

Self-care, healing, and safety

A guide for Brave advocates

Overview: At the Brave Movement, we know that well-being, self-care, and security are unique and personal journeys for all humans, survivors or lived experience experts of childhood sexual violence. These journeys are lifelong, varying greatly in form and timeline for each individual. There is no right or wrong way to navigate this journey of care. This plan provides an overview of how organizations working with survivors can integrate essential elements of well-being, security, and self-care into their advocacy efforts for the prevention, healing, and justice of childhood sexual violence, including technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. It should be continually updated and expanded as new resources, research, and feedback are integrated within the Brave Movement and the larger global efforts to end this crisis.

About the Brave Movement: The Brave Movement is a global, inclusive advocacy network of survivors and allies to end childhood sexual violence through campaigning and advocacy. It envisions a world where all children and adolescents grow up free from the fear of sexual violence. To achieve this vision, the Brave Movement utilizes two main strategies:

- Elevating and supporting survivor voices and leadership
- Supporting international movement-building and aligned, coordinated advocacy and campaigns

To learn more about us and our survivor leadership, please visit our [website](#).

What we hope you gain from reading this:

This plan aims to provide advocates with guidelines for safety, self-care, and mutual support, creating a foundation for empowerment in their work.

Brave code of conduct and child safeguarding:

Please note that by engaging with this plan and the Brave Movement as a whole, you agree to both our [Code of conduct](#) and our [Child safeguarding policy](#).

Created by: This document was created by and for survivors, with additional input from team members and partners of the Brave Movement (in alphabetical order): Jessica Airey, Janet Aguti, ElsaMarie D'Silva, Tom Krumins, Daniela Ligiero, Tabitha Mpamira, Matthew McVarish, Rosalia Rivera, Robert Shilling, Nina Vaaranen-Valkonen, Kaylan Weems, S. Caroline Taylor

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Disclaimers & suggestions

Disclaimers:

- We recognize that culture, beliefs, values, race, and language shape our worldview and are essential to our collective care and healing. We acknowledge the need for cultural nuances and contexts to create a comprehensive and trauma-informed plan.
- We suggest that this plan be translated and updated for specific communities as needed, including accessibility design and levels of knowledge related to childhood sexual violence.
- While this plan aims to address the lived experience of numerous people, it cannot and should not attempt to cover every single experience of a victim or survivor of childhood sexual violence.
- This plan uses the terms “survivors” and “lived experienced experts” interchangeably, and refers to those who are publicly disclosed and undisclosed. We welcome and encourage all survivors to self-identify based on their comfortability, needs, and safety - everyone has the right to determine how they would like to be addressed.
- This plan uses an ecological framework to address safety, security, and self-care within the context of our movement
- The information provided should not be a substitute for the advice and guidance of trained professionals and this plan is not a therapeutic tool.

Stop & get help

If you need immediate emergency assistance for whatever reason, our [“Get help” page](#) can connect you to free helplines and/or confidential support from trained professionals around the world.

Suggestions for how to use the plan

- Read all the above disclaimers before engaging.
- Complete the outlined exercises at your own self-guided pace or in coordination with a trained professional. If helpful, we suggest having a notepad and pen, or your phone notes available while doing these exercises.

Get the support you need

We encourage all advocates in the Brave Movement to identify and secure professional and community support. This work is difficult and can be traumatizing, regardless of whether you have lived experience.

- You can work with trained professionals (e.g., psychologist, therapist, coach, mental health professional) or alternative practices that are culturally appropriate (e.g., peer support group, mentor, spiritual leader/guide).
- Whoever you engage with should understand the nuances of childhood sexual violence and have the cultural relevancy to help you feel connected.
- For guidance on finding a mental health professional, consider this worksheet [found here](#) published by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection.

Trigger warnings

This document addresses childhood sexual violence, including technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation, and explores various themes related to mental health that may be distressing to readers. We encourage you to take your time while engaging with this material. If you experience feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, or fear while reading, we suggest taking a break and returning to it later.

Ongoing self-care

The MeToo Movement has a full self-guided digital healing platform, Survivor's Sanctuary. The Sanctuary reminds survivors that healing is possible. With 36 lessons created by Black, Indigenous, and Brown practitioners ranging in depth from 5 to 25 minutes and modules exploring affirmation practices, breathing exercises, and compassionate self-touch, survivors are welcome to begin or continue their healing journeys wherever they are.

To use the Survivor Sanctuary, [click here](#).

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Foundations of healing and safety

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

If you've been guided here, you are already taking the first few steps to better take care of yourself and therefore your community.

Stop & breathe

Before continuing, we suggest taking 5 deep breaths or scanning the QR code below for guided breathwork.



....or [click here](#)

This work can be both incredibly difficult and deeply rewarding. Whether you have lived experience or not, it is likely you will find yourself reflecting on past experiences when talking about and working with topics related to sexual violence. Many survivors state that doing advocacy work is one of the most healing aspects of their journey, and we're excited you've chosen to take that journey with us.

“Even where our experiences are different, there is something we instinctively understand and recognize within each other that allows us to be more open because we can absolutely say the things we want and need to say without fear or judgment.”

Rhiannon-FayeMcDonald, survivor leader & SAGE member

Survivors and allies

The Brave Movement is building a movement for everyone interested in addressing childhood sexual violence around the world. The 3 definitions below help us make sure you can take action regardless of your lived experience.

Publicly-disclosed survivors

Individuals who have shared their lived experience of childhood sexual violence and have consciously decided to recognize themselves publicly as survivors.

Publicly-disclosed survivors may require additional support and safeguarding, as their public personas may be the target of threats or harassment.

Non-disclosed survivors

Individuals who have the lived experience of childhood sexual violence but have not chosen to recognize themselves publicly as survivors.

This group may include survivors that have disclosed within their community, small group of colleagues/friends, or advocacy networks but chosen not to share more broadly (e.g., on social media)

Allies

Individuals without the specific lived experience of being the target of childhood sexual violence.

Some allies may have someone close to them who experienced sexual violence and have a personal connection to the issue. Others care deeply because they are concerned about the safety of children in their lives (e.g., parents) or around the world.

