

# Storytelling for Change: Shifting the Culture on Gender-based Violence

A Tip Sheet for Documentarians from the Canadian Women's Foundation

## INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Women's Foundation invited documentarians and a trauma expert to join a panel discussion on gender-based violence in documentary storytelling at the 2024 Hot Docs festival. Part of a series of knowledge sharing events, these conversations aim to shift culture on gender-based violence by engaging filmmakers and other creatives to share their experiences and knowledge.

This document is a compilation of information shared during the session and not intended to be a complete resource. For more information, see the list of additional resources at the end of the document.



# Get informed about gender-based violence and how to support those who have experienced it

- Research **ethical storytelling** and its relationship to trauma and gender-based violence.
- **Consult with a trauma specialist** or survivor advocate to help guide you through a trauma-informed approach to the story you want to tell.
- Take the **Signal for Help online mini course** to learn more about supporting survivors and recognizing the signs of abuse.



- **Add time and budget in your production plan** to accommodate survivors: this might include taking days off from filming or providing counselling support.

# Prioritize the trust, well-being, and consent of survivors throughout production



- **Build trust with local communities** before beginning your work; for example, spending time on-site before filming.

- **Consider having a counsellor available** to support during key phases of production (during and after shoot days, edit review, and audience screenings). If your project is an Indigenous-led production, you may want to work with an Elder and have them available for support throughout your project.



# Prioritize the trust, well-being, and consent of survivors throughout production



- **Allow survivors to retract consent:** someone may start out wanting to tell their story but decide down the road that they aren't comfortable anymore. This could look like: not using their interview in your project or keeping their contributions anonymous.

- **After the project has been shared, check in** with participants and your team—challenging feelings may come up over time. Similarly, it can be a good idea to talk through any press coverage or public response as a group.



# Some ethical considerations for sharing a survivor's story



## CONSIDER:

**whose land am I on?  
Whose story is this?  
Consider the impacts  
of colonialism and  
how your project can  
reduce harm.**

## ASK YOURSELF:

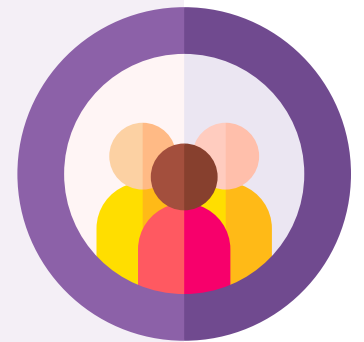
**do I need to tell this  
story? If I think I  
need to, why?**

- If you're working with marginalized communities, **ensure representation from the community on your production team to avoid tokenization.** If that isn't possible, consider engaging a culturally relevant support counsellor, leader, or elder from the community. Taking time to learn from the community you're working in and developing these connections is key.

# Support the well-being of your production team



- Cultivate a production environment of **safety, support, respect, collaboration, and solidarity**—feelings that are *opposite* to those that come out of trauma.
- **Explore what works best for you and your team**, e.g. regular check-ins or collective meals at the end of each production day.
- **Consider all crew.** For instance, sound engineers and editors spend a lot of time with the raw content, which can be challenging or triggering. Consider regular briefings with your team about the content they'll be working with, and/or providing support resources.





## Useful Resources

1. [How to Support Survivors of Abuse: What I've Learned - Chatelaine](#) - Article by panelist Nana aba Duncan
2. [Support Services - Canadian Women's Foundation](#) - List of support organizations across Canada
3. [Trauma-informed journalism: What it is and why it's important + tips \(journalistsresource.org\)](#)
4. [ICGBV-Guide-to-Ethical-Storytelling-on-Gender-Based-Violence.pdf](#), Irish Consortium on Gender-based Violence [Trauma Informed Reporting - Transom](#) - Guide to trauma-informed reporting with a focus on conducting interviews
5. [Signal for Help Responder Campaign](#)
6. [Signal for Help online mini course](#)

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