

ASK FIRST!

resources for supporters, survivors, and perpetrators of sexual assault

dear reader,

i want to start this zine by saying that this information is just a place to begin. tackling issues as important as sexual assault, rape, and trauma isn't always easy to write about, or to read. we aren't instinctually driven to know how to deal with these things.

that includes how to deal with your own feelings as you learn about these issues and how you handle yourself while helping someone in need. if you reach a point where you need to take a break from reading, do it! if you want to work through some feelings that you're having difficulty with, talk to someone about it, or call 1.800.656.HOPE. it's free and it helps to talk to someone who is trained to listen.

i don't profess to know everything about the subject; there are no easy answers, and i'm not a trained therapist. this is meant as a compilation of all the things i've learned from various sources, my personal experiences, and the experiences of those close to me.

this zine is a guide to assisting others with their issues, and confronting our own. hopefully, you can take the information in here and use it as inspiration to work towards the liberation of all people-- abused or not.

take care.
-cheyenne

glossary

an accountability process is a plan for healing following a traumatic event. an accountability process can be self-imposed by a perpetrator, it can be the product of an intervention, or requested directly from a survivor or liaison. accountability is about accepting responsibility for actions, making efforts to accommodate the needs expressed by community/survivor to correct behavior, and so forth. each accountability process is different because each situation is different.

consent is permission or allowance, often given verbally, to engage in any potentially triggering act, or an act that is otherwise "intimate" or personal. this ranges from holding hands to having sex and everything in between.

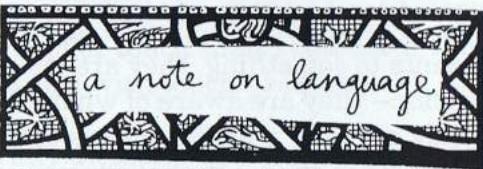
a perpetrator is someone who has caused trauma for another person. perpetrators are often aware of the assaults they are committing, but not always.

rape is a form of sexual assault in which someone engages in penetrative intercourse with an unconsenting partner.

sexual assault refers to any unwanted sexual advance, ranging from unwanted kissing or touching to rape. it can happen to anyone.

a survivor is someone who has undergone a traumatic event. this term applies regardless of when (far in the past or recently), and can mean different things to different people.

triggering is the act of causing someone who has been assaulted or raped to re-live their trauma by reminding them in some way, or crossing a boundary that has been crossed before with damaging results.



the english language is laced with sexism. i am going to do my best to combat that by not using gendered pronouns at all most of the time, especially since some folks don't identify with a particular pronoun. when discussing roles within a traumatic situation (as in one person doing harm to another), i am not going to use the terms *victim* or *attacker/assaulter*, but rather *survivor* and *perpetrator*.

victim implies that the person who suffered trauma is weak and/or unable to respond to their situation.

survivor is a word that denotes ability to cope and move on; to integrate the traumatic event into the context of their lives and to accept it, rather than avoiding or "burying" the incident.

attacker/assaulter implies that the perpetrator is physically stronger and that the sexual assault was planned. it also implies violence, which is not always present, though it certainly can be. for that reason, i choose to use the word *perpetrator*-- intentional or not, they engaged in an act that was traumatic to another.





a note on gender & power

in our society, gender plays a huge role in how we interact. prescribed gender roles influence the decisions we make in everyday life, and place different responsibilities on people based on their identities as 'male' or 'female' -- cultural constructs (some other cultures have third gender non-gendered people, etc). our language reinforces this idea-- for instance, until fairly recently (just read any book from the 1950's!), the generic pronoun was "he," regardless of biological sex. our culture disempowers women from a variety of angles-- and disempowers men too, in an often complementary way.

a really common gender stereotype is the nuclear family: a man working to provide economic stability for his family, and a woman staying home, doing housework and child-rearing chores. he is bound by the expectations of culture to be a peripherally involved parent, rather than a full-time one; she is bound by the expectations of culture to not be "gainfully employed," and to be a full-time parent, whether she wants to or not. no matter how "true" this scenario is, it is easy to see how both parties are disempowered by the social standards set upon them.

in the field of domestic violence prevention and response, there is a gendered dichotomy between abused and abuser-- with female being the abused and male being the abuser. statistical evidence suggests that the majority of intimate partner violence occurs in monogamous heterosexual relationships, with males as aggressors. however, this information is based on the number of *reported* incidents, and many incidents go unreported because there aren't a lot of programs specifically aimed at non-hetero couples, people who aren't married, people who are being abused/manipulated by caretakers, polyamorous partners, or other "unusual circumstances." this isn't meant to discredit the staggering number of women who are abused by men, but to point out that the abuse can come from anyone and happen to anyone.

★ consent ★

consent is permission; a mutual agreement. when someone consents to something, they are making an informed decision-- they are aware of what is being negotiated, they are okay with the effects and actions that may occur. consent is often a verbal expression of one's comfort level with a specific act.

it can be hard for people who have been assaulted to say no, because they may feel like it won't matter if they say no. make it clear to your partner(s) that you intend to do something before you do it, and that you will honor their requests if they want you to stop, slow down, etc. emphasize that you won't be angry or disappointed if your partner wants to stop or slow things down. also remember that some partners will be okay with things that others will not; everyone is different. encourage honesty.

people with a history of abuse might freeze up or zone out if they are uncomfortable. their silence and unresponsiveness should not be seen as them being "into it," but rather in need. check in with them, make sure they're okay.

sexual assault can occur in an explicitly nonconsensual situation (ie, the assault occurs regardless of previous agreement to not engage in said behavior, etc), or a state of ambiguous, unspoken non-consent (ie, the people involved have engaged in making out before; one of them no longer wants to but doesn't say so). thus, verbal (or otherwise clearly communicated) consent is important to preventing sexual assault (and triggering partners). don't forget, people can change their minds! if someone decides they're not into it, don't push it.

it's also important to get consent if you want to touch a survivor while you're supporting them. touching can be triggering, so make sure that it's okay to do things

before you do them. it's good for a survivor to feel supported and loved, but it's crucial for them to feel safe, especially if they came to you for help. it might not be appropriate to hold their hand or touch their shoulder if they are not prepared to deal with touch. ask first.

a really awesome article on consent appeared in the zine Give Me Back's summer 2007 issue. some of the article is reprinted here:

It seems like a couple years ago the anarchist and punk communities really started talking a lot (more) about consent and assault. I was really excited to be hearing about this but I also saw another side to it. I felt like consent was being viewed as this yes/no dichotomy: either you give consent in a sexual situation, and it's great hot sex, or you don't and it's sexual assault. I would say, "Sometimes I don't even know what I want myself; how is someone else supposed to know?" or, "What about when I couldn't say what I wanted?" People would reply, "No, it's not your fault. Don't blame yourself," and the conversation would end there. But not blaming myself didn't give me tools to communicate better, which is what I wanted.

