

**a**

*world without*

**sexual assault**

## WARNING:

This publication contains material that may be difficult to read, or triggering for people who have had experience with sexual assault. Remember to take care of yourself. Choose the environment you read this in. Take time to read it, if you need to, and take time to find your friends or family to debrief, discuss with, and distract you. There is a list of support services in the back of this publication.

# For A Community Response to Sexual Assault



**Sexual assault happens in all of our communities, all over the world. In Australia, one in three women and one in five men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. This is an issue that all communities need to deal with. Some are already trying. We need to recognize that most of the members of our communities are either survivors of sexual assault - they are people who have been assaulted, supporters of survivors, perpetrators of assault, or often any combination of these things. All of the following contribute to fostering a culture of sexual assault: underlying power dynamics, patriarchy; assumptions and myths; understandings of masculinity and femininity, sex and consent.**

Men usually, though not always, are the perpetrators of sexual assault. Sexual assault is predominantly against women, but also against other men, trans and intersex people. Most sexual violence is committed by someone the survivor knows: their relative, their friend, their partner. Myths and assumptions about sexual assault, together with the culture of assault and sexual violence in which we live, contribute to a lack of understanding around assault issues, and a general inability or lack of knowledge about how to deal with these issues.

The way that our society currently addresses sexual assault is seriously inadequate, and in many ways it perpetuates a culture of assault and makes dealing with assault harder for survivors. Almost no assaults are reported to police, and most reported cases fail to result in a conviction. This is not

because they are “false claims”, but because the legal system forces someone who has been assaulted to try to “prove” their claim.

The method used to investigate these cases involve doubting survivors, disbelieving them, requiring them to relive their assault and undergo invasive medical examinations that may remind the person of their assault, almost like a second attack. The survivor is probed by police and lawyers who are rarely educated in addressing assault issues with sensitivity and caution. This interrogation and lack of training often re-traumatizes the survivor. The survivor must re-live the assault again, acknowledge what has happened, defend their stories, and confront the perpetrator, not when they are ready but when the legal system tells them to, and in the framework the legal system requires.

Being doubted invalidates the survivor’s experience. Most assaults happen in private. This makes it the survivor’s word against the perpetrator’s. Requiring sexual assault to be proven “beyond reasonable doubt” makes it almost impossible to convict perpetrators of assault. Being cross-examined in court, sometimes in the same room as the perpetrator, by defense lawyers who are trying to devalue and de-legitimise what a survivor is saying, to break them down and destroy their credibility in order to win their case at all costs, is traumatizing for a person who has gone through an assault. Despite constant reform of sexual assault law, a culture of myths and patriarchal assumptions still exist in the courtroom, with survivors often being blamed for their assault, their previous sexual history dragged out as “evidence”, and their personal lives attacked.

Judges are usually upper class, mid-50s white men who have a very limited understanding of the experiences of survivors, and often favour descriptions of events given by the perpetrator. Just recently, a women appearing in court to prosecute her assaulters was attacked by the defense lawyer, who tried to suggest that the noises she made during her assault were “moans of pleasure”. When questioned afterwards, the lawyer defended his behaviour by suggesting that you have to do things like that to win the case. The nature of the system encourages and allows lawyers to pull out all stops to destroy and discredit the other side, regardless of the impact this has on people’s lives.

In the rare event that a perpetrator of assault is convicted, prison does nothing to confront or challenge the behaviour and underlying assumptions and understandings that foster cycles of sexual assault. There is no educational function of prison, no attempt to find out what the survivor might want to happen or need from the perpetrator, and nothing that allows the perpetrator to take responsibility for their behaviour.

A majority of the education we receive in our lives about sex and consent reinforces a culture of assault. We do not learn about consent, about the complicated issues around consent, about the things that make it hard for a person to say no to sex; about the myths of assault that lead to so many different

kinds of non-consensual sexual relationships. In our society, active consent is largely seen as “un-cool”, and sex is established as an expected part of a relationship, an obligation rather than a mutually consented to and desired activity. The way we learn to have relationships is unhealthy as well, with unequal power dynamics, myths and learned assumptions leading to situations where open communication is not the norm, and where manipulation, assault and violence are common.

We believe that our society and governments cannot and will not deal with sexual assault. We believe that we need to think of ways within our communities that we can respond to and deal with sexual violence ourselves. Ways in which to focus on supporting survivors of assault, helping them to heal. To learn how to support, to listen, to provide space for a survivor to tell their stories. We can learn from models of conflict resolution and mediation, like restorative justice, that are about actually changing the power dynamics in situations and in our communities, about dealing with assault and preventing it from happening again. We need to deal with perpetrators of assault in ways which prioritise the needs of the survivor, and allow them to have control, autonomy and self-determination in the process. Any process needs to provide a mechanism by which the perpetrator of violence can take responsibility for their behaviour, to confront themselves, and to change. To provide them with an opportunity for redemption, and support them through that process, while at the same time keeping control in the hands of the survivor. Responding to sexual assault needs to be about empowering survivors to take control of their lives and to heal, and empowering communities to acknowledge and act on sexual assault that happens within them, without delegating our safety, our education, or our responses, to other people, be that the police, lawyers, governments, or whoever.

Community response is not about reacting when a particular situation occurs. It is about responding to and trying to change the culture of sexual assault and violence at its fundamental levels: about changing the way we think, we feel, we act. We need to work within our communities to try to prevent assault happening in the first place. This means educating ourselves and the people around us; unlearning underlying behaviours and understandings of sex and consent that perpetuate a rape culture, relearning the ways that we interact with others to create healthy, respectful, honest and open relationships. We need to recognize within our families and communities that we can deal with assault. We can come up with collective solutions, and create processes of accountability and responsibility in the spaces and communities that we create.

We can teach ourselves and constantly be learning ways of engaging in a community response - not a government response, not a legal response, but one which comes from us, from the people who are affected by sexual assault in all its forms, myths of sexual assault, and myths of consent. We can take back our power to care for, protect and support ourselves and the people around us.

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# MYTHS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

**Myth:** “Sexual assault doesn’t have anything to do with me or my friends”.

Some statistics report that as many as 80% of women experience sexual assault in their lives. Most report somewhere between 40-75%. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 5 men are sexually assaulted by the time they’re 18 (Miller and Biele), (Lew). And while these numbers may be scarily high, we must add a lot of under-reporting to almost all of these figures for reasons such as fear of revenge, fear of disbelief and stigmatisation, lack of confidence in defining...

**Reality:** Almost everyone we know has experienced, directly or indirectly, sexual assault.

**Sub-Myth:** “But women rape too”. Nearly 90% of reported rapes are on wom\*n by men, and almost all male rape victims have been raped by other (in the vast majority heterosexual) men. (Robin Warshaw, 98).

**Myth:** “Only weirdo’s and psychopaths (who are out there in dark alleys) commit sexual assault”.

This translates roughly into: Women are sexually assaulted when they are out alone at night. If women stay home they will be safe. In reality, 90%+ of sexual assaults are committed by a woman’s acquaintances i.e. the men in her life. (Funk, 11). The statistics for men are similar. So for wom\*n at least, it is much more dangerous IN THEIR OWN HOME than in those ‘dark alleys’ of our cultural imagination- and this is without even accounting for domestic violence! The men that assault are the men that are our friends, our families, not those “weirdos” (or racialised ‘others’) out there. Generally and consistently, only “Stranger Rape” is seen as “real rape”, again silencing and obscuring most rape/sexual assault- i.e. marital, date and acquaintance rape. This is residue of the ‘women-as-property’ ideology that bases the wrong of sexual assault in the trespass, spoiling or theft of men’s rightful property. This myth again excuses and stops us from taking responsibility for the pervasiveness and closeness of sexual assault. This myth also constructs and sustains much race, class and sexuality-based prejudice and fear.

**Myth:** “Men can’t help themselves”.

Sexual assault is not a crime of spontaneous passion or some naturalised and ‘animalised’ drive. Studies show that 60 to 70% of all sexual assaults are planned. Control and manipulation are common. (<http://pubweb.ucdavis.edu/Documents/RPEP/rculture.htm>). Rape is not a crime of ‘deprivation’. Most rapists are married and having consensual sexual relations while assaulting other wom\*n or men. Wom\*n who aren’t sexually active generally don’t sexually assault people out of deprivation either!

**Sub-Myth:** This also invokes the “women wearing sexy clothes are asking to (deserve to) be raped”. Though as we have seen, the majority of rapes occur either in the offender’s home or in the victim’s home. This myth also implies that wom\*n must know about men’s uncontrollable sex/violence-lust and be courting it by being anything other than completely invisible, and that men only sexually assault young, sexually ‘attractive’ women. Both of these are based on ideas of victim ‘irresistibility’- that the victim/survivor is knowingly responsible for male sexual projection/desire, and at worst becomes about a supposed Female masochism: Women enjoy being raped, or want to be raped, queer men and transies want to be raped. This is also based on ideas of women/non-men as passive objects, as sexual and moral gatekeepers to uncontrollable and omnipotent male lust. And this also obscures why men rape men (especially ‘heterosexual’ rapists).

**Sub-Myth:** If you orgasm or ejaculate in some way during rape, you must have liked it. Often your body responds to particular sensations whether you want it to or not. Just because rape creates a bodily sensation does not make it any more consensual.

**Myth:** “Men aren’t raped”.

1 in 5 men are sexually abused by the time they’re 18 (Lew). With the under-reporting that comes from men’s shame in revealing their sexual abuse, this is still very high, and this is a huge part of our communities also. *Could we double or triple this statistic?* Men may not disclose their sexual abuse for fear of being punished further when their “manhood” and sexual orientation are called into question, by a homophobic legal/justice and police system, and by culture generally. Again, we know that most males who sexually assault other males are heterosexual in orientation, and that most survivors of sexual assault are also heterosexual. The assumption that perpetrators are homosexual “protects and exonerates the heterosexual offender and unfairly places suspicion and blame on the gay community”. (Sexual Abuse of Men and Boys <http://www.xyonline.net/Abuse.shtml>)

**Sub-Myth:** All men who are raped become perpetrators of assault.

**Myth:** FALSE ACCUSATIONS are common and we need to examine the situation before taking any action.

**Sub-Myth:** Sexual assault is just (hysterical) women getting back at men.

**Sub-myth:** Feminists (who insist on making things like this an issue) are femi-nazi’s or man-haters- they ruin everyone’s (the boys’) fun.

Only about 16% of rapes and sexual assaults are ever reported. FBI statistics show that only 3% of rape calls are false reports. This is the same false-report rate that is usual for other kinds of felonies ie. robbery and assault (<http://pubweb.ucdavis.edu/documents/RPEP/rculture.html>). These statistics also include statements withdrawn by victim/survivors due to fear of revenge and the impact of the legal system, which in effect polices its own low reportage/conviction rate. Around 0.4% of sexual assaults are false claims. In other words: for every false report of sexual assault, roughly 208 “true” sexual assaults occur!! Thus the personal, legal and societal focus on false accusations is therefore hugely out of step with reality, and obviously another tool of avoiding the issue by placing the focus and risk-of-harm back on hapless, good-natured men.

As Jim Hines writes: “It’s easier to dwell on the false accusations. Rape is a horrible thing, and it’s not something we like to think about. It’s easier to assume a someone is making it up than it is to think about what they might have gone through”.

Whether anything can be proved or whether everyone knows everything is beside the point. Most often accusations are true and most often are dramatically reduced versions of the events and feelings. Think about why someone would put themselves through the trauma of calling someone out falsely. When people call what they know ‘rumours’, it is often another way of reducing their responsibility, and the constant focus on and fear of ‘rumours’ or false accusations is a silencing and avoidance technique used to keep things the same.

# REACTIONS TO ASSAULT

No list of reactions could cover all the reactions people have to assault, and no one will have all of these reactions.

**Common immediate reactions:**

Fear/fright, anxiety, anger, embarrassment, shame, disbelief/denial, feelings of guilt/responsibility, feelings of vulnerability/helplessness, crying/screaming, hostility/suspicion, controlled reaction style – calm/composed/unemotional, tense smiling, making jokes, feelings of being repulsive, fear of being murdered/mutilated/dumped, shock/feeling cold, disorientation, nausea, vomiting, hyperventilation, trembling/jitteriness, difficulty making decisions (eg, about contacting a crisis center), aversion to physical contact, hypervigilance, increased startle response, doubt of/fear for sanity, gratitude (for being alive), numbness/dissociation/depersonalisation/derealisation, flashbacks/intrusive recollection, sore throat, genital pain/itching/burning, skeletal tension/muscular soreness, injury including internal bruising/tearing/haemorrhaging/infection, STDs, olfactory hallucinations, sleep disturbances/nightmares.

**Common medium/long term reactions:**

Sleep disturbances (including insomnia and oversleeping), nightmares, exhaustion, eating disturbances/disorders, weight gain/loss, lowered body image, anxiety/panic attacks/pervasive fearfulness, fear of being left alone, sense of foreshortened future/fear of death, phobias, feelings of being persecuted/damaged, constant feeling of being threatened, heightened startle/fright response, hypervigilance, anger, depression, loss of interest/enjoyment, self loathing, suicidality, feelings of hostility, feelings of isolation/difference/alienation, increased/decreased socialising, increased dependency (on family, friends, partner), aversion to physical contact, difficulty completing tasks/performing at work, feelings of ineffectiveness/helplessness, impatience/irritability, heightened emotional sensitivity/fluctuating emotions, loss of emotional range/numbness, restlessness/agitation/inability to relax, loss of self respect/confidence, self-blame, guilt, feelings of humiliation, paranoia, obsessive compulsive behaviors, denial/doubt that the assault occurred, analgesia, amnesia of the event, memory loss, fugue, flashbacks/intrusive thoughts (can be more common under stress/fatigue), sensory distortion/sensory overload, avoidance of associated situations, changes in sexual behavior and satisfaction including sexual dysfunction, concerns about own sexual development, unwanted sexual fantasies/arousal, promiscuity/compulsive sexuality/compulsive masturbation/inability to refuse sexual advances, rejection of sexuality, confusion/concern about sexual identity/preference, concerns about becoming a perpetrator, precocious maturity (in children), hiding masculinity/femininity, reasserting masculinity/femininity, inertia, catatonia, escapism/fantasy/daydreams, thoughts of revenge, defiant risk taking, feeling neglected/that the trauma is invisible/unrecognized, mind – body separation/dissociation/derealisation/depersonalisation, feeling loss of self, freezing in response to perceived dangers or under stress, changes in/lack of expressive body language, loss of previously sustained beliefs/changed worldview, changes in spirituality/importance of spirituality, relationship difficulties, unhealthy relationships, substance abuse/addiction, self injury/self punishing behavior, nervous twitch/tics, sweating, suppressed immune system, soreness in lower back/stomach, nausea/stomach upset, headaches/migraines, stuttering/speech difficulty, gynecological changes including irregular/heavy/painful periods, urinary tract infections, painful intercourse, neurocirculatory symptoms, physical terror response to proximity of the perpetrator (even without visual-intellectual recognition), recreation of the victimizing experience.

# ... my reactions to assault

These are some of my reactions to being sexually assaulted. There may be as many reactions to sexual assault as there are people assaulted. This is a short list, from a long view, of one person. For years I didn't think that these things were reactions to sexual assault. I thought they were unrelated manifestations of weakness and cowardice. I want people who experience reactions to sexual assault to recognize them, and not be held back in healing by shame or lack of awareness. Thinking about these experiences in the context of sexual assault has been an integral part of my healing.

I was sexually assaulted in 2000 and am writing in 2007.

## Sensory overload

For about 2 years after I was assaulted sensations generated by touching something once would repeat (as if occurring again and again) for as long as, or longer, than similar sensory input was being received. The intensity of sensation was not relative to the physical intensity of the action or to 'competing' sensory data, usually it was over rather than under intense. I can't classify when this happened except for 'sometimes'. Sensory distortion occurred at manageable as well as unmanageable levels.

For example, I wasn't able to do up buttons in the dark. The information which was buttons, fingers, button holes and fabric continued beyond the time of contact, and didn't play at a relative sensory volume, so I couldn't tell what I was touching when, or what object was what. Difficulty was less if I could compensate by watching what was happening.

The sensations generated by the clothes I was wearing distorted when I left the house. Sometimes I went home because I was physically uncomfortable, or the sensory information was so confusing, that my sense of where the parts of my body were, and how to coordinate them would result in a gait that I was uncomfortable displaying in public. For example, if my back felt like my shirt was shoving me rather than stretching passively and unchangingly across me, I would instinctively arch my shoulders back to alleviate contact. I believe this particular circumstance of sensory overload was related to feeling unsafe, as well as an expression of my fear of being seen by people, which was related to negative self-appraisal. In addition to physical sensory distortion, when in public I sometimes experienced olfactory hallucinations of the smell of decayed blood. Olfactory hallucinations have been reported by many survivors and are interpreted by some as reflecting feelings of horror or disgust.

## Aversion to orgasm

After being assaulted, I still had sexual motivation but I had an absolute aversion to orgasm.

On approaching orgasm, the sensations I had been experiencing would switch from pleasurable and flowing to grating and flat. My desire would correspondingly stop looping through action and reaction. I often became alienated and lost, before I realised that anything was changing. I found it difficult to stay emotionally present with my partner or maintain affection for them, particularly if I didn't recognise, accept and indicate my discomfort quickly. Usually this seemed to be a reaction to sensation, but sometimes it was a reaction to sexual behavior or body language.

In the first years after being assaulted, these negative feelings and alienation were generally not overcome.

One of the things I need to do if I want to continue sexual activity after experiencing aversion is re-establish consent. I previously experienced consent as being formed internally and automatically in the presence of safety, approval and desire or interest. The process of actualising consent moved very slowly for years after assault and still does.

Sexual momentum/dialogue has often been derailed while my partner and I tried to find an activity that didn't continue or trigger aversion. Perceiving and responding to my discomfort has been difficult for my partner in a number of ways. I have often struggled to re-author the idea of the 'natural' sexual experience, which I previously perceived as being desired input > heightened arousal > ecstatic experience. My own process seemed diseased by comparison. I now consider this ideal subversive to desire and expression.

Without the participation of a partner and the desire to communicate sexually with them I had less motivation to confront aversion (for example, in solo masturbation). When I finally realised that I expected I wouldn't orgasm because of, or by myself, I decided that confronting and overcoming aversion was something that I could probably do on my own, and did.

Over the last 7 years the content and accessibility of my orgasm has been rebuilt and I value it absolutely, although it still occurs without the spontaneity and security that I characterise my pre-assault orgasm as having.

## Eating disorder/body image

I utilised eating disordered behavior for its physical-sensual effects, which would replace/be louder than the other messages that

came from my body or my self. I say 'eating disordered behavior' because I never identified myself as having an eating disorder. I multi-tasked any behaviors that suited me, and did not fulfill any diagnostic criteria.