The Brave Movement uses the language “**movement of survivors and allies**” for two reasons:

1. To hold space for allies to contribute to the movement
2. To provide a safe label for non-disclosed survivors to engage.
 - a. If you are a survivor and have not publicly disclosed your lived experience, there is no pressure to do so.
 - b. We encourage you to use the label of “ally” and feel empowered to participate safely.

To learn more about Brave’s approach to building a movement of survivors and allies, [click here](#).

The four R's

The Brave Movement is committed to the trauma-informed approach of the “four R's” outlined by the Center for Health Strategies [found here](#) and listed below which is:

Rrealize

Have a basic realization of trauma and how trauma can affect families, groups, organizations, and communities as well as individuals. Everyone can have trauma even if it is not related to childhood sexual violence.

Recognize

Recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system.

Respond

Apply the knowledge, skills, and principles of a trauma-informed approach to all areas of functioning.

Resist re-traumatization

Actively seek to resist re-traumatization.

“What we do is important.

How we take care of ourselves is equally as important.”

Tom Krumins, survivor leader & Brave Movement chief of staff

Definitions and terminology

Definitions are important. They help us have shared language and understanding as we advocate to keep kids safe from sexual violence.

The definitions below are not all-encompassing. You may even use different language in your own work and that's okay. These are simply the definitions the Brave Movement uses.

Childhood sexual violence

Sexual violence against children and adolescents is complex, can take many forms, and is influenced by various factors. It can be perpetrated by both adults and peers, those known and previously unknown to the child, by individuals working alone or in groups and gangs, and in diverse settings inside and outside the home, school, and the wider community.

Sexual violence against a child includes items such as inappropriate approaches and touches, harassment, grooming (preparing a child with the intention of committing acts of sexual violence against them), pressuring or forcing someone into sexual acts, offering money or some other compensation in exchange for sexual acts.

To learn more about childhood sexual violence and its many nuances from [Together for Girls](#), [click here](#).

Technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation

Technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation includes a wide range of behaviors and situations. Most commonly, this includes grooming, live streaming, producing and consuming child sexual abuse material, and coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes.

To learn more about addressing online child sexual abuse and exploitation from the [Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation](#), [click here](#).

Child sexual abuse material

Child sexual abuse material is any content that depicts sexually explicit activities involving a child. Visual depictions can include photographs, videos, or computer-generated images indistinguishable from children and youth.

To learn more about [Child Sexual Abuse Material \(CSAM\)](#) from [Thorn](#), [click here](#).

Trauma and its impacts

To work effectively in this space, it is key that we acknowledge trauma and its potential impacts. Individual trauma results from an event or series of events/circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. It often has adverse effects on an individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being. (National Library of Medicine, n.d.)

Levels of trauma

Trauma doesn't just happen to individuals. According to SAMHSA, or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, trauma may be experienced at three different levels: micro (individual, family), mezzo (groups), and macro (organizations/ community). These levels can overlap and contribute to the collective impact.



Credit: <https://ecosocialwork.wixsite.com/ecosocialwork/blank-1>

Types of trauma

There are different types of traumas¹ as well, including but not limited to:

Acute trauma can arise from intense distress in the immediate aftermath of a **one-time event** – the reaction is typically for a shorter duration.

Chronic trauma can arise from harmful events that are **repeated or prolonged**. It can develop in response to persistent bullying, neglect, abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual)

Complex trauma can arise from experiencing **repeated or multiple traumatic events** from which there is no possibility of escape. It is often grounded in a sense of being trapped.

Secondary or vicarious trauma can arise from **exposure to other people's suffering** and often affects first responders and social workers. This trauma is every bit as real and can lead to compassion fatigue.

***Survivors of childhood sexual violence
may experience one or all types of trauma.***

***....so can everyone else.
It is part of being human.***

***It is important we remember that
we each bring our own lived experience to this work.***

***It is important we remember that
others may be carrying trauma that we cannot see.***

Let's take care of each other.

¹ Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/trauma>

Safeguarding against compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue describes the physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of helping others. Compassion fatigue is often mistaken for burnout, but it is a unique experience tied directly to experiencing the trauma of others you care about.

Compassion fatigue can affect your ability to engage in your work or advocacy. Fortunately, there are clear signs that you or someone you know may be developing compassion fatigue.



Mood swings

You may experience moderate to severe mood swings. Compassion fatigue may lead to pessimistic or cynical thinking.



Detachment

You may experience a withdrawal from social connections. You may feel emotionally distant from friends, family, or colleagues.



Addiction

You may experience secretive self-medication or addiction – in alcohol/drug addictions, gambling addiction, or even workaholism.



Anxiety/Depression

You may experience anxious or depressive feelings. You may view the world as overly dangerous or feel demoralized about yourself.



Productivity issues

You may experience trouble concentrating, remembering or being productive in your personal or professional life.



Insomnia

You may experience a disruption in your sleep or disturbing images or intrusive thoughts. This often results in feelings of exhaustion.



Physical symptoms

You may experience unprocessed trauma through a host of bodily symptoms:

Exhaustion

Fatigue

Changes in
appetite

Digestive issues

Headaches

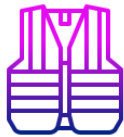
Muscle pain

**To learn more about compassion fatigue and its impacts
From WebMD, [click here.](#)**

Trauma-informed practice or policy

A **trauma-informed practice or policy** simply refers to the recognition that every person we interact with may have experienced some trauma, so we proactively create and establish protective factors to respond to this. For a deeper dive into trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the phases of trauma [click here](#) for resources and video by the The Assist.

The Brave Movement bases our trauma-informed approach in the following 6 Guiding Principles [found here](#) as outlined by the The Assist:



Safety

Ensuring emotional and physical safety



Trustworthy / Transparency

Decisions are made with transparency to build and maintain trust for all



Peer support

Utilizing lived experiences and stories to promote healing



Collaboration

Everyone has a role to play in this healing process



Empowerment, voice, and choice

Individuals strengths are recognized, built on, and validated



Cultural, historical, and gender issues

Actively moving past stereotypes and biases to offer inclusive services

Stop & reflect

It is important that we understand how our trauma affects us both as individuals and as a movement.

