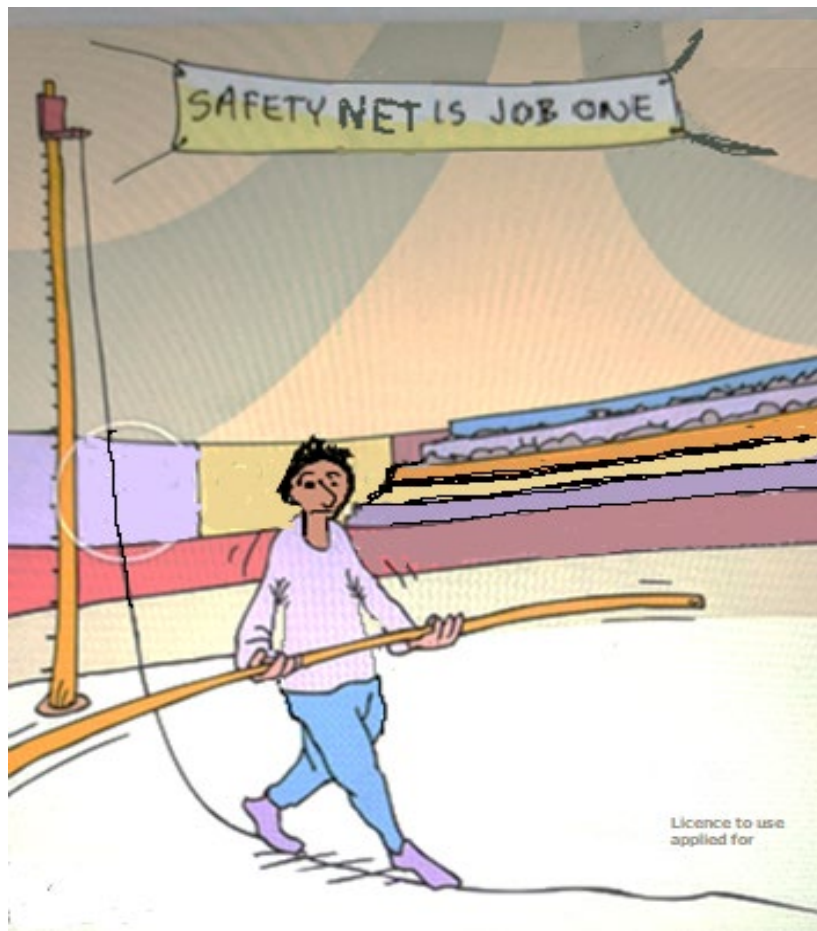


When Listening is Hard: How to handle difficult feelings or offensive views when researching sensitive topics including violence



Doing research involves:

- Commitment to listen to the views, experiences and ideas of other people.
- Enabling other people's voices to be heard.

The people we listen to in research may say or behave in ways that:

- We disagree with
- Upset us
- Offend us.
- Make us feel concerned about safety.

Use this three step guide to create a team action plan to balance your way through three common challenges when doing research.

Discuss and practice your plan as a team to help you be prepared to take care of yourselves, each other and your research participants.

There are also things you can say to your self in the moment in blue boxes

“Neither you nor the research participant should leave the interview space feeling worse than when you entered”.

STEP 1: Prepare and plan for a safeguarding concern

Remember:

- Your policy for dealing with safeguarding issues includes referring your concerns on to the right people.
- You have had training on safeguarding.
- Before you start any research interview or discussion group, you will have discussed confidentiality with your participant(s). This will have included a statement along the lines of: *"if you tell me anything that indicates that you or anyone else are in danger, I may not be able to keep this to myself"*.



Include in your team preparation and plan:

- practicing the safeguarding conversation with team members.
- having a short list of steps to follow – and to look at if your mind goes blank
- being clear how to flag safeguarding concerns and who to call to get support for yourself.



