

# Questions to Ask Before Telling Your Story

Coming forward publicly is a big decision, without a lot of information to help predict what you can expect because each case is different. This document includes some ideas and questions to help you prepare. Some of these questions may be hard to answer, and Maine's sexual assault support centers (who support people who have been sexually harassed and/or sexually assaulted) can talk with you and support you.

## Purpose

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Deciding to speak out publicly about your own story will have both positive and negative impacts. It is okay – and important – to think about your needs and how speaking out meets your goals.

Why do you want to come forward in a public way? What good things do you hope will happen? What does success look like?

Do you feel like you have to tell your story for someone else? Are others making you (whether they know it or not) feel like you have to tell your story?

## Risks

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Coming forward comes with some risk. And while the #MeToo movement is beginning to create space where speaking out publicly is more socially acceptable, there are factors to consider. It is important to be aware and prepared for different things that might happen.

Going public will create distractions from your everyday life that could impact your job, friendships and family life. Can you discuss your decision with your family, employer and close friends?

If the press picks up your story, it will become public record. Does it feel okay for your name to be associated with this story? For people to find it through Google?

Will coming forward create any risks to the safety of you or your family?

How will you respond if people blame you? If they say things that are upsetting or side with the offender? Sometimes no response is best, but having a plan for how you could handle it may be helpful in the moment.

How will you handle discussions with mutual friends, acquaintances, colleagues, etc. if those people are not willing to pick a side? How will you prepare yourself for awkward situations, like bumping into these people in the grocery store?

Is your case currently in court (civil, criminal, family)? Have you talked with the district attorney/your attorney about what going public could do to your case?

# Social Media

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Sharing your story on social media has its own benefits and risks. One of the benefits of coming forward through social media is that at first, you get to control when your story comes out and who sees it. There are further reaching and longer term impacts of posting on social media –“memories” on Facebook, notifying distant relatives, acquaintances, colleagues as well as people who might also know the offender. Once out in the open social media world, it’s nearly impossible to control who sees and uses your story.

Do you have people who will help you before, during, and after your post? Do they know your plan?

Which platform(s) will you post on?

If you have a lawyer, will you have them read your statement before posting it? If not, do you have a trusted friend/ally that can provide you with feedback on your statement?

Do you want the post to be shareable? What are your privacy settings? Are you okay with the post being shared beyond your network?

What is your plan if there are bad comments? Good comments? Are you going to respond?

You might be contacted by media outlets. They may keep calling and try to reach you in many different ways (email, social media accounts, phone calls to your place of work, etc.). Will you be open to speaking with them or will you only offer what you posted?

Many people will reach out to you. Some survivors may want to share their story with you, people who may want to help and offer support, and others that may have negative reactions. Will you respond? If so, how?

How will you handle internet/social media trolls?

Do you have a plan if someone threatens you?

# Logistics

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Are you going to use your real name?

Do you want to talk to a lawyer before going public?

Have you thought about how you are going to tell your story and how to keep it basically the same?

Have you prepared the people in your daily life?

# Support

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Coming forward requires a lot of energy and will be a big source of distraction for at least the first few weeks. Having a plan for taking care of yourself is important.

Have you spoken with a lawyer? An advocate can help you contact one.

What does taking care of yourself look like during this process? Can you take some time away from work? Do you have back up care for kids and/or others you take care of?

Do you have outlets you can make a priority like therapy or counseling?

It will be important to make sure you have a small group of allies and supporters - 3 to 5 people (if that's possible) that you can discuss your story and plan with before coming forward. These people can also support you during and after your story becomes public. Who are these people for you?

How will you handle the negative responses - like if others claim you're lying? How will deal with your own anger and disappointment?

Do you want to have more/other support ready to help you? A therapist, a local sexual assault/sexual harassment support advocate, etc.?

The questions in this document might make the idea of speaking publicly about your story seem scary or bad. The questions were written by advocates and survivors who have (successfully!) told their story in public. We want to be sure that you have as much information as you can about coming forward - and are here to answer any of your questions.

Please call, text, or chat an advocate to help talk you through any of these questions if you need to. They are here for you and have ways to help.