



Guidelines for hosting genocide survivor speakers in schools

These guidelines will help you host a visit from a genocide survivor at your school

We developed them as a collaboration between Ishami Foundation, Genocide80Twenty (Hampton School) and King's College London. They are grounded in discussions with Rwandan survivors and teachers who have extensive experience in this area. We designed them for UK secondary schools but they may also be useful for other contexts.

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Why invite a genocide survivor speaker?

“While hosting a survivor speaker is daunting and requires a lot of preparation, meeting a survivor is transformative for students. This is what makes it so valuable and worthwhile.”

Andy Lawrence, Hampton School

The human connection between a survivor speaker and your students can be powerful and have lasting impact. Listening to a survivor from a country they may not know helps students begin to understand other places and people. These lessons reach beyond learning about genocide and support your students’ personal development and growth as citizens. Meeting a survivor speaker can also help counter stereotypes and misconceptions.

A visit from a survivor contributes to your students’ social, moral and cultural education. For example, a survivor speaker visit may be linked to classes in:

- Personal, social or citizenship education (PSHE, Citizenship, Health and Wellbeing, Learning for Life and Work – topics relating to identity, community, racism and discrimination)
- History or social studies (topics relating to the Holocaust, genocide and colonialism)
- Religious education (religious intolerance, religious resistance to persecution)
- English, Drama or Expressive Arts (literature as testimony, life writing, verbatim theatre)

A visit could also be linked to events:

- An anniversary, such as January 27th (Holocaust Memorial Day), April 7th (Rwanda), July 11th (Bosnia) or December 9th (Genocide Prevention Day)
- A theme week, for example Refugee Week

It is important to connect a speaker visit to a learning programme to avoid tokenism and to allow students to relate the visit to their existing knowledge.

Guiding principles

These guidelines start from the principles that:

- Speaking at schools is emotionally demanding and difficult for survivors. Making survivors feel welcome and appreciated helps them be more comfortable during their visit.
- Student safeguarding and wellbeing is a priority for teachers and parents. Listening to difficult testimony can be challenging but also brings benefits.
- Learning about the historical context for genocide prepares students for hearing the survivor speaker’s testimony and provides them with tools to process what they hear.

Timeline for organising a survivor speaker visit

- **6–12 weeks before**
 - Make first steps and contact an organisation that arranges survivor speaker visits.
- **4–6 weeks before**
 - Confirm the practicalities of the visit with the organisation and/or survivor:
 - Date, time and location.
 - Structure and format of the talk, Q&A and any other activities.
 - Payment of a speaker fee and travel expenses.
- **1–2 weeks before**
 - Prepare students for meeting the survivor (history and context).
 - Focus on safeguarding and wellbeing:
 - Address known safeguarding issues and inform school staff and parents of the visit.
 - Check enough staff will be present during the talk.
 - Confirm plans for welcoming the survivor and arrange a room for after the talk.
- **On the day**
 - Welcome the survivor, introduce them, moderate the Q&A, and thank the survivor.
 - Focus on supporting the wellbeing of the students and the survivor speaker.
- **A few days after**
 - Facilitate student reflection on the visit.
 - Thank the survivor (again) and share students' reflections.

Before a survivor speaker visit

Meaningful engagement between students and a survivor speaker requires careful preparation and planning. **Most of the work involved in hosting a survivor speaker takes place before the visit.**

First steps

- Note down your reasons for hosting a survivor so you can communicate these to students, the survivor speaker and other stakeholders.
- Determine who the audience is at your school and what format would work best.
 - A double lesson or long lesson is ideal because it gives time for questions and discussion. Other options include an extended assembly or special event.

- If a survivor testimony takes 30-45 minutes, we recommend allowing at least 60-90 minutes for the visit.
- Contact an organisation that arranges survivor speakers. **Ishami Foundation** (Rwanda), **Remembering Srebrenica** (Bosnia) and many local organisations welcome enquiries. Please include:
 - Your reasons for requesting a speaker
 - Framing for the talk (subject or event)
 - Format for the talk (length and setting)
 - Age and number of students
 - Potential dates and times
 - School location.

