

The Human Library for Human Books

This brief guide is directed to potential Human Books and provides an overview of the Human Library and essential information about what the role and responsibilities of being a Human Book entails.

What is the Human Library

The Human Library is a safe space for dialogue and personal conversation. It is based on the idea that we all carry prejudices and that we all judge. This is why the Human Library publishes humans as open Books who engage in a Reading, meaning a personal and honest conversation of 30 minutes. The Human Library facilitates Readings, where people from the community can come to check out a Book for loan and thereby become Readers of the Human Library. In a Reading, either a single or a small group of Readers can participate, but there should always only be one Book.

Who can be Published at the Human Library?

The Human Library publishes people who belong to a group in society that has experienced stigma, stereotyping, or prejudices. The topics relevant for publication include but are not limited to ethnicity, religious belief, gender, mental and physical health, lifestyle, disability, and traumatic experiences. The Human Library also publishes topics subject to heavy taboos, including victims of incest, sexual abuse, domestic violence, or grief-related topics. Yet, there is no exhaustive list of topics that can be published at the Human Library.

Books at the Human Library are there to provide Readers with their own personal experiences. Books should also be aware that many potential Readers might be unfamiliar with their topic. Therefore, the Readers may carry prejudice but also the will to understand and explore their topic.

During the Reading, Books may be asked difficult questions; these might be taboo or challenging to talk about, but can be necessary to thoroughly understand the topic. But still, each Book decides on the boundaries of the conversation. No Book is endless, and there might be chapters that they would want to keep private and meet with a polite “I am sorry, but that is a chapter that has not yet been published in my book”.

It is crucial that any traumatic experiences, addictions, or unlawful activities should be in the past and have been processed. The Human Library should never be a substitute for any professional therapy.

How to Decide on the Book Title and Content of an Open Book?

In the Human Library, every Book is unique and can choose their own Book Title (topic) based on their experiences. A Book has a short and accurate Title, that is easy for the Readers to grasp. The Title should reflect the experience of stigma, stereotyping, or prejudice. A Title cannot include wordplays or poetic features as these often mislead or confuse the Reader about the topic of the Reading. A few examples of Titles previously published at the Human Library are: Ex-convict, Bisexual, Non-binary, Police Officer, Alcoholism, Schizophrenic, Jewish, Indigenous, Orphan, and ADHD.

The Human Library is responsible for vetting and preparing the content of a Book before publication. This means all Books are trained and prepared to engage with the Readers.

Safeguarding Human Books

The Librarians serve to screen and introduce Readers to the concept of the Human Library to ensure that only individuals in the right frame of mind may become Readers. Librarians also float around the venue of the Readings to see if all participants are engaging in conversation and feel comfortable. Books always have the right to turn down or interrupt a loan and report any kind of problems to the Librarians, for example, if the Reader is not behaving in an appropriate manner or the Book does not feel comfortable with the situation.