



Source Care in Emotionally Heavy Reporting Tasks and Action Items

Directions

Below are structured activities designed for journalists who already have a basic understanding of emotional risk and trauma exposure.

1. Anticipatory Harm Mapping

Objective

Train journalists to anticipate how coverage may affect sources long after publication.

Tasks

Come up with a hypothetical difficult assignment (for instance, a mass casualty event, a school shooting), or think about a hard assignment that you or your newsroom has dealt with in the past.

① Map out:

- Immediate risks to the source/s
- Medium-term risks (days/weeks after publication)
- Long-term risks (years later, digital permanence)
- Social risks (family, community, online harassment)
- Legal or immigration risks (if relevant)

② Then ask:

- What, if anything, could we change in reporting to reduce harm?
- Which harm/s may be unavoidable?

✓ Deliverable

A “Source Risk Forecast” document specific to your scenario.

✓ Debrief Focus

Work toward the following insight: Care is not just about the interview/photograph/video moment — it’s also about “downstream” impact.

2. Role Play for Consent Under Pressure Simulation

Objective

Practice meaningful consent — not procedural consent.

Based on your scenario in the previous activity, role-play a fast-moving situation, with a journalist + members of the public (survivors, protestors, family members...)

- ① Assign roles based on the scenario, for instance:
 - A grieving parent after a shooting
 - An undocumented protester being detained
 - A survivor disclosing abuse
- ② The journalist must:
 - Explain what publication means
 - Clarify permanence and audience
 - Offer real options if you can (anonymity, delayed publication, no photo)
 - Avoid coercion disguised as urgency
- ③ Midway, a facilitator can introduce complications, for instance:
 - “Your editor wants a name.”
 - “Deadline in 20 minutes.”
 - “The source says, ‘I don’t care, just tell it.’”

Reflection Questions. Discuss:

- ➔
 - Did consent feel truly informed?
 - Where did power imbalance show up?
 - What language helped or harmed clarity?

3. Photo Ethics Drill (Especially Useful for Photojournalists)

Objective

Visual care decision-making.

Set-Up

- ① Present hypothetical visual moments based on your scenario, for example:
 - A child crying at a protest.
 - A survivor mid-breakdown.
 - A person being arrested.
 - A family member collapsing in grief.

- ② Decide:
 - Photograph or don't photograph?
 - Publish or don't publish?
 - Crop? Contextualize differently? Reframe the perspective?

- ③ Give justifications based on:
 - Public interest
 - Dignity
 - Agency
 - Long-term risk
 - Etc.

Twist

Then introduce: “What if this image wins awards?” Does that change your calculus?

4. Aftercare Follow-Up Protocol Design

Objective

Normalize responsible post-publication care.

Based on your scenario, design:

- ①
 - Whether and when to check in with sources after publication
 - What to do if online harassment begins
 - How to respond if a source regrets participation
 - Whether journalists should maintain long-term contact
- ② Present competing models:
 - Strict professional distance
 - Limited structured follow-up
 - Ongoing relational engagement

Discuss tradeoffs, or the pros/cons of each scenario.

5. Moral Residue Roundtable

Objective

Process difficult ethical gray zones.

Note

This is *not* specific to your the scenario you have used previously.

Prompt

- ①
 - Have you ever documented/published something that was accurate but later felt harmful?
 - Have you withheld something in the name of care and later questioned that action?

This should be voluntary sharing.

- ② Facilitator's goal is to distinguish:
 - Necessary harm
 - Avoidable harm
 - Harm sometimes rationalized as “newsworthy”

***Different individuals will have different reactions and reasonings...and that is OK.**

6. Build a “Source Care Checklist” for Real Assignments

Objective

Participants create a practical, field-ready checklist. Each participant should add to the below (see next page) and create deeper before/during/after plans.

Note

If you choose this task, make it this final one and build upon insights and discussions during previous tasks.

Before Interview

- ①
 - Risk assessment
 - Discuss consent
 - Establish privacy expectations

During Interview

- ②
 - Language monitoring (e.g., No: “Can you describe the worst moment?” Yes: “Is there anything you might like to share right now?”)
 - Monitor signs of distress
 - Establish exit options

After Interview

- ③
 - Notification plan
 - Monitoring impact
 - Follow-up boundaries