Sometime after being assaulted I developed heinous body-image. I believe this was a direct reaction to assault, which was reinforced by eating disordered behavior. Prior to assault I thought that my appearance was satisfactory and unimportant. Post assault I came to believe that my physical self was readable evidence of my internal self, which I newly judged to be lacking strength and aptitude a priori, and totally offensive on that basis alone. The social consequence of feeling so object is profound.

Eating disorders are expansive and alienating in their psychological effect. It did not seem to go away even when I stopped investing in it. Despite having become wholly unattractive to me, it is an accessible resolution. Accessibility of resolution can take priority over intellectual dismissal or consequential discomfort. The shame of having an eating disorder sometimes contributed to continued use of the eating disorder. Integrated subjective experience did not return when I committed to more appropriate stress responses and a pro-human assessment of my physical presentation or not judging it at all.

## Body Language

Some changes in my expressive body language post-assault: difficulty displaying appropriate body language when I feel welcoming or close to people (I block people physically from entering my space or peripheral vision), fear of gaze-based or body-language based interaction (passing a person on the other side of the street, or my friend in the hall), a lack of facial expression, particularly in stressful and intimate situations (for example, the first months of an intimate relationship) and aversion to initiating or responding to social affection, despite wanting it.

For your own research, if you wish to make it, you may find the following phrases helpful (or heavily indoctrinated and western): Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), rape related PTSD, rape trauma syndrome, acute stress response, sexual dysfunction, stress disorders, survivor.

wwwwww@yahoo.com

# What are Triggers?

Triggers are things that bring up negative feelings, flashbacks and other assault related reactions in survivors. Triggers can be particular smells, places, actions, sensations, body language or even unidentifiable things. Triggers can affect a survivor years after an assault.

How do I know if a sexual experience is bringing up bad associations for my partner?

Ask. Then ask again. Make it part of your lovemaking to kiss or touch and then to ask, "Hi. How are you?" Then kiss a little longer. Explore your partner's body. Then ask, "Is this good for you? Are you still with me?" Tune into each other's body language. Sometimes it can be hard for survivors to identify and express what's going on. If you pay attention, you will often be able to sense a change in body signals or mood when old feelings come up. Does your partner tense up? Stop being expressive? Stop looking at you or turn their face away? Close their eyes? Act like a child? Is there a particular moment when you start feeling like you're alone in the interaction?

## Trigger Plan

Adapted from Support Zine

### 1. Notice

What are some of your current triggers? What happens when you are triggered? How can you (and others) notice that you are triggered? Be specific about behaviours, thoughts and feelings that you may have when you are triggered.

### 2. Stop

If the trigger is something like the smell of particular cologne, it may be very convenient to remove yourself from the situation. If the trigger is a circumstance that you don't want to remove yourself from, such as using the kitchen at your work, or having sex with your partner, you

can stop long enough to take a deep breath and think about what you're going to do next. If you are triggered by sexual activity, name three things that you can do to stop the sexual activity when you are triggered. Examples may be gestures, signals, or words.

### 3. Choose

Choose how you would like to proceed. Keep breathing, relax your body and take your time. It may be easier to do this step if you have already made a list of options that you feel will work for you. This list may include options such as talking, being held, walking around the block, changing the intensity/pace or position of a sexual activity or ending the sexual activity. If it is sex with a partner, see if you can find a way to stay together through the experience that is supportive to both of you.

### 4. Engage

Instead of 'checking out' or dissociating (not being present in the situation you are in), engage in whatever strategy you have decided on. Continue to build your capacity to stay present and tolerate the sensations and feelings that are a part of this healing work. Remind yourself that you are safe. You are always allowed to change your mind and choose again. If you find that you consistently make the same choice, try something different. For example, if you consistently choose to end sexual activity when you are triggered, practice continuing slowly.

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Maybe we need 100 new words for when our friends or acquaintances or partners assault or rape us. One word to describe, "I let you because I was half asleep and too tired to do anything else." One that's "I was too sick of arguing about it." One for "It's fucked up and scary the way you talk to me." One for "I told you that I didn't want to do that." One for, "why didn't you notice I wasn't present anymore." One for, "we had an agreement you would use protection." One for, "you said if I didn't do it you'd leave me. What choice did I have?"

”

From Support zine

“When I tell you about my scars, I don't want you to pity me, I want you to understand that some parts of myself I still can't understand. It sometimes feels like I can't control what's going on in my head. I don't want you to see me as “damaged goods”, I want you to see me as someone who has had to be stronger than others and has had to work harder for what others take for granted. There are no words that can take away the past, the past is a corpse, the future is a lie. And when I cry all I need is for you to hold me safely and all I need is to cry.”

From Support zine



# CONSENT & BOUNDARIES

Consent and non-consent aren't defined or communicated in the same ways by everyone. Not every definition of consent will be applicable to every person. For healthy relationships, each person should come up with their own definition of consent and feel positive about communicating it.

Consent involves healthy communication between everyone involved in sexual activities. Consent can never be considered 'a given', with strangers or long term partners, because of a particular situation, because of someone's earlier behaviour, because of someone's clothing, or because of how someone "seems". Consent is an ongoing process which can be given or taken back at any time. Saying yes to one thing does not mean someone is saying yes to other things.

Once you achieve checking consent, keep checking in to maintain a consensual experience. Consent/non-consent can be non-verbal, and may include body language, posturing, tone of voice. Some people aren't comfortable expressing consent/non-consent verbally. But also, non-verbal consent can be ambiguous and confusing – sometimes someone may seem as if they are giving consent by their body language, but actually not want to continue. On the other hand, someone may say yes but their body language may indicate that they are not present or not really into it.

Consent means paying attention and stopping if you think something might be wrong. Yet consent also involves working through things with your partner, if someone says they want to be doing something even if their body language suggests otherwise, if maybe they are not present but they want to keep going anyway as part of working through the stuff they are thinking and feeling, it means listening to them on that but doing so supportively, and being aware of changes in mood and non-verbal and verbal signals.

Consent means stopping in the middle of whatever you're doing if your partner withdraws consent. Silence does not mean consent. Consent means not manipulating or punishing people who deny or withdraw consent for any activity. Consent means hitting on someone before they're drunk/intoxicated.

It is hard to give consent if you haven't defined your boundaries or you are uncomfortable asserting them. Boundaries are ways that we come to an understanding about how we interact with others in healthy ways, what we are okay with and what our limits are, what we like and what we don't like and don't want to do. We don't always have the words to articulate a boundary, but we might be able to recognize that we feel something is wrong when \_\_\_\_\_, or that we stop feeling that everything's OK when \_\_\_\_\_. Boundaries are a way of protecting yourself emotionally and physically. Boundaries are fluid and subject to change.

Not all styles of communication or language will suit all people. Here are some examples of language that some people use to communicate about consent and boundaries.

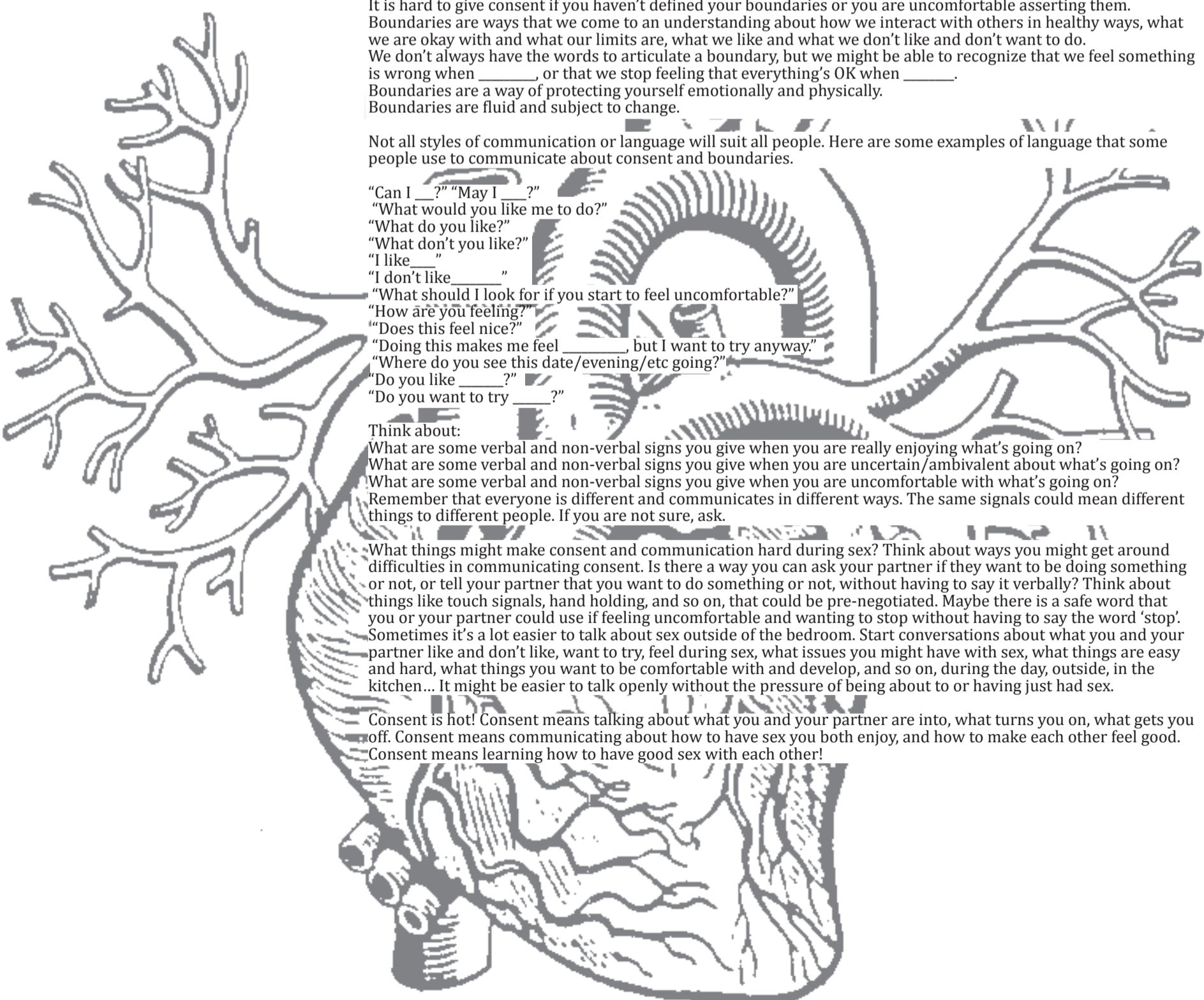
- “Can I \_\_\_?” “May I \_\_\_?”
- “What would you like me to do?”
- “What do you like?”
- “What don't you like?”
- “I like \_\_\_\_\_”
- “I don't like \_\_\_\_\_”
- “What should I look for if you start to feel uncomfortable?”
- “How are you feeling?”
- “Does this feel nice?”
- “Doing this makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_, but I want to try anyway.”
- “Where do you see this date/evening/etc going?”
- “Do you like \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Do you want to try \_\_\_\_\_?”

Think about:

- What are some verbal and non-verbal signs you give when you are really enjoying what's going on?
  - What are some verbal and non-verbal signs you give when you are uncertain/ambivalent about what's going on?
  - What are some verbal and non-verbal signs you give when you are uncomfortable with what's going on?
- Remember that everyone is different and communicates in different ways. The same signals could mean different things to different people. If you are not sure, ask.

What things might make consent and communication hard during sex? Think about ways you might get around difficulties in communicating consent. Is there a way you can ask your partner if they want to be doing something or not, or tell your partner that you want to do something or not, without having to say it verbally? Think about things like touch signals, hand holding, and so on, that could be pre-negotiated. Maybe there is a safe word that you or your partner could use if feeling uncomfortable and wanting to stop without having to say the word 'stop'. Sometimes it's a lot easier to talk about sex outside of the bedroom. Start conversations about what you and your partner like and don't like, want to try, feel during sex, what issues you might have with sex, what things are easy and hard, what things you want to be comfortable with and develop, and so on, during the day, outside, in the kitchen... It might be easier to talk openly without the pressure of being about to or having just had sex.

Consent is hot! Consent means talking about what you and your partner are into, what turns you on, what gets you off. Consent means communicating about how to have sex you both enjoy, and how to make each other feel good. Consent means learning how to have good sex with each other!



# *These are some things I've learned to say ...*

I'm really nervous to do XXX because I'm worried I won't be good at it \* I don't think I can cum right now but I'm really enjoying this touch \* When you do XXX it reminds me of abusive experiences \* I want to try XXX but I'm worried you'll think XXX \* I feel really XXX so I really want to cum but I'm ashamed of that need so I need you to XXX \* Is this something you want to be doing? \* What are you in the mood for? \* I fantasize about XXX and I'm not sure how I feel about that \* When I'm doing XXX that's a pretty good sign that I've switched off and maybe that I'm re-experiencing traumatic experiences or performing a role that I've learned as a coping mechanism \* I need you to talk to me \* I feel XXX about my body right now \* I feel really present and connected \* I feel I should XXX but if I listen closely to myself I think I would prefer XXX \* I trust you and I feel safe with you \* I would like you to touch me/hold me like this \* I'm nervous to ask but I would really like it if you XXX \* I want you to help me learn how to XXX \* I feel really reckless but I feel like we need to XXX first so that we can be reckless in a safe way \* I faked it because I felt XXX \* I need you to reassure me that my body/cunt/being is desirable \* I've never done/experienced XXX but it's something I want to feel safe trying \* I feel XXX by these feelings of being turned on \* When I find it hard to talk these are the ways that I can communicate what's going on for me \* How do you feel about having a code word or something for when I need things to stop or slow down? \* I need eye contact right now \* I'm really enjoying this, I feel happy, playful, strong, proud and wonderful in my body \* It feels nice when you XXX \* I feel XXX but I still want to be close to you \* When I XXX I need you to tell me XXX \* I like enjoying these sensations, feelings and closeness even if they don't fit into the trajectory of orgasm \* I feel happy and warm inside when I see your body \* I feel like doing XXX, how does that idea sound to you? \* I need you to tell me that your here because you care about me \* Maybe we could try this instead? \* I'm not wet but that doesn't mean I don't want to be doing things with you \* I feel inadequate when XXX \* In this moment I'm hearing these hurtful self thoughts \* I get triggered when XXX \* I need you to help me stop what we're doing \* Previous experiences of XXX include XXX \* I've internalized these expectations XXX of what I should be doing \* I need you tell me that you like touching me, and that you know its me here \* I learned how to listen to my inner voice, to recognize uncertainty, to say 'hang on', 'wanna play chess instead'...

*4 months later.*

# *These are some things I'm learning how to say..*

*It can be hard to feel safe enough to say what we want, particularly with layers of guilt/shame/feelings of expectation. But I've found that it can be just as difficult to ask other people what they want, because I'm scared of feeling rejected if their not into something I'm into, or triggered if something that they want reminds me of abuse, or hurt because I conclude that in them expressing their desires, I am made invisible, as an object, or as a substitute to someone they have or would like to enact those desires with. Also if I'm not in a good head space it can be hard to be present enough to have the connection to ask these things. But I'm working on it!*

How you are feeling? \* Are you ok with this? \* What do you want to do? \* Does this way feel nice for you? \* How can I touch you to show my love for you? \* Do you feel close enough to be touching like this? \* What sort of ways do you want to have sex? Reckless? Tender? How 'far' do you want to go? \* I would like to XXX is that something you want as well? \* How would you feel about trying XXX? \* I feel really good about this and close to you, if you would like to come, I would feel really good about that \* Do you feel like we have enough, time, space, presence and safety to do XXX? \* You seem a little XXX, is there something you want to talk about? Is there something I can do? \* What ways would you feel comfortable expressing your care right now? \* How do you like to get head/hand-jobs? \* What positions do you like? \* What are your fantasies? \* Is there anything we haven't tried that you would like to try? \* What words do you like using for this stuff? \* What contraception do you want to use? \* How do you understand/make sense of what this means \* How can we make ways for you to tell me what feels good or not good, what you want to do, or not do, without me being triggered by that? \* What things can we set in place so that you feel safe in your sexuality and in us when I'm triggered/dissociate etc? \* Do you feel connected? \* Is there anything that you want that you haven't felt comfortable asking. I'm in a good space to listen \* How can I know when you're comfortable/ uncomfortable with what we're doing? \* What turns you on? \* How do you feel about talking this much about things!? \* Do you want to make a time when we're not having sex to talk about some of these things?

## **Talking consent turns me on.**

More months later, I re-read this. And reflect on how each one of these things has had differing importance at different times in my life. That for a month or so, I was on anti-depressants that made it really hard to orgasm, which meant I had to renegotiate my relationship to sex, and feel safe in sitting with intimacy without being able to rely on previous narratives of what sex was... That in the year I was living in a Muslim country, it was so important to be able to be so reckless and absorbed, to fight back against the shame I had internalized about having sex outside of marriage ... So many journeys. And I am so grateful to you. Always.

