

Keeping truth-telling safe: Checklist

Reconciliation Australia:
Community Truth-telling Pathways

If you are undertaking truth-telling as an organiser, truth-teller, or listener, this factsheet will help you plan for some important safety considerations.

Concerns about safety, particularly for First Nations truth-tellers and their families, can discourage participation in truth-telling. With thoughtful planning and a willingness to adapt as needed, communities can create truth-telling spaces that are safe, respectful and supportive for everyone.

What is truth-telling?

Truth-telling covers a range of activities that engage with a fuller account of Australia's history and its ongoing impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Truth-telling deals with colonial conflict, massacres, racism and dispossession. It also celebrates and promotes the strength, contributions, resilience and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Understanding truth-telling is fundamental to keeping it safe. Check out the Truth-telling Resource Hub for some helpful explainers.

Why planning for safety is important

Truth-telling can be a profound healing experience for communities but also carries risks, including re-traumatisation.

Stories of strength and resistance go hand in hand with deeply traumatic histories and their ongoing legacies.

First Nations peoples are not solely responsible for truth-telling. Non-Indigenous people and organisations can play crucial roles as listeners, supporters, co-organisers and sometimes as truth-tellers. While the process should always be First Nations led, everyone plays a part in ensuring safety.



Key principles of safe truth-telling

Understand the context

Being culturally safe goes beyond respecting protocols such as Acknowledgements of Country. Safer environments depend on awareness of the histories of First Nations peoples and how these impact their experiences, perspectives and safety. For non-Indigenous participants, self-education is critical to minimise harm.

Put wellbeing first

Prioritise First Nations participants' emotional and physical wellbeing over cost, time and other expectations. Make sure First Nations participants know from the words and actions of all involved that their wellbeing is the top priority.

Act don't extract

Truth-telling takes a physical and emotional toll on truth-tellers. Their stories are not mere objects of interest; they place responsibility on listeners. Truth-teller safety and wellbeing are supported when listening and learning turns into determined action for real change.

Follow First Nations leadership

Truth-telling processes should always be led by the First Nations community concerned. Participants must follow the community's leadership and respect their decisions. They must understand the community's expectations for their involvement.




Photo: AAP Image/Diego Fedele

Truth-telling safety checklist

Safe people

Social and emotional wellbeing support is in place for truth-tellers, their families and all listeners. This support should be in place throughout the activity: before, during and after stories are shared. Consider things like:

 *Preparing with local services – for example counsellors who offer holistic and culturally safe wellbeing support; consulting our [First Nations Social and Emotional Support Services Directory](#).*


Organisers **work with First Nations truth-tellers in advance** and on their terms to clarify things like:

- how and where truth-tellers want to share their story
- if they wish to share their story publicly, with a limited audience, in private (or a combination of these options for different parts of their story)
- if their story will be recorded or published
- how their information will be stored and used; and
- what support they need before, during or after.

Everyone involved is aware of **trauma-informed principles** and understands safety needs will vary from person to person. There is a culture of readiness by organisers to hear personal safety needs and make any changes necessary to keep people safe.

Organisers understand what additional support **family** of truth-tellers might want before, during and after any truth-telling.


Truth-tellers have access to **legal advice** before deciding to participate. Truth-telling can involve legal issues like self-incrimination, non-disclosure agreements, mandatory reporting obligations, copyright, confidentiality, family law arrangements and child protection orders, defamation and other legal consequences.

 *Explore free legal assistance options, for example, Legal Aid, community legal centres and Aboriginal legal services.*


Safe planning and processes

Elder and **First Nations voices are centred** at every step in the process and decision-making.

Before truth-telling starts, reach agreement about **what is being shared, who owns the information and how it may be used**.

 *Understanding Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDSov) and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) rights is critical. See our [ICIP resources](#) for more information.*

Organisers have identified **risks**, by mapping out where challenges might arise.

 *For example, consider the impact of local tensions, opposition to the activity, disputed facts, vulnerable groups/relationships, as well as what supports and allies could help manage these.*

There are agreed processes for managing difficult conversations or resolving disagreements.

Safe engagement

Local **First Nations cultural protocols** are identified and incorporated into truth-telling processes.

☞ *For example, requirements for any displays of archival or other materials, including personal information or pictures of people who have died.*

Guidelines are established and communicated about **respectful participation protocols** and how participants can support each other.

Participants have been prepared for confronting information through **trigger warnings** and information about available supports.

Expectations for non-Indigenous listeners, truth-tellers, allies, and/or organisers have been discussed with the First Nations community concerned. For example:

☞ *Expected self-education, such as learning about the historical context or participating in anti-racism or cultural safety training; respectful participation protocols; and expectations about commitment to further actions.*

All participants, including the media, have clear instructions on **what information and images can be recorded or shared**.

☞ *Consider providing participants with guidance for safe engagement on social media and event promotion. For media, this includes how to report on the activity respectfully, who has authority to speak with media, and any cultural protocols they should observe.*

Safe events

In consultation with both truth-tellers and listeners, a **suitable location** has been chosen. For example, one that is:

☞ *Free of potential unsafe associations for participants, like some schools, churches, or government buildings; suitable for cultural protocols, like smoking ceremonies.*

Event timing accounts for dates that may be difficult for truth-tellers, or that may be a trigger for negative reactions in the broader community.

The event **space, schedule and team** support the wellbeing of truth-tellers and truth-listeners, through things like:

☞ *Quiet, safe spaces for truth-tellers to brief and debrief with appropriate people (such as family members or Elders); pauses in activities; professional and culturally appropriate emotional support services on hand; relevant people monitoring for distress during proceedings.*



reconciliation.org.au/truth-telling

This resource was produced by Reconciliation Australia to support community truth-telling. Published May 2026.

