

AUDIENCE GUIDE

Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery Policy Conference PEC

Creating and Maintaining a Trauma-Informed Environment

Thank you for contributing your expertise to this conference. As an audience member, you play a vital role in shaping policy conversations that directly affect survivors, communities, and practitioners working to address human trafficking and modern slavery. This guide will help you engage with the panellists — and your fellow audience members — in ways that are informed, safe, and respectful of the traumatic realities this work involves.

1. What Is a Trauma-Informed Approach?

A trauma-informed approach recognises that many people in the room — including audience members, panellists, and conference staff — may have direct or indirect experience with trafficking and modern slavery. It does not require disclosures or personal stories; rather, it involves structuring the way we speak and engage so that participation feels safe, voluntary, and respectful of each person's boundaries. We also know that non-related trauma can also be triggered by speaking about sensitive and traumatic content so being mindful of all persons present.

The Four Core Principles

Principle	What It Means in Practice
Safety	Participants feel physically and emotionally safe throughout the session.
Trustworthiness & Transparency	Panellists are clear about intentions, the nature of discussion, and what to expect.
Empowerment & Choice	Audience members are given agency over their own level of engagement.
Cultural Sensitivity	Recognising that trauma is shaped by identity, culture, and lived experience.

2. Language and Terminology

The language we use carries significant power. Choosing words carefully prevents re-traumatisation, respects the agency of those with lived experience, and promotes more accurate policy framing. We know most of this is already happening however, reminding ourselves and having it accessible to check our work against is important.

Instead of...	Consider...
Avoid: 'victims' (when referencing survivors present)	Use: 'survivors', 'people with lived experience', or follow their lead
Avoid: 'prostitute' or 'sex worker' (as a general label)	Use: The specific context or say 'person who was trafficked for sexual exploitation'
Avoid: 'illegal immigrant'	Use: 'undocumented person', 'person without status'
Avoid: Graphic or explicit descriptions of abuse	Use: Sufficient detail to inform policy without sensationalism
Avoid: Speculating on why someone 'didn't leave'	Use: Acknowledge the complexity of coercion and control
Avoid: Conflating all forms of trafficking	Use: Labour trafficking, sexual exploitation — be specific

3. Survivor Participation and Lived Experience

Conferences on trafficking and modern slavery are increasingly — and rightly — including survivors and people with lived experience as speakers, panellists, and attendees. Their participation enriches policy dialogue. Audience members have a responsibility to ensure participation is safe, especially once the floor is open to the audience during the Q&A.

Key Responsibilities When Survivors Are in the Room

- Do not prompt or invite disclosures — personal stories should never be requested from the audience.
- Do not single out individuals who you know or suspect have lived experience, even with positive intent.
- If a survivor is a panellist, follow their lead on what they choose to share and how.
- Validate without requiring — you can acknowledge the weight of the topic without asking others to speak to it.

4. Managing Difficult Moments

If a Participant or Panellist Becomes Distressed

- Do not pressure any individual to remain in the room — affirm that stepping out is a valid and respected choice.
- Avoid singling out the individual or drawing continued attention to them.
- If you yourself are distressed acknowledge the experience and ask for what you need. If this is to step away, you are welcome to do so.
- Individuals will hold different stories and responses; some may experience different ways of responding which is normal. It is the threat response system reacting. Sensitive spaces require attunement and the need to accommodate challenging emotional responses.

A few points to consider:

- **Neurobiological Responses:** Understand that trauma affects how people process information. For example, intense stress can lead to fragmented memory or difficulty focusing, dissociation (separation from the self and experience), flashbacks (where a person believes the event is happening again), intrusive thoughts (Where unwanted images and thoughts about an event enter someone's mind), Functional responses like seizures, migraines, functional neurological disorder.
- **Avoid "Dosing Away" Pain:** Do not feel you must "fix" or minimize the pain being discussed. Instead, aim to "bear witness" to the information being shared. The aim of the conference is to make change, which starts with understanding and bearing witness to someone's lived experience.
- **Use Grounding Techniques:** If the material is particularly heavy, there is the option to use the quiet room, and if you wish, a support provider can help with some brief grounding exercises (e.g., focused breathing or physical awareness) to help.
- **Radical Validation:** Validate the reality of the traumatic experiences being discussed without judgment. Many people appear to be fine as that has been part of the survival response, treat everyone with dignity and respect and do not assume someone's trauma is obvious.

If a Panelist or Moderator Says Something Harmful

- If you are in a position to do so, gently correct the framing in real time: 'I'd add to that by noting...' or 'It may also be useful to frame this as...'
- Avoid public confrontation that escalates tension. Raise concerns directly with a conference organiser during a break.
- Remember: the goal is to model good practice, not to shame colleagues. A brief, respectful redirection is more effective than a correction.

5. After the Session

Engaging with this material is demanding — for both panellists and attendees. Please take time to look after your own wellbeing following each session.

Post-Session Checklist for Audience Members

- Debrief with a PEC member of staff or a colleague if needed.
- Connect with the conference wellbeing support if you experienced any distress during the discussion.
- If other audience members approach you to share personal experiences, listen with care and direct them to appropriate support services — you are not expected to provide counselling.

6. Support Resources at This Conference

The following support is available to all panellists, speakers, and attendees throughout the conference:

Resource	Details
Wellbeing Support	Available at the Wellbeing Hub (Room TBC) throughout the conference day.
Quiet Room	A dedicated quiet room is available for all attendees who need to step away.
Designated Contacts	Please see your conference materials for named wellbeing contacts.

Post-Conference Support

If you are affected after the event, your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme or a counselling service may be helpful. You can access your GP if you require further support, there is also a list of resources around London and some national support if you require it.

Thank you for your commitment to this work.

Your leadership in modelling trauma-informed practice makes this conference safer and more effective for everyone.