# FROZEN INSIDE

By Cindy, taken from *Slug & Lettuce*

**1. How do you define consent?** 2. Have you ever talked about consent with your partner(s) or friends? **3. Do you know people, or have you been with people who define consent differently to how you do?** 4. Have you ever been unsure about whether or not the person you were being sexual with wanted to be doing what you were doing? Did you talk about it? Did you ignore it in hopes that it would change? Did you continue what you were doing because it was pleasurable to you and you didn't want to deal with what the other person was experiencing? Did you continue because you thought it was your duty? How do you feel about the choices you made? **5. Do you think it is the other person's responsibility to say something if they aren't into what you're doing?** 6. How might someone express that what is happening is not OK? **7. Do you only look for verbal signs or are there other signs?** 8. Do you think it is possible to misinterpret silence as consent? **9. Have you ever asked someone what kinds of sign you should look for if they have a hard time when something feels wrong?** 10. Do you only ask about these kinds of things if you are in a serious relationship or do you feel comfortable talking in casual situations too? **11. Do you think talking ruins the mood?** 12. Do you think consent can be erotic? **13. Do you think about people's abuse histories?** 14. Do you check in as things progress or do you assume the original consent means everything is OK? **15. If you receive consent once, do you assume it's always OK after that?** 16. If someone consents to one thing do you assume everything else is OK or do you ask before touching in different ways or taking things to more intense levels? **17. Are you resentful of people who want to or need to talk about being abused? Why?** 18. Are you usually attracted to people who fit the traditional standard of beauty as seen in the united states? **19. Do you pursue friendship with people because you want to be with them, and then give up on the friendship if the person isn't interested in you sexually?** 20. Do you pursue someone sexually even after they have said they just want to be friends? **21. Do you assume that if someone is affectionate to you they are probably sexually interested in you?** 22. Do you think about affection, sexuality and boundaries? Do you talk about these issues with people? If so, do you talk about them only when you want to be sexual with someone or do you talk about them because you think it's important and you genuinely want to know? **23. Are you clear about your own intentions?** 24. Have you ever tried to talk someone into something they showed hesitancy about? **25. Do you think hesitancy is usually a form of flirting?** 26. Are you aware that in some instances it's not? **27. Have you ever thought someone's actions were flirtatious when that wasn't actually the message they wanted to get across?** 28. Do you think that if someone is promiscuous that makes it OK to objectify them or talk about them in ways you normally wouldn't? **29. If someone is promiscuous, do you think it is less important to get consent?** 30. Do you think that if someone dresses in a certain way it makes it OK to objectify them? **31. If someone dresses a certain way, do you think it means they want your sexual attention or approval?** 32. Do you understand that there are many other reasons, that have nothing to do with you, that a person might want to dress or act in a way that you might find sexy? **33. Do you think it's your responsibility or role to overcome another person's hesitance by pressuring them or making light of it?** 34. Have you ever tried asking someone what they're feeling? **35. Do you think sex is a game?** 36. Do you ever try to get yourself in situations that give you an excuse for touching someone you think would say no if you asked? i.e. Dancing, getting drunk around them, falling asleep next to them. **37. Do you make people feel "unfun" or "unliberated" if they don't want to try certain sexual things?** 38. Do you think there are ways that you act that might make someone feel that way even if it's not what you're trying to do? **39. Do you ever try and make bargains? i.e "if you let me \_\_\_\_, I'll do \_\_\_\_ for you?"** 40. Have you ever used jealousy as a means of control? **41. Have you made your partner(s) stop hanging out with certain friends, or limit their interactions in general because of jealousy or insecurity? Do you use jealousy to make your partner feel obligated to have sex with you?** 42. Do you feel that being in a relationship with someone means that they have an obligation to have sex with you? **43. What if they want to abstain from sex for a week? A month? A year?** 44. Do you whine or threaten if you're not having the amount of sex or kind of sex that you want? **45. Do you think it's OK to initiate something sexual with someone who's asleep?** 46. What if the person is your partner? **47. Do you think it's important to talk with them about it when they're awake first?** 48. Do you ever look at how you interact with people or how you treat people, positive and negative, and where that comes from/where you learned it? **49. Do you behave differently when you've been drinking?** 50. What are positive aspects of drinking for you? What are negative aspects? **51. Have you been sexual with people when you were drunk or when they were drunk? Have you ever felt uncomfortable or embarrassed about it the next day? Has the person you were with ever acted weird to you afterward?** 52. Do you seek consent the same way when you are drunk as when you're sober? **53. Do you think it's important to talk the next day with the person you've been sexual with if there has been drinking involved?** 54. Do you think that people need to take things more likely? **55. Do you think these questions are repressive and people who look critically at their sexual histories and current behavior are uptight and should be more "liberated"?** 56. Do you think liberation might be different for different people? **57. How do you react if someone becomes uncomfortable with what you're doing, or if they don't want to do something? Do you get defensive? Do you feel guilt? Does the other person end up having to take care of you and reassure you or are you able to step back and listen and hear them and support them and take responsibility for your actions?** 58. Do you tell your side of the story and try to change they way they experience the situation? **59. Do you do things to show your partner that you're listening and that you're interested in their ideas about consent and their ideas about what you did?** 60. Do you ever talk about sex and consent when you're not in bed? **61. Have you ever raped or sexually assaulted someone? Are you able to think about your behavior? Have you made changes? What kinds of changes?** 62. Are you uncomfortable with your body or your sexuality? **63. Has your own discomfort or your own abuse history caused you to act in abusive ways? If so have you ever been able to talk to someone about it? Do you think talking about it could be helpful?** 64. Do you avoid talking about consent or abuse because you aren't ready or don't want to talk about your own sexual abuse? **65. Do you ever feel obligated to have sex?** 66. Do you ever feel obligated to initiate sex? **67. What if months or days or years later, someone tells you they were uncomfortable with what you did? Do you grill them?** 68. Do you initiate conversations about safer sex and birth control applicably? **69. Do you think that saying something as vague as "I've been tested recently" is enough?** 70. Do you take your partners concerns about safer sex and birth control seriously? **71. Do you think if one person wants to have safer sex and the other person doesn't really care, it's the responsibility of the person who has concerns to provide safer sex supplies?** 72. Do you think if a person has a body that can get pregnant, it's up to them to provide birth control? **73. Do you complain or refuse safer sex or the type of birth control your partner wants to use because it reduces your pleasure?** 74. Do you try to manipulate your partner about these issues? **75. Are you attracted to people with a certain kind of gender presentation?** 76. Have you ever objectified someone's gender presentation? **77. Do you assume that each person who fits a certain perceived gender presentation will interact with you in the same way?** 78. Do you find yourself repeating binary gender behaviors, even within queer relationships and friendships? How might you doing that make others feel? **79. Do you view sexuality and gender presentation as a part of a whole person, or do you consider those to be exclusively sexual aspects of people?** 80. if someone dresses in drag, do you take it as an invitation to make sexual comments? **81. Do you fetishize people because of their gender presentation?** 82. Do you think only men abuse/assault/rape? **83. Do you think that in a relationship between people of the same gender, only the one who is more "manly" abuses?** 84. Do you think there is ongoing work that we can do to end sexual violence in our communities?

# Support

from Support zine, other places, and our own hearts and minds and lives...

When you support someone through something that they are going through, or after something that has happened to them, the focus has to be on the person you are supporting. Their wants, needs and desires need to be at the centre of your attention.

Supporting isn't about trying to "fix" or "rescue" the person. It's about staying present, being there, assuring them that you are there to help and support them in whatever way they want. It means listening to the survivor if they want to talk or vent, being with them during their silence if that is what they need, providing a space for that person to feel and express their emotions safely if they want to express them, and understanding and respecting if they don't want to do that at that moment, or at all.

It is about giving space and time to those feelings even though they might be contradictory, confusing, intense, painful, hard to listen to. Most importantly, it is about validating the survivor's feelings, affirming for them that you believe them, and you don't judge them. It is about talking with them, and letting them work out what kind of support they need, what they want and need to feel safer, to feel more in control of their lives, to heal, to feel comfortable in their community and the spaces they are in. It is about helping that person to get those things if you can and if they want you to.

If someone can't tell you what they need, you might be able to do some trial and error, give the survivor some options, find different ways of working this out that doesn't mean that they have to tell you straight up. Even if people can't articulate what they want, they might be able to tell you what not to say, what not to ask, what not to do, what they don't like, what they don't want to be happening, and so on. There might be ways of asking, do you want me to ask this, talk about this, do this, or something. Can I check in with you and see what kind of support I can give you, maybe each day, or each week, etc?

It is important to remember that even though you might need to help the survivor to identify their needs and their desires, that they always remain in control of the process. That each decision is their decision, and what you are doing as a supporter is assisting them to make decisions, not making choices for them. Support is about empowerment, about helping people to reclaim control over their bodies and their lives. The way we support has to do this as well.

*"When he told me he'd been abused and didn't want to talk about it. I said ok. But we were best friends for five years and lovers for another five, and I never brought it up. I really regret that I didn't ask him about it when we got closer."*

## SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT...

### 1. Health and Safety First

Make sure that the person you are supporting is not in any serious danger. If they are, figure out how you can help them to get out of it.

### 2. Restore Choice

Rape is about power and theft of choice. In order for you to be a healing agent in this person's life, you must immediately allow them to make choices for themselves. Do they want to sit? How about stand? Would they rather talk at their place? Yours? Tea? Orange juice? Water? The same principle is true for large choices. Do you want to go the hospital to be checked out? Do you want people to know? Do you want to keep it quiet so you can get on with your life? Do you want to call the police? Do you want to think about what a community response to your assault might look like? Restore their power to choose. Ask, and follow their lead.

### 3. Believe

Being believed is one of the most important things in healing and recovery from sexual assault. You have to believe them. Even with a believing supporter, many survivors struggle with themselves about what they might have done to prevent what someone else did to them. Assure them that they are not to blame, there is nothing a person can do that would justify someone else raping them and that what they did in the situation was the best that they could have done for them to survive.

### 4. Shut up and Follow the Lead

Listen, listen, listen. You will not understand this person's experience- even if you have also been assaulted, the person you are supporting now will have their own experience of it. Rape is silencing, so allowing a space for a survivor to use their voice is a powerful way to support them.

### 5. Be Wary of Violence

Be careful about responding to someone telling you about their assault with anger, aggression or violence, at the situation, the perpetrator or anyone. This can be re-

traumatising for the survivor, and take away their control and ability to make decisions about how to respond to the assault. A lot of the time, especially with men who are supporting a survivor, people tend to react with desire for retribution. In this, the focus can be put on the perpetrator, on people alleviating their own feelings of anger or aggression, instead of thinking about what the survivor wants or needs. However, sometimes a survivor/victim is not able to express the anger they feel towards the person that assaulted them, and may never be able to, and it may be really cathartic for them to hear this from someone else. To see the what happened in less of a jumble of confusion, hurt and guilt. To say yes, this person did someone wrong, and that is not okay at all. Sometimes survivors have much more trouble seeing this than supporters. Sometimes that can give survivors permission to be angry. But again, it had to be about what the survivor wants, what the survivor needs, what the survivor feels, not what your instant reactions are, instant desires are, and so on.

### 6. Know your Limitations

You can't "save" anyone. And nor is that your role or responsibility. A survivor is not a damsel in distress. They are a strong person, with so many different dimensions, so many of which have nothing to do with their assault. A survivor can only recover or heal to the level that they are capable of achieving at a particular time. Look after yourself, know your boundaries and needs, and be aware of and honest about the capacity you have to support someone. Address this and take time to care for yourself when you need to so that you can be there for the survivor in a real way.

### 7. Stay Connected and Stay Flexible

Dealing with an experience of sexual assault will not happen in a day. It might never really happen. An experience of sexual assault is always there, in different ways, throughout a person's life. There will be ups and downs, good periods, and tough periods. A survivor might experience many of these changes in one day, in every day. Your consistency through all these changes and transitions is important. Each person's path is different. Don't give up on someone if it looks like things aren't going to turn around right away. Stick around, adjust the way you support someone if you need to, for yourself and for them. Consistency isn't always about being the same kind of support, putting the same energy into support, all the time. But it does mean being totally honest about what you can do, what you have to give, and not abandoning a survivor. If you can't support someone in the same way any more, talk to the survivor about it, help them to find out other ways to meet their needs, or other people who can take on that role.

### 8. It's Not About You

As a supporter, you will have a lot of different feelings and experiences. Supporting someone can be really hard, sometimes. You will have your own feelings about what has happened, what is happening. It is really hard to see someone close to you having something so awful happen to them, watching them get sad, get depressed, feel afraid, feel hopeless. The experience of the person you are supporting might trigger memories of experiences you might have had in the past. All these feelings are real and important, but in no way can they take the focus off the person who has survived the assault. Most likely they are feeling all the things you are feeling, but much much more. Try not to take space away from the survivor by using their experiences to process your own experiences and reactions. One way to keep check on this is to take care with what you say and how you behave. Think about what you are doing and why you are doing it, before you do it. Think about why you want to say what you want to say. Make sure it is not about some need that you have, no matter how justified you think that it is. If your own experiences are blocking or interfering with your ability to support the survivor, be honest about that with yourself and them.

### 9. Work to Understand the Process of Survival

Try to understand what it might be like to be a survivor. You can never understand someone's feelings or experiences in the way that they do, but you can work to understand the way things might affect someone to be aware of what someone might need and how what you do might affect how they feel. Movements, touches, places or words that remind a survivor of a moment; films or songs that refer to or depict assault; unfamiliar and unsafe situations - all of these things can trigger a flashback to the moment of a survivor's assault. If you can pay attention as these things reveal themselves, you can do what you can to avoid creating or participating in these situations when you are around a survivor of assault

### THINK ABOUT LISTENING

When you are supporting someone who is a survivor of sexual assault, it is really important that they feel like they are being listened to, heard and believed. Assault is really hard to talk about. There is so much that silences a person, that can make it difficult and hard to define what happened or how we feel about it. Think about listening. Pay attention to the different ways people you know listen. Figure out what it is that makes you open up to certain people and not others. What are the things that make you feel like someone is listening to you and really hearing you? What are the things that make you feel like

someone is not?

### Active Listening

Active listening is engaging with what someone is telling you while they are telling it to you. The purpose of active listening is to help you understand what is going on inside the other person. What their feelings are, what they are experiencing, etc. A survivor may not always be able to share what is going on inside them, and so the statements they make are sometimes coded, or clouded. This means that you might have to decode or clear up the message to hear what the person is really saying. You might need to find the hidden feelings, otherwise you might assume the wrong ones. Sometimes, listening properly might be giving a person complete space to talk, for as long as they like. Sometimes the only way to know whether you are hearing correctly what the survivor is saying is to reflect back to the person what you are hearing, maybe by asking "Do you mean...?", "Are you saying...?", "What does it feel like?" and other clarifying questions.

*"When my partner tells me about her abuse, or things related to it, she becomes really distant and closed off. She talks in a monotone, and it's scary. The stories are hard to hear, and I don't always know what to say or how to reach out to her. For a long time I just didn't know what to do. I would listen. I didn't think I had the right to ask her questions, and I didn't know how to comfort her. I didn't want to make her say more than she wanted to. I didn't want to talk about things she didn't want to talk about. But I realize that on one hand, she really doesn't want to talk about it all, and on the other hand, she really, really does. She needs to feel like I really want to know, for my own sake, as well as to help her take some of the burden."*

### Validating the Survivor's Feelings and Experiences

In our society, so often survivors of assault are doubted and disbelieved. Even if you do believe someone who has told you that they are a survivor of assault, there are many ways you could react that might make it difficult for that person to talk to you. The way a person talks about their assault can be affected by or dependent on how other people have reacted or listened to them previously. Often they may never have been validated or believed, and this can affect how they trust other people, how much they can open up about their assault, and also how they feel about themselves and what happened to them.

Lots of these ways of reacting reflect the ingrained myths we have learned about what sexual assault is, how it happens, and who is responsible. These myths may lead us to question or silence survivors, doubting them, underestimating what they are saying, or somehow placing the blame for the assault onto the survivor.

For example:

\*The survivor might doubt themselves so much that they present the situation in a way that plays down what really happened, and sets it up for you to dismiss as well. Eg. They might say, "yeah, I mean, I don't think it was assault, I know he would never do that, he probably just misunderstood/was really drunk", etc. You might say "yeah, probably, I mean he was really drunk..." This ignores the feelings the survivor might have about what happened, and makes it seem as though these feelings aren't valid. Maybe the supporter could instead have asked how the survivor felt about what happened, what was going on for them, and what they needed.

\*You know the perpetrator and can't imagine them doing anything like that intentionally, and maybe feel the need to defend them, even subtly. Eg. You might say "wow, XXX really isn't like that. I'm sure if you talked to XXX about it, they'd be really sorry, I mean, I've always thought he was...". Again this kind of response makes the survivor doubt what happened and question their feelings, making them less likely to open up about what happened and what they need. We need to accept that sometimes people we know, people we like, even people we love, may cross others' boundaries in different ways, and may assault people. We are part of a society that breeds unhealthy relationships and attitudes towards others, a culture of sexual assault. Even though this hurts us, we have to remember that it has hurt the survivor more, and they need our focus and complete belief and support in this situation.

\*You've had experiences of your own where your boundaries were crossed in a way that you consider much more extreme, and you never thought you were assaulted. Eg. Saying "that sucks, but I mean, guys just do that shit, you know?" This might reflect experiences you have had and myths you have learned about sex, consent and sexual assault. Sometimes we do not want to acknowledge that certain things that have happened to us might be assault, and we shouldn't have to. But we also don't want to silence other people who are survivors of assault or question them about their experiences either. If you are supporting someone, instead of focusing on what did or didn't happen, you can focus on how that person feels about what happened, what they need to happen now. Maybe one day you will be able to do that for yourself, as well. There should be no degree of "badness" that something that happened has to meet before a person can ask for support. Different people have different needs, different boundaries, different responses and different reactions, and need support at different times in different ways. We want to create a world where people can ask for and receive this support, whenever they need it.

\*You might ask for lots of questions about the details, or about the survivor's decisions or behaviour. Eg. "So... what happened exactly?" "Why didn't you sleep somewhere else?" "Did you say no? How come?" "How



use were you?" "How long ago was it?" "Why were you in that place, visiting that person's house, out that late, that drunk and in the person's bed, etc?" This doubts the survivor's experience, invalidates their feelings, and makes them question their own behaviour, placing some of the blame for what happened on them. No matter what we do, what we wear, where we are, how "close" to a sexual experience we get with someone, it is not an excuse for someone to assault us. We do not "ask for it" with our behaviour or our clothing – we only ask for or consent to sex when we do so clearly, explicitly, at all stages of a sexual encounter. It is never our fault that someone ignores us when we tell them to stop, does not give us a chance to say no, takes away our choice to be in the situation. It is the perpetrator who has made that happen. It is not the fault of the survivor in any way.

## SEX

Talking about sex can be really hard. When were we ever taught to talk about it? What language do we use? How do we now feel embarrassed? Why is it sometimes hard to say what we really mean? Really, sex is our bodies, our lives, something that's supposed to be cool and fun and amazing, and why shouldn't we talk about it?

The difficulties we might have talking and communicating during sex can make it really difficult for a survivor to talk about their experiences, how they might affect their sexual relationships, or things that might be hard for them being intimate with someone. It shouldn't be the responsibility of the person who has been abused to initiate conversations about sex. Being in a sexual relationship with a survivor of assault can be really hard. In saying this, we need to remember that most of the people that we have sexual relationships with have had some experience with sexual assault. This makes it really important that we learn how to give someone space with sex, to communicate in different ways with people during sex, to make sure we know how to check in with how someone is feeling, if they are okay, and support them if they are having a flashback, feeling not present, or feeling not okay.

## Spacing Out and Flashbacks

Sometimes sex might trigger flashbacks to someone's experience of assault. A survivor might not feel present in their current experience, but feel like they are reliving their assault. If you going to have a sexual relationship with someone, even if it is only a once off thing, it could be a good idea to ask them if there is anything that might trigger flashbacks to a past experience, or if there is something you can do if they feel not okay or not present at any time.

Sometimes talking can help. If someone looks like they are not present, you can ask them. You could ask them to open their eyes – don't demand it, just say something like, "I wish I could see your eyes" or "Are you here". Sometimes a voice can bring us back. But sometimes not. If you are not sure where a person is or if they are present, it is a good idea to stop or slow down. Sometimes you can come up with a code word beforehand that a person could say if things were not going okay, because some people can't say stop or express what is going on with them.

If something like this happens, don't overreact or freak out. You don't need to press the person for information and details. They don't have to tell you what their experiences have been unless they want to. Don't feel inadequate. What you could do will be different depending on the person and the situation. Sometimes the survivor might want you to leave them alone. Other times they might want you to stay with them. Sometimes the person might want to be in the present. Other times the person might want to stay in the flashback, through the whole thing, open it up to gain information about the past or for some other reason.

If the survivor wants to be in the present, you can talk about what help they might need to do that. Maybe the person needs to say out loud that they want to be in the present. Maybe the person needs you to say their name, tell them who you are, tell them details of where you are and what is around, or tell them a story of something nice and simple, something not sex related, something you've done together lately, or something else, something that is not about fear and helplessness.

