

# REPORTING ON ABUSE IN CARE

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Advice for journalists working on stories about survivors of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and their whānau. Research suggests that moments such as the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care can be catalysts for significant change in how society responds to abuse, because they change the way we talk. Journalism is central to that.

The advice is based on research done at the University of Canterbury and on other professional and academic work.

## BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP

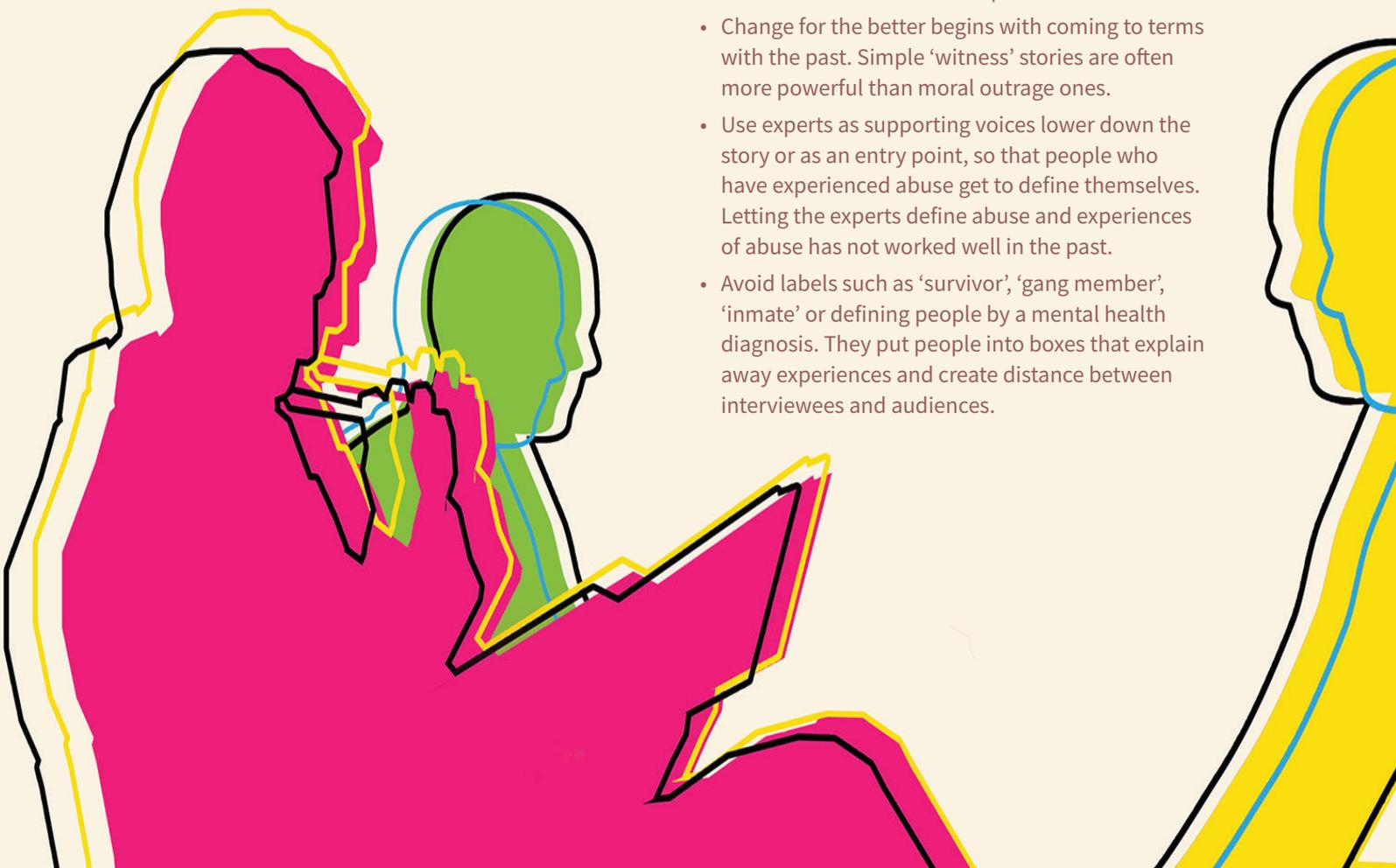
- The first conversation with someone about abuse shouldn't be an interview but to build trust. Then set up an interview.
- Let your interviewee have some control – the experience of abuse and denial is all about loss of control.
- Check in with your sources the day after publication or broadcast. They may be at their lowest and most fragile.
- Remember that survivors may not have spoken with whānau or close friends about what they've told you.

## WRITE ABOUT US NOT THEM

- Your audiences may have experienced abuse themselves. You may need to dial down the emotion in stories that may be triggering or very difficult to read.
- Abuse is happening today and the effects are ongoing. Connect past and present.
- Link to help services to help people affected respond to the story. If appropriate, give details on how people can talk to people at the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care.

## LET PEOPLE TELL THEIR STORY

- Give people control over their story and let audiences connect with the person.
- Change for the better begins with coming to terms with the past. Simple 'witness' stories are often more powerful than moral outrage ones.
- Use experts as supporting voices lower down the story or as an entry point, so that people who have experienced abuse get to define themselves. Letting the experts define abuse and experiences of abuse has not worked well in the past.
- Avoid labels such as 'survivor', 'gang member', 'inmate' or defining people by a mental health diagnosis. They put people into boxes that explain away experiences and create distance between interviewees and audiences.



## WEAVE TOGETHER THE ISSUES AND THE HUMAN STORY

- Audiences want experiences and explanatory context interwoven. Connect the individual story to who else has been affected, past failures to listen, the life-long impact of abuse, or the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care.
- Keep solutions to the fore – listen for voices saying what needs to change.
- Avoid too many stories about processes and structures. They distract from the central story and alienate many readers.

## LOOK AFTER YOURSELF – REPORTING ON TRAUMA CAN BE TRAUMATISING

- Talk with colleagues and friends about how you're feeling.
- Keep some distance – this is not your story to bear.
- Give yourself a break and don't become the abuse reporter in the newsroom who is obliged to do it all.

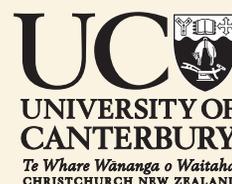
## FURTHER LINKS

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Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: Resources on journalist self-care and good reporting practices  
<https://dartcenter.org/>

New Zealand Sexual Violence Network: Resources for journalists on reporting sexual violence  
[www.toah-nnest.org.nz](http://www.toah-nnest.org.nz)

Our Watch: Resources for reporting violence against women and children  
<https://media.ourwatch.org.au/w>



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