



From the Frat House to the White House: #StopSexualViolence

Document created by [Al Turkos](#)

A practical guide for journalists covering the October 8 Day of Action

Note: *This document may be updated with additional guidance in the coming days. Need support or want to add to the guide? Please email turkos@alisonsturkos.com*

On October 8th, students nationwide are **WALKING OUT** and **RALLYING** to #StopSexualViolence. This is a part of a [larger day of action](#) anchored by Women's March, me too. International, Feminist Generation, and FEMINIST

This document was shared with you because you are a journalist interested in covering the October 8th Day of Action. Below are some helpful trauma-informed and survivor-centered tips.

Remember: Survivors are people with their own timelines, boundaries, leadership, and reasons to speak, or not speak. Survivors are not sources to be mined for trauma.

Coverage of the October 8th Day of Action must center survivor dignity, community, systemic failure, and action, rather than graphic details or personal tragedy.

Before you interview a survivor, reach out with care.

- Reach out once, briefly, and in writing. Introduce yourself, your outlet, what your story is about, and your deadline.
- Make clear that “no” and “not now” are both okay responses from the student.
- Give survivors time to decide. We understand same-day deadlines are common, but please remember they can create pressure for storytellers
- If someone is involved in an active Title IX, legal, or criminal legal process, ask whether they want an attorney or advocate involved. Do not provide legal advice.

- Ask about risks rather than assuming them. Identification can have consequences related to disability, immigration status, race, gender identity, sexuality, international status, employment, or student status.

Before interviewing a survivor, it can be helpful to explain:

- Where the story will appear:
 - Outlet, format, and whether it will appear in print, online, broadcast, or podcast
- How they will be identified:
 - Full name, first name, pseudonym, or anonymous. Remember that a name is not the only identifying information; a school, team, year, hometown, or specific date may also identify someone.
- Images and recording:
 - Photos, video, and voice can identify someone. Survivors can decline images or choose where and how they are photographed.
- “Off the record”:
 - Explain your newsroom's policies clearly. You may offer to read back quotes or facts for accuracy, but do not promise editorial control you cannot provide.
- Changing their mind:
 - Explain when they can withdraw from the story or request changes, and promise only what you and your newsroom can control.

During the Interview

Let the survivor have control.

- Let them choose the format when possible: in person, phone, video, or written.
- Record only with explicit permission.
- Tell them they can skip a question, pause, or stop at any time.

Start with the person, not the assault. Consider asking:

- “What do you want people to understand?”
- “What brought you to this work?”
- “What does justice mean to you?”
- “What would you like to see change?”

You do not need graphic details to tell an important story. Do not ask questions that imply the survivor caused or invited the violence, including:

- Why didn't you report sooner?
- What were you wearing?
- How much had you been drinking?
- Why were you there?
- Why didn't you leave?

- What is your sexual history?

Verify facts through records and other sources. Remind survivors that independent verification is standard journalistic practice, not a judgment about whether you believe them.

When the conversation becomes difficult, pause. Let silence happen. Do not say, “I know how you feel.” Do not pressure someone to continue.

Promise what you can control: accuracy, transparency, and communication, not a particular outcome.

End the interview with care.

Ask:

- “Is there anything you want to add or clarify?”
- “Is there anything you wish I had asked?”

Thank them, share your direct contact information, and explain what happens next.

Once the story has been published

Your relationship with a source does not necessarily end when the story goes live.

- Send a heads-up with the publication time and link when appropriate.
- Correct errors quickly and tell the affected person.
- Ask again before pursuing follow-up coverage.
- Never share a survivor's contact information with another journalist or colleague without permission.
- Discuss potential name-removal or identification concerns with your editor before publication, rather than promising something your newsroom cannot provide.

Take care of yourself, too.

Reporting on sexual violence can affect journalists personally. Debrief with a trusted colleague or editor, take breaks when needed, and use professional resources when appropriate. The [Global Center for Journalism & Trauma](#) offers guidance for journalists covering trauma.