

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Disclosing, Confronting or Going Public About Surviving Sexual Violence

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The Awareness Center, Inc.

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WARNING

Survivors of various forms of sexual violence (childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, clergy abuse, professional sexual misconduct and sexual harassment) often want to disclose their experiences, confront their perpetrators, and/or speak-out about their victimization. This is done in an attempt to try to help educate the public. Often the urge to share personal information about one self occurs during various stages of healing.

If you are considering speaking out PLEASE review the many questions listed in this pamphlet. You may also want to refer to "The Courage to Heal" (by Laura Davis and Ellen Bass) and "The Courage to Heal Workbook" (by Laura Davis). It is also highly suggested that you consult with your family, friends and or therapist prior to speaking engagements.

Unfortunately, the reality is that our society has NOT been very accepting and/or understanding to the various issues faced by many adult survivors of sexual violence. The majority of the survivors who have confronted individuals, and/or have gone public -- shared that they had negative experiences after sharing their abuse histories with others. These survivors have all been met with disbelief -- been considered to be crazy, hysterical and/or delusional. Too often survivors state that after the disclosures, they felt that they have lost a level of credibility.

We, as survivors can not be responsible for the reactions of others. What we can do is take control of our actions and be prepared for the outcome if we decide to share our histories with others. It is vital for each individual decide for him/her self, and be sure that they are not being pressured to going public. This is a reminder that once you share information about yourself -- you can NOT take it back!

If you thinking about going public, it is important to consider how you are going to do it.

1. Are you going to use your real name or a pseudonym?
2. Will you wear a disguise of some sort?
3. Will you be paid? How much?
4. If you are going on television will the producer of the show agree in writing to use a computer and distort both your voice and face (this is strongly suggested for the beginner)?
5. Will you have to sign a contract or an agreement? What will it say? It is strongly suggested you read the agreement BEFORE the day you are supposed to speak-out (and if possible have an attorney review it too)!
6. Will your attempt to educate the public cause harm to your credibility? Are you allowing yourself to be exploited?
7. Will it hurt you in your present or future career, social life, family life (including your spouse and children)?

The Following are some questions you can ask yourself to help you make up your mind if disclosing, confronting and/or going public is right for you.

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper. Think about the following questions and your answers. Share your responses with at least one trusted support person. Ask for Feedback! BEFORE you disclose and/or confront someone.

1. Whom do I want to tell? Why?
2. Is someone or something internally/externally pressuring me to disclose my abuse history or confront my perpetrator(s)? Who and/or What is pressuring me?
3. If my plans includes going public, what are my motives? (It's suggested you consider all of the following questions before speaking in any public forum).
4. What do I hope to gain from this disclosure and/or confrontation? What could I lose by this disclosure and/or confrontation? Are my expectations realistic?
5. Have I thought about safety issues? What are they for me?
6. What are my motives for confronting my perpetrators? Do I have to be concerned about my safety?
7. Am I confronting my perpetrator(s) to gain information? Can anyone else supply me with the information I desire?
8. Would I be risking something I still want from my family (i.e. financial and/or emotional support, inheritance, employment in family business, other)?
9. Could I live with the possibility of being excluded from family gatherings (i.e. Holidays, Weddings, Deaths in my family...)? What would that mean to me? How would I deal with the loss?
10. Am I willing to take the risk of losing contact with other family members with whom I want to stay connected? What would that mean? Would I deal with the loss?
11. Am I grounded and stable enough to risk being called crazy?
12. Could I maintain my own reality in the face of denial?
13. Can I withstand the anger that I am likely to face from others?
14. Could I handle my own anger and/or other feelings? How would I do that?
15. Could I handle no reaction at all?
16. Do I have a solid enough support system to back me up before, during and after the confrontation?
17. Which support people agreed to be available before, during, and after?
18. Can I realistically imagine both the worst and best outcomes that might result? Could I live with either one?
19. How have I prepared myself for the Confrontation and/or disclosure?
20. Other issues I've considered regarding confronting or disclosing my abuse to others.

Remember: It is important that you focus on yourself and your own personal needs before deciding to go disclose, confront and/or go public. This is also true before, during and after any confrontation. Try to remember what you want or need to say (for your own personal needs and not anyone else's), how you want to handle the situation, rather than on any response you may hope to get. Plan to process the confrontation and/or disclosure with your therapist and/or trusted support person(s). Remember, this can be an ongoing task (and that's ok).



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