As an anarchist, I'm all about breaking down barriers, so why was it so hard for me to talk about what I wanted – and didn't want? As you can imagine, there's a lot there. On an intellectual level I recognize how cultural conditioning comes into play – body image issues, sexism and misogyny, heterosexism and even religious morality. And, to be honest, my conditioning as a punk and anarchist sometimes also stopped me from speaking up. On the one hand, I sometimes feel too shy to suggest something I want. On the other hand, I feel like I shouldn't say no to certain things because I'm a sex-positive anarchist! On top of feeling self-conscious and unliberated I didn't have the words to talk about what I wanted and didn't want.

For me, consent always means a space free of pressure, expressing what we do and don't desire, and checking in regularly. And, of course, to have that hott, orgasmic yes, there always has to be the space to comfortably say no to stuff that is not hot for me!

If you are trying to open up the subject of consent with a partner, here are a few suggestions. Think about what you want: What are your boundaries? Desires? Needs? Set a time to talk when you both are feeling up for it and ideally when you're not "in the moment," so you can focus on the conversation. Try starting with checking in on how you're both doing and if it's a good time to talk about this. Next, you can try each sharing your views and ideas about consent and what it means. How do you like to communicate you are into something – or not into it? Are there things that you are not comfortable with? What are your expectations for the relationship (both sexual and otherwise)? How do you feel about polyamory? What is your STI status? What kinds of birth control (if that's an issue) do you prefer?

Some of this can seem easier with a long-term partner or someone you know well. But, even in a casual hook-up it's still important to talk about consent. If it's your first time with someone try taking time to talk before things get too "hott and bothered." It may seem hard to bring up but the other person just might be glad you did. Try easy conversations starters like, "Do you wanna kiss me?" "I wanted to let you know that I really like you / think you're cute," "Before this goes to the next level I want to talk about STIs / what we're each comfortable with sexually / what you're interested in doing."

If you can, try modeling the kind of communication you want to have happen. For example, you could say, "I wanted to let you know that I'm not comfortable with _____. Is there anything you're not comfortable with?" Try to agree about language or actions to express "no" as soon as

possible, like a hand on the shoulder or a safe word that has nothing to do with sex, like "potato." Some other ideas for facilitating consent "in the moment" are giving options, such as, "We could do this, or just this, or we could take a walk, get some food, etc." If the other person is not giving a clear yes, take a step back literally and figuratively. Ask, "What do you want, what would feel good to you?" rather than, "Can I do this?" or "Is this OK?"

Also, there are lots of ways to make talking about consent with a partner fun and HOT! The book *The Ethical Slut* has a great list of different sexy acts with boxes you can check on how you feel about them – ranging from "let's do that!" to "maybe one day but not now" to "never ever." Sharing responses can be fun. Some partners like to have a "fantasy journal" where each person writes down fantasies and they share them together. Other ideas are writing a letter, drawing a picture or diagramming hot zones and not so hot zones. Personally, I find it verbal consent and communication very hot, when I know that the person yelling "yes, yes, yes" can and will say or communicate "no."

Having these conversations is an important part of being present in a relationship (even if it's just for a night) and letting the person you're with know that you care about them. Here are some of the questions our workshop asks that you might want to think about yourself, with a group of friends or with sex partners. These aren't questions with "one right answer" but just ways to get thinking about the topic.

- How do you give yourself or someone else space to figure out what you/they want?
- How do you know when someone else is consenting?
- Have you interpreted passivity or silence as consent?
- How do you react when someone expresses non-consent?
- How can you communicate about STI's? When might be a good time to bring this up?

- What power dynamics might factor into communication and consent? (privilege, gender, sexual preferences, size, race, age, class, power, sexual histories, sex-worker status)
- How can we talk about histories of sexual assault?
- What's hott about consent? How can we incorporate clear consent into "doin' it" and make it fun and erotic?
- What are some key elements that need to be taken into account in a radical definition of consent?
- How do power and privilege relate to our ability to give, receive, and understand consent?
- How does inebriation effect consent giving / asking?

How does this relate to our larger political goals as a health collective and as activists? We want to see our society transformed into one based on consent and not coercion. We view this as one small piece of that. This is an ongoing process in understanding our desires and boundaries and communicating this with others. We encourage you to talk about this in your communities, to break down barriers to talking openly about this.

If this has inspired you to talk more about consent with friends/ lovers/ partners/ etc, great! If it has inspired you so much that you too would like to do a workshop in your community, or you would like us to do ours, we'd be happy to email you resources or try to come to you!

(feel free to email the down there health collective at downthereshealth@mutualaid.org.)



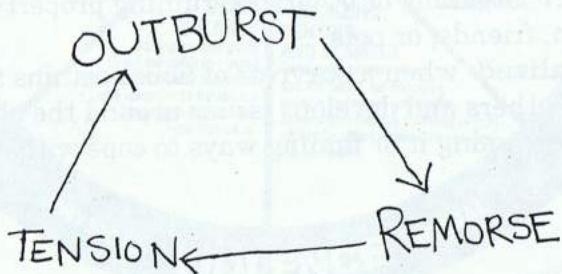
types of abuse

knowing the different forms that abuse can take is really helpful when you're trying to identify a problem, or figure out a pattern. a lot of different factors can play into abusive behaviors, and a lot of these behaviors reinforce each other.

cycle of abuse

one of the first things that is good to know is the "cycle of abuse" that is characterized in many relationships. it has three stages:

- 1- *outburst stage*: when a perpetrator verbally or physically attacks their partner.
- 2- *remorse stage*: when the perpetrator apologizes and "smoothes over" for their abusive behavior and attempts to bring things "back to normal."
- 3- *tension building stage*: the period during which irritability increases and the perpetrator accuses the survivor of causing their stress. this stage can last minutes, days, months or even years. this stage ends in the outburst that begins the cycle again.