Take time to think about potential trauma with videos [found here](#) from the Canadian Survivor Group, [Phoenix 11](#). Their hope for these videos is that they can help you grow compassion for all the ways your body and mind, or those of someone you care about, adapted to survive.

Defining and working with our triggers

Because of the trauma that survivors and lived experience experts may face, triggers can happen when doing this work. Triggers can also arise for anyone working in this field as they aren't just associated with childhood sexual violence.

What is a trigger?

A **trigger** is simply a stimulus that causes a person to relive a past trauma.

A trigger could be a person, a place, or any sensory item such as a phrase, smell, or even color. It could also be things such as an event or even an anniversary.²



Person



Place



Smell



Phrase

It's helpful if we all understand our triggers, how we can work to avoid them, and what to do when they arise. If we choose not to address them, it is likely you'll end up feeling worse.

It is also important to remember that no one is "damaged" because they have trauma and triggers. These are our brains' natural responses to overwhelming and distressing information.

Stop & reflect

Open the worksheet [found here](#) from Therapist Aid and reflect on identifying your triggers and creating a mitigation strategy.

Remember, the first thing is to understand what a potential trigger is for you. Getting clear on what it is allows you to create a mitigation plan and strategy for when they arise.

² Saripalli, V., & PsychCentral. (2022, April 28). *Triggers: What They Are, How They Form, and What to Do*. Psych Central. Retrieved June 14, 2024, from <https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-is-a-trigger>

Coping strategies

It can also be helpful to reflect on some of the subtle thoughts, feelings, sensations, or behaviors that may start to arise at the onset of a problem. Triggers can be dealt with in healthy ways if people are given the proper coping mechanisms.

Here are some strategies to cope when a trigger arises:



Run your hands over really cold water.

Alternate between cold and warm and notice the sensations that pop up when you switch.



Use your taste buds.

Pick up a sour candy, mint, or piece of gum. Focus on its distinct taste.



Listen to an external sound.

Breathe as you listen and give your full attention to the sound.



Feel with your feet.

Place your feet on the ground or a soft surface. What are the sensations that arise?



“Snap back” into the moment.

Put a hair tie or rubber band around your wrist. When you notice yourself triggered, pull and release the band.



Study an object.

Focus on a small object, such as a pencil or coffee mug, and identify every color and shape.



Connect with your senses.

Use the 5 senses exercise [found here](#).

Public disclosure of childhood sexual violence

Sharing one's lived experience can be difficult, even if it's shared privately with those that we love and trust. Sharing publicly adds a layer of risk and potential harm.

With that in mind, Brave has provided guidelines to safely disclose your lived experience or to support another survivor as they disclose.

Disclosing your lived experience

Making a public disclosure marks the beginning of a new journey. There are the days and weeks of preparation. There is the moment of disclosure itself. And there are the days and weeks of processing it that follow.

Public disclosure can be a powerful and healing experience. It exposes our internal mental and emotional wounds to the sunlight, providing space for processing in a community of support. However, disclosure can also sting and burn as a reminder of all you have been carrying.

If YOU are over 18 years old
[click here.](#)

If YOU are under the age of 18,
[click here.](#)

**Working alongside organisations when publicly sharing
experiences of child sexual abuse
(Marie Collins Foundation)**

[click here](#)

We respect peoples' decisions to not disclose their abuse for a variety of reasons, whether that be internally with us at the movement or externally.

If you choose not to disclose, you can still participate fully in advocacy with the Brave Movement under the title "ally". ***There is never a pressure to disclose.***

Supporting another survivor's disclosure

As an advocate in a global movement, survivors may feel comfortable and empowered to disclose their lived experience with you.

While this is often a good sign that their stigma and shame is fading, disclosure is an important milestone that requires careful consideration for both their wellness and yours.

If THEY are over 18 years old

[click here](#)

If THEY are under the age of 18

[click here](#)

Stop & reflect

It is possible as well that if you choose to disclose publicly about your abuse, you may find others confiding in you about their own abuse. Together for Girls published a full blog post [found here](#) about what to do—and not to do—so you're equipped to respond in the best way possible.

Child disclosure and safeguarding

The brave movement does not engage minors (under the age 18) as spokespersons for the movement in any way.

Although Brave does not engage with minors in our formal advocacy or movement-building work, we recognize that children or adolescents may choose to disclose to individuals in our network.

We have therefore created a robust [child safeguarding policy](#) to ensure a safe experience for any child or adolescents who engages with Brave in an informal capacity.

Identity and violence

Childhood sexual violence affects some communities and societies more than others. Factors like gender and social inequalities, poor housing and job opportunities, weak governmental policies, cultural norms, and economic and health barriers contribute to this problem.

Understanding these factors is essential to solving the crisis. **We need to know the facts before we can find solutions.**

Gender

Women and girls

- Globally, more girls and young women are survivors of childhood sexual violence³.
- Girls and women have long faced sexual bias and damaging beliefs that violence against them is normal and expected.
- Many systems of power in the world are male-dominated.

Men and boys

- Systems and patriarchal views that devalue women and girls also harm men.
- Many male survivors don't report their experiences due to a culture of silence and shared concepts about masculinity.

Gender non-conforming

- People who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender have higher rates of violence⁴
- Ideas around gender are nuanced and fluid and we respect those who are non-gender conforming.

Race and ethnicity

- Race and ethnicity can also disproportionately affect children who may be exposed to sexual violence
- The Economist Impact found that 79% of 18 year olds belonging to an ethnic or racial minority experienced at least one sexual harm during childhood⁵.
- Race and ethnicity can also lead to differences in access to prevention, healing, and justice

Other social factors

Social inequities affect childhood sexual abuse and allow people in different social positions or statuses have unequal opportunities and rewards. This happens in consistent and predictable ways, leading to unequal distribution of resources, wealth, opportunities, rewards, and punishments. Examples include:

- Unequal access to opportunities such as employment and economic systems
- Health disparities, such as access to services and information leading to worse health outcomes
- Inequities in the legal and justice systems that can lead to imprisonment

³ *Devastatingly Pervasive: 1 in 3 Women Globally Experience Violence*, 2021: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

⁴ Human Rights Foundation: <https://reports.hrc.org/an-epidemic-of-violence-2023>

⁵ Harrison, L. (n.d.). *Global Threat Assessment 2023 Data*. WeProtect Global Alliance. Retrieved June 14, 2024, from <https://www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-23/data>

Setting and maintaining boundaries

In addition to the trauma that survivors or lived experience experts can face, we need to talk about boundaries and why they are the most foundational item for all of us.

