

REFLECTION GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS

Considering Involvement in P/CVE



2026 Version

BEFORE YOU GET INVOLVED

Some survivors of terrorism choose to become involved in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Some do so by sharing their experiences publicly, while others contribute through advocacy, research, education, policy, mentoring, or advising organizations. There is no single "right" way to contribute.

Working in P/CVE can be meaningful and rewarding, but it can also be emotionally demanding and may have unintended consequences for you and those close to you. This work may affect your wellbeing, relationships, privacy, future career opportunities, and recovery.



This guide is designed to help you reflect on whether becoming involved in P/CVE is the right step for you at this point in your life. Take your time and answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. Some people find purpose in this work, while others choose to contribute in different ways—or not at all. All are valid choices.

1. Why Do I Want to Become Involved?

Survivors become involved in P/CVE for many different reasons. Understanding your motivations can help you determine whether this work aligns with your values and goals.

- Why am I considering becoming involved?
- What do I hope to contribute—and what do I hope to gain from this work?
- If I chose not to become involved, how would I feel?



There is no expectation that you should become involved in P/CVE because of what you have experienced. If you do get involved, public speaking is only one option; you can also contribute through research, policy, mentoring, advising, education, or community engagement.

2. My Wellbeing

Working in P/CVE may involve discussing terrorism, hearing about attacks, engaging with people affected by violence, or revisiting your own experiences. Reflect on how these situations might affect you.

- What situations might be particularly challenging for me?
- Consider particular dates, anniversaries, news events, environments, sounds, or other situations that may affect you unexpectedly.
- How might other stresses in my life affect my ability to do this work right now?
- How do I usually cope with emotionally difficult situations?
- What helps me recover? Who would I turn to if I needed support?
- Can I leave the emotional weight of this work behind at the end of the day?
- Do I have interests, relationships, and activities that help keep me grounded?
- How would I know that I need to take a break?



This work can be emotionally difficult. Anniversaries, new attacks, personal loss, or other stressors may affect you unexpectedly. What feels manageable one day may feel harder another. Have people you can turn to and give yourself permission to take a break when needed.

3. Sharing My Experiences

Some survivor roles involve sharing personal experiences publicly. While many people find this meaningful, it is entirely your choice whether, how, and when you share your story.

- Do I want to speak publicly about my experiences?
- How would I feel if people came to know—or define—me primarily through my lived experience?
- What parts of my story do I want to keep private?
- Are there questions or topics I do not want to discuss?
- How might public exposure affect my family, privacy, relationships, or career?
- Could being publicly identified create safety concerns for me or loved ones?
- How would I handle a question that feels insensitive, blaming, hostile, or too personal?



Once you share your story publicly, you may lose control over where it goes. Others may quote, record, edit, or share it out of context. Think carefully about what you make public, because it can be difficult to take back.

4. Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries can be especially important—and harder—when your own experiences bring you to this work. Clear limits can help you stay involved in a way that is sustainable and leaves room for the rest of your life.

- What boundaries would help me feel comfortable in this work?
- Am I comfortable saying "no" without feeling guilty?
- Are there types of work, requests, or situations I would not want to take on?
- How much time and energy do I want to give to this work?
- Where does my responsibility end?



P/CVE work can make it hard to separate personal experiences from the work itself. A strong desire to contribute can make it harder to notice when you are taking on too much—or to say no without guilt.

5. Working in P/CVE

If you choose to become involved professionally, your lived experience is only one part of what you bring. Organizations should also support your development, respect your boundaries, and recognize your broader skills and expertise.

- What strengths do I bring beyond my lived experience?
- What type of role would suit me best?
- What skills or experience would I like to develop?
- Do I want my lived experience to be central to my role, or only one part of it?



Your lived experience may open the door to this work, and some people build a career in the field. Look for opportunities to build skills, take on new responsibilities, and grow. Your time, perspective, and contribution should be valued and respected.

6. Choosing the Right Organization

Organizations have responsibilities. They should provide appropriate support, respect your choices, and never expect you to share more than you are comfortable sharing. Before agreeing to a role or activity, it can help to ask some questions (see the following page).

- ▶ Remember: you are interviewing the organization just as much as they are interviewing you.
- ▶ Be cautious if you feel pressured to share more than you want to or take part in something you are uncomfortable with.



Not every organization is prepared to involve individuals with lived experience. A good organization will respect your boundaries, provide appropriate support, and value you.



Questions to consider asking a potential employer

SUPPORT

- What support is available if I find this work emotionally difficult?
- Who can I contact before, during, or after an event if I need support?
- Do you work with counselors or other external support providers I could access if needed?

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Can I decline speaking or media opportunities?
- About an event:
 - Who will the audience be, and what kind of setting will I be speaking in?
 - Will questions be moderated, and will I be prepared for difficult questions?
 - Will the event be recorded, shared online, or attended by media?
- How does the organization respond to harassment or unwanted media attention?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- What training do you provide?
- Will I receive preparation for speaking with different audiences, handling difficult questions, or dealing with the media?
- Will I have opportunities for building a network or mentoring?

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- Are survivors respected as professionals?
- Are survivors involved in decisions that affect their work?
- What happens if I change my mind, or need to step back?

7. Inquiring About Compensation

Sharing your experiences involves more than the time spent on stage. Preparing, travelling, speaking, answering questions, and processing the experience afterward all take time and emotional energy. Before agreeing to an activity, think about the full practical and emotional cost to you.

- Is this a paid role, voluntary position, or occasional speaking engagement?
- Is there an honorarium or speaking fee?
- Will my travel, accommodation, meals, childcare, or other expenses be covered?
- If I need to take time away from work or family, how is that recognized?



Wanting to contribute does not mean you should be expected to work for free. Your time and experience have value, and it is appropriate to ask how your contribution will be compensated.

8. Looking Ahead

There is no expectation that survivors should automatically become involved in P/CVE. Your recovery, wellbeing, and future remain the priority.

- ▶ Being a survivor is part of your story, but it does not have to become your identity—or your career.
- ▶ Whatever role you choose, it should support the future you want to build, not limit your ability to pursue new interests, opportunities, and chapters in your life.
- ▶ You can always change your level of involvement over time or step back.

Final Questions for Reflection

- Why am I considering becoming involved?
- What do I hope to contribute—and what do I hope to gain from this work?
- If I chose not to become involved, how would I feel?

Whatever you decide, the goal is to choose a level of involvement that feels right for you and supports the life you want to build. If you do become involved, stay connected to people you trust and can turn to along the way. We hope this guide helped you make that decision with greater clarity and confidence.



Feedback and Questions

This is a living document and may be updated as practice develops. We welcome questions, suggestions, and feedback on how the guide works in different contexts.

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This document is part of the Lived Experience in P/CVE toolkit, developed by Katharina Sengfelder (Exit Nexus) and Gordon Clubb (University of Leeds), in collaboration with INDEX / Violence Prevention Network gGmbH.

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