

# Interviewing with Care:

Documenting Stories of State Violence



texas  
after  
violence  
project

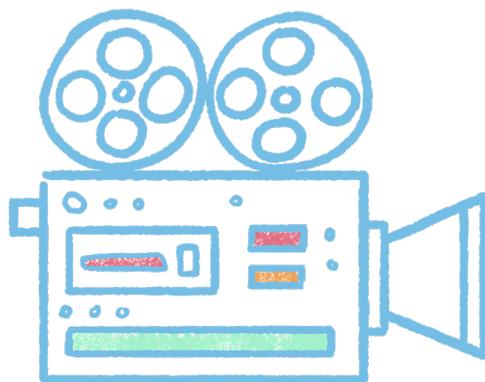


**WITNESS**  
SEE IT FILM IT  
CHANGE IT



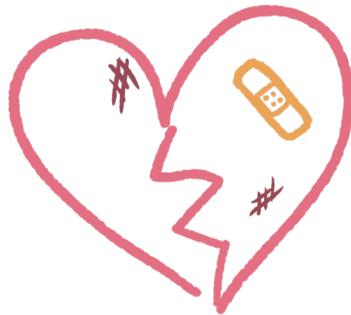
# INTRODUCTION

This guide is for activists, advocates, journalists, filmmakers and anyone conducting interviews on camera for advocacy, media, historical or artistic purposes with individuals who have been directly impacted by state-sanctioned violence, such as abuse by police, corrections officers, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Border Patrol, etc. The following tips



will assist you in ensuring that your approach and conduct before, during, and after filming the interview, whether in person or remote, respect the dignity and human rights of your interviewee.

# Please remember

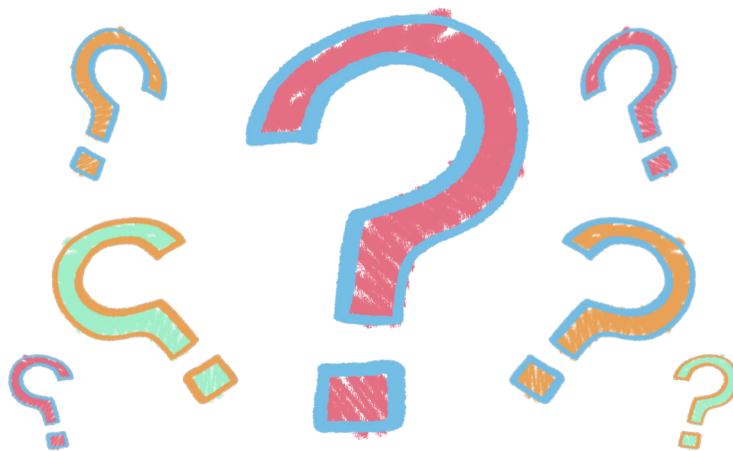


that asking someone to speak about an encounter with state sanctioned violence comes with a great potential of emotional distress or retraumatization. There could also be legal risks or potential for retaliation

associated with participating in an interview, especially if the person has vulnerable immigration status, is seeking asylum, and/or is in a prison or detention center. It's important to consult resources, an experienced interviewer, an advocate or organization that works closely on the issue (i.e. Texas After Violence Project), or a mental health professional. For these reasons, we caution against doing interviews that will be livestreamed because they don't allow you time to think through safety and ethical considerations.

