sign the Murad Code to show their commitment to it. You can consider asking them for their written commitment to listen, be respectful and uphold your dignity, be honest and not promise what they cannot honour, to protect your confidentiality and privacy, not judge or blame, to ask permission to use your information and to take photos/video/audio.

Telephone or Online Interviews

Increasingly these days, people seeking information may ask you to speak to them through a telephone call or video link. This presents a different and additional set of technical needs and risks that you should be aware of.

Additional considerations include:

- **What equipment and procedures are needed for secure and private communications for arranging and then participating in telephone or online interviews.** For example:
  - Arranging a remote interview must be done in a safe and private way. For example, you should not be called or messaged unexpectedly to ask whether you would do an interview. The person contacting you should also explain how you can delete traces of the message or call from the device that you are using.
  - A safe place where you take the call or speak online where you cannot be overheard, and which you can access safely, privately and easily.
  - A computer, tablet or phone with software/platform that protects (encrypts) communications such as video calls (e.g. Signal, Jitsu Meet, Wire).
  - A good internet link to provide bandwidth for video calls, and sufficient data that you do not have to pay for.
  - Software for protected video calls so that you can see the person speaking to you and so they can see you. You can also ask to see who else is in the room with them or ask who is listening in.
  - Testing the system to make sure it works.
  - If using your own device for the interview, safety measures to remove any trace of the interview or call from your device.
- **Someone you trust nearby** (or in the room with you if you wish) to help with:
  - The technology if something isn't working.
  - Support if you feel distressed or uncomfortable.





Also stop and consider before deciding whether to proceed:



- Cyberhacking – who could be listening in?
- Who is off camera in the room with the interviewer?
- Ensure no recording, screenshots or user names on screen without your consent.
- What will you do if the connection is lost?
- What will you do if a family member or someone else unexpectedly walks into or otherwise interrupts the remote interview?



See the rights tool for survivors, **10 Important Things to Remember Before, During and After Remote Interviews** (by phone or over the internet) which will be published soon.[5]



You may find the following resources and standards for practitioners useful to understand best practice and risks in remote interviews:

- The Institute for International Criminal Investigations (IICI), IICI guidelines on remote interviewing, August 2021
- JEC, Restricted Access Interviews: a guide to interviewing witnesses in remote human rights investigations, August 2021.

[5] This resource is a companion guide to the 2015 IASC GBV Guidelines (available at www.gbvguidelines.org).

How to Recognise Good Practice

This section can help you assess whether the situation feels right and what to expect from a professional, ethical and responsible person seeking your information. The following examples are good practice and are drawn from the principles of the Murad Code as demonstrating safe, ethical and effective practice so that you can recognise positive behaviour. We use green traffic lights to show it should be good to proceed, but only you will know if you feel comfortable and if it feels right for you.



- They find you through a trusted organisation and take time to earn your trust.
- They apply the central principle of “ask the survivor”. They ask you what you want and need, what your concerns are, how you would like to do things.

> ***Empower us by giving us choices.***



Principle 1.3: Ask the survivor



- You don’t feel any pressure from them.
- They can answer your questions well and you feel reassured that they have prepared well in terms of safety and confidentiality.
- They ask you open questions (for example, questions that start with ”Tell me about”, “Describe for me”, “Explain to me”, “What, How, When, Who?”) and give you the space to talk about what happened in your terms and in your words.

> ***The documenter should allow the survivor to take the lead, let her tell her story as she needs to tell it. She might say something that is not important to the documenter, but she needs to say it for herself because it's important to her. Documenters sometimes try to guide too much.***



- They work with you to find a time and place to meet that you are comfortable with and feel safe coming to and being there.
- They provide water, food, a support person or companion if you want one, and take regular rest breaks.
- They check in with you about time, your comfort levels, etc.
- They acknowledge your courage, the value of what you are sharing and your time.
- They create ways to follow-up and stay in contact if you wish.

Principle 5.9: Enable follow-up

> ***They focus on you as an individual, not as your story. They ask us other questions beyond the violence. We want people to know about the consequences, how we got past it, how we become a person again, how we moved on, have rebuild our life, how we learned to live with it. Please help turn this experience into something positive. That will help us change.***

Signs for Caution

This section gives you examples and early warnings of behaviour that do not meet the minimum standards of the Code. If you see these signs, stop and think!

The red traffic light signals serious risks of potential harm and situations which may be best to avoid or stop.

Amber lights are those which should make you cautious – you can ask questions, ask for a change of approach and decide whether or not to continue.



