

Facilitated Dialogue Around Sexual Trauma:

A Path to Recovery



Facilitated Dialogue Suggested Interview Questions

1. What is sexual trauma?

It is sexual abuse or violence.

2. Why would survivors of abuse want to talk to the people who hurt them?

So the people who harmed them can understand the affects their actions had on the people they hurt. Many survivors feel that dialoguing with the person may help to prevent others being victimized.

Survivors often want to ask the people who hurt them questions to see what they have to say for themselves and to see if they have made any changes in their lives.

3. Why would people choose Facilitated Dialogue instead of charging the person who harmed them?

It's not an either/or choice. Some people who use Facilitated Dialogue have already charged. And some who use FD might charge in the future (participants do sign an agreement saying they will not bring FD process into a court process).

Some survivors don't want the person who offended against them to go to jail or to suffer legal consequences.

Many feel that FD provides accountability to the victim rather than to the state. In the traditional justice system the dialogue is between the judge and the lawyers—the victim is often left out.

4. How do you make sure a Facilitated Dialogue is safe for survivors?

By doing extensive work with survivors and other participants in a dialogue to make sure everyone has reasonable expectations of the process, is emotionally healthy enough to participate, has an attitude and approach that will be safe for others to be in contact with. This case development is done through phone conversations, face-to-face meetings, and email contact in the weeks and months leading up to a dialogue. We do not proceed with dialogues if anyone's safety would be compromised.

All participants in a Facilitated Dialogue are invited to bring support people with them to a meeting.

CJI staff ask direct questions about the perceived level of safety that survivors and other participants feel. If anyone is not feeling safe during the case development or the dialogue, the process can stop at any time.

5. Are survivors pressured to forgive people who hurt them?

Absolutely not! We offer a space where people can choose to forgive or not forgive.

6. What if a person who offends doesn't say they are sorry?

That's okay. Survivors aren't always looking for this. Often survivors would rather know that the person who hurt them has made changes.

We do look for acknowledgement from the person who offended that they did offend. Saying sorry is only a word, truly taking responsibility for actions by making changes is more meaningful.

7. Why would Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) want to work with people who have offended sexually?

We want our community to be safer. People who offend sexually are in our communities: they are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and other family members. They are people of all religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. "They" are a part of "us"—part of our community. Yet, many people who offend sexually don't have safe spaces to think about change or support to make changes. If we give them opportunities for change it makes our communities safer.

Staying in denial perpetuates the cycle of sexual trauma.

8. Do you think it's possible for people who have offended sexually to change?

It depends on the individual. Many people can get insight into their offending behaviour through education groups, peer support groups, counselling and other therapeutic activities. Many who sexually offend are horrified by their actions and want help to change. With the right support, an individual who is committed to change can avoid sexually offending in the future.

Others who offend need to be managed so that the people around them are kept safe.

9. How are you able to help people who offended sexually?

We treat them as people. CJI provides a safe space where people who offended sexually can be treated respectfully and challenged to make changes. Peer support groups eliminate isolation and allow space to talk about things that were formerly secrets.

Through one-to-one support and support groups, we help people identify their patterns of behaviour (offense cycle) so they can understand ways to make changes. Facilitated Dialogues can provide space for people who offended sexually to be accountable and understand the impact their actions had on their victims.

10. What needs do those impacted by sexual trauma have?

Sexual trauma often impacts all areas of a person's life: eating, sleeping, thinking, feeling, relating, working, how they see the world, trusting, sexuality, intimacy, etc.

People need to feel believed that the trauma happened. They need to know that it was not their fault and that they are not alone. People need education to know how sexual abuse generally impacts people.

People need a place to reflect on what happened so that they are not constantly triggered by or reminded of the past. They need a place to grieve and to vent anger, to address guilt and shame. People often need help with relationships and boundaries. They need an opportunity to voice their thoughts and feelings and questions to others in their lives.

Through our 26 years of working with people who have been impacted by sexual trauma, we have found that survivors and people who have offended sexually have many of the same needs.