

GBV Guidance for Institutions Engaging with the Media

Foreword

This document provides guidance on best practice for institutions when communicating about cases of gender-based violence, including engaging with the media and responding to external reporting. Institutions have a responsibility to do so in a trauma-informed manner that recognises the impact on victims/survivors, avoids reinforcing harmful narratives, and uses language appropriate for publication.

The guidance also highlights the importance of considering diverse audiences, including students, staff, the wider public, and being mindful of the potential consequences. In addition, it reflects the growing channel of social media as a key means through which institutions engage with their communities and beyond.

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Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Language and Tone

It is crucial that when speaking to members of the media (journalists, social media posts, news outlets etc), that institutions ensure both the language and tone within their statements are trauma-informed and reflect an understanding of the diverse behaviours that come under gender-based violence. This should include acknowledging the reasons for late and/or anonymous reporting, echoing a stance of believing victims/survivors.

- Use accurate terminology and acknowledge the experience as an example of gender-based violence.
- Avoid sensational and dramatic statements whilst ensuring your statement does not trivialise or invalidate a victim/survivor's lived experience.
- When drafting communications, be cautious with the use of the term "*allegedly*." While it can serve an important legal purpose in protecting the institution from liability, it may also inadvertently cast doubt on a victim/survivor's account. Importantly, such qualifiers are rarely used when referring to the account of the alleged perpetrator, which can create an imbalance in tone. Where possible, seek ways to balance legal accuracy with trauma-informed language, and ensure that terminology does not undermine or delegitimise the experience of victims/survivors.
- Be cautious about making statements such as "*the institution acted on the limited information it had at the time*." While often intended as reassurance, such comments can be premature, as it may not yet be clear whether information was in fact limited. They may also sound dismissive of victims/survivors' experiences and undermine confidence in the institution's response. When communicating publicly, consider how messages will be heard by different audiences, particularly victims/survivors and their families, and ensure the tone conveys sensitivity and support.

Content

Reports and statements on gender-based violence should ensure that included content does not exacerbate harm to victims/survivors, whether directly involved in the case or reading the statement once it is made public. Detailed depictions of events risk identifying those involved and triggering further upset for victims/survivors. Equally, it is key that the content included is fact-based rather than speculative.

- Include trigger warnings at the beginning of a statement/online post.
- Include relevant support pages and info sites, such as signposting to your internal support services and external support services.
- Maintaining the anonymity of the victim/survivor involved should be prioritised by limiting identifying information and context, and by following confidentiality practices. There are ongoing risks to harm following a report/investigation of GBV and a statement or report should be mindful of alleviating this to the best of the institution's ability.
- Acknowledge that gender-based violence is a widespread issue and takes place at your institution. Doing this reduces the 'taboo' nature of gender-based violence and demonstrates to victims/survivors that your institution is engaged with work on tackling GBV. We also encourage institutions to link their "zero-tolerance" stance on GBV to this statement, such as by referring to their GBV policy and support services.
- Be mindful of intersectionality and ensure statements do not include elements of gendered or racial stereotypes. This can be further considered by noting the additional barriers these groups face when reporting and seeking support and addressing these in an institution's practice.

Publication of Statement

We advise institutions to consider the timing and location of publications on statements around gender-based violence. As social media becomes a more prominent channel through which institutions communicate with their community and beyond, it is important that additional consideration on social media posts is demonstrated.

- For social media posts, limit/turn off comments and switch off push notifications where possible. This prevents potential re-traumatisation through a push notification on a victim/survivor's phone and avoids public comments that could be triggering.
- Consider *where* your statement is going to be found - easily accessible, but not without trigger warnings (e.g. popping up on social media pages which may be triggering to victims/survivors).
- Communication with the victim/survivor is essential and demonstrates a trauma-informed approach by ensuring the victim/survivor is updated of any publication *ahead* of release.
- Alongside any statements or reports, institutions should provide ongoing support for victims/survivors involved. Institutions should demonstrate an awareness of re-traumatisation of media involvement and that more intense support may be required during this period.
- If a victim/survivor chooses to engage with the media, the institution should offer support throughout the process. This may include providing tailored guidance, sharing toolkits that outline available options, and ensuring the victim/survivor has the resources needed to make informed decisions. Available resources include: Women's Aid ([RRM 2025 FINAL](#)); Karma Nirvana ([Introducing the Media Advocacy Toolkit – Karma Nirvana](#) and [Toolkit KN colours](#))

Communicating publicly on cases of gender-based violence (GBV) presents significant challenges for institutions. It requires a careful and sensitive approach that balances transparency with the responsibility to protect those affected. Central to this process is the need to ensure that the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of the victim/survivor remains the primary focus. By following this guidance, you are supporting trauma-informed practices and helping to foster a safer and more supportive community.