- You cannot understand them (or their interpreter).
- They don't ask permission before trying to take photos or videos.
- They ask you to sign something without reading it to you or giving you a chance to read it (in your language).
- They focus solely on the violence you have experienced and not you as a person.
- They pressure you for information when you are not comfortable to give it.
- They are dismissive of your concerns.
- They ask you to tell your story for a second or third time to their colleagues.



- They show up at your door or otherwise contact you unannounced.
- They do not respect your local customs and expected behaviours.
- They make you feel rushed or under pressure.
- They don't give you their full attention.
- They refer to another survivor by name in front of you.
- They don't give you time to ask questions or raise concerns.
- They seem unprepared and unaware of local dangers or risks.
- They don't know anything about support services or trusted community-based organisations.
- They ask you a rapid series of questions without giving you the space to tell your story in your own words.
- They ask 'Why' questions.

What Happens Afterwards

It is also important to think beforehand about what happens after an interview or meeting, as there are measures and protections you should agree and put in place before you share your information.

What to agree in advance

- Whether there are any limits to their confidentiality and privacy measures.
- That any communications will be done safely and based on your wishes in terms of means of communication, and timing of communications (for example, not when you are at home, or not when you are at work).
- How the interview will be conducted, for what duration and who will be present. That there will be time provided at the end to close the interview with care and respect, providing a separation between recounting traumatic events and your normal day-to-day life.
- If you have been asked to travel for the interview, how will you be supported away from home, on your journey back home and once you are back home. Have you identified someone you can talk to once you get back home, particularly if you have not been able to tell your family or friends?
- What your information will be used for, how it will be stored and who it can be shared with. If this cannot be agreed to your wishes, then do not share the information in the first place.
- That you have the right to review and approve any intended publication, including for any private and identifying information which you can insist they remove for safety reasons.
- How to stay in contact for follow-up in terms of any review or approval of the publication, changes in circumstances, withdraw or changes to informed consent, security issues arising.



Principle 5.9 Enable follow-up
Principle 10.4 Create a safe interview process

What to expect at the end



- The interview should end after you have completed telling your story, and taking time to ensure any distress and reliving of the events is closed off together, helping you to feel grounded in the present and prepared for the days to come.
- They should provide a reminder of how to contact them if you wish to change your mind, if you have any concerns arising or any security issues come up.
- There should be a discussion again about the importance of support, and a discussion of potential referrals for different kinds of assistance.



- The interview should not end abruptly without time for you to come back to the present and to feel grounded again.
- It is problematic if the interviewer does not discuss support with you and how to manage any heightened or refreshed memories you may experience in the coming days.
- It is problematic if there is no way to contact them again if you need to; for example, if you change your mind about how your information can be used.

Questions you can ask about follow-up and what happens next



- *How can I reach you safely? What if there is an emergency? How can I contact your organisation if I can't reach you?*
- *If I change my mind, how do I contact you and what can you do?*
- *What will happen next?*
- *When will you tell me about any news and developments?*
- *Will you tell me before you share any of my information with* [e.g. the courts]*?*

Advice from Other Survivors

> *I am more than pain: I am a whole person. What happened doesn't define me.*

> *You do not owe anyone your story. Whatever you decide is valid. You are not alone.*

> *Tell survivors and children they are in control. They decide how much they want to share. My trauma is my story and I share what I want. This small piece of my story I keep to myself because I want to have something private to use to heal.*

> *Some may have blamed you. Maybe you may have even blamed yourself. But remember, it's not your fault. So many people have been through this. It can happen to anyone.*

> *You have nothing to fear, your story is from your truth, you own that truth.*

Groups of survivors have created videos with advice and messages for other survivors. Here is one example from Cote d'Ivoire: www.muradcode.com/are-you-a-survivor-i-am-one-too.



Acknowledgements

This Guide was drafted by Dr Ingrid Elliott and co-designed with six survivor experts: Elizabeth Atieno, María Alejandra Gómez Duque, Ajna Jusić, Meris Musanovic, Venesa Sulimani and Philomène Uwamaliya. Other experts contributed to its development and review: Olivia Head, Gabriël Oosthuizen, Danaé van der Straten Ponthoz and Marion Volkmann-Brandau. We are grateful for their invaluable assistance. We are also grateful to the survivors who contributed to two other Murad Code project resources which are also quoted in this Guide: the *Survivor Perspectives Resource* and "*Are you a survivor? I am one too*" advocacy video.

From 2023 to 2026, the Murad Code project, including this Guide, is supported by the government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada. Funding support for the development of the Guide was also provided by the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative of the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (up to March 2023).