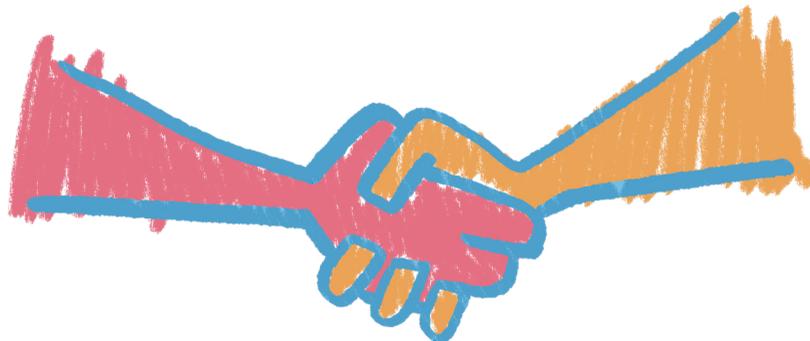


## Be clear about your WHY



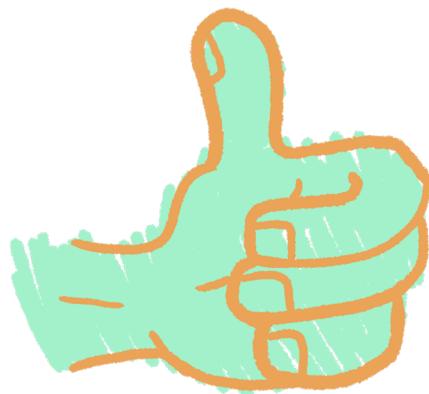
Before filming, ask yourself: is video the best way to move towards the overall advocacy or storytelling goals? Make sure to check in with the “why” and set your intentions before you film. Your goals should never outweigh the goals of the interviewee.

## Obtaining Informed Consent



It's important to obtain informed consent either in writing or verbally on camera before your interview. Informed consent means that the interviewee understands and consents to how and why they are being filmed, and the intended use of the footage. Remember to explain that once a video is shared on the internet, you cannot control how and when it is further shared or what kind of attention it may attract. This is especially important when conducting an interview with someone who may not have familiarity with social media, i.e. someone who has been incarcerated for a long time. And even if you or your organization have strict protocols for access/permissions and take-down clauses, videos can still be manipulated or presented out of context. Ensure

the interviewee understands the scope of the project by asking them to explain it back to you in their own words.



Consent should be an ongoing process, and the interviewee should be able to change their minds and ask for an interview to be taken down from a public channel at any point in the future.

# Security

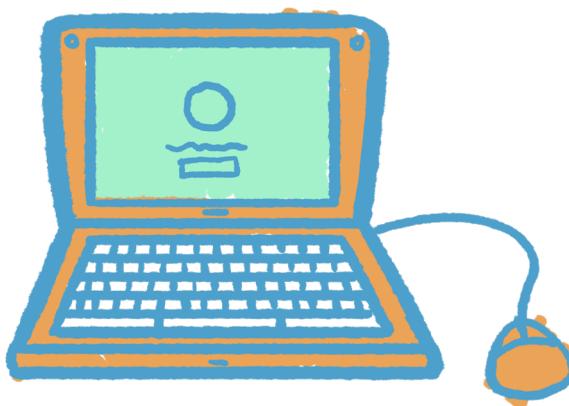
If you conduct the interview in person:

1. Determine the safest location for the interview. Ask for the interviewee's input.
2. Make arrangements for the interviewee's and your own safe travel to and from the filming location.
3. Discuss security threats. Assess who could be impacted and the risks with WITNESS's Getting Started with Digital Security post; <https://blog.witness.org/2016/11/getting-started-digital-security/>
4. Consider communicating via an encrypted app like Signal.
5. Does the interviewee need to be fully anonymized? And what other information, i.e. names, locations, occupations, etc, needs to stay confidential?
6. What support, if any, can you offer them if there is retaliation? Be explicit about what you can and cannot do.

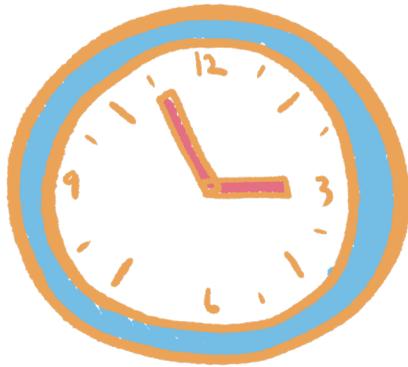


If the interview is remote:

1. Make sure you have a good internet connection.
2. Set up a waiting room and a passcode to help prevent "zoom bombing."
3. Think about where it will be safest to store the video - locally or to the cloud?
4. Consider editing needs. Zoom includes the names of the people participating in the call in