How to think about boundaries

Personal boundaries are the ways in which we want to accept behaviors or actions from others to feel most comfortable in our relationships. Boundaries can be either statements or behaviors that we use to express to others how we want to be treated. Setting boundaries can be hard because it requires you to uphold them and keep yourself accountable for doing so.

Overall, **setting boundaries allows us more freedom and peace** as it allows us to set healthy expectations with ourselves and others. Having boundaries for yourself should also include respecting others' boundaries. A simple but clear way to gauge if you have strong boundaries is to assess if you regularly ignore your desire to say "no."

*"My favorite definition of boundaries is
the distance at which I can love you and myself simultaneously
and not one at the expense of another."
Tabitha Mpamira, survivor leader & SAGE member*

Stop & reflect

Take time to think about the questions below.

- In what areas of your life could you have stronger boundaries?
- What areas are you currently doing well in?

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers here. We just want you to recognize that you are worthy of creating your ideal life and boundaries can help push you in the right direction.

If you'd like to fill out a worksheet to help identify your boundaries, [click here](#).

Types of boundaries

There are many different types of boundaries you can use to take care of yourself:



Emotional boundaries

What, where, and how much you share your emotional life

- Understand that your feelings and needs are separate from others' feelings and needs.
- Take responsibility for your own emotions and reactions.



Physical boundaries

What, where, and how much you share your personal space

- Make it clear and known to others how you feel about touch and personal space.
- Understand who you will allow access to your personal spaces.



Intellectual boundaries

What, where, and how you share your opinions, thoughts, and preferences

- Respect others' ideas, even when you disagree.
- Make appropriate decisions as to when to engage in discussions or thoughts.



Digital boundaries

What, where, and how much you engage in interactions in the digital space

- Define how much privacy you need and apply the applicable settings.
- Limit the amount of time you spend online (i.e. scrolling on social media)



Work & advocacy boundaries

What, where, and how much you engage in work or advocacy efforts

- Schedule breaks throughout your workday.
- Put time limits on certain activities or when you will stop working for the day.
- Recognize that your personal time is just as important as your work.
- Say "no" when your workload is too heavy.

For a deep dive into more ideas surrounding boundaries, [click here](#) to see the Center for Mindful Psychotherapy's approach.

Practicing self-care

Self-care is essential to your journey of healing and to working with us at the Brave Movement. The National Institute of Health examined various definitions and concluded that self-care is “the ability to care for oneself through awareness, self-control, and self-reliance in order to achieve, maintain, or promote optimal health and well-being.”

If we can't take care of ourselves while doing this work and ultimately burn out or become exhausted, we aren't doing the work right.

*“It is vital for us to recognize what actions we're taking
when we're at our best.”*

Matthew McVarish, survivor leader & SAGE member

Self-care is going to look differently in relation to your cultural identity and practices. Many societies in the world have had self-care built into daily routines for thousands of years and the term “self-care” has no meaning as it is simply a way of life. In general, western cultures have made self-care feel inaccessible and costly. We encourage people to connect with the wisdom and legacy of their ancestors and culture to tap into the nurturing of themselves. Self-care is community and collective care.

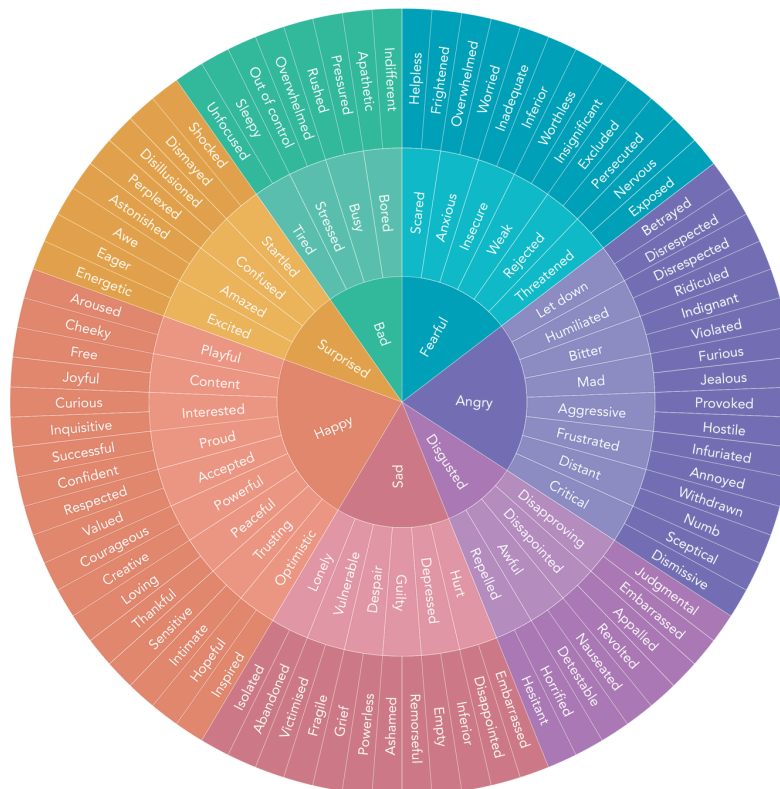
Understanding your emotions

One of the first steps to self-care is understanding your emotional self and getting a better sense of what you're feeling at any time, and what you may need to change to feel better.

There may be days when you feel on top of the world and days when it feels like the world is crashing down. It is most important to be kind to yourself throughout this journey. It can be hard to understand what we are feeling – especially when we are overwhelmed. This is because most of the time, we are experiencing multiple feelings at once.

The emotion wheel

One of the most recognized tools for understanding where you're at emotionally is the emotion wheel. This tool was developed to highlight the big emotions we feel and see the other related emotions we may not always recognize.