Our top tip

At the moment a participant starts to raise an issue that you think may be a safeguarding concern, you will want to support the person and to remind them what will happen. If someone begins to tell you something that indicates a safeguarding concern you may wish to say something like:

"this is the sort of thing that if you haven't discussed with anyone else before, that I may need to tell someone else to make sure you have the right support"

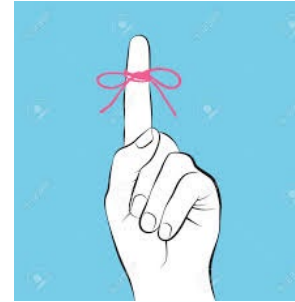


Remind yourself: My job as a researcher is **not** to find out all about the issue. That is the role of anyone who will provide long term support to the young person. My job **is** to help the participant say the things that are safe to share for my research, and to refer safeguarding issues on to someone else. Also remember that you can end the interview at any point, with care!

STEP 2: Prepare and plan for someone saying something that triggers you

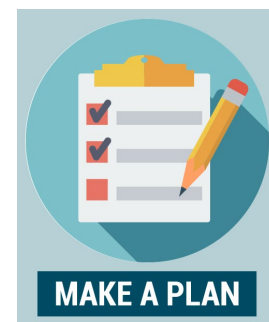
Remember:

- Many of us choose to do research because we are affected by the issues we are investigating.
- Getting triggered, to the point we feel upset and cannot listen, can happen to all researchers. It's very hard to predict if and when it will happen.
- We all need *cushions* and *allies* in our research. You can ask for help.



Include in your team preparation and plan:

- Reflecting on what your personal triggers might be and what you can do to avoid situations where triggers are likely.
- Practicing conversations as a team, so that you are prepared for how to take a break from a triggering situation.
- Identifying the ally – maybe another peer researcher or a designated worker – who will take over if anyone is triggered in any research situation.
- Identifying the support mechanisms you will use to debrief from the research situation and to recover from being triggered



Our top tip

At the moment a participant talks about something that triggers a difficult memory for you, it is a good idea to make a pause and to draw in an ally. You may want to say something like:

- *"That is such a difficult experience I feel this is a good moment to take a small break"*
- *"That is a difficult experience I'm just going to ask [SUPPORT WORKER] to sit in on this/ take over here to make sure we do not miss anything"*



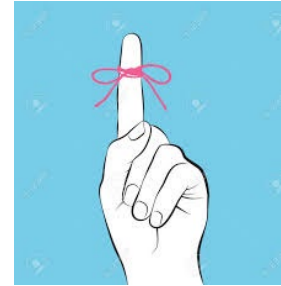
Remind yourself:

My job as a researcher is **not** to put myself at risk. My job **is** to look after myself and to get any help I need from other people to make sure the participant can say the things they need to for our research. Everyone has somethings they cannot listen to. I know who I can ask to listen to this instead of me.

STEP 3: Prepare and plan for views or behaviour which might be racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive

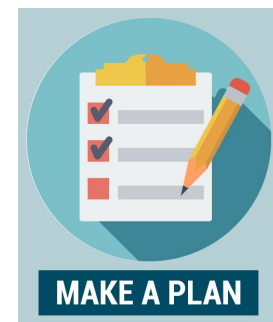
Remember:

- You have the right to be free from prejudice.
- You do not have to listen to things which you find offensive.
- You can never know exactly what will be said in a research situation.
- Sometimes the actions and views of research participants can make us feel uncomfortable, upset, or even angry.
- You can choose when to end a research situation if it feels too uncomfortable.



Include in your team preparation and plan:

- Reflecting on the things that you think might be said that could be offensive to you and knowing your limits
- Discussing how to strike a balance between our *commitments as researchers* (to listen to the views, experiences and ideas of other people and learn from these) and *our human needs to feel respected*.
- Practicing or thinking about an offensive situation and deciding when you will end an offensive conversation.
- Planning how to use or adapt the approach for triggers, described in step 2.



Our top tip

Practice how to use these strategies and choose what works for you:

- a. check in how you are feeling physically - anger, irritation and upset have physical as well as psychological effects and knowing your physical signs will help you understand what is happening for you.
- b. check in on your breathing – this is a good way to keep calm.
- c. if working in a team you may look at other members of the team as a non-verbal way of checking in (“are you OK? Am I OK? Is this OK?”)



Remind yourself: My role as a researcher is to allow people to express their views and then analyse them afterwards. By listening to things I find offensive I will be able to write about this in research. There are people who I can rant to about this afterwards. **I can choose to sensitively end this at any time.**