[forms of abuse]

this list categorizes and gives examples of types of oppression that are present in abusive intimate partnerships. sometimes, these actions seem unrelated, but abuse is about power and control, and the following behaviors are each attempts at power over a partner. the following examples are not complete lists; they offer some common examples of each kind of abuse. there is also a lot of cross-over between the forms that abuse takes.

physical- slapping, punching, kicking, harming with weapons, forced/coerced use of alcohol/drugs

psychological- intimidation, isolation from family/friends, attempts to control behavior

verbal- name-calling, insults, threats, silent treatment, criticism, harassment

sexual- forced sexual contact, withholding of sexual contact, unprotected sex without consent, coerced sexual contact with others

economic- withholding money, preventing partner from working, controlling bank account(s)

indirect- breaking or otherwise ruining property, harming children, friends, or pets

internalized- when a survivor of abuse retains the damage done by others and develops issues around the abuse rather than overcoming it or finding ways to cope with it.

the power and control wheel:

this diagram maps out elements in an abusive heterosexual partnership. the creators of this model ask that the pronouns not be changed, since other kinds of relationships may manifest abusive behaviors in different ways.

nonetheless, i like the way it's laid out, and hope that in the future, more of these wheels come out to illustrate the dynamics in a wider variety of relationships. i feel that the over-arching themes are applicable to most relationships characterized by abuse.



the equality wheel:

this wheel is similar in content and design to the power and control wheel, but it illustrates how a couple could support and empower one another. this is best when contrasted with the power and control wheel. again, it uses heteronormative pronouns, but shows various ways that enable an equal relationship to function.



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT

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* Supporting survivors *

being a supporter means taking time to meet the emotional needs of someone who has been traumatized. it takes a lot of patience, self-control, and an open ear. most of the things that you'll learn here about being a supporter are common sense, but when you're in a stressful or emotionally charged situation, it's important to keep a few things in mind. most of all, remember that every situation is different. the survivor you're supporting may want to have an intervention-style meeting with their assailter or they may just want someone to listen. the following section is about ways to offer support to survivors. later in the zine i will discuss self-care for supporters-- an equally important (though overlooked) aspect of support.

some ways you can support a survivor:

- offer shelter. ask if they would like some company and offer your couch/bed/floor or ask if they want you to stay over, unless they ask to be alone.
- assist the survivor if they need medical attention. if the survivor wants to get tested for sexually transmitted infections, or if they have sustained injuries, urge them to get the medical attention necessary, as soon as possible.
- medical evidence kits: if the survivor wishes to press charges, and physical assault or rape has just occurred, get photographic evidence of injuries if possible. tell the survivor not to bathe, use the restroom (if possible!), eat, drink, or change clothes before going to the hospital; it can destroy or damage physical evidence if rape has occurred.
- emergency contraception. if the survivor feels that they may be at risk for unwanted pregnancy, a lot of pharmacies now carry emergency contraception for about \$35. unfortunately, if the survivor is under 18, it may not be available to them.

-if the assault or rape happened in the past, it is unlikely that a medical kit will collect any evidence. however, encourage the survivor to get tested for STIs and/or seek counseling.

-monetary support. if you can help them with medical bills, offer to take some of the pressure off of them.

-be available. the survivor may need to talk a lot about the same feelings or triggers, or they may have nightmares or "flashbacks" and need a friend to talk them down.

-be patient. allow the healing process to take its course. don't try to rush the survivor or figure out a "quick fix." also, don't try to solve their problems for them, even if they ask you to. your job as a supporter is to listen and offer encouragement for healing, not to run the show.

-accept the survivor's decisions. if the survivor decides to do something that you wouldn't, be as understanding as you can. support the survivor, if not the decision, if you disagree. survivors know what's best for them. if they need help figuring it out, don't offer solutions-- offer options, ask them what they have in mind, and work from that. this can be a matter of saying "perhaps you could..." instead of "if i were you, i would..."

-offer resources. if you have them available, give the survivor phone numbers and addresses to agencies that can help them-- generally, cities have crisis shelters that offer counseling over the phone and in person. remember that you should never try to make a decision for a survivor, but rather assist them in making their own decisions, or just offer suggestions for them to choose from. survivors are coming from a place of intense disempowerment, and encouraging them to be instrumental in their own healing will foster a positive attitude towards their healing process.

things to remember

- *always listen to and believe survivors. it is often hard for them to talk about their experience, so try to be respectful & non-judgmental.
- *sexual assault isn't something that someone is supposed to "get over" or eliminate from their lives. the ultimate goal in healing is to integrate the experience into their lives as part of what makes them who they are-- to make sense of the event, and to do whatever is necessary to obtain healing. help them process their reactions.
- *sexual assault and rape may happen in a 'loving' relationship. this does not negate the fact that an assault occurred. it is often a reason used by the perpetrator as a means to avoid guilt, or an excuse for the survivor to rationalize their trauma.
- *just because sexual contact was the norm in a relationship doesn't entitle either partner to sex whenever they want or however they want.
- *sometimes it is hard to untangle the lives of a survivor and a perpetrator, especially if they are/were in a relationship, live in the same town, share friends, etc. being hostile isn't going to make the healing process easier for anyone; supporting the survivor is the most a compassionate community member can do-- holding back violent outbursts is the least one can do.
- *if you choose to support a survivor, it might mean a long-term commitment. the immediate shock of the event will be the hardest part, but be prepared for the survivor to be triggered and/or need to talk to someone about their experience for a long time.
- *survivors may seem uninterested, amused, or torn apart by their assault. let them deal with it their way. don't be perplexed by their display of emotions or lack thereof; it is their event and their healing process, and everyone is different.

*you may recommend that the survivor puts their story in writing to prevent them from having to repeat, and re-live, the scenario again and again.

*sometimes, drugs and/or alcohol can take a role in the assault situation, or factor in as part of a dependency issue with a partner. if a survivor mentions this, ask if they want to talk about it more or seek help. there are lots of resources for people with drug and alcohol issues, including groups like NA and AA.

*supporting survivors of sexual assault can be triggering. if you decide that the situation is too much for you to handle, be honest with yourself about what you're capable of. self-awareness is vitally important for dealing with these situations in healthy ways.