It can be important, especially if you are in an ongoing relationship or friendship of any kind, to talk about these things when you are not in bed. To talk about them before hand, to work out what to do when something happens. And also to talk about them afterwards.

Maybe you could say something like "I know you couldn't talk about what was making you so scared and sad last night, but I really do care and really want to know. Do you think we could talk about it now?" Maybe the person will say yes, or maybe they will say no, and either of those answers is totally fine.

Maybe you can say "It was confusing when I asked if you were okay and you said "I'm fine" but you didn't really sound fine, and I didn't know what to do. What should I do when that happens?" Maybe the survivor will say "yes, I was actually fine, just trying to bring myself back to the present, and I was glad you didn't stop and that you trusted me", or maybe the survivor will say "yes, actually I was saying fine to be cynical and I am glad that you noticed and glad that you stopped."

Maybe you can say "do you like it when I \_\_\_\_\_? I can't tell." Maybe the person will say "I want to like it, but it makes me feel weird." Maybe they will say "I don't really

like that, I just didn't know what to say anything."

It can be so hard to know what to do in these circumstances, what someone is saying, what someone means, because of all the reasons they might be struggling with communication in these moments, because of all the things we have learned to silence and oppress within ourselves. This is why it is important to talk about these things, not just in the bedroom with all the pressures and meanings that exist there, to build up trust and knowledge of each other and how to support each other in relationships around this stuff, to learn from the person what to look for in their body language and eyes to help you figure out what they mean, what they want, and so on. To talk so that a survivor knows that you want to know, you want to be there for them, you want to support them in this.

## Boundaries

Sometimes someone's boundaries with sex might be confused, or constantly changing. Sometimes something might be okay, another time not; sometimes a survivor might want something, and other times not. This might be confusing for you, if you are someone who is in a sexual relationship with a survivor, but you can guarantee that it is more confusing and difficult for them. Be patient, be gentle. Don't get frustrated, don't get annoyed, don't pressure a survivor to make their mind up or be consistent. Make sure that your partner knows that it is okay to change their mind, at any time, as much as they want, that it is okay if they are confused or not sure. Always ask, always check in, with how your partner is feeling, if they are enjoying themselves, if they are present. But also remember that a survivor is not fragile. They are not glass. They don't always want to be reminded that they are survivor, or made to feel like you think they are fragile and might easily break. Sometimes asking too many questions might make them feel like this. Find out what works for you and your partner, what your partner wants or needs, what balance you can reach together.

*"It is not easy for a survivor (or just a girl in general in our society) to reach the point where they can figure out what it is they need, let alone tell you, so for god's sake, take it seriously when they can!"*



## SUPPORTING YOURSELF

Things to do when your having trouble staying present (from Support zine):

- ☆ BLINK HARD. BLINK AGAIN.  
DO IT ONCE MORE AS HARD AS YOU CAN.
- ☆ MAKE TEA. DRINK IT
- ☆ CALL A FRIEND
- ☆ EAT A SNACK
- ☆ JUMP UP AND DOWN WAVING YOUR ARMS
- ☆ LIE DOWN ON THE FLOOR; FEEL YOUR BODY CONNECTING WITH IT. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN. HOW DOES IT FEEL? DESCRIBE IT OUT LOUD TO YOURSELF
- ☆ MAKE EYE CONTACT WITH YOUR PET. NOW HOLD IT
- ☆ CLAP YOUR HANDS
- ☆ BREATH DEEPLY. KEEP BREATHING.  
PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EVERY BREATH.
- ☆ HOLD A STUFFED ANIMAL, PILLOW, OR YOUR FAVORITE BLANKET.
- ☆ ALTERNATIVELY TENSE AND RELAX SOME MUSCLES
- ☆ NOW "BLINK: WITH YOUR WHOLE BODY, NOT JUST YOUR EYELIDS
- ☆ MOVE YOUR EYES FROM OBJECT TO OBJECT, STOPPING TO FOCUS ON EACH ONE.
- ☆ WASH YOUR FACE.
- ☆ GO OUTSIDE FOR SUNSHINE OR FRESH AIR.
- ☆ NAME IT " I FEEL REALLY SCARED RIGHT NOW", " I FEEL LIKE THE WALLS ARE CLOSING IN ON ME," "I FEEL LIKE I'M SINKING". JUST HANG OUT WITH IT. DON'T LET IT CONSUME YOU, DON'T LET IT BE EVERYTHING THAT YOU ARE. RECOGNIZE IT FOR WHAT IT IS, A FEELING, AND THEN LET IT MOVE THROUGH YOU.

## TRUST

You can't expect a survivor to trust you straight away, or sometimes even at all. Understand and accept if they don't, it is likely not a personal thing. After having their trust broken in a sexual assault experience, usually by someone close to them, and often by the community around them in being disbelieved, questioned or silenced, a survivor can doubt themselves and the people around them so much that it is often amazing that they can trust at all. Talk and think about what kinds of things you might be able to do to make it easier for a survivor to trust you.

What about when you've made a mistake, when you've broken someone's trust? How can you regain someone's trust? You might not be perfect. You might make a mistake. You might make mistakes in ways that you can't even believe. When you are trying so hard to be there for

someone and you make a mistake, break their trust, make them feel worse, it can make you want to curl up and roll away. That's one option. Another option is really to think about it, take it on. Show them that you understand this wasn't what they needed, and that you really care about them and want to try again... and again, and again. But also recognize that sometimes you can't regain someone's trust. Sometimes they might not want you to take on the same role for them anymore. They might not be able to keep having you as their support person at all. And that's okay. It doesn't mean you are a bad person. It doesn't mean you've ruined everything. You just need to accept that that's what needs to happen, and if they want you to, help them to find someone else who can offer them the support they need.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The person you are supporting needs to know that you will not tell anyone anything they don't want you to. Who knows and what they know can completely change the survivor's experience. Other people knowing can take power away from the survivor in terms of being able to determine how and when things happen, where and when they have to be confronted with it, for example, rumours, the perpetrator finding out before the survivor is ready for them to know, and so on. Whatever reasons you might feel that you have for wanting more information; you think you might know other people involved, you want to take on a more active support role, or whatever, it is important that the person you're supporting only tells you how much they're ready to, and when they feel the time is right. What they do tell you can't go any further unless they have specifically asked you to talk to someone else on their behalf. If they do ask, make sure you know how much they are comfortable with you revealing, and how they want that person to use the information, to relate to them, and so on. Sometimes there might be situations that are more complicated, such as if you think someone else might be in danger. It is important that even in this situation, you break anyone's confidence without talking to the survivor about it, about why you feel it is important to talk about it, about how you can, for example, protect someone else, without sharing the survivor's secret if they don't want it shared.

It can be really difficult to keep such a painful secret. It's important to deal with your own feelings because you don't want to place the person you are supporting in the position of caring for you when it is important for them to concentrate on themselves. Helping yourself helps the person you are supporting. You have no reason to feel selfish or guilty. Talk with the person you are supporting about with whom, or in what ways, you can talk about how the experience is affecting you if you feel like you need to. Maybe you are able to talk about your feelings without describing the situation that has made you feel like that. Or maybe you can write out the stories and secrets and burn them. Crisis lines and counselors may assist you with your feelings and concerns, especially when you can't talk to anyone else about it.

## BRINGING STUFF UP AND ASKING QUESTIONS

It can be really hard to ask for or believe we deserve the things that we need. Having things offered or suggested can help us as long as we don't feel like we are being pressured or having our feeling shaped for us. However, being constantly asked if you are okay can be disconcerting, or make someone feel like everyone thinks or expects them to be fucked up all the time. The question "are you okay" also doesn't leave much space for someone to tell you how they feel, or to tell you the things they may want to tell you. It asks them to say "yes" or to say "no". Think about other ways of asking questions that create space for the person you are supporting to speak, without pressuring them to do so if they don't want to. Think about other ways you might be able to offer support or space.

## SPACE FOR SURVIVORS

It is really important to remember that space is one of the hardest and most important things for a survivor of any sort of abuse, attack, aggression, and so on, to have and to control. Someone who has had their power taken away from them and their choices removed might need to feel that they can be in control of their space. A person may be unable to be anywhere near the person who has made them feel unsafe, even if the situation that has made them feel like that happened somewhere else, or some time in the past. They may feel unsafe whenever that person is around, and it may trigger memories from previous interactions they have had with that person and/or others. They should not be around this person or have to deal with or see this person before they are ready. They may never be ready to. Trying to understand this, and then making it happen, can be really really good for the survivor's healing process.

## PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Some of the most crucial ways we can provide support are in practical, every day ways to help someone out. It can be providing a place to stay, comfort and safety. It can be in just being company, in making sure that someone doesn't have to go to sleep in a house alone. It can be child care, it can be food, money, medical attention, covering someone's shift at work. It can be providing them with the opportunity to be in a space without people who make them feel unsafe. It can be staying home with someone if they don't feel okay to go out. It can be hanging out and doing things that have nothing to do with sex, with assault, with any of these experiences in their lives. It can be helping someone with their school work. It can be just being a good friend, a parent, a child. Letting someone know you appreciate them, you care about them, you want to support them through the things they are going through.

# Grieving and Mourning

Bass, Ellen & Davis, Laura, *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Harper Perennial, New York, 1994. Pp.129-132



*"Sometimes I think I'm going to die from the sadness. Not that anyone ever died from crying for two hours, but it sure feels like it."*

As a survivor of child sexual abuse, you have a lot to grieve for. You must grieve for your abandonment. You must grieve for the past and grieve for the present, for the damage you now have to heal, for the time it takes, for the money it costs, for the relationships ruined, the pleasure missed. You grieve for the opportunities lost while you were too busy coping.

And sometimes the losses are extremely personal:

*"I don't remember ever being a virgin. It wasn't fair. Everybody else got to be one. It has always really hurt me. I still have a real anger that was taken away. Nobody asked. It was just gone. I didn't have that to give. I know that's just "the American Dream" but I heard that dream the same as any other woman did. Whether it's important now or not, it was to me."*

If you maintained the fantasy that your childhood was "happy", then you have to grieve for the childhood you thought you had. If your abuser was a parent, or if you weren't protected or listened to, you must give up the idea that your parents had your best interests at heart. Part of grieving is replacing the unconditional love you held for your family as a child with a realistic assessment. Your childhood may have been completely awful. On the other hand, there may have been a lot of goof times mixed in with the abuse. If you have any loving feelings toward your abuser, you must reconcile that love with the fact that they abused you.

You may have to grieve over the fact that you don't have an extended family for your children, that you'll never receive an inheritance, that you don't have family roots. You must also grieve for the shattered image of a world that is just, where children are cared for, where people respect each other. You grieve for your lost innocence, your belief that it's safe to trust. And sometimes, you must even grieve for a part of you that didn't make it:

*"I went down to see the children inside me. The first one I noticed just sat on the curb in my abdomen. She'd sit there with her head in her hand, looking very sad, or she'd be jumping up and down, being manic. Then there was one in my heart who would sit in a room behind a door. She'd open the door and peek out, and then shut the door, 'cause she got scared. Then there was one who was dead. I'd been waiting for her to wake up. And one day I was lying in bed crying, and I said, "Okay, it's time for you to wake up," but she was dead. I sobbed and mourned that a part of me had died. The part of me that had really wanted to believe in the good of the family and the good of everyone just died."*

Some survivors grieve not just for themselves, but for the abuse that was done to the people who abused them, for the generations of victims continuing to perpetuate abuse. A woman abused by her mother explains:

*"There was a lot of grief, lots of tears realizing I didn't have the kind of family I thought everybody else had. It really hurt. It still hurts. It comes in waves. Those kinds of tears go real deep. It's a sadness for what I didn't have; it's also a sadness for my mother. It hurts that she's so sick. It hurts that she never realised her beauty, and still doesn't. Because she had so much self-hate, she had to abuse me. For a long time I was angry about that, but then there was a stage of grieving for her because she is beautiful, she is loving; it's just that her sick side is overwhelming to her."*

## Buried Grief

Buried grief poisons, limiting your capacity for joy, for spontaneity, for life. An essential part of healing from traumatic experiences is to express and share your feelings. When you were young, you could not do this. To fully feel the agony, the terror, the fury, without any support would have been too devastating to bear. And so you suppressed those feelings. But you have not gotten rid of them.

To release these painful feelings and to move forward in your life, it is necessary, paradoxically, to go back and to relive the experiences you had as a child – to grieve, this time with the support of a caring person and with the support of your adult self. What you need to heal is not fancy or esoteric. It is remarkably simple, though for many survivors it has been hard to find. All you need is the safety and support that enable you to go back to the source of your pain, to feel the feelings you had to repress, to be heard, to be comforted, and to learn to comfort yourself.

And in this way, a transformation takes place. Once you have fully felt a feeling, known it and lived in it, shared it, acted it, given it full expression, the feeling begins to transform. The way to move beyond the grief and pain is to experience them fully, to honour them, to express them with someone else, thus assimilating what happened to you as a child into your adult life.

## About Grief

You may feel foolish crying over events that happened so long ago. But grief waits for expression. When you do not allow yourself to honour grief, it festers. It can limit your vitality, make you sick, decrease your capacity for love. Grief has its own rhythms. You can't say, "Okay, I'm going to grieve now." Rather you must allow room for those feelings when they arise. Grief needs space. You can only really grieve when you give yourself the time, security and permission to grieve.

*"After I had been in therapy for several months my whole self began to respond to that environment, within which I could allow my feelings. There were weeks when I entered the building, went up the stairs, checked in with the receptionist, all with a smile on my face and cheerfulness in my step. Then I'd enter the office, my therapist would close the door, and before she'd even get to her chair, I'd be crying. Deep within me I held those feelings, waiting until I knew there would be time and compassion."*

## The Role of Ritual

In order not to stifle your feelings of grief, take this period of mourning as seriously as if someone close to you had died. One survivor, whose abusive parents were very much still alive, spent many months dressed in black, telling everyone her parents had died. Another wrote a eulogy for their abuser, imagining themselves at his grave, telling everyone exactly what they would remember the abuser for. A third held a wake. Rituals such as these can be powerful channels for grief.

*"I wrote a divorce decree from my mother, because I kept having these dreams of wanting to cut the umbilical cord and her not letting me. I just couldn't figure out how to separate from her. We weren't talking. We weren't seeing each other, but I was still feeling too connected."*

You may not be inclined to ritual or ceremony. You may simply cry a lot. As one person put it:

*"I hadn't cried in years. It's only recently that that's been restored. I'm not sure I'm happy about it. It's like Niagra Falls at times."*

However you grieve, allow yourself to release the emotions you have struggled all your life to smother. Grieving can be a great relief.

# OK DANGER –

AN EXPLORATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY DEFENCE

*We would like to introduce you to our language in an attempt to redefine and reclaim our lives.*

**Self defence-** what we do to make our lives safer on a daily basis

**Violence-** the act of taking away someone's power or choice to control their lives (includes physical, sexual and emotional attacks etc..)

**State violence-** sexual assaults attributed to the state such as routine sterilizations and rape by the police and military

**Interpersonal violence-** sexual assaults that occurs between persons; within relationships, families, on the street

**Anti-violence-** philosophy and movement of organizing for violence prevention as well as addressing its roots and causes

**Potencia-** Spanish word for power/potential

**OK danger-** taking risks in a supportive environment

**Active subject-** taking control of our lives; seeing ourselves as active as opposed to passive, and subjects as opposed to objects

**Personal boundary-** defining what you are ok with involving your body, your space and the way you are treated and spoken to

**Gender-** our chosen gender identity whether this be male, female or gender variant.

**Patriarchy-** a social and political system where males dominate decision making, hold the resources and claim authority on the basis of their gender.

**The State-** a centralised system of control (schooling, courts, police, military, government)

**Perpetrator-** someone who has assaulted another. Note that we do not use the word 'assaulter'. We do this to give them the choice to break with patterned behaviors of sexual violence and change their ways.

{Note- this article is mostly written in gender-neutral language to acknowledge that people of all genders are both capable of assaulting, and have been assaulted. This is not to dismiss common patterns of abuse, whereby women and people from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual) as well as people of colour, sex workers and the poor are at higher risk of state and interpersonal sexual violence}.

We are passionate about exploring paths of resistance to disrupt this rape culture<sup>1</sup>. We want to critically examine current responses, and chart new territories of struggle. We are nervous about writing these words; fearful that we do not have enough experience of successful resistance to sexual violence to worthy a reader engaging in this article. Our lack of experience is however the force guiding this piece; we want to open spaces to discuss these issues, we want to call out to others to join us in this struggle to defend a world without sexual assault, we want to be able to create successful self-defence stories in which we stand up and fight back and look around and see that we are not alone.

Undoubtedly there is a problem; our bodies are a battlefield and attacks against our person, our safety, dignity and self-respect are constant. Sexual assaults occur everywhere, in homes, in relationships, in families, workplaces, on the streets, in churches, at the hands of the police, the military, in prisons and with strangers. Sexual assaults occur across boundaries of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality status and age. Who then do we need to defend ourselves from? How can we define our enemy? We need to identify sexual violence as a social relationship that is maintained in both subtle and coercive ways. We need to question how this relationship is maintained through critically examining the role of the patriarchy, the state, nationalism, racism, classism, schooling, the philosophy of non-violence<sup>2</sup>, the courts, prison systems, the culture of silence, dehumanizing pornography, Hollywood, marriage, religion, monogamy, the media, sports, capitalism and more. We need to look at who benefits from the ways things are, and question their role in maintaining a rape culture.

## The potential of individual self-defence.

1 For extensive analysis on why we live in a rape culture and how to transform it read 'Transforming a Rape Culture' (2005) by Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth. If you don't believe that we live in a rape culture I ask you to question your privilege and listen to the many stories of those around you have experienced sexual violence.

2 Though using non-violence approaches may be successful in violent situations or an individuals' philosophy, there are very real violent consequences to limiting a self-defence response to a non-violent practice.

The responsibility for an assault always rests with the perpetrator, the community they are part of, and the conditions that underpin their actions. While asserting the power of people resisting an assault, we do not mean to place the responsibility for being assaulted on survivors. It is never anybody's "fault" that they are assaulted. No matter the circumstances, nobody ever deserves, or asks to be assaulted. We acknowledge that there are valid and complex reasons as to why people differ in their ability to defend themselves, and that the ways in which people defend themselves is also unique and determined by their experiences, context, and gifts. All people deserve safety and control over their body. This is never conditional on their ability to physically defend themselves.

Individual self-defence can keep us safer; we may successfully defend ourselves, step away from a knife attack, get up from a ground pin, bite, kick or frighten an attacker. More than this, using self-defence in the face of an attack is a transformative process, whereby an individual or community affirms their strength as active subjects in control of their lives. They reject patterns of submitting to domination, and in the process challenge acceptance of or resignation to an attacker taking their power away. Such actions break cycles of domination and sexual assault within our society. When we fight we refuse to give away our power and to become victims (which literally means 'sacrifice unto death'). When we fight back our bodies become a site of resistance and the very process an act of strength and self-respect. When we fight back we join the dissident movement of individuals and communities uniting together to say 'NO, Enough'. 'I'm worth defending'<sup>3</sup>.

