

Support New York

# Accountability Process Curriculum

January 2016



To simplify the layout and allow for periodic updating, all readings mentioned in this document are found online at [supportny.org/transformational-justice/curriculum-readings](https://supportny.org/transformational-justice/curriculum-readings)

If you notice any inaccurate information on this page, please contact us and we will do our best to correct it.



The following is a basic template of the curriculum Support New York uses when doing an accountability process with someone who perpetuated harm. It addresses issues related to intimate partner and sexual violence from a d.i.y., anti-authoritarian perspective, and (in tandem with any specific requests made by the survivor) is intended to help perpetrators of violence examine harmful behaviors and take responsibility for transforming them. We use the term “perpetuator” instead of “perpetrator” to draw attention to the fact that interpersonal violence is pervasive and cyclical. We recognize that these harms occur within and build upon larger systems of oppression, and we view accountability processes as potential tools for transformation of these underlying conditions as well as the person. Specifically, we want to focus on the fact that people perpetuate harm yet the behaviors can be stopped – people do not have to permanently play this role.

This curriculum is designed as an educational tool mostly to address patterns of consent violations, incidents of sexual assault, and verbal, emotional, and/or psychological intimate partner abuse. We started doing this work because we were concerned about violence occurring in our community, and that the existing systems we knew of to address this violence were not enough. We are not counseling professionals, and this document is designed to be used by people who are similarly doing this work within a community realm rather than a clinical one.

The curriculum includes 8 sections: Introductions & Trust Building; Power, Control, & Entitlement; Gender, Privilege, Socialization, and Sexuality; Physical

Boundaries; Conscious and Consensual Touch; Survivor Empathy & Survivor Experience; Communication; Accountability; and Relationship & Group Dynamics. Because the readings listed primarily work on a cerebral level, we've also made an attempt to incorporate more holistic activities, such as somatics and journaling, to work on a physical and emotional level. The somatic activities are based upon Support New York members' personal experience taking classes with Staci Haines, the developer of Generative Somatics, which offers in-depth training in this work.

We included these topics because we've found them to have the most impact over the years, but we recognize that this layout is not an exact path for everyone to follow. We have incorporated readings that survivors recommended for specific processes, and typically show the curriculum to the survivor and seek their input at the beginning of the process. There may be some readings that aren't perfect in their use of anti-oppressive language, but we have included them anyway because we've found their main ideas useful for our discussions when read with a critical eye. This curriculum is meant to be flexible and can be reformatted to meet the specific needs of each survivor and each accountability process, so please see it as a framework that can be changed and adapted to reflect the particularities of the situation. Take what works; leave what doesn't!

Whatever the context, our accountability processes are intended to be shaped first and foremost by the survivor's input, and we like to do a lot of checking in with the survivor as the process unfolds. It's important

to keep in mind that what the survivor expects or desires from a process may change over the course of time. We usually have someone who is part of Support New York, but not part of the accountability team, act as a liaison to the survivor to transmit general impressions of how the process is going and inform the accountability team of any feedback from the survivor including their suggestions on content or readings. You can check out our document, 'The Role of the Liaison', for more details. We have occasionally done processes where the survivor did not specifically request a process — but we do not hold processes when it is against the survivor's wishes.

The accountability team usually consists of three people, at least one of whom is in regular contact with the survivor liaison, and ideally one who has never done a process before as a built-in training mechanism. Within the team, we try to rotate tasks (e-mailing out the assignment, sourcing additional readings, etc.) so that nobody is overburdened and each facilitator has a task they need to follow through on. The process is intended to last about a year depending on frequency of meetings, which we commonly hold every two weeks. During a meeting, both the perpetuator and the accountability team usually participate in activities, but the focus should remain on the perpetuator. People from the accountability team use examples of their own experiences if it seems they might help the process, but this shouldn't overshadow the experiences of the perpetuator (i.e. it might not be helpful to get too deep into a team member's experience of sexual violence or abuse). The assignments are either discussed at the previous session or e-mailed to the participant at

least a week before the meeting. They can either bring their assignment to the meeting or e-mail it to the accountability team a day or two before the meeting so that it can be reviewed prior to meeting. Any writing assignments can also be turned into drawing or diagramming assignments for people who are more visual learners. Most of the assignments are written with “you/your” so that the italicized text can be cut and pasted into an e-mail to the perpetrator. We typically don’t give this curriculum directly to the perpetrator; we are now making it available publicly not so that perpetrators can work through it on their own but so that other groups can utilize it as needed in their own accountability work. We think the dynamics of a group are important to make a process successful.