((active listening))

if someone comes to you with a situation that they need to discuss, try to be an active listener-- this means letting the survivor do the talking. if you're unclear about a detail, hang onto it or write it down until the survivor pauses or finishes, then ask for clarification. you can also rephrase a situation by naming feelings. for example, "it sounds to me like they really made you angry. does that sound right to you?"

use a mixture of open-ended and closed-ended questions. an open-ended question is "how do you feel about that?" or "how are you dealing with that?" closed-ended questions are generally yes or no, such as "do you want x or y?" or "do you feel sad?" these can make the survivor feel closed-in, or imply that you're leading them to a conclusion that may not have anything to do with what they want to communicate about.

try not to ask leading questions, or questions that come from your own curiosity. these kinds of questions force your opinion into the conversation and can create tension between you and the survivor-- the focus should remain on the speaker, not you, the listener.

SEVEN STEPS TO ACTIVE LISTENING

1. focus all of your attention on the subject at hand. before you talk, take a moment and think about what you know and how you can use that knowledge.
2. avoid distraction if possible. go somewhere quiet, turn music down or off, etc.
3. acknowledge your emotional reactions as they arise, but try to keep them under control. if possible, suspend your reactions until the end of the listening session, or ask to take a break if you're struggling.
4. set your opinions aside for the time being. you are just there to listen. engaging in argument sets the balance off of who is listening to whom and it can be detrimental to the situation. again, if you need, ask to take a break.
5. be other-directed. don't interject with stories of your own experience. giving a "me too" story might feel like a way to normalize their experience, but it can negate the experiences of the speaker. if the speaker specifically asks "has this happened to you?" you may answer yes or no, and offer to share the experience with them outside of the listening session.
6. use nonverbal acknowledgement- make eye contact, nod your head, or give an occasional "yeah" or other non-invasive listening noise. let the speaker say what they need to say.
7. be involved. respond to questions posed to you (without de-railing the session), and use rephrasing methods to keep understanding mutual.



active listening skills

- ask them if they feel safe. this question can open up a lot of emotional discussion and can be a good starting point-- if the survivor doesn't feel safe, find out what you can do to make that happen.
- if the speaker is hyperventilating, crying, or otherwise in distress, ask them to take deep breaths with you, or get them a glass of water and let them know that they can take their time. making them feel comfortable will help them focus on communication later.
- do not judge the speaker. just try to understand how they're feeling. your role as a supporter is to help the survivor work through issues and make decisions-- not to tell them how they should be feeling or to make decisions for them.
- make listening noises to let the survivor know you're paying attention.
- consider the speaker's basic feelings and thoughts; use these to paraphrase.
- paraphrasing can take this formula: "i'm hearing that you feel (x way) because of (y reason). does that sound right to you?" you can also say "i'm getting (this emotion) from your story" etc.
- check in with them at intervals; it may be difficult for the survivor to express needs without prompting.
- validate them, especially if they sound depressed or negative. if a survivor says, "i don't think i can trust anyone again," you can reply that you can understand how they may feel that way & that it's normal to have extreme reactions to such a stressful situation.
- don't give advice. offer options instead. this may be a matter of phrasing, but it's important to empower the survivor while offering support. enabling someone may seem easier than gentle guidance, but ultimately you want the survivor to make their own decisions.

-if a survivor can't figure out what they want to do, you can use this model for evaluation:

"SODAS"

Situation- get an idea of where the survivor is coming from

Options- look at the survivor's ideas for responding to the issue at hand

Disadvantages- potential drawbacks to the proposed plan

Advantages- potential benefits to the proposed plan

Solution- come to a conclusion together about what the best option is for the survivor.

some good questions to ask while evaluating include:
-do you feel comfortable talking about this right now?

-how do you feel when he/she/they ____?

-where do you want to go from here?

practice, practice, practice!

you can practice these skills with a friend. each of you should take a few moments to think of a situation where you felt like someone had disempowered you (this can be a misunderstanding, someone being insensitive to your needs, etc-- it doesn't need to be a big scary issue, just a time when you felt like you weren't treated fairly) and take turns explaining your situation to the other.

one person takes the role of listener and tries to come up with a solution with the speaker, or at least give support. then switch roles. now, when you've both been on both sides, give feedback about communication skills. did the listener seem distracted or too talkative themselves? was there anything that really helped illuminate the issue? was the solution or support acceptable?

doing this activity with multiple partners can sharpen your active listening skills, and help you understand different styles of communication.



take care of yourself.

being supportive to a survivor can be really emotionally (and sometimes physically) taxing. get your own support if you need to. if the survivor's situation brings up difficult feelings for you, ask a friend to listen to you, or call a hotline to work out your own issues. the survivor may express guilt for asking you for help; reassure them that you are there for them-- even let them know that you're happy they came to you for help!-- and try to focus on the issue at hand. don't breed resentment for someone else's needs. if you can't provide the help that they request, be sincere, and don't belittle them.

don't "should" yourself. try to remember that you're doing what you're capable of, not what you *think* you should be capable of. act within your capacity and be okay with what you're able to do. everyone comes to these situations with their own issues to deal with-- sexual assault/rape/traumatic situations don't occur in a vacuum. unfortunately, many of us deal with these issues at some point in our lives.

it's okay to tell the survivor if you need to take a break, go for a quick walk, or get a snack. it might help both of you to do something to get your minds off the issue for a moment, or to meet physical needs like rest and nutrition. when you feel that you've reached a point of accomplishment or have gone through a difficult period, treat yourself to something-- take yourself out to dinner or do something that you want to do for yourself. don't skip this-- treat yourself! you deserve it.

taking care of yourself is essential not only so you establish a positive relationship with yourself during difficult times, but also to keep yourself motivated to assist survivors as they need you. positively rewarding ourselves for important work is a great way to boost morale in the face of scary stuff.

♡ be a responsible partner ♡

i am not claiming to know how everyone's relationships work... here i am offering some elements of support that can be integrated into a relationship to make it more open and communicative.

1. boundaries

boundaries are super important and also really helpful. knowing a partner's boundaries (what they want you to do, and most importantly what they really DON'T want you to do) is the basis of a healthy relationship, or even just a hook-up. you can't make assumptions about what is okay and what is not okay-- don't assume that your boundaries are the same as your lover's, or that any two people are the same. ask "is there anything i should know first?" if you can't think of a place to start.

2. previous abuse history

previous abuse history probably won't come up in conversation with a hook-up partner, and it may not come up with a longstanding partner either. if you think that someone is showing signs of former abuse (or even witnessing abuse; witnesses of abuse display a lot of common symptoms with those who experienced the actual abuse)-- which include, but are not limited to: bouts of depression, angry outbursts, and/or suppression of emotions-- you might want to gently ask if they have a history of not being emotionally expressive, depressed or angry.

these can be caused by other factors in one's life-- stress is a common example-- but asking a partner if they need any sort of emotional support, counseling, etc, can really be beneficial in the long run. just opening that line of communication is a positive step towards mutual aid and empowerment.

