ETHICAL STORYTELLING FOR SURVIVORS

How to Share Your Experience with Power, Protection, and Purpose

> *"Your story is yours. Sharing it is an act of courage and bravery — not an obligation. When you tell it on your terms, in your own words, at your own pace, it becomes one of the most powerful tools for change that exists."*
>
> — I Am Faythe Consultancy

WHAT ETHICAL STORYTELLING MEANS

Ethical storytelling is the practice of sharing survivor experiences in a way that **centers around dignity, preserves safety, and transfers power back to the person telling the story. It is healing.** It is not trauma dumping. It does not cause the person telling emotional or mental harm and leaves out personal and intimate details. It stands in contrast to exploitative storytelling — which uses trauma for shock value, extracts pain for other people's gain or reduces a person to the worst things that happened to them. Ethical storytelling recognizes that a survivor is **a whole person, a child of God** — not a tragedy, not a cautionary tale, not a prop for a fundraising campaign.

THE FIVE CORE PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL STORYTELLING

1 CONSENT

You decide what to share, what to withhold, and when to stop. Consent is ongoing — you can change your mind at any time, including mid-conversation.

2 CONTROL

You own your narrative. No one has the right to paraphrase, edit, or summarize your story in a way that changes its meaning without your explicit review and approval.

3 SAFETY

Your physical and emotional safety come first. No story is worth sharing if it risks your identity being exposed, your location being revealed, or disrupts your well-being.

4 DIGNITY

Your story is told through the lens of your strength and resilience — not only your suffering. You are a survivor, an advocate, and a person created in the image of God— not a case number or a cautionary tale.

5 PURPOSE

Your story should serve a goal that matters to you. Ask yourself: Why am I sharing this? Who benefits? Does this align with my healing and my values?

FOR SURVIVORS: WHAT TO DO — AND WHAT YOU ARE NEVER REQUIRED TO DO

✅ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- **Decide exactly what details you share** — and keep the rest entirely to yourself
- **Use a pseudonym or first name only** — you never owe anyone your legal name
- **Stop at any time**, without explanation or apology
- **Review any written or recorded version** of your story before it is published or shared
- **Withdraw consent after sharing** — including requesting removal of recorded content
- **Be fairly compensated** for your time and expertise when sharing with organizations

✗ YOU ARE NEVER REQUIRED TO:

- **Share graphic details** of abuse, exploitation, or violence — ever
- **Answer questions** that feel invasive, inappropriate, or retraumatizing
- **Perform your trauma** to make an audience feel something or so they will give more money
- **Minimize your healing** to seem more sympathetic or 'broken enough'
- **Speak on behalf of all survivors** — your experience is yours alone
- **Accept last-minute requests** without adequate time to prepare

- **Ask clarifying questions** before agreeing to share — who will hear this? How will it be used?
- **Say no** to any event, platform, or organization that does not feel safe or aligned with your values
- **Forgo compensation** because 'it's for a good cause' — your expertise has value
- **Continue sharing** with any organization that does not respect your boundaries

SHARING YOUR STORY AT FUNDRAISING EVENTS & WITH ORGANIZATIONS

BEFORE YOU AGREE

- **Ask in writing:** Who is the audience? How many people? Will it be recorded or live-streamed?
- **Request the agenda** so you know exactly when you speak and for how long
- **Set your boundaries in advance** — provide a written list of topics you will not discuss
- **Ask how your story will be used** after the event — will it be edited, published, or shared?
- **Request a support person** be present — an advocate, counselor, or trusted ally
- **Negotiate compensation** — speaker fees, travel, childcare, or a donation to a cause you choose
- **Practice your story** with your support person until you feel grounded in it

DURING THE EVENT

- **You control the narrative** — stay within the boundaries you set in advance
- **You do not have to answer Q&A questions** that go beyond what you prepared to share
- **Signal your support person** if you feel unsafe, overwhelmed, or need to stop
- **Use your language** — you are a survivor, an advocate, a person. Not a 'victim,' 'prostitute,' or 'case.'
- **Pause when you need to.** Silence is powerful. Drink water. Breathe. You set the pace.
- **Redirect invasive questions:** 'That's not something I share publicly, but what I can tell you is...'
- **End on your terms** — close with your vision, your healing, or a call to action of your choosing

AFTER YOU SHARE

- **Debrief with your support person** — sharing your story can be activating even when it goes well
- **Request a copy** of any recording, transcript, or published version before it goes public
- **Review how your story was used** — does it accurately represent what you shared and how you intended it?
- **Request corrections** if anything was edited, altered, or taken out of context
- **Practice aftercare** — rest, therapy, journaling, or whatever restores you
- **You can decline future requests** from any organization without providing an explanation
- **Assess the relationship** — did this organization treat you with dignity? Would you return?

RED FLAGS IN ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES TO PAY ATTENTION TO

- **Being asked to share graphic details** to increase donor emotional response and increase giving
- **Publishing your photos, name, or identifying information** without explicit written consent prior to filming or sharing
- **Editing your story** without your review and/or approval ahead of time, in writing
- **Framing you as broken, helpless, or defined by your trauma** rather than as whole person made in God's image
- **Refusing to compensate** you while paying all other speakers or vendors
- **Inappropriate compensation** which includes gas and food cards, expensive gifts (jewelry, perfume), and anything less than at minimum $500
- **Using your story in perpetuity** without renegotiating consent each time
- **Treating you as props** for credibility rather than as equal partner in the work
- **Diminishing your value** by only asking you to share your story with donors instead of being a consultant

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While this is not an exhaustive list, it is a start in helping you understand how to navigate sharing your personal story with others, especially for fundraising events to help an organization raise money. Always remember that it is not up to you to help them raise the money they need to keep their programs running. It is up to them, and it is up to them to do it ethically. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, don't understand the contracts or agreements, or for any other reason, you have the right to say NO and wait until you do. You can also put a plan in place prior, including media agreements, that can help you navigate the nuances and often difficulties in negotiating your terms. If you ever need assistance, you can email us and we will be more than happy to help you navigate it.