You may already be using tactics and skills to keep yourself safe. This could be through practicing assertive communication, defending personal boundaries, screaming at potential attackers, attacking eyes/groin/throat, avoiding dangerous spaces, walking with a dog at night, training in martial arts, taking self defence classes, practicing safe sex, talking to lovers about sexual boundaries, practicing consent, building supportive relationships or training spatial awareness and learning to listen to our intuition. It is a lot to do with believing in our strengths, not only in our fists and strikes, but also in our eyes, in our heart and in our spirit<sup>4</sup>.

3 'I'm worth defending' is a community run self-defence anti-rape program run in Kenya.

4 The psychological aspects of self-defence have been widely acknowledged by such collectives as 'Breaking Free'- Self Defence From the Inside Out in Oregon, USA.

We are being bold, feet gripping the dirt under us, bracing as we take the risks we know are necessary to build the worlds we desire. And we train our bodies to remember how to fight, we train our voices to remember our choice and assert it, we find our hearts again so we can offer support to each other, and create spaces of refuge to heal.

And yes we struggle bravely, and yes there is still more to do.

**Limitations of individual self-defence.**

We need to be honest with ourselves about the limitations of individual self-defence. We also need to be honest about the risks of focusing on and reacting to the violence that erupts in our day-to-day without directing our energy to addressing its origins and its causes.

There are oppressors/perpetrators who have more power than us as individuals; we need to reflect on how we deal with this reality. If we focus our efforts on individual self-defence as a response to sexual assault, what happens when we come into conflict with people, or groups of people who have more power than us as individuals? What are our choices if we have not prepared ourselves for such confrontations? We can choose to fight, knowing we will be harmed, maybe killed. We can choose to submit, hoping we will be spared. We can choose to escape, hide and stay vigilant for the next attack. We can choose to ask for protection from a person, or an organisation of people who have the power to stop whoever is trying to oppress us.

*...I bow my head as I pass them in the hallway, I am small and invisible... they laugh and taunt anyway...*

What are situations we face in which we cannot defend our bodies, our needs, through individual self-defence tactics? How do we respond if there are organised groups of people who are trying to harm us (eg. gangs, fascists, Nazi's, corporations, the government, police)? What structures and people do we rely on to try and meet our need of safety when we are faced with these situations? What external authorities do we rely on? Cops, security guards, surveillance cameras, courts, locked doors and fences (and thus land lords), prisons, the army are all examples. In what ways do these powers that are external to our communities and ourselves control us, dictate how we live our lives, what we do with our energy, our bodies? What happens when our protectors become our oppressors?

*...“well don't come to us if you ever get raped then”... heard from a cop who was responding to criticism from a woman who was waiting for her friends to be released from prison after an office occupation...*

When we call the cops, when we call on the state to lock somebody in a cage because they have sexually assaulted another person, when we resolve conflict through the court system, we are deferring our power to these people/institutions and entering into a relationship of reliance. We are also outsourcing our violence to these people. We do not own our actions, we are removed from the real-world consequences of them... the messy pain, confusion, force and struggle that are repercussions of our decisions. We fracture ourselves, we are not fully human... By relying on authorities' external to our communities and ourselves, we forget our power and what it feels like, we move away from realising our potencia.

**“The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken power away from (women’s) ability to organize collectively to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence.”**

- Statement on ‘Gender Violence and The Prison Industrial Complex’ from Critical Resistance and INCITE!- women of colour against violence)

We need to be honestly reflecting on the extent to which responses that rely on and increase the power of police, prisons and the court system (i.e. responses that rely on external authorities) are effective tactics in realising our dreams, in meeting our needs. We also need to acknowledge that the tactic of ‘calling the cops’ may not work for communities that organise resistance to state policing, that are targeted by the racism of law enforcement, immigration laws, and enforcement of the prison industrial complex<sup>5</sup>; or that are marginalised in

<sup>5</sup> For detailed analysis of the links between sexual violence, sexism and racism see ‘The colour of Violence’ (2006) edited

society, for instance sex workers.

**Community defence as alternative.**

**We gotta fight back  
In large numbers fight back  
I can't make it alone  
Fight back  
In large numbers  
Together we can make a safe home**  
- Holly Near,  
“fight back”

Hold my hand, there are other ways. Organised community defence that both responds to sexual violence and addresses its roots and origins presents the potencia of defending a world without sexual assault. Community defence refers to the act of people mobilizing as a community to defend individuals, homes, projects, land or spaces without relying on external authorities such as the police, military or prison systems. Community defence may also involve defending a community from the sexual violence of the police or military. We are excited about the potential for people to share power and self-organise responses to threats, to shift oppressive relationships where they occur and to keep justice local, whereby the people who are affected by the act have a part in affecting a response. Community defence could involve establishing our own culturally specific protocol and response to sexual violence, defining justice and how we can have it, holding each other accountable for actions, aiding each other in meeting our needs, responding to situations locally and asserting our autonomy. Established systems of community response and accountability protocol present a real alternative to the criminal justice and prison systems.

By community we refer to people who either live together or are involved in each other's lives, practice respectful relationships of mutual aid and would be prepared to defend one another. You may not feel that you are currently living within a community; a lot of us don't. Faced with the unviable option of relying on external authorities to keep us safe (control us), establishing strong communities based on trust, respect and mutual aid becomes an act of resistance whereby we come together to meet our needs and defend one another. Though it is our personal values that influence what we view as worth defending, intimate relationships with people, projects and places connect our hearts with the world; we defend what and whom we love. Creating and maintaining intimate relationships with the people and world around us can then be seen as a defensive act.



Artwork by Cgd.

**What could community defence look like?**

So, what does it look like if we choose to actually practice community defence? We all need to be answering this question as we try... but it could look like people learning and sharing skills in resolving conflict, communicating well, defending themselves... it could look like a group of people working together to facilitate perpetrators owning their actions, replacing denial, guilt and self protection with responsibility, accountability and action... it could look like a group of women surrounding a perpetrator who has refused to own his actions and forcing him to at least feel what it is like to have your power taken away... it could look like a circle of over a hundred people from a neighbourhood addressing how to respond to the assault of a young girl... sometimes it looks like 3 indigenous women in an alicé springs town camp walking red dusty paths under starlight, finding people who are fighting or drunk and responding to the situation before the police get a chance... sometimes it looks like a village of indigenous people in mexico electing the individuals who will act as community police for a set period of time... sometimes it looks like that same village recalling one of the people elected because they have not acted as the people desired... sometimes it looks like a group of “lavender panthers” using their fists to stop a group of men from assaulting a person who doesn't fit a gender norm... sometimes it looks like a store that stocks dehumanising pornography being fire bombed... sometimes it looks like a class of boys in a slum in Kenya honestly discussing sexuality... it looks like risk, and letting go of the false choice of state protection... it looks like breaking down prison walls, and having ways to rehabilitate those that need rehabilitating... it looks like putting our hearts, egos and bodies on the line... it

by Incite! South End Press, or more on the prison industrial complex see Critical Resistance [www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org)

sounds like hard words, honest words... it sounds like tears... it sounds like quiet spaces that give room to tell painful stories... it sounds like laughter from the gut... it sounds like war cries and bellows... it sounds like trembling voices getting louder... it sounds like distant drums or thunder... it sounds like deep breaths... it feels like bellies on fire with nerves and rage... it feels like aching muscles... it feels like tight throats and tears... it feels like noticing your body for the first time... it feels like shivers up spines... it feels like bracing and calm when all around is danger... it feels like legs tense, gripping the dirt... it feels like tingles and dancing fingers on skin... it looks like eyes glistening and big smiles... it looks like eyes narrowed and fists up... it smells like fresh... or gardens after rain... or soil... it tastes like blood and sweat... it tastes like our collective bravery... it tastes like each other's tears... it feels like weary steps and tired legs still moving forward... it feels like falling... into good hands... it looks like mountains and valleys and rivers and clear night skies, and that shooting star we just caught a glimpse of... it feels like doubts and tight chests and confusion... it looks like a child staring a cop in the face and asking “why?”... it looks like unlikely friendships, and hands held through prison bars... it feels like bodies filled, bristling and feeling power beyond imagination...

**“We seek to build movements that not only end violence, but that create a society based on radical freedom, mutual accountability, and passionate reciprocity. In this society, safety and security will not be premised on violence or the threat of violence; it will be based on a collective commitment to guaranteeing the survival and care of all peoples”**  
-Incite and Critical Resistance Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex (2001)

**Navigating barriers**

What needs to happen? Honestly, we're not sure, for these paths are not familiar to us<sup>6</sup>. But we do know we need to do something different, and we do know that it will probably be hard, and it will probably take focus and bravery and it will definitely take us learning to imagine again. And we are going to need a community to defend and to defend us... So whatever “community” looks like for us<sup>7</sup>, we need to cultivate it<sup>8</sup>. And we need to learn to feel and actually love again so that we care enough about ourselves and each other to believe we are worth defending. We need to understand the people we organise with and share worlds with. We need to ask each other what we feel is important, what our dreams are, what risks we are willing to take... We need to trust each other. We need to be accountable to each other. We need to be willing to offend each other in order to call each other out. We need to feel like if someone says they'll do something, their word has meaning. We need to feel like if we take risks, other people will support us. We need to take care of each other... We need to challenge the privileges that allow us to neglect building real communities<sup>9</sup>. We need to identify the stories we have been told about the world that make us forget how powerful we are, or result in prioritising things that aren't actually important to us<sup>10</sup>. We need to identify where we are currently directing our energy, who or what this is supporting, and what we are building in the long-term. We need to reclaim our power, our labour, our creativity, in order to share it with each other<sup>11</sup>. We need to take risks. We need to challenge the façade of safety, dignity and meaning we are offered in exchange for our compliance. We need to be willing to lose the crumbs we are given, so that we can storm the whole bakery<sup>12</sup>. We need to be honest about the extent to which we are compromising our dreams in order to “get by”... We need to start experimenting, and be willing to fail. We need to redefine failure and success in a way that goes beyond degrees, careers, awards or grades. We need to take steps together on these paths, be willing to stumble, and break each other's fall when we do. We need to begin. We need to take small steps to build our confidence that we can actually

**6** Although in moments we have seen a glimmer of what community defence could be; in the spontaneous care we have offered each other on streets and behind barricades, or when a perpetrator has been asked to leave a space, and when he turns to his mates for support, *they* have told him he has to go

**7** or you, if you are not us

**8** though maybe it will be by learning to defend each other and to work this stuff out together that a community will form

**9** whether it be the ability to find work that is not completely mind-numbing and that offers to meet our material needs, or that we are white enough that we can get away with calling the police without it resulting in our arrest or assault

**10** what did you do today? or what are you going to do? how many of these things do you actually feel is important? how many of these things move you? what are the frameworks or stories that are informing your choice to use your energy this way?

**11** and to realise what we are giving away!

**12** and until then hit the dumpster

this... We need to listen to the community defence stories of people who don't have the option of calling the police, the people who only feel the stick of this current system, and are not lured by any carrot... We need to celebrate the ways in which we are currently doing this, and draw confidence and strength from how amazing we already are.

### Risks

Community defence without social change and radical transformation of oppressive relationships runs the risks of recreating an order based on white supremacy, capitalism, racism, sexism, classism, homo/queer phobia and inequality. The defence of autonomous communities and spaces must be allied with the struggle to shift power concentrations, decision making control and resource distribution or else we will mirror the old world in the new; we will recreate a society where the ruling class dominate or perpetrate in a new uniform. Community defence could look like angry men stoning women who have been seen with a lover, or chasing out people of colour from a white neighbourhood. With the possibility of autonomy and self-governance comes absolute responsibility and accountability to everyone involved; there is no justice without us struggling to create the world we need and dream of here and now.

We struggle for safety, liberation and OK Danger; a world where we are supported to take risks and live dangerously. We want a world where we can dance outrageously, hitchhike across the country, confront and challenge authority, do sex work, indulge in the touch of a stranger, make ourselves vulnerable to a lover, swim naked, leave the doors unlocked, trust another to baby sit our children, sleep soundly next to whoever we choose, wake up alive. We deserve this all. Our actions are then shaped by dreams for better worlds and for personal and collective liberation. We realise that building for a world without sexual assault must be tied to our dreams for social change and liberatory practices, or else 'safety' became isolation, fear, and withdrawal from society. Locked inside physical or emotional walls, we may never suffer abuse at the hand of another, but neither will we experience the rush of arriving in a new city after hitch hiking alone to see your lover, or dancing shirts off surrounded by fiery friends, or swimming alone under the starlit sky. We want to feel alive. We want to support one another to grow. We want to stay real. We want to relax into the consensual touch of another in reclaimed spaces and whisper ok danger, ok danger, ok danger.

### About the scribes

Dino Scout has 13 years experience in the martial arts and self-defence world and is humbled by the journey. Dino has instructed self-defence classes to martial arts students, community groups, women, queers and friends over the past 7 years and has been involved with 'world without' organising around Australia. Dino is attempting an analysis of the role of race, class, sexuality, gender and ability in the patterns of interpersonal and state violence, and is passionate about transforming oppressive relationships through individual and community defence.

Scruff has grown up boy. He has perpetrated violence. He has survived violence. He has spent the last 2 and a half years learning to own his actions, his messy shit, to listen and support, to feel what consent is, to sit on hills and tell stories that are real and hard. He still walks this journey. He has helped initiate and facilitate workshops and a group aiming to encourage men to take responsibility for our actions. He is moved by a desire to be real, raw and human in his interactions and to own his life, his power and moment.



'Safer spaces' is a concept relating to actively creating physical spaces, relationships and communities that are safer for everyone who is a part of them, that are respectful of each of our stories, our experiences, our pains and fears. Safer spaces is about everyone who shares space together exploring and acknowledging our privileges, and how we fit into various power dynamics and hierarchies that operate within communities, working to become aware of how these affect our behaviours and interactions in order to challenge and confront the way we perpetuate oppression. 'Safer spaces' are communities and social groups that prioritise the needs of people who are survivors of various kinds of hurt and oppression, such as sexual assault. They are spaces that prioritise listening and responding to survivors, open and healthy communication about how people are affected by the behaviour of others, and encourage the analysis and confrontation of people's own behaviour in order to work towards creating communities and social groups free of oppression, assault, marginalisation and inequality. We call this concept 'safer spaces' rather than 'safe spaces' because we live in a world where oppression and hierarchy is systematic, and like it or not, we are all socialised to fit into these patterns. 'Safer' recognises then that oppression and inequality exists in all spaces, even amongst people who are aware of privilege and prejudice, but that through self-organising, self-awareness, willingness to challenge and change our own behaviour, and a commitment to helping others acknowledge and confront their behaviour, we can create spaces and groups of people that are SAFER.

### 5 points of what Safer Spaces is all about.....

- ☑ Respecting people's physical, mental and emotional boundaries
- ☑ Always getting explicit verbal consent before touching or crossing someone's boundaries
- ☑ Respecting all people's opinions, beliefs, differing states of being (mental/physical & other), and differing points of view
- ☑ Being responsible for your own actions and the effects they have on others
- ☑ Taking responsibility for your own safety and get help if you need it

### Ways people have tried to create safer spaces include:

- Putting up 'Safer Spaces' policies (a list or description of things/behaviours people feel are necessary for a space to be safer – it could be as simple as the five points listed above) at events or social centres so that people are encouraged to think about their behaviour, and feel that they have a reference point to use to confront other people on the way they are behaving. 'Safer spaces' policies can also be used as a framework to respond to incidents that occur at events or in social spaces or communities. The policy makes it clear to people who are at an event or using a social space what kind of behaviour is and isn't acceptable. If a person is then acting in a way that makes others feel unsafe, a safer spaces policy can be a way of explaining this to a person, and also a clear reason for any response that is thought to be necessary.
- Grievance collectives, usually in conjunction with a safer spaces policy. These are temporary groups that get together for events, or in particular centres or other spaces, or in particular groups of people, to respond to incidents and situations that come up where someone is feeling unsafe. The group exists for anyone who is experiencing behaviour they do not want to be around. Their role is to listen to that person, and explore with them the ways they would like their issue to be addressed. The group offers listening, and respectful and confidential support. A response to the situation can also include conciliation and mediation with the person against whom the grievance is felt, or excluding that person from the area, depending on the wishes of the person who has experienced the grievance. A grievance collective may also need to follow up an incident after the particular event. This may include helping the person find people willing to help facilitate a conflict resolution, or in some cases, calling the police if that is what the person wants.
- Running workshops with people who consider themselves to be part of the same loose social group, organization or collective about what safer spaces might mean to them, what it could look like, and what could be done to work towards that vision. Acting on suggestions and ideas that come up in discussion.



# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

*Some of this information is adapted from: Jennifer Llewellyn, 'Dealing With the Legacy of Native Residential School Abuse in Canada', and a lot of it I've changed or added to from discussions, experiences and lessons I've learned. Although restorative justice has been used to describe processes incorporated into legal systems of various countries, and modified significantly, when I talk about restorative justice I am talking about a concept, idea or understanding of justice and the way it relates to conflict resolution processes. I think these ideas are never fixed and always changing as we learn more and try more, succeed sometimes and fail more times.*

Restorative justice is a concept of justice and a model for working through conflicts. It is only one model or idea about justice and conflict resolution – there are heaps of others. But there are at least interesting things you can take out of it and use, and it can be adapted or at least used to guide responses to a various range of different issues.

## What is it?

Restorative justice is about restoration of relationships: restoring mutual concern, respect and dignity between people. This might not always be possible or even desirable. Restorative justice is about creating a process that can deal with the true nature of the harm that someone has suffered, acknowledging that harm and hurt is experienced as internal pain and suffering of the person who is directly affected by an action, but that it also affects that person's relationships with others, and relationships between and among people in a wider community. Restoring relationships doesn't mean restoring personal or intimate relationships. It means restoring (or more realistically, attempting to CREATE) social relationships of equality.

There are various contexts in which different restorative justice models are already used, such as within particular organizations and schools, within communities that use culturally specific conflict resolution processes such as many indigenous communities all over the world, sometimes as a professional service through independent mediators and so on, and in many communities and social groups as an unofficial organic process. In some specific contexts restorative justice processes have been officially sanctioned to deal with situations that have particular cultural and contextual requirements. A good example is outlined in the article that much of this information was sourced from, detailed above, in dealing with the aftermath of sexual and physical abuse in residential schools Indigenous children were made to live in during more overt assimilation policies in Canada.

Restorative justice and community accountability and conflict resolution processes must be unanimously survivor-centric. The needs and desires of the person who has suffered/survived the harm or hurt are the most important. Sometimes restoring personal relationships may be one of these needs or desires, but more often it won't be. The goal of a restorative justice process will probably be more along the lines of enabling all people involved in a situation to coexist with security and respect within the same community, and most importantly, allowing the survivor to heal and move on with their life in whichever way they want to, within a community that they feel supported, respected and safe in.