3. checking in

checking in with a partner is a really good way to keep lines of communication open. if you notice something about them during your interactions or you think that they need to express something, check in with them. this can be as simple as asking 'is everything alright?' or 'do you need to talk about something?'

4. being honest

honesty can be really hard, especially if it has anything to do with a partner's shortcomings or abusive behavior. bringing up delicate issues takes patience, tact, and good communication skills. a simple way to phrase things that are hard to talk about is "i feel...(this way) when you (do this/these thing[s])." making "i" statements instead of "you" or "we" statements is a good way to focus the issue you're trying to discuss instead of making it into an argument about someone's shortcomings.

5. awareness & safety

safer sex/sti awareness is really important in a relationship. it's instrumental in preventing pregnancies and avoiding gnarly sex germs. it can also be a path to communication about existing conditions, personal wants and needs, and sexual likes and dislikes. there are a lot of really amazing resources out there if you want to learn more about treatment, prevention, and safety issues.

surviving sexual assault

this section may contain triggering parts, much like the rest of this zine. please read with caution and don't feel bad if you need to take a break, or not read a section at all. do what is best for you.

sometimes deciding if someone's actions constituted sexual assault can be really difficult. sometimes it's perfectly clear. it might have felt like everything was okay until you thought about what was going on. maybe you know that you didn't communicate something clearly until it was too late, or your partner didn't understand something you said earlier. maybe your partner forgot a boundary you mentioned or didn't seem to care. maybe one or both of you were intoxicated. it's often a very murky situation, and it can be really hard to find the words to explain what happened. but you know it felt wrong.

if you decide that you want a medical evidence kit (sometimes called a "rape kit") done, you should try to get to the hospital as quickly as you can, and not change clothes, bathe, or use the restroom if possible. these kits can be helpful if you plan on pressing charges against your assailter. however, be aware that these don't always get conclusive data, and not all hospitals provide them. call around in your area or ask a local domestic violence shelter for more information.

one of the first things that has to happen is that you need to be okay with your feelings. are you hurt, scared, full of rage, stoic, not ready to deal with it, or something else completely? all of these are valid reactions to a traumatic situation. hang out with your feelings, write

them down, or talk about them if you want. being in touch with how you feel about a situation can help you explain the situation to others and can help you figure out how to deal with the aftermath. if the situation is too intense to deal with alone, ask someone to help you deal with it. do whatever you need to do-- you make the rules of how this should work for yourself. everyone approaches healing differently.

writing out the event(s) can also help you if you don't feel like repeating yourself a bunch of times about what happened. you can print a copy or two of your account and give it to people who you trust or who you want to have the information. if you choose not to disclose to anyone you know, it can still be helpful to write it down and process that way-- you can write in narrative style, lists, or anything else you want. you can handwrite or type. it's about your comfort level and how you work best. written accounts can also be helpful if you need to report on the event to an authority-- you can hand them your statement instead of having to talk about it if you don't want to. be sure to date it.

while you're coping, setting a schedule for yourself, even if you have nothing to do that day, can be really helpful. giving yourself allotted time to go to the library, journal, have lunch, exercise, etc, can give you a sense of purpose for that day and is good for focusing yourself on daily living-- taking care of yourself and staying motivated build on each other and create a cycle of positive feedback. try to get out of your house at least once a day, even if it's just to walk to a corner store and back or to meet someone for coffee.

there are tons of ways to cope with trauma. you may choose to write your assaulter a letter, to never speak to them again, to file a protection from abuse order (also called a restraining order), to utilize community resources like counseling services, to ask friends to help you, to not deal

with it at all until you feel more able to, to make lists of things you want to accomplish, to ride your bike for hours, to do yoga, or go somewhere quiet and chill. any of these things can help if you feel like you need to do them-- don't feel bad if you can't accomplish goals, just try, and give yourself credit.

if you get triggered (flashback to your traumatic experience or feel like you're back in the situation), ground yourself. blink hard, focus on objects in the room, do simple math problems in your head, drink some water, call a friend or hotline, or carry a list of ways to cope in your wallet or pocket and try them when you feel triggered. it's common to be teleported back into the moment of trauma after the

fact, or to feel the same feelings that you did as it happened or after it was over. allow yourself to recognize your feelings as valid, then calm down, and remind yourself that you're safe and you're taking steps to improve your situation.

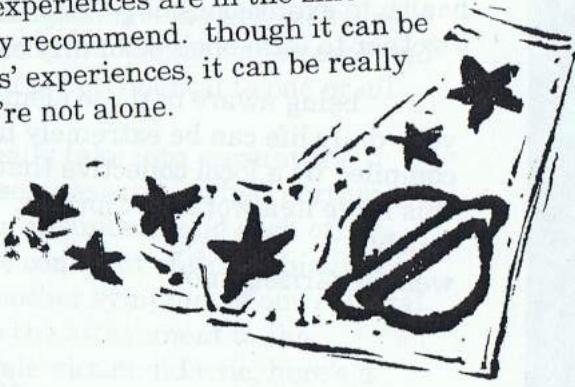
if you choose to disclose publicly and call out your assaulter, there will be a lot of work required-- of the people involved with accountability processes for the perpetrator and of the people involved with your well-being. it can take a lot out of you to ask for help, but you might be surprised who will come to your aid. it can't hurt to ask. try not to take it personally if someone can't support you; they know what their limits are with the situation or how much time they can realistically contribute.

knowing what you need is really important when calling out someone publicly (or on a smaller community level), because members of the community may have their own ideas about what should be done. however, this process should not be about them or what they want. try to be receptive to suggestions and input, and if they seem good, go with them, but don't compromise yourself. if

needed, remind others that the healing process is about your needs, not their wants. i personally don't recommend violent retaliation for the reasons described below; some people may choose to use violence (or the threat of violence) as a part of the accountability process.

speaking from personal experience, try not to let your rage eat you. it will subside, and taking it out on anyone-- even the perpetrator-- will not send a clear message of your needs/wants, and might result in retaliation that can make matters worse. there are other outlets for your anger; use it to motivate, cry it out, punch the pillows on your bed, go running, play drums, talk about it, do whatever you need to do until it burns out. it will burn out and you'll feel better. deep anger is a completely valid reaction, don't feel guilty about it. use your rage to your advantage or the advantage of others-- an expression of my anger is making this zine, for instance.