Credit: <https://www.calm.com/blog/the-feelings-wheel>

Stop & reflect

Take 5 minutes to think about how you're feeling right now.

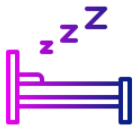
- Look at the wheel and try to identify your emotion. Sometimes a good way to figure out our emotions is to do a quick body scan. Use [this link](#) on how to do a body scan.
- Try to figure out what triggered the emotion for you. If needed, journal about it.
- Analyze any possible connections. When has this emotion come up before? Is it connected to anything you're worried about in the past or future?
- Take positive actions to feel better. Can you get up and physically shake it out? Can you watch a funny video? Can you distract yourself for a bit? Can you talk to a trusted friend or loved one?

Being proactive with your care

Survivor leaders consistently share that self-care must be used and practiced before we may need it. Engaging in this work is a journey, and we should take care of ourselves.

*“You need to be aware of your own needs
and take appropriate actions to re-energize yourself.”
Elsa Marie D’Silvia, survivor leader & SAGE member*

All the best self-care tools are ones that we as humans may do every day but also that can fall at the wayside when we aren’t feeling our best. This includes items such as:



Make time to sleep and rest properly



Eat nourishing full meals and drinking water



Move around by stretching, dancing, swimming, yoga, etc.



Create intentional breaks for reflection, meditation, etc.



Engage in activities or practices related to spirituality



Hold space for activities that make you feel joyful



Build and maintain connections to other humans and loved ones

Stop & reflect

Take 10-15 minutes to identify the following:

- What are the things that I do when I’m feeling well?
- What do I absolutely need to do every day to stay well?
- What are some activities that I might need to do if I am feeling overwhelmed?
- What are some activities that I would ideally like to do weekly or monthly?

Building self trust

One of the best ways to work safely is to trust yourself. You have the answers inside of you. Trusting yourself can build up your self confidence and can help you make clear decisions.. One practical way to gauge your feelings about a situation is to note that **anxiety often sits in your chest while intuition sits in your gut.**

Stop & reflect

Take 5 minutes to consider the following as it relates to building self-trust:

- What's one small promise you could make to yourself today and fulfill? For example, you could promise to take a shower and follow through.
- What's one thing that you love about yourself that makes you uniquely you? Maybe you have a fun sense of humor or you're a talented artist.
- How can you be gentler in how you think or talk to yourself? For example, what would you say to a friend in a similar situation? How would you speak to them if they came to you with a problem?
- Who's one person in your life with whom you can start to practice self-trust? This is someone with whom you can practice making decisions with such telling them your preference for dinner plans.

"It is important we all work to remain soft with ourselves."

Kaylan Weems. Brave membership manager

Vigilance and personal safety

In more practical terms, personal safety when doing advocacy work in a physical location can look like:

Being aware of your surroundings within a public space and as you're traveling to a public space

Trust when something feels wrong in your body. Remember, you can decline doing something at any moment

Entering or leaving a venue with others

Using a fake name

Seeking help and community when needed - this could be in the form of a Brave employee or trusted advocate

Taking a direct route to locations with as many other people and lights in plain site as possible

Keep others updated about where you are and how long you will be there

Not agreeing to any "closed door" meetings without other individuals

Preparing for safe advocacy

To do advocacy work, we must feel safe and emotionally-regulated. In the Brave Movement, we consider ourselves all advocates. Specifically, we advocate for bold and ethical change with both governments and those in the private sector. Personal safety must be an individualized plan because what makes you feel safe won't necessarily work for someone else.

Advocacy can happen in many ways but always involves action and public support for a cause. This can mean speaking up, arguing for, supporting, or defending a cause, and or advocating for other people. These actions can be big or small and can happen in-person or online.

Defining your capacity

Before you think about advocacy, it's important to think about your capacity. Capacity simply refers to what you can hold, store, or do.

Advocacy goals are usually never short-term outcomes. Many people in this space have been doing work on this issue for decades now. Because of this, we must constantly be asking ourselves and others guiding questions about whether we have the bandwidth to engage or not. When you as an individual are asked to engage in any type of advocacy engagement, whether in-person or online, consider use the following questions:

Do I have the emotional and physical bandwidth to engage this opportunity right now?

Do I have the realistic time to complete a task?

Am I in the right headspace to take this action?

Safety

As mentioned when doing advocacy work, safety is the most important thing for ourselves and others. We'll discuss safety from various perspectives, including:

- Personal safety – in the context of physical, emotional, and psychological safety
- Safety of others
- Safety of the actual advocacy work itself
- Online safety
- Organizational safety and risks and social risks

Stop & act

Create a safety crisis plan. We recommend this guide from the Army of Survivors, which you can print and fill out – [found here](#).

Examples of advocacy

We feel that our voices together will help to make private, public, and digital spaces safer for children.

Speaking out to members of a governmental agency or institution	Holding a meeting with a lawmaker or public official educate them	Creating a public campaign to broaden awareness, education, and support
Speaking to or writing for media outlets	Speaking with one other person, a neighbor, or a small group	Writing to elected officials
Participating in a podcast	Re-sharing or creating any social media posts related to advocacy efforts	Participating in research gatherings

Stop & reflect

Some questions to help you understand your emotional bandwidth could be:

- Do you often feel overwhelmed by minor issues?
- Are you getting irritated by things or people that usually don't bother you?
- Do you feel extremely tired or drained most days?
- Is it hard to empathize with others or their problems?
- Do you frequently feel stressed or on edge?

If any of these answers spark some additional thought and recognition, that's okay and we're proud of you for being honest with yourself. Please remember that understanding your capacity will help you show up most authentically in this work.

The Brave Movement honors that if at any point you want to remove yourself from an opportunity, you have the right to do so. ***Just because you said “yes” at an earlier time doesn’t mean your answer still stands.***

Bonus exercise

If you do feel you have emotional bandwidth, some additional questions can be asked to help gauge your capacity for an event or engagement including:

- How does this opportunity fit with the goals of the Brave Movement or your personal advocacy goals? How does it help our goal of ending childhood sexual violence?
- Is it a paid opportunity, or what benefits will you and the movement gain from attending?
- Does it suit your preferences?
- Do you feel comfortable with what's being asked, and was it made clearly and with enough notice for you to commit?
- How will the organizers handle sensitive information or personal experiences?
- Can anonymity be guaranteed if requested?
- Will media involvement be required? If so, can clear details, requests, and trauma-informed guidelines be provided to the media in advance?