The survivor should be the central focus in designing the restorative process. It should be them that determines how the process will work, in so far as they want to. This can be an important way for a survivor to regain control over their life, to feel empowered, and to reassert and redefine their boundaries.

For a restorative justice process to be possible, there needs to be enough support for the survivor to be able to heal and to engage in the process or want it to occur, to help them to create and hold the space they need; the perpetrator must want to take responsibility for their behaviour, have the will to confront and change that behaviour, and receive enough support and encouragement from others to assist them to do so; and there must be a wider community that recognise sexual assault as an issue, that is capable and willing to support the process and participate in it to the extent that they are required to, to educate each other and learn, and to continuously try to find ways to address the inequalities in our communities that perpetuate cycles of assault and violence. If all those who are implicated in the situation or necessary for a restorative justice process to work do not want to participate, the process will be unable to achieve its aims. This area is often where restorative justice and mediation processes fall short, and often because there is no one who is willing or able to support perpetrators through a responsibility and rehabilitation process. Especially in relation to sexual assault, there is an extreme shortage of people the perpetrator respects and trusts, who will most often be male, as the perpetrator is

usually male, who take on this kind of role.

## How can it work?

Sexual assault goes wider and deeper than a particular individual situation. Usually, assault has lots of different dimensions and levels of hurt, harm and tension. It is important to recognise that different things like acts and feelings are usually connected. Past experiences and other relationships the person has had or has will change the way current experiences are felt and the effect that acts have on people. The harm that may be felt stems beyond the particular response and reaction to an incident – it is usually ongoing, and spreads into many different parts of a person's life, relationships and interactions.

There can be no specific model of restorative justice. This is because every situation is different. There are different circumstances, different people involved, every survivor will have different needs and things they want to come from a process, and every perpetrator will have a different role in their community and so the process that can be used to help them confront their behaviour will be different. Restorative justice is more a concept, an idea, or a set of principles that can be used to develop a process of conflict resolution and accountability that is suited to a particular situation and conflict. Some principles that might form the basis of a restorative process could be:

- a common commitment to creating social equality in relationships across a community
- accountability and integration rather than isolation of a perpetrator (though often isolation might be an important part of a process leading to integration; and sometimes, if the isolated person does not take the steps required of them, they may be unable to be integrated back into the community)
- understanding community as an integral part in the creation and solution of social conflict and assault cycles; that conflict can go beyond the individuals directly involved
- understanding that dealing with a situation requires looking at the specific situation but also its wider contexts and causes, looking at the outcomes or implications of a conflict and its resolution for the future of everyone involved, and bringing together everyone that has an interest in that future to deal with a situation in some way

The first step in a restorative process is to help the survivor of an assault to work out what they want and need from the process. To do this, they may need support in working out exactly how they feel about what happened to them, their fears, and the things they need to feel safe and supported and continue with their lives within a community. There may also be other people that are involved in the situation in various ways, such as friends of the survivor or the perpetrator, whose needs may impact somewhat on the kind of process that is necessary. However, the needs of the survivor must be the absolute priority. After helping the survivor to identify their needs and those of others involved, the survivor's support group and the people who have agreed to mediate or facilitate a restorative process can help the survivor to work out the best way to make sure as many of those needs are met as possible.

In many situations, truth-telling might be a central part of the process. Conflict resolution might involve creating space for people to tell their stories, to talk about their hurts and harms to whoever they want or need to. Truth-telling in the form of an admission of responsibility by the person who has caused the harm is a pre-condition for a restorative process. Sharing of stories and experiences between the survivor and perpetrator, and perhaps others involved or affected, may be involved. However, protection of the survivor must be the predominant concern, and a face to face meeting with both at once might not be something that the survivor wants. It is also important to be aware of power imbalances and try to prevent them from affecting the process. There may need to be other ways such a process could work, such as through sharing of letters, communication via a mediator, or shuttled mediation sessions with a main meeting group and the perpetrator in a separate room with communication occurring via a person moving between, and so on. Any process such as this should enable the perpetrator to participate in restitution for the survivor, personally acknowledging and taking responsibility for the harm caused. It should allow the survivor to make demands of the perpetrator, to tell them how they can address the

harm they have caused, and how they can work to prevent that harm happening again, to the survivor or to others.

A restorative process should develop a plan for the future, a way for the survivor and perpetrator to coexist respectfully in the same community, and a way for the perpetrator to be rehabilitated. It should be the product of the communication and agreements that happen as part of the process. This does not mean that a restorative process should aim for 'forgiveness' of the perpetrator by the survivor – the survivor may not be able to, may not want to, and should never have to, "forgive" the perpetrator. To coexist with the perpetrator, the survivor needs to feel safe. This might mean never sharing the same space as the perpetrator, and negotiating which spaces these will be. This might mean sharing space but never being approached by the perpetrator, or being warned before seeing the perpetrator, and so on. Agreements for the future are based on what the survivor needs for closure, and to feel safe in continuing with their life.

It is important to remember that a restorative process might lead to various different outcomes. These may include someone attending professional counselling, making public an account of their experiences, writing publications, making personal commitments about how they will behave in public spaces and which public spaces they will enter, taking part in an ongoing communication process with certain people about the extent to which they are holding to the agreed outcomes, agreeing to engage in active work around education on sexual assault issues in the wider community, talking to others about the process they have been involved in, and so on. Restorative justice is an ongoing and long-lasting process. Conflicts are never just 'resolved'. As assault is a result of underlying social inequalities in society, until these are rectified, there will never be complete resolution of conflicts. Sexual assault affects survivors for their entire lives. Healing processes are ongoing, and a person will struggle with this in many different aspects of their future relationships. A perpetrator's commitment to change and responsibility must be equally ongoing, and also stretch into all their future interactions and relationships, and into working to instigate change in the wider community. For someone to truly understand and take responsibility for their actions, they must acknowledge the true impact of sexual assault on survivors. If someone truly understands the suffering they have caused, they should *want* to work towards a world without sexual assault.

# Principles of Accountability for Individuals/ Organisations/Constituents/ Movement

From 'Community Accountability Within the People of Color Progressive Movement', Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, July 2005, available at [www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)

## 1) Understand impact of unequal power.

Gender oppression, abuse and violence takes place within a context of patriarchal (and other forms) of power.

- Unequal power as cause of abuse. Acknowledge how unequal power dynamics caused or allowed oppression, abuse or violence to occur.
- Address unequal power in accountability. Consider unequal power dynamics in the accountability process and act to correct unequal power dynamics, make responsible use of unequal power relationships which exist, and/or minimize its negative impact on the accountability process.

## 2) Prioritize survivor safety.

Gender oppression, abuse and violence violates the safety and integrity of individual women/girls/female identified and women as a collective group.

- Support. Offer a consistent support space including specifically designated people for support and specific roles they can play.
- Safe space. Consider how to keep a safe space within the workplace, organization, political spaces including asking the abuser to stay away (temporary or long-term).
- Confidentiality. Consider and be clear about confidentiality (who knows what and how long will confidentiality be kept).

## 3) Prioritize survivor self-determination.

Gender oppression, abuse and violence exercises male privilege and power or that used by the abuser (including women/girls/female-identified) at the expense of women's right to self-determination.

- Self-determination. Consistently offer self-determination and choice over the process of accountability (does she want to be a central part of it; does she want to leave the process to others but be updated and how often; does she want regular spaces and places for communication and input on the process; does she want to directly meet with the abuser . with whom and how; decision-making on reparations).

## 4) Collective responsibility and action.

Gender oppression is often exercised as individual, interpersonal, and private acts. This keeps the blame on individual victims/survivors (and individual abusers) and helps to keep these violations out of the public eye and outside of the boundaries of collective action and responsibility.

- Collective responsibility for creating conditions of oppression/abuse. Understand that violations taking place within an organizational, constituent, or community context are also the responsibility of that collective group.
- Collective action towards community accountability. Take collective responsibility to come up with principled and effective accountability processes to address gender oppression, stop it, and prevent it in the future.

## 5) Collective accountability for oppressive, abusive, and violence organizational culture and conditions.

Organizational conditions are often themselves systems of gender oppression, abuse, and violence. or serve to tolerate, condone, encourage, or perpetrate gender oppression, abuse, and violence.

- Acknowledge collective responsibility in creating a culture or condition allowing for abuse. Take account of any responsibility the organizational culture or conditions have towards perpetrating, tolerating, condoning, or encouraging gender oppression, abuse, and violence.
- Change organizational culture or conditions. Take action to change organizational culture, structures, and practices which tolerate, condone, encourage or perpetrate gender oppression, abuse, and violence.
- Transform organizational culture or conditions. Transform organizational culture, structures, and practices to those which prevent gender oppression, abuse, and violence; encourage those who are survivors/victims or abuse, witnesses, and perpetrators to come forward; and move towards gender equity and liberatory gender relations.

## 6) Abuser accountability for oppressive, abusive, and violent attitudes and behaviours.

Individuals and/or organizations responsible for oppression, abuse or violence fully accountable for their attitudes and actions. Individuals/organizational perpetrators must hold themselves accountable. And the collective accountability process must also prioritize full accountability by abusive individuals/organizations/constituents.

- Acknowledge the abuse. Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser fully understands acknowledges the abuse (as specific acts and patterns and their political implications) without excuses, disclaimers, denials, minimizations, or victim-blaming.
- Acknowledge the consequences of abuse. Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser fully understands and acknowledges the

impact and consequences upon the survivor/victim, their friends and family, the organization, and the community.

c) Make reparations. Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser makes sincere and meaningful reparations which can include a full public apology, payment for damage, payment of debts, behavioral changes, counseling, leaving the organization, political education for self and towards others, etc.

d) Make long-term, permanent change. Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser can receive and take action towards meaningful and long-term personal and political education regarding his or her attitudes and actions, alternatives to abusive attitudes and actions, and is held accountable to a plan for long-term follow-up and monitoring including consequences if conditions are not met.

## 7) Transformation towards liberation.

The overall goal for community accountability is to transform all individuals and collective groups towards gender equity and respect . Towards liberation.

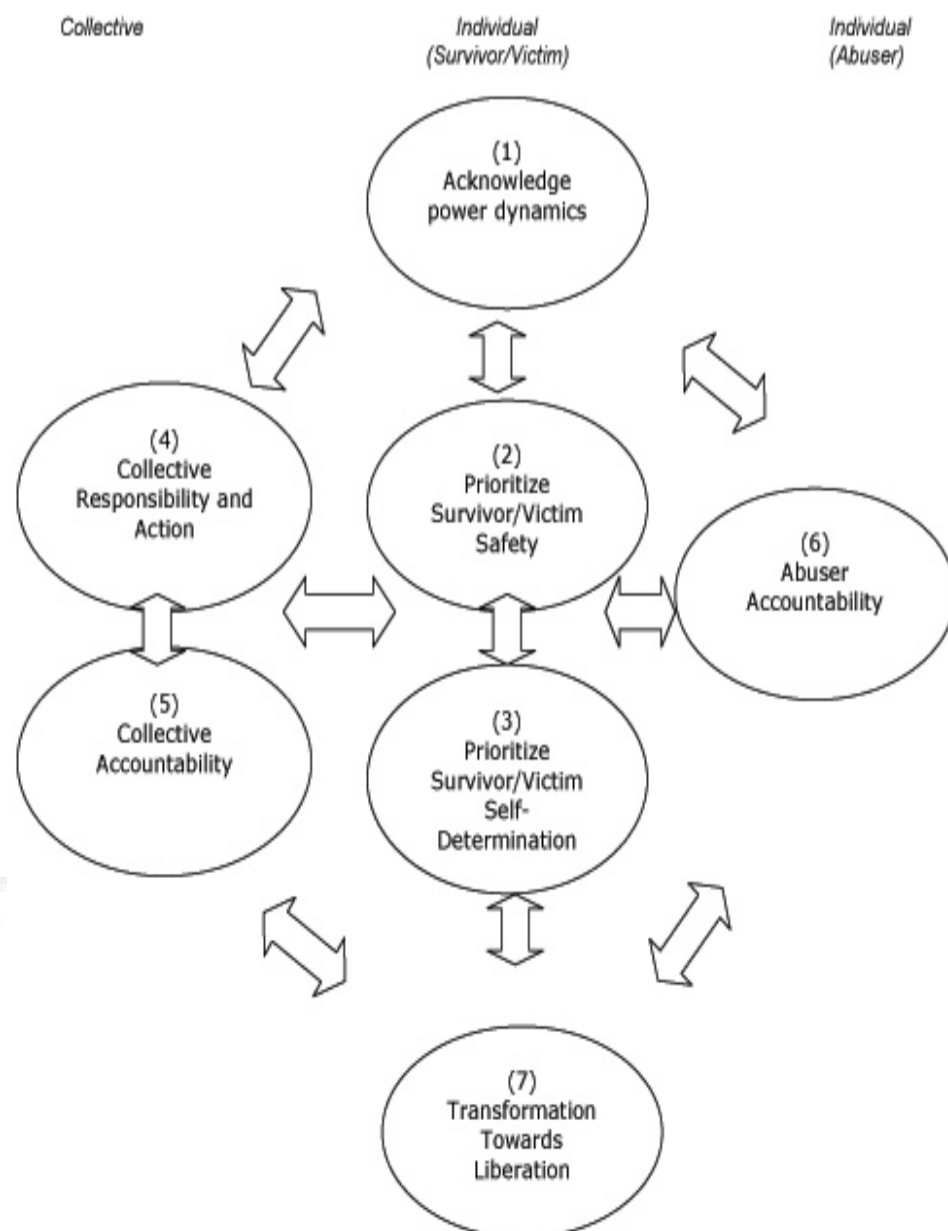
a) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of victims/survivors from victimization from oppression, abuse and violence to safety, healing, and self-determination.

b) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of abusers/oppressors from perpetrators of oppression, abuse and violence to responsibility, accountability, and advocacy for gender equity and respect.

c) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of organizations and communities from those tolerating, condoning, encouraging, and perpetrating oppression, abuse, and violence towards those upholding in principle and practice gender equity and respect.

d) The accountability process should allow for transformed relationships among all of these individuals and collective groups from oppression, abuse, and violence towards liberation.

Principles of Community Accountability (Chart)



# Facilitating Autonomous Restorative Justice

From 'What Do You Do When' zine

...In 2004, in Sydney, Australia, I was asked to facilitate a 'restorative justice' process with a woman who had been raped, the man who had raped her, and the community around them. This is a personal account of my experiences... because there is no way to be definitive or objective about a process that was steeped in the specific conditions of our community and developed by individuals with particular need... Restorative Justice (RJ) is a handy term although I don't think what we did fits neatly into the established definition of RJ as used by the state. There are other names like conflict resolution and transformative justice, none of which really fit...

## Preparation

The first time I heard about the rape was when the perpetrator (M) told me what he had done. The RJ process was already being organised and he asked my advice about finding a facilitator. My first responses were, in order, happiness that he wanted to do something about it and doubt that anyone would want to facilitate such a process... Anger came afterwards...

A few weeks later another participant (from the group who had been working with Z, the survivor of assault, on developing the process) approached me and asked me to facilitate... I had taken some time to read the proposal and after a few weeks of discussion with some of the participants I knew that the project was both possible and vital. I have worked in the welfare sector for several years, the last two in the criminal justice system. I have seen what happens to people who go through the system, victims and offenders alike. It doesn't work...

Before I could agree to participate I had to meet with Z to talk to her about what she wanted from the process. I knew Z socially, but not well. We met in the park and talked about general ideas, practical problems, and her feelings about the rape and its consequences. My immediate impressions were of strength and a need for closure; she was very aware of her own grieving process. It would have been difficult to accept the role of facilitator without understanding her motivation. Having worked on the idea for a year she was well prepared to go through with it. In the months we spent working on this meeting I learned a great deal, and much of that from Z.

The next step was research. Briefly, restorative justice is the idea that the victim and offender meet with a group of their peers and discuss the effects of the crime, allowing the victim to process their grief and the offender to change...

We had to formulate a process to fit our specific situation...The bulk of the work was done by Z and the group she worked with, who had written a proposal and basic plan for the day. I nitted this out in more detail with her and the group in a series of meetings. I also met with M and tried to gauge his feelings and expectations for the meeting. He admitted the assault and seemed to genuinely want to make up for it somehow. Without this the process would not have been possible.

In all the preparation, the most important part was meeting with Z...in my meetings with the group I felt they were briefing me, much to my relief. Reading and discussing this with people outside the process was also vital...

## The Process

The following is a plan for the day. As anticipated, the day itself diverged from the plan, but I feel it is important to have a record of the process we tried to use...

*Facilitator:* First of all I would like to acknowledge that we are on Eora land and to express my solidarity with the struggle of Indigenous people for self-determination. Thank you for coming. My name is J and I will be the facilitator for today. First I would like everyone to introduce themselves by going around in a circle and saying out names, and then I will explain the process for today.

*Group:* say their names

*Facilitator:* Some housekeeping: where are the

toilets, kitchen, turn off your phones, rescue remedy, tissues. Today may raise a lot of issues for people so if you need someone outside this meeting to talk to, here is a list of organisations that can help. [I hand out a prepared list of contact numbers – rape crisis centre, helplines, etc].

Is everyone comfortable?

Now I will explain the process for today and my role in that process. First I would like to say a few words about why we are here. We're all here because we have been affected by a rape in our community. We are here to express our responses to that rape. We are here because we are autonomous activists who believe in taking responsibility for our actions, rather than using the criminal justice system. We are also here to look at ways we can move forward as a community and prevent this from happening again.

My role is to explain the process for the day; to make the meeting safe for everyone (this means I will interrupt you if I think your behaviour is inappropriate); to check in for breaks regularly; and to make sure we keep focus and keep to the process agreed. I am new to this too, so please call me on my shit if you think I am not doing a good job.

Now I will explain the process...

Does everyone understand and agree?

We have also devised a few ground rules for today:

-That this process is confidential;

-That we focus on the harm done – the act and not the actor – and as much as possible use 'I' statements such as 'I feel';

-That this is a non-judgmental space and we acknowledge that everyone has different ways of coping and communicating and that we listen to them;

-That there be no interruptions when anyone is speaking (except by me); and

-That anyone at any time can call timeout by indicating to me. We are here because we choose to be here and anyone can leave at any time.

However please call a timeout as chances are if you are feeling fatigued somebody else is too.

Does everyone understand and agree? Are there any questions about the process?

Now I would like to invite Z to begin this process by telling her story.

Z: tells her story. She chose to read a detailed pre-written statement about her experiences.

A minute's silence.

*Facilitator:*

Now we will go around in a circle and talk about our responses to the rape. You can say as much or as little as you want, so please take your time. As a guide, I suggest people talk about the following: how you felt when you first heard about the rape; how you feel now; how you think it has affected you; and how you think it has affected our community.