there are a good deal of support groups, free counselors, hotlines, and other resources out there. an internet search for resources in your area will probably point you in the right direction. a lot of self-care methods and stories of personal experiences are in the zine "support," which i highly recommend. though it can be triggering to read others' experiences, it can be really comforting to know you're not alone.



empowering your sexual identity

many of the instances in which i have felt isolated, ashamed, or violated have been, at their roots, due to a lack of communication-- with myself, with others, or from a lack of dialogue on subjects of sex and sexuality in the grander social sense. being in touch with your own unique sexuality is vitally important for communication-- how can you describe what it is you want or don't want if you haven't thought about it first, or tried it?

there are, of course, some things that you inherently know you don't or won't like. these are your boundaries. own them, be okay with them. everyone is different. i think of my own empowerment and frankness as armor against sexual assault and violation. i am not afraid to say no, or to explain why i don't want to engage in a particular behavior.

there are a lot of ways you can embrace your sexuality-- and dismantling the idea of "sexuality" to see how it works is a good place to start. sexuality consists of a variety of elements, ranging from sexual orientation to health to expressions of gender. these elements work together to form one's sexuality and sexual identity.

being aware of these elements and how they affect your daily life can be extremely helpful. a zine was compiled by a local collective that deals specifically with this issue in a workbook format. if you'd like one, get in touch:
wenches@riseup.net



resources for perpetrators

sadly, there are few resources for perpetrators and those who wish to help perpetrators through their accountability processes, and far fewer resources for perpetrators who are not male-identified or people who aren't in heterosexual relationships. the following information is from different sources i was referred to, and some insights from experiences i've had personally.

a lot more of this section is from other sources due to my lack of training/experience in this area. information not provided by me is cited with at least a website. a LOT of work needs to be done in this area of the whole sexual assault/abuse arena-- without healing for perpetrators as well as survivors, we're not going to make a lot of progress.

on abusive behavior

i think that this is a useful place to start: our culture stunts the emotional growth of many folks-- not just men. being in touch with your feelings and being able to express them in a healthy way is essential to being empowered and to recognize when a situation is detrimental to one or all partners, friends, etc.

this article doesn't really take into account the instance of "accidental" abuse or assault-- when partners don't communicate clearly or misunderstand each other. and/or when angry outbursts come out of that. this is not an excuse, but rather just another symptom of our cultural silence on the issue. despite the attachment to the traditional male-abuser/female-victim didactic, here's a brief discussion of the roots of abuse from selfhelpmagazine.com:

People often think that abusive behavior only involves physical violence. In fact, it also includes emotional abuse, such as intimidation and chronic criticism, which can be as harmful as physical attacks. Violence is, unfortunately, often the last in a series of behaviors.

The work [of mens' emotional healing] involves helping men to understand that abusive behavior stems from distorted thinking that is rooted in male privilege-the false sense of "entitlement" that many men may feel in a relationship... These distorted beliefs often allow a man to blame the woman and free him from accountability for his abusive behavior. He may truly believe that he has a right to his own way simply because he is a man. He may say, "she made me do it" or "she was asking for it." Men must learn to recognize that they don't always get their own way and that a woman never is responsible for being abused-in other words, they are accountable for their own actions.

Just as important as a man's beliefs are his expression of emotions. Boys learn to deny and ignore painful feelings from an early age in our culture, and they carry that pattern into adulthood. This aggravates abusive patterns of behavior. They learn to transform feelings of hurt, fear, and shame into anger. In the short run, anger numbs the painful feelings and provides a sense of renewed strength and power. But in the long run, buried, unacknowledged feelings increase the severity and frequency of abuse. If an abusive man does not address the feelings hidden under the anger, the changes he makes through correcting and modifying his behavior will be superficial and probably short-term. Consequently, men need to identify and manage those core feelings of hurt, fear, and shame as well as the more obvious feelings of anger that are present during acts of abuse and control.

ter suggestions

an article appeared in the zine "Deal With It" and was also featured in Clamor magazine that was called "Taking the first step: Suggestions to people called out for abusive behavior." it is included in this zine because i feel like it's one of the most pertinent and useful articles written by someone in the radical/punk community on the subject. i have edited it down a bit.

the url for the full article is here:

<http://fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit/02wispy.php>

Ten Suggestions For People Called Out For Abusive behavior

by wispy cockles

1. Be Honest, Stay Honest, Get Honest

If you know that you hurt the person calling you out for abuse, acknowledge it. If you think you might have hurt them, let them know. If you have any inkling that some way that you interacted with them might have compromised their dignity and boundaries let them know. The first step to dealing with our abusive tendencies is getting out of denial. Denial is like an infection. It starts in some locality (specific instances and situations, nitpicking at certain parts of an account of the situation[s]), and if untreated festers and eventually consumes us entirely. When we are able to vocalize that we are aware that something isn't quite right with our behavior it brings us closer to dealing with it in a meaningful and honest way.

2. Respect Survivor Autonomy

Survivor autonomy means that the survivor of abuse, and the survivor of abuse alone calls the shots concerning how abusive behavior is dealt with. This means s/he calls the shots and you live with her/his decisions. You don't get to determine how or even if a mediation/confrontation happens, or initiate action towards a resolution. 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 to never be in the same space with you again. It is not their responsibility, nor their duty, to attempt for resolution or enter into dialogue with you or take any 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

It is imperative that you open your ears and your heart to the person calling you out. This will likely be difficult, because people tend to get defensive when they are accused of wrongdoing. To listen you will need to keep your defensive tendencies in check. These suggestions could be very helpful to you:

- A) Let the person calling you out direct the dialogue. If they want you to answer questions do so, but otherwise let them have the floor.
- B) Be aware when you're formulating responses and counterpoints in your head while they're expressing their account of the situation(s), and attempt to stop doing so.
- C) Focus on their account of things, and save going over in your head how you remember things until after they have spoken.
- D) Reflect upon the entirety of what they expressed and not just the disparities between your and their account of events.
- E) Talk with your friends about how you can better listen before you enter a mediation or confrontation.