“In every project, in every campaign, in every process that we’re engaging with a survivor or lived experience expert there needs to be constant opt-out options available. We need to go above and beyond normal consent asking.”

Jessica Airey, former Brave Europe campaign manager

Advocacy events

For effective advocacy, the Brave recommends the following safe advocacy model to be followed for any event or engagement opportunity which includes the following:

Before the event

Conduct a risk assessment.

For the event itself, all risks should be outlined to survivors. Some examples could be:

Risk that anonymity may not be able to be secured

Risk of retraumatization with the re-living of experience

Risk of possible emotional exhaustion due to the reliving of experience

Risk that outside parties could be dismissive of work

Coordinate and communicate travel and accommodations

When coordinating an event, it's important to share all details regarding travel or accommodations as far in advance as possible. Provide space for questions and discussion.

Travel

Ensure that survivors feel comfortable with the flight and driving accommodations

Lodging

Vet prospective hotels using online reviews and known safe areas.

Uber and food vouchers

Survivors should have a clear outline of food and possible transportation vouchers.

If a survivor wants to book their own accommodations, make it clear what the budget is. Emphasize that safety is the top priority.

Agendas and expectations around participation

Make sure you have a clear plan regarding meetings and that survivors feel clear on what the ask or day will look like.

Agenda with times and locations where survivors are needed

Outline bathroom and food breaks

Recognize that all post-work gatherings are optional

Schedule time for a mental health pre-brief that goes over the services that will be offered to those attending.

Day of the event

Establish an intervention team

Communicate to individuals that they can always opt out if needed.

Plan breaks

During events, provide safe spaces and time for processing emotions .

Secure a mental health professional

Have a licensed or trained mental health professional available at all times.

Schedule regular check-ins

See how everyone is feeling about the work and ensure they're comfortable.

After the event

Hold a debrief session

De-briefing helps people process the emotions they feel and also allows for a better educational experience about an event or engagement. A successful debrief session normalizes the process of safely sharing feelings, thoughts, emotions.

Here are several questions you can cover in a debrief session.

What went well?
What should happen at future events?

What went poorly?
What should change for future events?

Did you feel safe and supported?

Did you experience overwhelm?

How can survivors be more empowered for future events?

Are there any ideas you would like to pursue for future events?

Provide access to care

Onsite care

Provide a safe space and/or trained professional to help survivors decompress during the remainder of their time onsite.

Access to self-care resources

Make sure that everyone who participates knows they have access to self-care resources and emergency hotlines.

Conduct participant check-ins

Contact all participants 3-5 days after the event to ensure they are feeling safe and supported. Share links to self-care resources and emergency hotlines.

Media engagement

Sometimes, as an advocate, you might use media like newspapers, TV interviews, podcasts and online news sites to share your message or experience. These opportunities can provide risks for those who speak out. There are many reasons why:

1. Once you say something to the media, it's hard to take it back or change it.
2. Talking about personal trauma might be made worse by reporters who aren't respectful.
3. You could become a target for harassment online or in person.
4. Your reputation and possibly legal safety might be at risk.

These risks can be serious, and the Brave Movement wants to make sure people who talk to the media know about them.

Deciding whether you want to speak with the media

Before talking to the media, we recommend the following steps:



Spokespeople should try to attend a training session led by a communications expert. This will prepare people to handle interviews skillfully and understand items such as “on the record/off the record” and bad faith lines of questioning.



Spokespeople representing the Brave Movement must use approved key messages that are checked for accuracy and organization boundaries.



Ideally, spokespeople should have support from a media relations professional and a trauma specialist during interviews. The media expert can help to handle tough questions, while the trauma specialist can help with any well-being needs.



All media opportunities must be checked by a media professional beforehand to avoid difficult or unfair interactions. Regional experts should also be consulted to align with local strategies.



We recommend that spokespeople take time before agreeing to a press interview. Don't rush into a decision, even if deadlines are tight. It's important for spokespeople to fully understand and consider the risks involved.

Sharing your experience publicly

It is an important and deeply personal decision for someone to share their story publicly. Take the time to prepare properly, and you can have a better, safer, and more fulfilling experience.

Brave bases its guidelines on guidance from the Australian Government National Office for Child Safety ([found here](#)). These concepts will help you make the best decision for you.

Prepare

Take time to prepare before sharing your experience

Are you ready to go to the media?

What is your motivation or desired outcome?

Do you have the right support?

Consent

You have the right to be informed before giving a journalist consent

It is your right to know what will happen when you tell your story and once it is public. This includes fully understanding the legal impacts.

**NOTE - the final outcome may look different due to changes during the editorial process*

The media

Understand how the media and journalism works

Different forms of media operate in different ways and having a better understanding of how media works will help you know what to expect.

**NOTE - It can help to [share guidelines with the media](#) to improve how they engage survivors.*

Boundaries

Be clear about your boundaries and conditions at the start

You have the right to have control over how your experience is told. This includes how much you share when you decide to tell your story, and where and how you engage with the journalist.

Stay safe

Look after your safety and seek support and advice

Only engage with the media if you feel physically and emotionally safe. It can help to activate your personal and professional support networks.

Remember that you are an expert and your point of view matters.

People may dismiss or doubt you. That is okay. Trust in yourself and lean on your community.

Communication & collaboration

When working in advocacy, it is essential that we all speak, listen to, and treat each other with respect. This work isn't easy. There may be times when people have big emotions. We need to make room to accept ourselves as full humans having human experiences.

No matter how far along someone is in their journey, they need to have space to process these feelings that arise. It is important we don't have a fear of being shamed or looked at differently if we show up with big emotions.

What is collective care?