I have brought a stone which I ask you to hold while you speak and pass to the next person when you have finished. This is partly to make my job easier but also to help us take our time to speak. First I will read emails from people who couldn't be at the meeting...

*Group speaks in turn.*

Now I would like to invite M to speak about how he is taking responsibility for the rape and any steps he is taking to change.

M: speaks

*Facilitator:* Now I would like to invite everyone to go round in a circle again, respond to what M has said, and suggest any further actions he can take, you may also wish to talk about how we can move forward as a community.

*Group:* speaks

*All:* discussion of issues which arise

*Facilitator:* Thankyou and close of meeting

Between each step I explained what the next step was to be. It might sound like a lot of explanations, a lot of rules. We needed to create a safe space within which people could express very strong emotions without losing a sense of direction. Without a cohesive purpose, not to mention the possibility of conflict, it was necessary to maintain the boundaries of trust in an explicit way. For this reason the process appears quite formal. I also had some notes beside me to remind myself of things to keep an eye on. I was quite concerned that there would be people to present who might have trouble

expressing their feelings, or might not feel like being constructive with their anger. Some of these notes were useful, some not. The list read:

Language: use we/us/our statements, check for breaks, participation, conformity/transference/projection/archetypes, martyrdom/guilt/fixing/attachment

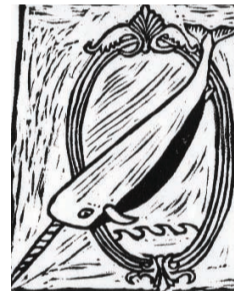
If we get stuck: identify, ask; move, check environment; kinetic, oral, imaginative, visual

It was important for me to use 'we' statements to create a sense of cohesion. I didn't really need to check for breaks as the participants were pretty good at calling them, but it was good to remind myself to be aware of it. Participation wasn't really a problem – everyone had their turn to speak and while it might have been different in a different group I am happy to say that everyone spoke fluently and well...

I did not know how much I was going to have to guide people in their responses. I was concerned about the potential for transferred dynamics from past experiences of abuse. I was concerned that people might identify with and defend the offender – myself included, as at the time I was working with prisoners and well aware of the social forces that contribute to violent crime. ...

By the time we came to discussion of issues, we were all fatigued. Instead of trying to press people on with games or movement I suggested we cancel the further discussion planned and the group assented...

While I had a degree of control over the meeting structure, I was also going through my own emotional process. I have experienced sexual and domestic violence in my life and while I knew that I would be affected by the meeting I had no way of predicting how. I knew I had to remind myself that it was okay to be "selfish" if I needed a break. I was careful to watch my own mental state and to listen actively without becoming too involved.



## On the Day

...I chairs arranged in a circle. I sat facing the exit, with Z two chairs to my left and M three chairs to my right, so that they were not exactly facing each other...

I made the introductions as planned and passed the stone to Z to tell her story. I can't articulate my feelings about this part of the meeting. I can only say how powerful it was. Z began reading nervously and finished speaking aloud, charged with emotion and strength. The energy was incredible and overwhelming. We had planned a moment's silence, but we needed a ten minute break, called by Z. We stopped for ten minutes, and then returned to the first circle...We had a longer break, the first ten minutes of which I spent crying uncontrollably in the back room. I was expecting to feel strongly but I wished at that moment I had someone to take care of me... Fortunately I could take a walk...and felt much better... The first part of the process was painful, but the release of speaking was at once liberating and conducive to group cohesion...

We gathered to hear M's response. M's response threw me, and I think many of us. He claimed not to be able to share his changing process as the things he was changing were all in his head. He spoke about the day as if it was something we were doing to him, instead of something he was an active participant in. I was expecting an apology, or at least a concrete example of what he was doing: seeing a counsellor, or offering some kind of support to the group's ongoing projects. I was disappointed.

In part this disappointment was my own fault. I was optimistic about the process and in my preparations I had been thinking about the potential for good outcomes, particularly when speaking with the group. I had been determined to stay positive. I had hoped that we would at least approach forgiveness...

We began the next part in a state approaching exhaustion. Participants raised a lot of issues. The suggestions included: an apology; that M keep in

contact; that he disclose the rape to anyone he is closely involved with, personally or politically; and that he distribute any publications the group makes, all good, concrete points. I think he listened, but when he was given the opportunity to speak again he seemed to fumble through a series of self-justifications.

He was not sure if he was part of this community, he said, which came as a shock to those of us who had been working alongside him for years and considered ourselves friends. I don't want this article to be about his therapy process, but the flight response was a fairly clear indication of where he was at. There's an important point to be made here and it's something one of the participants said in response to M. Community is something you are part of whether you want to be or not. We don't choose to be interdependent, we simply are, and until we acknowledge this we will never be able to organise our own lives...

One particular moment that really affected Z was when one of M's supporters began to argue that his lack of response was justified because it was not integral to the RJ process. She had a point in that his response was not the more important part of the day, but her way of communicating seemed to defend M and go against the process...Z called a timeout and was quite distressed. After a few minutes she came to me and told me she wanted to leave. I encouraged her to see it through. Afterwards I felt guilty about this. I didn't want to force her to participate, I felt I was pushing my own agenda, as I had envisioned that she would have the last word. She tells me that she did feel some pressure to stay on, but was glad she did so in the end.

Despite the tiredness...there were a lot of good points made...I could feel the anger at M's response, but there was a genuine effort to communicate to him where that anger came from and to challenge his way of thinking. The response to the process itself was positive, and many participants expressed a wish to continue meeting and to develop similar procedures for dealing with future conflicts.

...I have come to realise that in the end it didn't matter whether M came through with an apology or not. It mattered that Z and the other participants were able to tell their stories. It mattered that we did it, that we showed him – and more importantly each other – how strong we really are.

## Some Reflections

...Without M's participation the first half could have been punitive or meaningless. Without the responses to M he would not have had the sense of interaction and participation necessary to make it real for him. Although the process depended on M's participation in this way, it was not about him. It was about Z, and the people who cared about her. In that way I would argue that it was a success. However, I do think we raised more questions than we answered. We still don't really know how accountability works, what it means to take responsibility...

Shortly after the meeting M left our community by his own choice. For the rest of us it has been hard to see if he is doing anything about the rape, but at the very least we offered him the opportunity. Too often people are simply expelled from a community without considering them a human being, capable of change. This can also cut off the victim's opportunity for closure. Legal "justice" freezes people in these roles. I think RJ has the potential to liberate us from blame and victim-hood and outlive our mistakes. Watching Z's voice change as she told her story from nervous reading to empowered truth-speaking was all the evidence I needed to believe that we can transcend the roles an act of violence can thrust upon us.

What we came up with certainly isn't a perfect way of doing things but it's a start. Next time it happens I will do things a little differently. I will know (not just intellectually, that it is not the time for forgiveness, that forgiveness is a long-term goal and a process of remembering suffering in a constructive way. It take more time than one meeting!...I will not have any expectation of decision-making at the end (though I think it was good to have the space for it available)...

I can share the most important thing I learned, and this from Z as well as all the other participants: we are not only stronger than they can possibly imagine, we are also stronger than WE imagine.

# Community Response to Domestic Violence:

## Experiences in a Remote Community

*In March 2007 I started work as Domestic Violence Educator in Yuendumu, an Aboriginal community about 290km north-west of Alice Springs. I intended to run the project for several years but went on maternity leave in March 2008 for the birth of my daughter. As my position has not been filled by a replacement the project has been on hold since then. We still live in Yuendumu.*

In March 2007 I began the process of inventing a community development oriented domestic violence prevention program in Yuendumu. There were three main features to what I did: community education, community development, and crisis management. Community education consisted of facilitating workshops and other educational activities about domestic violence for all different segments of the community- women, men, seniors, youth, whoever, wherever. This was a process of identifying and naming people's everyday experiences of violence in the family and problematizing it, questioning it: what is it? Why does it happen? What are the patterns? How does it affect us? What can we do about it? This was probably the easiest and the most successful component of the project. Violence in families is a common experience here, and a public one, too: nothing is secret for long in a small community like this one. It was important to name this violence in an abstract way that didn't evoke personal loyalties to either victim or perpetrator, so that people could talk about the phenomenon of violence in general without getting hung up on particular situations. It was also essential that part of the conversation be about colonization and its repercussions. Again, this enabled us to discuss violence as a problem for the whole community, and avoided the conversation turning to blaming and shaming. Of course, applying the conclusions people drew from these conversations to particular situations was the next, and the much harder, step. But it was important to break the ice by raising the general level of community awareness of the issue. "Domestic Violence" became a phrase that was "in the air;" people were talking about it in all of their various social and work contexts; the issue was highlighted and people could name the problem when they saw it.

The community development component consisted of organizing monthly or 6-weekly meetings of respected community members, male and female, to imagine, plan, and enact family violence prevention strategies. This was a slow process and had only just begun to bear fruit at the end of a year: unfortunately it didn't continue nearly as long as it should have. The first few months were spent identifying appropriate participants, and goals and strategies for the group. After slowly building relationships with a few key people, the networks spread and meetings became better populated. The group named itself "Kurdiji Manu Ngarlkinpa Warlarlaku," which translates as 'Shield and Protection for Families'. As group meetings envisioned projects - like Warlpiri language radio ads, or bush trips for extended family groups to traditional country to discuss the intergenerational transmission of violence - I would scurry off to write grants and try to discover appropriate avenues for funding and resources.

One of the surprises of this part of the project was the willingness of men to participate. I came into the project with preconceptions about the gendered nature of power and family violence, and while some of these were reinforced, others were stood on their heads. Senior men do tend to be the more vocal power-wielders of the community. But many are distraught by the addiction, incarceration, and early demise of younger generations of men. The "in" with this group of men was that they're sick of their sons and grandsons getting put away: it was the threat of punishment by kardia (whitefella) law that made them want to act to prevent family violence. The crisis management side of the project was the most difficult to handle, and in some ways the most rewarding. I didn't originally intend for this to be a big part of my work: I was very interested in focusing on community development and its potential for prevention and knew all too well that crisis work had the potential to take over everything else. It quickly became apparent, though, that in a community context, if you're going to talk the talk, you have to be prepared to walk the walk. If I was going to go around stirring up conversations about what family violence is and how it affects people, I was going to have to be prepared to act to intervene in family violence incidents when they actually happened.

Family is everything here. Everyone is family, and everything you do is with or for your family. Yapa (Warlpiri) people are almost never alone. Marriages are not (just) love matches between two individuals: they are contracts between two large extended families, that create obligations, privileges, and responsibilities for power, for resources, for loyalty. Children are raised by a whole group of adults, not just nuclear families. The networks of family and kinship relationships are so dense so as to leave everyone connected, somehow or other, to everyone else.

Family loyalty in this context is a phenomenon utterly different to anything I have ever seen in the kardia world. The facts of the matter of any given incident - of politics, of violence, of sexual indiscretion, of sport, of anything at all - are almost irrelevant. It is the family of

the participants that matters. If your son has murdered someone, and there's no question it was him: he is still innocent, he was acting under coercion of witchcraft - your enemies made him do it. If your nephew is sleeping with someone other than his wife: his wife's not a proper wife to him anyway, she's always nagging him, and it's not his fault he's looking for someone better. If your brother lost at football, it's because your enemies cursed his Guernsey.

This was both helpful and problematic when addressing domestic violence. The networks are designed so that every victim of violence or mistreatment should have natural allies to protect her, with power, loyalty and resources. Traditionally, her family should be able to negotiate with his family, with appropriate advocates on both sides managing conflict and negotiating resolution. However a big part of the problem today is of course the enormous stress on traditional systems caused by colonization and its after effects. Whitefellas only established the community of Yuendumu in the 50s: colonial massacres are still in the living memory of the oldest people here. Many of the middle aged grandparents in Yuendumu were stolen from their families. This means that the past three or four generations of Yapa people in Yuendumu were directly affected by white violence in their families. This has left a legacy of direct trauma as well as disruption to traditional parenting and family skills. This legacy only gets worse generation after generation, as people cope with trauma by turning to drugs and alcohol, and violence gets normalized after generations of its imposition. So the traditional systems for protecting women and children from violence in the family are under huge stress and aren't operating at full capacity. The incidents when I would get called to help were the ones that were falling through the cracks; usually where there was an imbalance of power between families. The perpetrator might have family members who are sober, English literate, participating in community power structures and with access to resources. The victim might have family members who are addicted, mentally ill, and limited by illiteracy in accessing support services or financial help. These are the cases where frightened women and children would turn up on my doorstep: nowhere to turn for effective help, and on the wrong side of a large, reinforcing network of power and resources which would be brought to bear to excuse, justify, and exempt from punishment the perpetrator of violence. The Kurdiji Manu Ngarlkinpa Warlarlaku group were very clear in their instruction to me: every situation of family violence must be dealt with by a meeting of the two extended families involved. But sometimes that would mean a meeting between a violent man and his large, powerful family and one battered young woman and her senile grandmother. And I was unwilling to put a victim of violence in this situation: one which would only reinforce her powerlessness and reproduce the manipulation and control of her partner.

So it was the incidents where the balance of community opinion went against the victim, where I would be stepping in to protect the unprotected. This was, clearly, not a very popular job. For a period I became a somewhat controversial figure in the community, and more than one person tried to explain to me that I was doing wrong. Despite my deep respect for traditional culture, and my desire to live by the rules of the local people, I was not willing to negotiate when it came to individual personal safety.

Disgruntled husbands were of course a big part of the party against me at this stage. To my surprise, some senior women were also. I had formed good relationships with a number of these women and they participated in "community education" discussions with enthusiasm. But when it came to particular incidents - especially those that involved their sons - they often lined up against my attempts to protect younger women in danger. There were a few things happening here: one, a sort of generational envy -- the sense that younger women can get away with more than they could. There was an "I put up with it, why can't she?" attitude behind some of the obstruction I encountered.

But the stronger element was one of maintaining family loyalty at all cost. Apart from their knowledge of traditional healing and ceremony, a lot of the power of senior women is based on the formation and maintenance of families. That is, these women are often ceremonially, and almost always socially, involved in the sanctioning and support of some of the marriages amongst the younger generations, and the upbringing of the children of those marriages. Once a marriage had been contracted on ceremonial sanction, it was these elder women's obligation to ensure that it continued. My "interference" was viewed as a threat to traditional law, family stability, and an invitation to transience and disarray. Eventually, my willingness to put my own safety and reputation on the line to protect the most vulnerable women earned me respect. I gained a cohort of supporters, which slowly grew, in numbers and confidence. After a peak of incidents during which it seemed to me I was being measured, tested to see where I would back down, things seemed to settle down. I still did my utmost to respect the Kurdiji Manu Ngarlkinpa Warlarlaku committee's instructions. I always attempted

to involve both families, and when that failed I would ask committee members to help me find appropriate community members who could stand in for family and help restore power balance. On a few occasions I had to help women leave the community, quietly, in order to get them to safety: but they almost always came back. In the meantime, I was trying hard to reach a community resolution that would ultimately protect their safety. In an atmosphere of pervasive social breakdown, where conflicting cultures have wedged the survivors of colonization into a very narrow space in which to negotiate their lives; in an environment of disempowerment, poverty, and substance abuse; addressing epidemic rates of interpersonal violence is not easy. But I am convinced from my attempt to pilot the program I've described that with community involvement, principled and professional support, and constant efforts towards communication, a difference can be made.

### The New Warlpiri Woman

Social change is never easy. In any society it is instigated by a handful of brave and forward looking individuals who begin to cut the paths that the rest will eventually follow. Social change in Warlpiri society is in some ways even harder. The situation is complicated by the uneasy coexistence of two very distinct sets of values and behaviours. There is traditional Aboriginal culture, which is treasured and respected but which is also degraded and partially lost, and there is modern whitefella culture, which is viewed with suspicion and associated with the violence of colonialism, but which is also the key to power, independence, and material prosperity. Contemporary Warlpiri culture is a constantly negotiated mixture of these two root cultures. The articulated preference is almost always for the old ways; but the practical realities of modern life push people towards the dominant paradigm.

Of course, "modern" whitefella culture is also continually in a state of flux and social change: not least in the areas we are addressing in this newspaper: family violence, sexual violence, and gendered power in general. So social change in this context in Yuendumu is a process of brave and forward looking individuals, negotiating two distinct (and often opposed) value sets, themselves in the process of change.

Warlpiri culture is very gendered and I've never had the opportunity to know many of the young men here well. But I can tell you that there are some absolutely remarkable, courageous young women who are managing to embody the social change I've just described. I see them as the vanguard of a whole new wave of understanding. I want to describe a sort of a composite portrait of the handful of individuals I've been privileged to get to know in Yuendumu, to convey the hardship and the hopefulness of their lives.

The women I'm thinking of are, as a rule, under 30. Most have a couple of children, all have at least one. They are sometimes involved with the father(s) of their children: whether or not, they definitely have ongoing relationships with his family - their kids' grandparents, uncles, cousins, etc. This is a strong element of traditional culture and one none of them would dream of sacrificing.

These young women have managed to gain a good education and are English literate - despite the appalling state of schooling in remote communities. They've often been away to boarding school at some stage, where they were also exposed to the outside world of white Australia. They are almost all well supported by an extended family network, in the traditional way. This means their kids are being raised not only by them, but by a whole range of their sisters and other kin.

They take advantage of this strong traditional support network to participate in part-time work: at the shop, at the pool, at the radio station. This gives them a degree of economic independence and freedom from the outrageous racist restrictions on Centrelink payments. These young women are strong, articulate, independent, and confident. They take strong stands about their rights. They have almost all left violent marriages - or stayed in the marriage but effectively protested the violence. These are women who will not tolerate sexual assault and who will brave the white legal system to persecute their assaulters, who will tell judges to lock up abusers to "teach them respect for women," even when the assaulters and abusers are their husbands. They will shelter their sisters and cousins in the face of violence or family pressure; they will mentor younger girls and teach them about contraception and sexual health; they will follow their hearts against taboo and love who they want to (wrong-skin love affairs are as shocking to their grandmothers as, for instance, same-sex affairs might be to yours).

But their lives are not easy and they are not universally admired. They are frequently condemned as troublemakers and liars. They are accused of locking up their husbands so they can pursue affairs instead of as punishment for violence or assault. They are told that there is no such thing as rape within marriage, that he is allowed to do what he wants with you. Their in-laws kidnap their children in the middle of the night and refuse to give them back. Everyone in the community has an



...ion about every private detail of their lives and no-one hesitates to share it.

But these young women are the future: they are the trailblazers of social change. They are role models for young women and strong mothers to their children. They are claiming their rights to personal safety and sexual autonomy and they are not backing down. One day these women will be the senior women of the community, the ceremonial bosses and the makers of marriages. And there is no doubt that future Warlpiri women will be better off for the brave struggles these young women are engaging in today.

### The Intervention

Last year the Northern Territory Intervention introduced a raft of legalistic and bureaucratic responses to physical and sexual violence in remote Aboriginal communities. Other legislation was introduced by both Territory and Federal governments to further aid the response efforts.

