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Interviews with survivors of the war - A guideline for what to do and not to do.

Guidelines of the Forum of Organizations for Public Psychology Services

The Forum of Organizations of Psychologists (the Forum) is an umbrella group representing all professional psychologists in Israel, with the goal of promoting public psychological services in Israel. It is made up of the Israel Psychological Association and the Association for Public Psychology.

At this time, as we are faced with war and terror attacks, we feel it is most important to provide you with some principles and guidelines for interviewing those who have survived the war and experienced recent atrocities.

The need we all have to receive information about life-threatening events is understandable and important for survival. In accordance with the information at our disposal about threats that occurred, we can improve our preparedness for other similar events. However, the Forum urges caution by interviewers on the various media platforms, so as to avoid causing a deepening of the distress and disruption to already fragile coping among those who survived the war atrocities.

It is important to recognize that certain content can have a detrimental impact on interviewees and such topics should be completely avoided. There is clear research evidence that requests for specific information and graphic descriptions of atrocities they experienced, encouragement of recounting their experiences of helplessness and the terror they were exposed to, or direct questions about how they felt or are feeling now – all these can undermine feelings of emotional resilience of the survivors and in turn can affect their physical resilience.

We also note that listening to interviews that include such descriptions of horror and helplessness can undermine the emotional resilience of the interviewers themselves and of the viewers and listeners. There is a very real risk that secondary trauma and development of post traumatic symptoms may develop following exposure to such details of events that others have experienced.

Therefore, we most strongly urge all interviewers to act responsibly. It is incumbent upon you to exercise restraint and caution. This is extremely important for their own wellbeing as well as for listeners, but first and foremost for the mental health and resilience of those they are trying to help!

Recommended questions that are suitable for survivors should focus on active coping in the face of the threats they experienced. For example:

- How did you deal with the threat?
- What helped you cope at the moments of terror?
- What/ Who gives you strength to continue to cope?





- What are your plans for today and going forward?
- What is the message you would like to give our audience?

This warning against interviewing in ways that may damage resilience and coping holds for interviews with survivors of all ages. It is important not to take them lightly and differentiate between children and you, and adults.

We turn to you with the request that media groups that do present clips involving the witnessing of horrible events should post a warning on the screen stating that: The Forum of Organizations of Public Psychologists in Israel warns that unrestricted exposure to this content may be traumatic to viewers and damage their emotional resilience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Heads of the Forum of Organizations of Public Psychologists

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