Collective care is all a culture of “**prioritizing the emotional and physical structures we all need to live more loving and liberated lives**” as defined by two gender activists, Janey Starling & Seyi Falodun-Liburd.⁶ For the Brave Movement, this means that we put in place policies, procedures, and a culture where we all contribute and shape it together.

Some examples of collective care at the Brave Movement are:

<p>Being mindful of diversity and the different lived experiences that we all bring to the table.</p>	<p>Being aware of signs of *burnout or exhaustion checking in with others.</p>	<p>Being honest about feelings, opinions, and decisions in a respectful manner</p>
<p>Collaboration and a disregard for competition with other members</p>	<p>Leading with kindness and compassion for all other members</p>	<p>Supporting other members when they make decisions or set boundaries</p>

***Examples of burnout can be:**

- *Lack of energy, focus, or productivity*
- *Reduction in motivation or changes in behavior such as being late or completely missing tasks*
- *Frequent illnesses or expressions of insomnia or sleep changes*
- *Frustration or anger at what may be considered minor items*

⁶ TED Talks. (2023, March 8). *How collective care can change society* | Janey Starling & Seyi Falodun-Liburd | TEDxLondonWomen. YouTube. Retrieved June 14, 2024, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj-alDQD2fg>

Principles for trauma-informed communication and collaboration

We communicate with transparency and sensitivity.	We prioritize clear and direct communication	We foster an environment where members feel safe to express concerns and needs.
We show deep understanding and respect for everyone's experiences and feelings	We seek to identify and resolve conflicts in a trauma-informed manner.	We uphold high ethical standards on confidentiality and non-discrimination
We value and respect the diversity that individuals bring to the movement.	We recognize the impact of trauma on communication styles and needs.	We strive to accommodate the unique needs that individuals may face.

Showing up

Our impact is greater when we work together as a stronger, more unified movement. ***It is important to prioritize “showing up”.*** When you collaborate consistently and communicate clearly, it becomes easier for you and those around you to navigate challenges, support each other, and come up with solutions.

Oftentimes, advocates may focus too much on what we “owe” others that we work with. ***We may not share our work because we do not believe it is “ready” to share.*** We may create our own self-silos, separating from others when we have a project or task – because of a positive desire to deliver for those we care about and a negative anxiety that we may be judged on the merits of our work.

Prioritize showing up, and only commit within your means. Organize and/or participate in regular meetings, brainstorming sessions, and workshops. Show up and share the burden of our good work.

This work doesn’t work if we do it alone.

Meeting structure and design

Brave uses a trauma-informed meeting structure based on a model by Michigan State University [found here](#).

All Brave advocates and partners are encouraged to implement trauma-informed structures into their meetings.

Prepare the physical space or digital space

For physical spaces

- Make sure the physical space or room can comfortably fit everyone
- Consider arranging the seating to allow for open dialogue and conversation
- Provide appropriate accommodations for any participants with disabilities.
- Check to ensure exits are clear and that people know where they are

For digital spaces

- Send a calendar invite in advance with a clear meeting link and disclaimers on privacy/accessibility.
- Ensure accessibility requirements are provided such as closed captioning or an ASL interpreter if needed.
- Provide a contact email/phone number in case a participant has technical difficulties joining the digital meeting space.

Prepare attendees in advance

Notification email to attendees

- Goals/objectives of meeting & key questions/topics to be covered
- How information will be collected during the meeting (i.e., note-taking, audio/visual recording), for what purposes
- Who is invited to the meeting (including any outside parties)

Logistics

- Communicate how the information collected and discussed will be used outside of the meeting and if anything needs to be put in place to protect people's privacy

Prepare live emotional/mental support during the meeting

Recommendations

- Create a separate Safe Space – a private and accessible room near the meeting space for survivors to decompress and relax.
- If possible, contact a wellness expert to provide further support.
- Include breaks between sessions.

Other options

- Allow support persons and/or advocates to accompany survivors as silent observers during the meeting.
- Provide art supplies, drawing pads, small toys, or other items for survivors to use as tactile distractions.

Prepare follow-up communications

Concluding the meeting

- Thank attendees for their input and willingness to share.
- Offer options for people to suggest additional ideas that occur to them later.
- Remind attendees what will be done with the information collected.

Sending the follow-up email

- Thank attendees for their participation.
- Share links or information on how to take action on items discussed in the meeting.
- Share links to submit ideas or feedback.
- Provide reminders of self-care, healing, and safety
- Give updates on upcoming events or calls to action. In a movement, people want to feel included in the march forward.

Power sharing and survivor leadership

At the Brave Movement, we aim to foster an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. We recognize that because we are a survivor-led movement, we have a responsibility to share power.

Brave's commitments

Some practical ways we do this are as follows:

- Brave commits to sharing power with survivor leaders in nations around the world.
- Brave commits to uplifting the voices of those who may be unable to speak for themselves.
- Brave commits to holding space for feedback and critique.
- Brave commits to local governance and strategy.

The platform model

Brave Platforms are designed to empower local leaders to drive action. Governance guidelines are developed at the local level, and strategies are formed by leaders on the ground. Events, calls to action, and relationships are all managed by nations and regions themselves.

We believe this model is foundational to building a true movement. Local leaders know best, so we must share power and uplift where we can.

Honoraria

In recognition of the immense courage it takes to publicly share their stories or dedicate a significant portion of their time to the movement, Brave has developed a policy for providing honoraria to survivors of childhood sexual violence engaging in certain pre-approved activities.

An honorarium is any payment made in exchange for rendering a service or activity that is not part of official duties.⁷ Common uses include speaking at events, serving in advisory roles, or sharing a recorded interview for dissemination.

The Brave Movement's Honoraria Policy outlines the organization's approach to the dissemination of honoraria to survivors engaged in certain pre-approved leadership roles and official campaign advocacy.

⁷ New York State Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government: <https://ethics.ny.gov/honoraria>

Types of activities

There are many ways that a survivor can guide or shape the Brave Movement. Several examples are outlined below:



Participating in a task force:

Survivors can lend their expertise and insights to help shape Brave Movement policies and campaigns. Task forces are short-term groups formed at the global and regional levels to conduct a campaign, produce a deliverable, or take an action.