After confirming a speaker

Organisations may make arrangements on behalf of survivors, or they may put you directly in touch with your speaker. Some survivors have told us they appreciate discussing their needs and those of students with schools before the visit.

Discuss with the connecting organisation and/or survivor speaker:

- **Date, time and meeting place.**
- **Survivor speaker's travel arrangements.**
 - Will the speaker travel to the school on their own, or is it possible to pick them up from a nearby train or bus station?
 - If the school is far from the speaker's home, consider scheduling the event in the afternoon or look for funds for the school to pay for a local hotel the night before.
- **Payment of travel expenses and speaker fees.**
 - Ideally these should be paid *before* the event so the speaker is not out of pocket. Inform the organisation and/or the survivor of payment timelines and deadlines to complete paperwork.
 - Speaker fees tend to start at £200 (2024 rates), depending on location, duration of visit and travel time.
- **Who the students are and what are they are learning.** Many survivors want to understand the context in which they will share their testimony. Knowing what students know and don't know helps them consider how to make their testimony accessible.
- **The length of the talk and of the whole session.** Remember that the survivor only estimates the length of their testimony and that their testimony may be longer or shorter on the day. Prepare for this by scheduling ample time for questions, thanks, transitions or other activities afterwards.
- **Time and structure for the Q&A.**
 - Most survivors are happy to take questions, but it is helpful to double check.
 - Schedule at least 10-15 minutes for questions, longer if possible.
 - Be prepared to moderate the Q&A. Agree with the speaker how you will deal with questions they do not want to answer, for example, about contemporary politics or particularly triggering topics.

- **Request a brief summary of the survivor's story if you have not heard them speak before.** Use the summary to help you prepare students.
- Sometimes schools take photographs during the speaker's visit to share with the wider community. **Check with the survivor if they are happy to be photographed and where and how these photos can be shared.**
- Some survivors use a presentation or other visual aids, while others don't. **If the speaker has a presentation, ask them to email it to you and check that it works on your school computers.**
- **Double check how much time you need for the visit** (at least 60-90 minutes), including activities before and after the testimony, such as introductions, photographs, thanks, or students' more informal discussions with the survivor.
- **Consider how to best facilitate dialogue and connection between the survivor speaker and students.** For example, students could show the speaker an art display or a recent project they have completed. Ask the survivor speaker what they are comfortable with before and/or after their testimony.
- **Plan how you will thank the speaker.** You could:
 - Designate selected students to give a vote of thanks.
 - Give thanks yourself, explaining briefly why the speaker's testimony is meaningful for your students and what you will do next to continue learning.
 - Thank the survivor speaker with flowers and/or a small gift.

Establishing the educational context

Plan how a survivor speaker's visit complements a learning programme:

- **Make sure your students have some basic background knowledge** about the relevant genocide.
- Remember that survivors are unlikely to give comprehensive historical overviews. **Their role is to share their personal experience with your students.**
- **Explore the timeline of the genocide with students before the visit** to help them locate the survivor's testimony. Some survivors are not comfortable with explaining in detail violence they have experienced or witnessed. Their testimonies instead focus on pre-genocide experiences, their families and building a new life after the genocide.
- **Discuss with students the kinds of questions** they may want to ask.
- **Ask students to note down what they want to learn** from the upcoming visit. You can review these notes together afterwards to help reflect.

Students' background knowledge of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda

Awareness of these key points helps students to engage with a Rwandan survivor:

- The Kingdom of Rwanda in the pre-colonial period.
- German and Belgian colonial rule, introduction of identity cards showing ethnicity.
- The Rwandan Revolution and violence against the Tutsi in 1959.
- Independence in 1962, ongoing anti-Tutsi violence and propaganda.
- The growing Tutsi diaspora and formation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front.
- Civil war 1990-1993 and Arusha Peace Accords.
- 100 days of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.
- Rebuilding Rwanda, post-genocide justice and commemoration.

Ishami Foundation teaching resources include an overview of the history of the genocide and further reading suggestions.