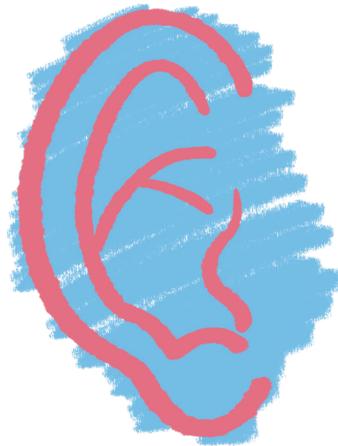
# Prepare



1. Prepare your questions ahead of time, and share the questions or pencil points of topics you'd like to cover with the interviewee.
2. Ask for their guidance on topics to avoid/cover, and respect their refusal to discuss uncomfortable questions.
3. Allow ample time for the interview and prepare for potentially stretching it over multiple sessions.
4. Ask how they'd like to be identified including what name, affiliations and gender pronouns they would like to use beforehand.
5. Identify support options and ask if there is anyone they would like present.
6. Gather, prepare, and test equipment in advance, and bring extra batteries/memory cards.
7. If needed, try to help find childcare arrangements.
8. Prepare a comfort kit of tissues, snacks, water and a mirror for your interviewee.
9. Turn off or set to silent all devices.
10. Make sure to prepare for language interpretation if necessary. And if the interview is remote, familiarize yourself with language interpretation via Zoom beforehand.
11. Plan for connectivity issues if remote, and always have a backup process in place.

## During the interview

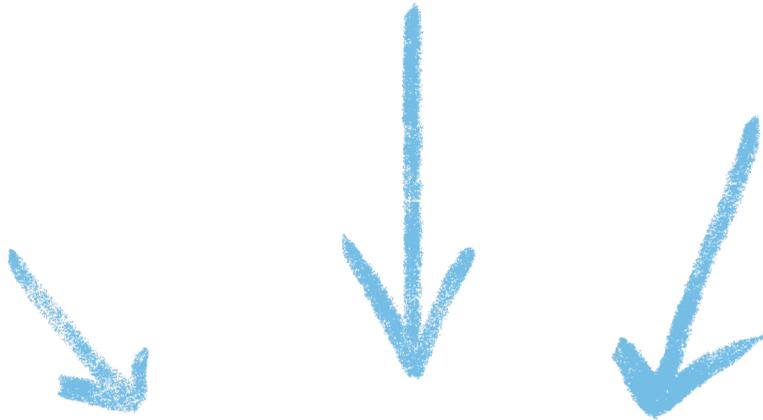
1. Direct the interviewee where to look. If in person you need to decide if you'd like them to look at the camera, or at you.
2. If remote, make sure to maintain eye contact and not be distracted by messages/emails on your computer.
3. Stay quiet, use nonverbal listening cues to signal acknowledgment of what they are saying, and let them know you'll be doing this beforehand.
4. Consider choosing a safe word with your interviewee for if/when they need a break or would like to stop talking about a specific topic.
5. Do not film wounds, scars or injuries without explicit consent and approval of the interviewee.



## After the interview:



1. Take time to move out of the interview space and into post-interview conversations about logistics and next steps. Preparing a breathing exercise is a nice way to transition and help ground.
2. Revisit informed consent, and what safety and security measures you will be using.
3. Share the final video and stay in touch if they want.
4. Work with your interviewee to redact information that might be sensitive for personal or legal reasons. Keep unredacted copies in a safe and secure location unless there is a legal reason not to, or the interviewee requests you destroy it.
5. And don't forget to preserve your footage by storing it securely and making multiple copies.

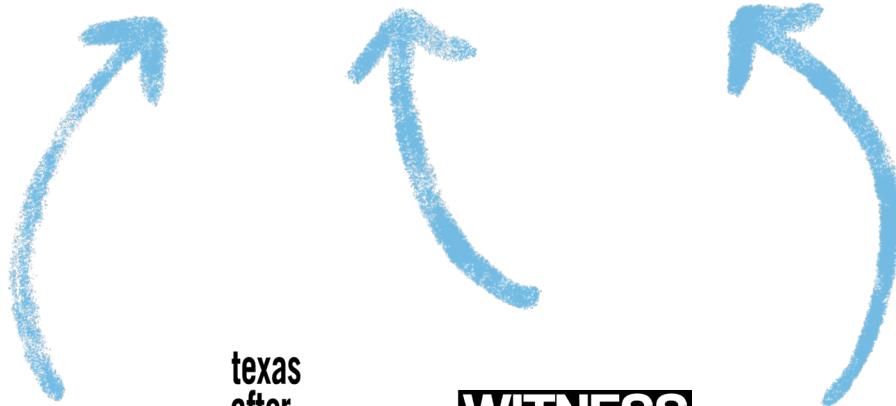


learn more here:

[library.witness.org](http://library.witness.org)

or

<https://texasafterviolence.org/>



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