

“VALIDATING SURVIVOR VOICES”



**Lunch & Learn for Human Trafficking
Awareness Month
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Ka Leo; voice is more than the physical act of speaking - it carries mana and spiritual memories tied to experiences in life

**Silence is both imposed and protective.
Perpetrators silence survivors as a form of power and control.**

Survivors may silence themselves as a coping strategy and a way to stay safe and survive

Be the Pu`uhonua

Validating survivor voices is essential for connection, safety, and healing.

Belief becomes the foundation of safety because, for many survivors, their truth was denied, their experiences minimized, their pain dismissed, and their voices controlled or silenced.

When we believe and validate their voices, we begin to repair what exploitation tried to erase.

STEPS TO CONSIDER WHEN VALIDATING SURVIVOR VOICES

Establish Safety First

- Create a calm, welcoming environment
- Explain confidentiality clearly and simply
- Offer choices in seating, pacing, and participation
- Use grounding practices to support regulation

Safety is the foundation of voice.

Build Trust Through Transparency.

- Explain your role and purpose
- Clarify what will happen with their words
- Avoid hidden agendas or assumptions
- Use plain, respectful language

Transparency repairs the harm caused by deception and control.

Offer Voice, Choice, and Control

- **Let survivors decide what, when, and how they share**
- **Provide options: speaking, writing, drawing, or listening**
- **Normalize pausing, stopping, or changing direction**

**Choice restores autonomy
— the core of trauma
recovery.**

Listen Without Judgment

- **Allow silence and natural pauses**
- **Avoid interrupting or redirecting**
- **Let survivors define their own language and identity**
- **Stay present without trying to “fix” or interpret**

**Listening is one of the
strongest forms of validation.**

Reflect, Affirm, and Validate
Use supportive statements such as:

- **“Your feelings make sense.”**
- **“Thank you for trusting us with this.”**
- **“What you experienced was real.”**
- **“You deserve safety and respect.”**

Validation reduces shame and strengthens self-worth.

Honor Cultural Identity and Ancestral Knowledge

- **Welcome cultural forms of expression (oli, mele, hula, mo'olelo)**
- **Respect cultural metaphors and ways of storytelling**
- **Avoid forcing Western clinical interpretations**
- **Recognize 'ohana, 'āina, and kūpuna as part of healing**

Culture is medicine — and voice is part of cultural restoration.

Avoid Pathologizing Language
Instead of clinical labels, use
supportive, human language:

**Invite Collaboration, Not
Extraction**

- “Your reaction makes sense given what you’ve lived through.”
- “You did what you needed to survive.”

**Validation means honoring
survival, not diagnosing it.**

- Ask how survivors want to shape the space
- Include lived experience in program design
- Avoid tokenizing or using stories for impact

**Survivors are partners, not
subjects.**

Support Free-Flowing Expression

- **Allow non-linear storytelling**
- **Welcome art, movement, metaphor, and silence**
- **Let survivors set the rhythm**

**Trauma is non-linear —
healing can be too.**

Close With Care

- **End with grounding or breathwork**
- **Check in gently: “How are you feeling as we close?”**
- **Reinforce choice: “You shared exactly the right amount today.”**
- **Offer support resources**

**A safe ending is as important
as a safe beginning.**

“When someone finally listened to me and believed me, it changed everything. I wasn’t just a victim anymore — I was a person again.”

Survivor quoted by Polaris Project
Source: Polaris survivor stories page (public testimonies)

“Being believed was the first step in my healing. For so long, people doubted me. When someone finally said, ‘I hear you,’ I felt hope for the first time.”

Survivor featured by the National Human Trafficking Hotline
Source: National Hotline survivor narratives (publicly shared anonymized stories)

“Sharing my story without judgment helped me take my power back. I realized my voice mattered.”

Survivor testimony shared by ECPAT International
Source: ECPAT survivor stories (public advocacy materials)

“Validating Survivor Voices means believing without conditions, listening without judgment, and responding with Aloha. When we do this, we do not just help survivors heal! We heal our community.”



“Aloha mai kākou. I acknowledge this ‘āina and the ancestors who held truth long before we had language for Trauma. I speak today as a survivor not to be defined by what happened to me, but to validate the voices of those who are still finding their way back to themselves, who are still unheard, disbelieved, or blamed.”

**“MY ADDICTION DID NOT CAUSE MY TRAFFICKING
TRAFFICKING CAUSED MY ADDICTION.”**

Highlights Before the Story.....

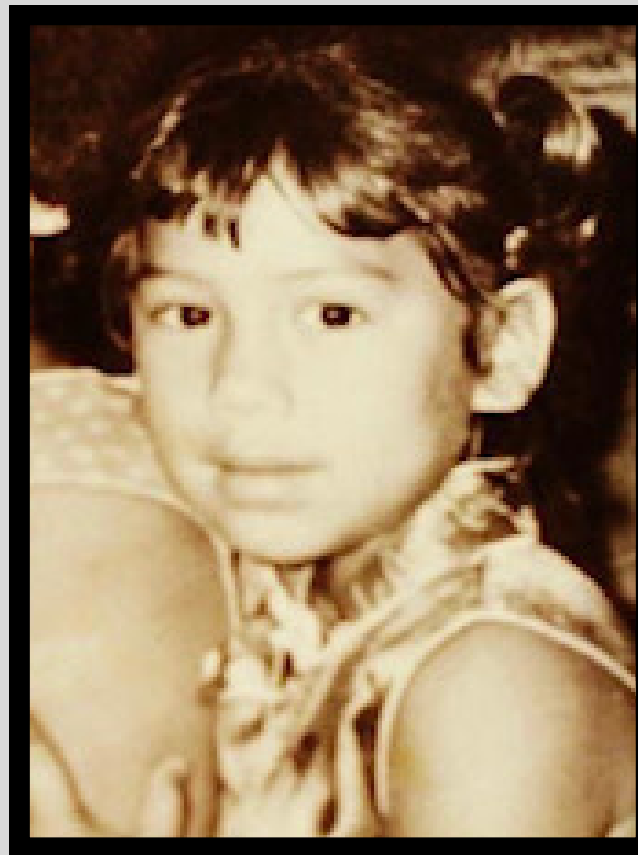
“What hurt more than what happened to me was being told it wasn’t real, wasn’t that bad, or was somehow my fault.”

Psychological/Emotional Control—Psychologically making survival dependent on **obedience**. Emotional manipulation masked as “love,” “help,” or “protection.”

Drug Dependency—Substances were introduced, withheld, and weaponized.

Often created fear of withdrawal to maintain control.

Using became a way of survival to cope with Rape, Abuse, and being Controlled.



**MY STORY OF FUN
THAT TURNED INTO FEAR**

LET'S STAY CONNECTED!



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