Planning safeguarding and wellbeing

For the survivor speaker

- Let the reception staff know who you are expecting, when they will arrive and who to contact when they arrive.
- Arrange for a staff member to welcome the survivor and act as a key contact during their visit to respond to questions and/or requests.
- Reserve a space where a survivor can have some quiet time after their testimony. Survivors say this can be very helpful to help them transition back to daily life. It is difficult to predict whether or not this will be necessary so it's a good idea to book a room just in case. If school regulations require visitors to be accompanied at all times, ensure a member of staff can remain with the survivor until they are ready to leave.

For the students

- Look at the summary of the survivor's testimony, if available, and identify topics your students may find particularly difficult, such as sexual violence or the death of parents or children.
- Explain to your students that the testimony will cover difficult topics and ask them to speak to you after class if they have concerns.
- Talk to the students about how many of us carry painful stories that are hard to discuss. These can make us sad and that is normal. Grief may be familiar for many of your students.
- Reflect on known safeguarding issues. Discuss with relevant students and staff responsible for pastoral care to put in place any necessary measures.
- Arrange for staff to be present and ready to support students during the speaker's testimony. If a student becomes distressed or unwell, a staff member may need to take them outside the room for a break.

- Organise time for students to reflect and process their learning after hearing testimony.
- Inform colleagues teaching the next lesson that students may need more time to settle or an additional opportunity to discuss the testimony they just heard. If the talk is before a break or the end of the school day, think about how to help students transition back to daily life.
- Inform parents and guardians about the visit and encourage them to discuss it at home.
- Check students' photography permissions if any photographs will be taken during the visit.

Remember to look after yourself

If possible, schedule time for yourself to decompress. This might include time to reflect, feel and rest before continuing your normal day. It might also be helpful to debrief with a colleague.

On the day

Arrival at the school

- Welcome the survivor and introduce the staff involved in the visit.
- Offer the survivor speaker a drink and ask if there is anything else you can do to support them.
- Let the survivor know who is available to respond to any questions or requests during the visit.
- If the survivor speaker has a presentation, set it up before the talk.

During the talk and questions

- Introduce the survivor briefly.
- Allow the survivor the time they need to speak, only stopping the testimony if it becomes absolutely necessary for timetabling or safeguarding reasons.
- Thank the survivor for entrusting the class with their story in this way. You may want to note the courage it takes to remember such painful memories. Focus on the dignity and determination of the survivor rather than pity or exceptionalism. Make it clear that you intend to take action in response to their testimony.
- Facilitate the Q&A as agreed and be ready to step in if needed. For example, if the survivor signals they are not comfortable answering a particular question, if the tone of the question is unexpectedly aggressive, or if the question itself is not relevant to the discussion. If you are unsure, ask: "Would you prefer that I answer that question or are you okay with it?"
- Thank the survivor together with your students.
- Students sometimes disclose safeguarding issues to survivor speakers after talks. Be present with the survivor to hear conversations, so you can take action if necessary.

Debriefing with the survivor speaker

- Ask how the survivor speaker is feeling and whether they would like to have some quiet time in a separate room.
- Offer the survivor a drink and perhaps some food.
- Double-check the survivor speaker's return travel arrangements.

After the visit

Student reflections

You may wish to ask your students questions to help them reflect on the visit individually, in small groups, or as a class.

Example questions for reflection:

- What did you feel when listening to the testimony?
- What would you like to tell the survivor about what this talk meant to you?
- How did the testimony deepen your knowledge of genocide?
- How does what you heard connect to your own life?
- Will you behave differently having heard this talk?
- Do you have any ideas about ways in which you can contribute to genocide prevention?

Your students can also reflect on what they learnt by writing thank you cards, or other short messages, or by recording video messages.

Thanking the survivor speaker

- Write to the survivor who visited to thank them for their talk. Let them know what impact their words had on the students.
- You may wish to share some of the students' reflections with the survivor speaker. Receiving these messages allows the survivor to see the impact their testimony had on students.

Sharing the experience more widely

- You may also wish to share the visit with the wider school community through a news article or report. If you quote the survivor directly or summarise their testimony, **please send a draft to the survivor before publishing to ask for their edits and approval.**
- Hosting a survivor speaker may evoke a range of emotions in you. Speak about the visit to a colleague, friend or family member.

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