4. Practice Patience

Sometimes things take time to be resolved. Sometimes it takes months, years, decades for a resolution, and sometimes there is no clear cut resolution. Be patient and never attempt to force a resolution, a process, or a dialogue. You may ask for a dialogue or a mediation, but if the answer is no it is no until s/he says it is yes. Don't attempt to wear down the boundaries of the person calling you out by asking for dialogue or mediation over and over again. Stay put, reflect, and think about the power dynamics in your relations with others.

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. S/he didn't ask for it, because s/he was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. S/he didn't ask for it, because s/he is a sex worker. S/he didn't ask for it because s/he chose to make out with you or because s/he went back to your place or because s/he is known to be into s/m or because s/he is a "tease" or because s/he is a "slut." They did not ask for it. It is not acceptable to write off his/her responses to your behavior, because s/he is "hypersensitive" to your threatening or abusive behavior. It is not acceptable to say that s/he is "exaggerating" the abuse [for any reason]. It is not acceptable to say that s/he is making it up, because s/he has a history of abuse. Making excuses for why someone is to blame for your hurtful actions are a way for you to avoid taking responsibility for your behavior.

6. Speak For Yourself

You can account for your experience and your experience alone. Don't ever assume that you can know how the person calling you out as an abuser experienced the situation(s). You cannot know how someone else felt at a certain moment, and so you should never presume that you have the right to judge the validity of their feelings. If they have expressed how they feel, then what you need to do, first and foremost, is to listen. It is important that you actively seek to understand their feelings. If you find that you simply cannot understand their feelings no matter how sincerely you try it is still not your place to judge the validity of them.

7. Don't Engage In Silence behavior

By telling your "side of the story" you could be creating an atmosphere that silences people who have been abused. If you feel that there are major discrepancies between your account of the situation(s) and their account, and that you are being "falsely accused" take a deep breath. With time you might come to realize that in fact your behavior was abusive. It is your responsibility to continuously challenge your notions about how your behaviors effect others, and to challenge your understandings of how you hold power over others in your relationships. Read books, enter into recovery programs for batterers/sexual assailants, seek out a therapist, and discover your own ways of challenging yourself and learning how your behavior effects others.

Understand 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 behavior. If you are committed

to creating a world where people speak freely about the wrongs done to them you will want to avoid focusing on how the accusers are "lying" about you, and you will want to avoid airing your presumptions and theories as to their "motives."

Silencing behavior is ANY behavior which attempts to make the survivor of abuse out to be the perpetrator of misinformation or any behavior which attempts to make the abuser out to be the victim. Often it leads to a backlash against them, both explicit (threats, harassment, violence) and implicit (endless questioning, non supportive behavior i.e. "I don't want to get involved in this" or "I'm hearing a lot of different stories"). Silencing behavior creates an atmosphere where people fear and don't call out their abusers; an atmosphere where abuse flourishes.

However, this does not mean that you should not speak of how you experienced the situation(s) differently from the other person(s) calling you out. It simply means that it is your responsibility to do so in a way that is respectful. You may need to relate your experiences to those with which you have close friendships/working relationships and to those that approach you, but speak for yourself. Do not intersperse their account with yours to illustrate the inconsistencies that you perceive. Do not go on and on about how they should have called you out in a different manner. Do not talk about their shortcomings in the relationship/ friendship. Do not cast yourself in the role of the victim of a "witch hunt." Do not assert that they are lying, and if your account differs from theirs make it clear that this is how you and only you account for your experiences(s) of the situation(s). Let what you say be limited exclusively to your recollection. If you feel the need to vent find a good person to vent to who is outside of your immediate social scene/community (if you look hard enough you might find a therapist willing to work with you on a sliding scale basis, preferably find one with a

radical/feminist analysis) or someone outside the scene/community altogether (who you know for sure has not been a victim of abuse). If you honestly believe you are being falsely accused your character will have to speak for yourself rather than you speaking for your character.

8. Don't Hide Behind Your Friends

Often the people most vocal in defending abusers are not the abusers themselves, but their friends, comrades, and lovers. "But s/he's really a good person/activist/artist" or "S/he contributed so much to the community/scene" or "The person I know would never do something like that" are some common defensive reactions among many. If you feel that 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(s) and their allies. You need to stop others from engaging in silencing behavior. Let them know that if they truly care about you, they need to help you examine yourself and figure out ways of transforming dominating behaviors.

9. Respond To The Wishes of The Survivor and The Wishes Of The Community

Taking responsibility for our harmful actions is an integral part of the healing process. You will need to respond to the wishes of the survivor and the community not just for their healing, but yours as well. If s/he or they wish that you be suspended from certain projects/activities or that you engage in a batterers/assailants program or that you do book reports on books about ending rape and abuse or if they want you to do anything within the realm of possibility

don't argue with them....give them what they ask for. You need to show the survivor and the community that you are acting in good faith and that you are ready to deal with your problems of abuse or at the very least that you are willing to sincerely investigate the possibility that you engaged in abusive behavior. You need to show the survivor and the community that you respect their autonomy and their ability to make decisions that meet their needs and desires for safety, healing, and ending oppression. If you want to live in a world free of abuse, rape, and oppression you will support survivor autonomy and community self-determination even if you feel you are being "falsely accused." Do not engage in the silencing behavior of attacking the demands and process of the survivor(s) or the community. This is what abusers and their supporters typically do to create a smokescreen of issues to take the heat off of themselves.

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 is what it will take to start overcoming our abusive tendencies. To know that you have wronged someone and to do otherwise is to perpetuate hierarchy. It will take honesty, diligent self investigation,

and compassion to start to overcome our abusive tendencies. Once you're able to admit that you have a problem with (sometimes or always) abusing people you can begin to learn how and why you do it. You can learn early warning signs that you're slipping back into old patterns, and you'll be better able to check yourself. My life has been a life of unlearning such patterns of abuse, of learning to reject the roles of both the abuser and the abused, and it is far from over. Bad habits are easily taken up again, and it is easy to assume that we are not wielding power over someone. We must persistently question this assumption just as we would demand that any assumption be questioned, lest it become dogma.