Contributing to Brave Movement resources and materials:

Survivors can contribute to the production of certain official resources and materials by requesting topics to be covered, participating in interviews, delivering feedback, joining roundtable discussions, and more.



Sharing lived experience publicly:

Survivors can share their experiences through an approved campaign by the Brave Movement, contributing to a focused and strategic plan of action. Survivors can also share their perspectives and experiences freely outside of the Brave Movement, so long as it does not break the Code of Conduct.



Speaking at an event or activation:

Survivors can share their stories at conferences, workshops, campaign activations, or other public forums. While survivors may be requested to speak on a specific topic or subject area, they are encouraged to speak honestly and in their own voice.



Participating in documentary projects or campaign films:

Survivors can contribute to documentary projects or campaign films, sharing their stories to inspire empathy and drive societal change. There are multiple rounds of feedback conducted throughout filming and production, empowering survivors to shape their own narrative.

Online safety & security

There are important concerns to address in the online space, especially for survivors of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. Images and videos can be repeatedly shared on the internet, causing ongoing harm and trauma.

Many survivors may need to stay anonymous for safety reasons. Abusers can use these images and videos to harm victims over time with threats and/or stalking. AI technology can make this issue worse as well by creating or allowing for the sharing of child sexual abuse imagery.

Benefits of the online space

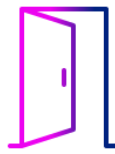
While the internet does pose risks, it can also be a powerful and healing place.

As the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence notes in their resource of survivor-led social media groups [found here](#) the online space can allow for:



Anonymity

It can be easier for some survivors to speak about difficult topics with honesty and authenticity online than would happen face-to-face.



Accessibility

Social media is free and accessible 24/7, which can help survivors who need connection or support outside of business hours, or who cannot access services in their community.



Acceptance

Social media and community groups offer a shared space for people. This can be appealing for survivors who feel isolated, misunderstood, or unsupported in their daily lives.

Potential risks

All social media engagement from your personal accounts is completely your choice. We also want to outline some potential risks if you choose to publicly identify yourself or even your experience of childhood sexual violence abuse online. This could be items such as:

- Mocking or making light of your experience
- Discrediting your experience or shaming you about it
- Making critical remarks to content shared
- Content could be taken from you and shared in other forums that you haven't agreed to
- Potential death threats and doxing

Creating a plan

Our technology tools can be great, but their default settings do not prioritize survivor safety and healing. Find time to meet with those you trust to develop a shared plan. Then take action to keep yourself safe online.

Create shared boundaries

- Consider what your personal boundaries need to be with others including personal information, photos, or even mentions that you aren't comfortable with.
- Commit to share your hesitations and concerns openly with people in your circle.
- Don't post any personal details about others without their consent.

Discuss engaging new people

- If you receive any emails, DMs, or messages that appear to be suspicious, delete and/or block
- Review settings for who can connect with you. Think twice about accepting friend requests from individuals you don't know.
- Familiarize yourself with how to report content. Understand that reporting inappropriate content creates a safer internet.
- Don't click unknown links, especially from people you don't know.

Safeguard your technology

- Make sure your computer is regularly updated and that you have a standard firewall
- Create strong passwords that aren't associated with anything that others could find online
- Update your software when prompted

Protect your data

- Limit your personal details online:
 - Your address
 - Phone number
 - Name (including your last name)
 - Birthdate
 - Schools you attended
 - Employers including past and present
- Familiarize yourself with privacy settings on all of your accounts ([Read a guide to privacy settings](#))

Find a confidential tool

- For sensitive conversations, use secure communication platforms. Avoid discussing sensitive topics over regular email or SMS.
- Avoid the usage of all AI tools when discussing sensitive topics.

Consider other practical tips

- **Use aliases if needed** – This means changing your name or using a different name
- **Safeguard yourself legally** – Do not name or declare the guilt of anyone if they have not been convicted of abusing anyone. You could be sued for libel or defamation of character.

Stop & reflect

Take 30 minutes to view the following two resources and consider your online presence and ways you want to make sure you feel good about engaging in this work:

- Tech Safety [found here](#) outlines how you can create a personal technology safety plan, tips of documenting potential abuse, how to secure devices and accounts, guides to emails and more.
- Privacy Rights Org [found here](#) outlines how online data collection works, what different privacy policies entail, how accessing the internet works, etc.
- Conversations with children about online technology assisted harm can be [found here](#)

“Be prepared for the fact that if you do share your experience online, you [may] have trolls. Know the risks ahead of time and prepare for them.”

Robert Shilling, Survivor Leader & SAGE Member

Safety of the work

Advocacy does not happen in a vacuum. It is important to check the context and broader risks when preparing

What is the political climate where you are?

Is it safe to speak against governmental authorities, figures, or politicians?

What are the potential negative shifts in the public’s opinion of you?

What are the potential risks of threats or violence you could face?

Is your family able to support you? Are they comfortable with the public scrutiny?

What are the potential social risks you could face for speaking out?

What considerations should be made for women survivors choosing to speak out?

What considerations should be made male survivors choosing to speak out?

What considerations should be made for those who have been historically marginalized?

If you want to discuss safety with us more in-depth, please contact us at info@bravemovement.org

Starting your advocacy journey

We are honored that you are willing to partner and advocate with us here at the Brave Movement. We are proud of you for taking action and speaking out...

...but know ***this is only the beginning of a lifelong journey.***

Advocacy work to address childhood sexual violence is deeply challenging and rewarding. This is especially true if you have a personal connection to the issue.

Building a better world for children requires dedication, self-care, and effective communication. ***Taking care of others requires taking care of ourselves.***

The lessons and best practices in this guide are only a foundation to a lifetime of self-care, healing, and safety. Remember to prioritize your well-being while helping others, and ***feel encouraged to seek support when you need it.***

And always remember...

Being brave does not mean being alone.

Parting thoughts from survivor leaders

"Be the person that you needed after your trauma event".

"You can't help others if you can't take care of yourself."

"You have a right & responsibility to treat your wellness needs seriously."

"Trauma not transformed is trauma transferred - Thank you for your courage to heal so we can all together break the cycles of trauma."

"You are not alone."