Child sexual abuse was the “weapons of mass destruction” of the Intervention. It was a rhetorical claim of such seriousness that anything was warranted to counter it. It was also totally unfounded. Child sexual assault does of course happen in remote Aboriginal communities, and is indeed horrific. However, even now a year after huge dedicated attempts to uncover it, there is still no evidence that it is worse here than it is in white Australia.

Like child sexual assault, domestic violence of both physical and sexual nature happens in every community in Australia, including remote Aboriginal communities. When it comes to domestic violence against adults, however, statistics do tell a different story in NT Aboriginal communities than in the rest of Australia.

The seriousness of physical assaults against women by their husbands in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory is in extreme. 9 out of 10 murder victims in the NT in one recent year were Aboriginal women. Desperation, disempowerment, and substance abuse – largely grog – combine to make Aboriginal women extremely vulnerable to physical assault by their partners.

The bureaucratic and legalistic responses of the Intervention and its allied legislation have not however made Aboriginal women safer. I would argue that it is impossible for legal responses alone to achieve any real social change, and that this is even harder when there is a huge cultural gap between the legislators/enforcers and the “target” population.

The huge push to investigate child sexual assault – to come up with some ‘WMD’s to justify the invasion – has mostly resulted in CIB investigations into consensual teenage relationships. 14 and 15 year olds dating 17 and 18 year olds have had police interviews and DNA tests. This is an outrageous invasion of privacy that does nothing to protect anyone.

The move towards mandatory reporting of domestic violence by health clinics has been equally ineffective, and potentially seriously dangerous. In the absence of effective support systems, a report to the police can sometimes result in nothing more than their assaulters being brought in by police for an interview and then released. This in turn will often result in further violence. Knowing this, victims must now consider whether medical care is worth the price of another assault.

Meanwhile family and children’s services are swamped, as they were years before the intervention. Nothing has been done to bolster their staff, their resources, or their services. If someone actually does report child sexual assault, or other abuse or neglect, it is still days, weeks, even months before anything is actually done. There are still no effective support services for domestic violence or sexual assault victims in remote communities.

Here in Yuendumu, the police and legal system are completely disengaged from the community. They represent an occasional and random enforcement of colonial regulations that is hardly ever perceivably related to promoting safety of women and children.

Most of our local police are totally insensitive to the effects of domestic violence. If you tell them you’re frightened for your life, they’ll lock you into the safe house by yourself until morning. Then when he’s sober they’ll let you out again. If you go back to him – so his mother doesn’t take your kids off you, say – then next time you call they’ll say its’ your own damn fault for being there in the first place.

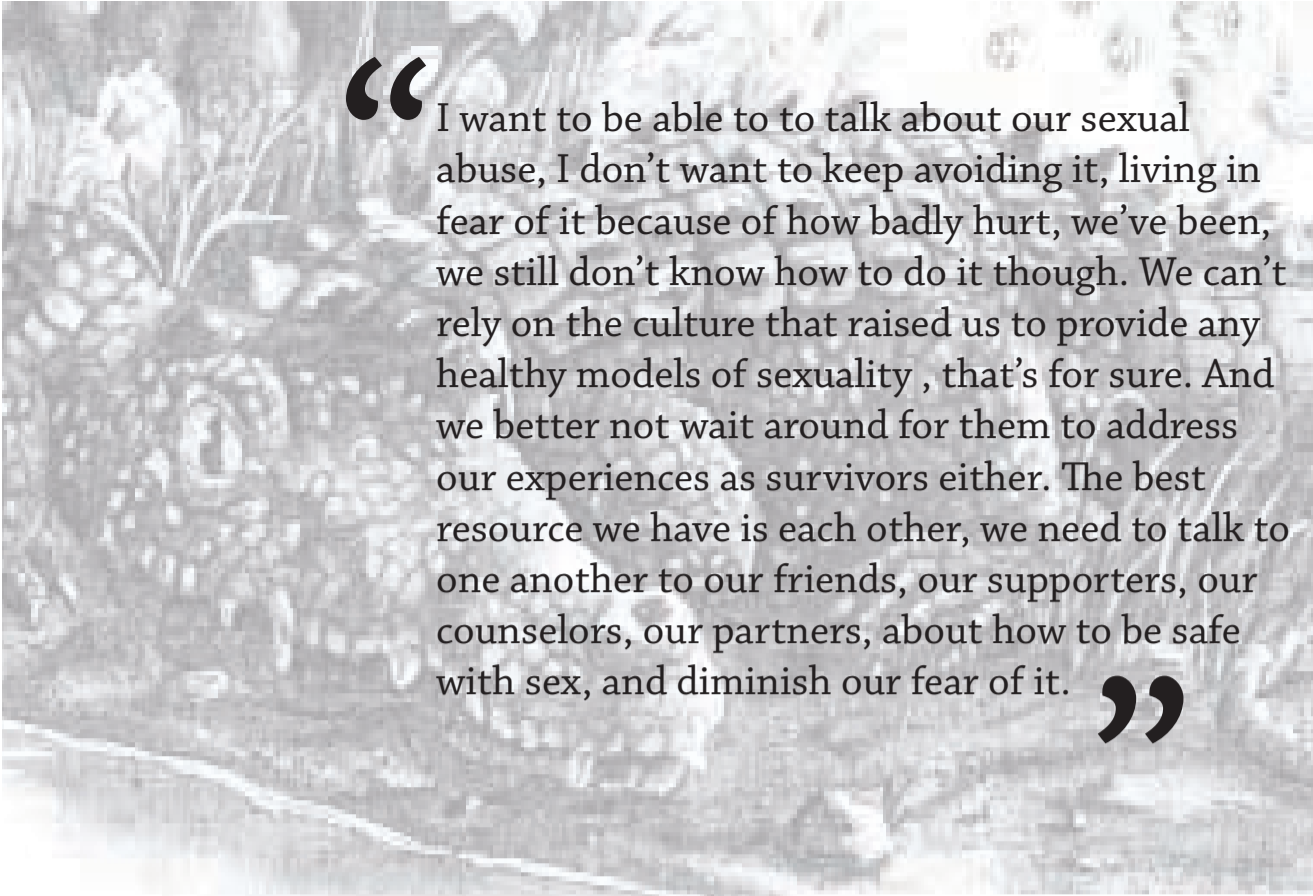
Getting in trouble with the police makes no dent in his behaviour. Their enforcement is sporadic and random and almost never in proportion to the extent of his violence.

He might go to prison: but men here almost all go to jail at some stage of their lives. In fact, jail is the only place where most adult Aboriginal men can access welfare or counselling support – never mind three meals a day and a quiet night’s sleep.

Court day inevitably comes months after any given incident. In Yuendumu, the magistrate’s court visits once every two months, for a day. They usually have a list long enough that they will get through only about half the docket and the rest will be deferred until the next court. The utter lack of victim and witness support services at court day further exacerbates the problem of having something “justly” heard. Accused and accuser, family and bystanders, all gather outside the council offices all day long waiting for a given case to be heard – an ideal setup for witness intimidation.

In the weeks and months between an incident and the court hearing, a broad range of things can have happened. Marriages can have dissolved or more likely reconciled. Family or other local law makers can have meted out their own justice. Penance or punishment can have been served.

It is this disconnect between the whitefella “justice” system and the reality of cultural difference and people’s everyday lives that makes any amount of new legislation or intervention policy inevitably ineffective when it comes to improving the safety of women and children. To really address family violence involves a long process of engagement with the community, becoming intimate with the issues, empowering people to act within their own families. This is something no amount of racist legislation from Canberra can ever achieve.



“ I want to be able to talk about our sexual abuse, I don’t want to keep avoiding it, living in fear of it because of how badly hurt, we’ve been, we still don’t know how to do it though. We can’t rely on the culture that raised us to provide any healthy models of sexuality, that’s for sure. And we better not wait around for them to address our experiences as survivors either. The best resource we have is each other, we need to talk to one another to our friends, our supporters, our counselors, our partners, about how to be safe with sex, and diminish our fear of it. ”

## this status quo and this silence has gotta be shaken.

So I’m writing this as a last minute thing and my computer had a hissy fit and died. I’m gonna try and make it uplifting (which it probably all won’t be) but I’m confident at least some of my friends will say it’s great, coz they’re great friends and that’s one of the things that great friends can do. Like trying to change the world in their own little way every day.

It is almost exactly one year since my ex lover xxxx xxxx raped me. It rocked my world in the worst way I could’ve imagined. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t sleep. It was like having nightmares or being in the middle of multiple horror movies every minute awake or sleeping. Images of the most grotesque violence kept recurring time and time again. Not that it was your typical horror movie rape. More like your typical 1 in 3 kinda rape. Then he put me and my bike in his car and drove me home.

Someone brought up that ‘anniversary’ the other day and it made me acutely depressed coz initially I thought ‘I’m still so fucked up’. I still get acute anxiety, I still can’t focus, I still can’t trust men, I’m still scared of being out alone. I had the most amazing lover and I loved him intensely but my trauma and anxiety and mistrust was just too much for him. I blame that on xxxx xxxx raping me as well. I know that both me and my beautiful lover really tried. Even if the first time he touched me I spent all night vomiting, even if I cried at the most unpredictable moments, even if I often had overwhelming visions of my rapist pressing down on me when noone was near.

Then I thought some more (like my counsellor tells me to) about how far I’ve come. I used to think I could never, ever want to live again – no, not suicidal, but the pain was just so unbearable I really didn’t want to live – I got lost on streets I know back to front, I spent weeks just crying. Now I occasionally spend days, but that’s a big jump. I also now go to uni most of the time, although independent study’s a write-off and my grades are down. I go for walks just to pinch jasmine flowers or buy books and I love people again. I started painting too. And **that vision, when you finally see colour again, was so strong that I fell off my**

### bike in Princess Park.

And another thing is what everyone else is doing.

It wasn’t a hard decision at first to try an alternative intervention. I’m not a fan of police process, nor court process, and far less a fan of prisons. I couldn’t see how putting xxxx xxxx in prison could possibly make him less likely to rape again. I thought it would cement his misogynist tendencies. So two of my best mates called a trusted person with expertise in community responses to sexual violence with the request that he avoid me and attend male violence counselling. He chose to do neither. I cursed myself for not going through police process earlier. This guy had no interest in redressing the hurt he had caused. In comparison to that, I’m not fucked up at all.

At various parties he arrived, was asked to leave and always I was the one who left shaking, crying, pale and traumatised. Even parties with ‘safer spaces’ policies. Sometimes I was not even around but he would aggressively confront other people who felt unsafe in his presence. All of a sudden my rape became popular knowledge and not everyone responded fabulously. It became obvious that a great deal of the ‘alternative’ community’s talk about progressive responses to these issues was just that, talk. Fence sitting may not be cool in other areas, but sexual violence was one area left right alone. Very lonely actually. .

One particularly awful incident was at a party last November. Just a short time ago I found myself in a remarkably similar but remarkably different situation.

Under the bridge just near that where in November last year people had demanded that HE (the rapist) could stay and HE threatened people and HE verbally abused people, and I carried my sleeping baby outside in the rain in tears and plenty of people cried with me, there was another party.

I arrived late coz I was working late. I wasn’t drinking coz I don’t drink at public parties anymore. I drove coz I need to feel I can leave immediately. I met some

friends, danced, talked, ate some food then went home.

The next afternoon someone quietly told me that HE had arrived earlier, been asked to leave, kicked up a bit of a stink, been told by other people he needed to leave, and eventually left. No one even told me that night (if they had, I would’ve left straight away with no dancing and no partying). HE had been asked early. There was consensus on what a safer space meant and how it was to be enforced. People were supportive of one another (particularly of the organising and grievance collectives) and they made a decision not to tell me so that I could enjoy the night.

When I found out I was taken to a quiet area, given tea and hugs. I was pretty shaken and needed to be around people. They were cool with that. People knew to ask me if it was ok to touch me to comfort me, if I wanted to be somewhere private. Someone stayed at my house and watched trashy movies that night. I’m so grateful for all of that. All of a sudden it seemed like people were capable of dealing with this stuff well. Really well.

My counsellor (a specialist in rape trauma) says she has never heard such an amazing response. People are very reluctant to make a stand about sexual or gendered assaults unless they watch them happen. Most rapes occur in private.

**In one year we’ve gone from dreaming about change, to at one (reasonably low key) party, beginning to see the change.**

So yeah, go public. It will be really fucking hard. It will be really damn hard on your mates as well and probably everyone else you know. But being silent must be awful too. Worse I imagine. To change the world we’ve gotta be prepared to take big risks, get stuff wrong and learn from the experience. It’s gonna take time, it’s gonna be traumatic, but **this status quo and this silence has gotta be shaken.**

Don’t get me wrong, **there’s a whole revolution to happen yet**, but the revolution starts at home. I think that’s what this is about.

I hope that by writing this some good may come to  
would not have otherwise. I owe you an enormous apology. I am  
I am sorry that I abused you. I am sorry that I raped you. On  
occasions I coerced you into having sex with me. On some occasions I  
tried to push myself on you so much that you gave in only to get  
On some occasions I believe that I tried to push myself on you so  
were simply too worn out to resist any longer. Several times you  
"No" and I continued to try anyway. I never asked  
come to your house that was



# Taking the First Step: Suggestions to People Called Out for Abusive Behaviour

by wispy cockles (full version available at <http://fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit/02wispy.php>)

...This is a work in progress...

Every situation will have unique characteristics that require unique responses and courses of action...

We find ourselves in a world where the overwhelming amount of abuse occurs with men preying on women. It is a patriarchal phenomena. In this document I have used the gender neutral term s/he. I wish for survivors that fall outside of the male=assailant/female=survivor model to have visibility...

Also in this document I do address people who feel that they have been falsely accused of whatever they've been accused of doing. My reason for doing this is mainly, because people who are in denial need to be spoken to, and they need to be held to standards of conduct that support an atmosphere that challenges privilege and oppression. It goes without saying that in the majority of instances when people are called out for abuse it is because, in fact, they abused the person(s). However, there exist a minority of instances in which people are falsely accused of things.

This writing comes from the context of my own experience of dealing with accusations of sexually coercive behaviour. Accusations which were later revealed, by the person my accusers had pegged to be the survivor, to have no validity. However, there were a good three months where, due to miscommunication and misunderstanding I honestly believed I was being accused by someone of manipulative and sexually coercive behaviour. I did a lot of self investigation and soul searching...in my opinion, false accusations of abuse are themselves a form of emotional abuse. However, it is very important to keep a perspective about such things. The priority, in any situation, where someone is calling out someone else for abuse must clearly lay with the needs and desires of those who say they have survived abuse.

## TEN SUGGESTIONS

### 1. *Be honest, stay honest, get honest.*

If you know you hurt the person calling you out, acknowledge it. If you think it is a possibility that you might have hurt the person, let them know....The first step to dealing with our abusive tendencies is getting out of denial...

### 2. *Respect survivor autonomy*

... meaning that the survivor of abuse alone calls the shots concerning how abusive behaviour is dealt with, and you live with his/her decisions...You get to make it explicitly clear that you respect their autonomy in the situation, and that you're willing to work towards a resolution. They may prefer never to be in the same space with you again and don't wish to speak with you. It is not their responsibility, nor their duty, to attempt for resolution or enter into a dialogue with you or take a specific course of action for that matter. However it is your responsibility, as someone being called out, to respect their needs and desires.

### 3. *Learn to listen ...*

To listen you will need to keep your defensiveness and knee jerk reactionary tendencies in check...Let the person calling you out direct the dialogue...;be aware when you're formulating responses and counterpoints in your head while they're expressing their account of the situation(s) and try to stop doing so; focus on their account of things, and save going over in your head how you remember things until after they have spoken; reflect upon the entirety of what they expressed and not just the disparities between your and their account...; talk with your friends about how you can better listen before you enter a mediation/confrontation.

### 4. *Practice patience.*

Sometimes things take time to be resolved...there is no timeline for resolution when human dignity is at stake...

### 5. *Never, ever, blame the victim.*

S/he did not ask for violence or abuse. S/he did not ask for it in how s/he dressed, because s/he is a sex worker, because s/he chose to make out with you, because s/he went back to your place, because s/he is known to be into s/m, because s/he is a "tease" or because people call him/her a "slut".. It is not acceptable to write off her/his responses to your behaviour because s/he is "hypersensitive" to your threatening or abusive behaviour...or to say that s/he is making it up because s/he has a history of abuse or mental illness or any other such nonsense. Making excuses why someone else is to blame for your hurtful actions are a way for you to avoid taking responsibility for your behaviour.

### 6. *Speak for yourself.*

You can account for your experience alone. Don't ever assume that you can know how the person calling you out as an abuser experienced the situation(s)...

### 7. *Don't engage in silencing behaviour.*

Silencing behaviour is ANY behaviour which attempts to make the survivor of abuse out to be the perpetrator of misinformation...to make the abuser out to be the victim...this doesn't mean you should not speak of how you experienced the situation differently from the other person. It simply means that it is your responsibility to do so in a way that is respectful and that does not help to foster an atmosphere of silence around abuse....Let what you say be limited exclusively to your recollection...If you think that you are being "falsely accused", first you need to know that you can never stop sincerely investigating yourself and questioning how your behaviour affects others...With time you may come to realise that, yes, in fact your behaviour was abusive...Understanding that if you attempt to silence the person(s) by promoting your account of things as "the truth" you will silence others as well. People will fear coming forward with their stories and fear confronting abuse, because of YOUR silencing behaviour...

### 8. *Don't hide behind your friends ...*

If you feel people are trying to insulate you from your problems or from questioning your actions...let them know that it isn't acceptable. You need to hear the criticisms and anger of the survivor and their allies. You need to stop others from engaging in silencing behaviour...

### 9. *Respond to the wishes of the survivor and the wishes of the community...*

not just for their healing, but for yours as well.

### 10. *Take responsibility...stop abuse and rape before it starts ...*

It takes a lot of courage and self-knowledge to admit that you've hurt someone, that you compromised their dignity and self worth, or that you used power over someone in the worst ways. It takes a lot of sincerity to make an apology without expecting to be applauded or thanked for it. However, this I what it will take to start overcoming our abusive tendencies...It is crucial that we learn to ask for consent from our sexual partners...



# NO MEANS NO

**"NOT NOW" MEANS NO**

**NO THANKS MEANS NO**

**MAYBE LATER MEANS NO**

**FUCK OFF MEANS NO**

**I'M NOT SURE MEANS NO**

**I'D RATHER BE ALONE RIGHT NOW MEANS NO**

**YOU'RE NOT MY TYPE MEANS NO**

**DON'T TOUCH ME MEANS NO**

**I REALLY LIKE YOU BUT... MEANS NO**

**I HAVE A BOY/GIRLFRIEND MEANS NO**

**LET'S JUST GO TO SLEEP MEANS NO**

**YOU'VE/I'VE BEEN DRINKING MEANS NO**

**SILENCE MEANS NO**

**DATE RAPE = NOT UNDERSTANDING NO**

a world without  
sexual assault