It is crucial that we learn to ask for consent from our sexual partners. It is crucial that we learn to recognize aggressive and passive aggressive abuse in its various emotional, economic, physical, and sexual manifestations, and that we stop it before it escalates to more severe and harmful levels. We need to call it out when we are aware of it in other people, as well as ourselves. This is a process of overcoming oppression, of rejecting the roles of oppressor and oppressed. It is a path that leads to freedom, and a path that is formed by walking. Will you take the first step?

the drama triangle

the drama triangle is a tool that i think is useful when dealing with sticky situations. acknowledging these roles as part of a negative cycle of interaction is important to get beyond interpersonal disagreements and get to the heart of an issue, and eventually, to its solution.

wikipedia defines the drama triangle as consisting of three roles:

1. The person who is treated as, or accepts the role of, a victim
2. The person who pressures, coerces or persecutes the victim, and
3. The rescuer, who intervenes out of an ostensible wish to help the situation or the underdog.

people may switch between roles in the middle of a conversation or situation; however, if all involved can identify their place in this triangle and work against those roles-- to instead take drama-neutral roles, or get someone to mediate their interactions, they can deal with the situation in a way that doesn't feed into the drama cycle.

recovering perpetrators

jeff ott is a writer, singer, and activist from california. he wrote a zine called "my world," which was also the name of his book. throughout the zine's issues he touched on local goings-on, personal essays, and resources for readers. he outed himself as a sexual assaulter and offered a lot of insight to his own situation and healing. outing oneself as a perpetrator is not easy, but accepting it, acknowledging faults and trying to improve personally is a good step in the right direction. paying lip service to wrongdoing and going back to the same patterns, or losing self-esteem and feeling like a terrible person, or ignoring the problem, hoping that it will disappear simply isn't enough to effect real change.

if a perpetrator is involved in an accountability process and is taking an active approach to their unlearning of oppressive behavior, there needs to be some form of support for them. this can be as simple as someone checking in with them on their progress, having a friendly conversation, or some other form of positive interaction. some perpetrators are unapologetic about their actions; others are terrified that they were capable of causing trauma. those who take initiative to improve themselves deserve some compassion.

i think it's really important to realize a few things when considering sexual assault and other forms of abuse. various forms of abuse exist within societal norms; institutionalized oppression and violence are prime examples. myriad subtle examples are also present everywhere, such as cat-calling or harassing female-bodied people in public. abuse should be considered the rule rather than the exception-- everyone feels disempowered, violated,

or otherwise oppressed at some point in their lives-- even perpetrators, and perhaps, especially perpetrators. behaviors are learned, and cycles of violence are perpetuated through ignorance of alternatives.

people make mistakes. not everyone intends to have an aggressive outburst or sexually assault someone. it's okay to make mistakes as long as they're taken to heart and learned from. those who do so intentionally or as a response to "provocation" are still at fault, are still human, and still owe it to themselves and everyone else to try to adjust their behavior to acceptable levels. "i didn't mean to," "i didn't know," and "i didn't hit them *that* hard" are simply not acceptable. nor are "they didn't say i couldn't," "i was drunk and don't remember," and "they're over-reacting." "i'm sorry" is a good place to start.

another thing to keep in mind is that people are products of their environments. the whole "nature vs. nurture" thing might lead some to believe that only people from abusive households will be abusers, or that people who seem well-adjusted are incapable of abuse. neither of these things are true. people come from all experiences and situations, and oppressive behavior occurs from a variety of sources onto a variety of people. everyone should try their best to work towards their own personal improvement, and assist in the liberation of others.

we're all in this together. let's make it as good as we can.

afterword

thanks for reading this zine! i am really excited that more people are breaking the silence around this topic. please take care of yourselves and each other. we're all we've got, and life can be painfully short.

as a survivor of sexual assault and witness of abuse, i would really love to see more zines, articles, what-have-you about perpetrators and their process—interventions, accountability processes, learned abusive behaviors, and how to heal as a perpetrator. if you are interested in this, too, please drop me a line! i would love to exchange ideas, read zines or articles, or just talk about these subjects.

i know that a lot of work needs to be done to ensure healing and to create spaces for survivors to work through their experiences and integrate them in healthy ways—that work is currently amazing—but i feel that it is, in a way, a band-aid on a broken arm. i feel this way especially about ‘conventional’ domestic violence response; it is currently pretty sexist, heteronormative, and incomplete.

creating a culture where the issues of entitlement, expressions of violence, and suppression of emotions are confronted and uprooted is incredibly important to me. if you want to discuss these issues, feel free to email me at neckmonster@gmail.com. i would love to learn from you!

resource list

online:

www.dorisdorisdoris.com

from the creator of *support* zine and the writer of *doris*. informative and thorough. check out the “articles” section!

www.worldwithout.org

based in australia, this site has a good selection of .pdf files of zines on a lot of pertinent topics.

www.rainn.org

the rape, abuse & incest national network’s site.

www.pomegranatecollective.org

a diy health collective from chicago. their site has tons of great articles and links—on subjects ranging from eating disorders to sexual assault, as well as an online distro.

www.fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit

the website for the now-defunct zine *deal with it*, from which the “ten suggestions for people called out for abusive behavior” article was borrowed.

www.skatedork.org/fifteen/theband/myworld.htm

i know, it’s a long url... but every issue of jeff ott’s zine is here, if you’re interested.

www.inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com

a lot of articles on a variety of topics. includes a few collected pieces from philly’s pissed and philly stands up—two community-based organizations that deal with survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault.

www.phillyspissed.net

the site for the sexual assault support group in philadelphia. includes a number of zines and articles on the subject.

www.girlthrive.com

from the creators of invisible girls: the truth about sexual abuse, this site is aimed at younger women, but is still relevant.

www.theicarusproject.net

a mental health collective's site. full of great resources!

zines & books:

support/apoyo: from the creator of *doris* zine, this is a compilation of suggestions for survival, accounts of abuse and healing, and resources for people dealing with sexual assault. *apoyo* is the zine translated into spanish.

see no, hear no, speak no: this zine consists of three sections; a perpetrator's view, a list of questions on consent, and an account of experiencing assault.

girl/boy: this split zine goes over a variety of topics dealing with gender and life experience.

the ethical slut: a book mostly about polyamory. however, it contains a lot of encouraging anecdotes for accepting your sexuality and working on communication.

phone numbers:

1.800.799.SAFE: the national domestic violence hotline. 24 hours.

1.800.656.HOPE: the rape, abuse & incest national network's hotline. 24 hours.

-p. o.

i don't claim copyright to this text, but i do ask that you give credit where credit is due—feel free to reproduce this zine, but please don't use it for profit. if you want to reference any of the work in here, if it's from me, please cite it as such, or from whatever website or source i gleaned it from. otherwise, help yourself! i am excited to contribute to the resources available on sexual assault.

-cheyenne