One of the main goals in most of the processes we’ve done is to have the perpetrator write a letter that acknowledges the harm they caused, outlines what they’ve learned in the process, and names what steps they will take to change their behaviors in the future. This letter could be delivered to the survivor if that’s one of their demands, it could be written to particular people or the general public, or it could just serve as a document for the team and perpetrator that outlines what was accomplished. If the letter is to go anywhere beyond the immediate group, the accountability team would work with the survivor liaison to figure out the details of what should be included, as well as when and how it would be delivered. Details on this letter-drafting process are discussed throughout the curriculum.

Deciding whether to take on a process, and when to begin and/or end it, can depend a lot on the particular



needs, capacities and circumstances of the people participating. Due to the time and energy-intensive nature of these processes, Support New York only takes on a few new processes each year according to member availability and capacity. We also only do processes with people who live in NYC or can travel to NYC for all the meetings, rather than trying to work with people long-distance. In addition to rotating tasks and taking breaks from being in processes, we try to not have a member working on more than one process at a time.

We have had to end processes without finishing when it became clear to the accountability team that the perpetrator was not participating in a productive way. There is often some resistance in the initial few meetings, however, if this is not overcome towards the middle of the process (i.e. if very few goals can be met or the same issues keep happening), it may be worth referring to another kind of program or asking for more support from the perpetrator's community members or friends. Creative Interventions drafted an amazing and very thorough Toolkit ("Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence"), which may be useful to refer to before and/or during a process for more guidelines and frameworks. If the team gets to the end of the curriculum/process and everyone involved feels that the perpetrator has met the goals, we formally end the process, lay out some things to continue working on in the future, and hand off the rest of this transformational work to the participant or them and their community. We have not done processes where child abuse, death of the survivor, etc. occurred so therefore cannot confirm whether or not this process would be suitable to address all kinds of harm.

After completing a draft of this curriculum in 2014, we held a preliminary release party where we gathered input from people we respect who also do this type of work. We then spent another year updating and integrating the feedback we received. We'd like to thank Ejeris Dixon from Vision Change Win Consulting and facilitators of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project, as well as the participants at our preliminary release event, for their input. We hope that distributing this curriculum is helpful for other people doing accountability work, and that it furthers important dialogues about sexual and intimate partner violence, community, accountability, and transformative justice. Just as we are all capable of creating harm, we are all capable of helping each other heal, and we hope that these processes can be one small step towards creating a better and more just world.

If you have anything that has been helpful for you, please share it with us! While this curriculum highlights what has been commonly used in our processes, we have an additional spreadsheet of material (<https://supportnyny.org/transformative-justice/curriculum-readings/>) that may be of interest. Remember, this work can be difficult for everyone involved, and it's important to do self-care activities while facilitating a process. We've found parts of the book *Trauma Stewardship* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky to be helpful for dealing with vicarious trauma.

## **WHERE WE CAME FROM**

Support New York came together in 2005, in direct response to instances of sexual violence affecting people in our communities. We formed a collective with the

intent to support the survivors of these incidents, to educate ourselves and others about the effects of sexual and intimate partner violence, and to figure out how we can respond without resorting to police and prisons that further perpetuate oppression and abuse. We remain critical of the ways that racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ageism, xenophobia, ableism, colonialism/imperialism, and other forms of oppression run rampant throughout the legal system and the non-profit industry, and we've sought to use practices grounded in transformative justice to create change in broader cultural systems while also addressing individual abuses. In this way, we seek to both transform the impetus to violence and the conditions that allowed the violence to occur. For our group structure and core beliefs, check out our Pillars.

Support New York was formed in the context of an anarchist and punk community that was largely young, white, college-educated and able-bodied, and we acknowledge the influence this has had on our structure and readings. We have worked with survivors of a range of genders and sexualities, however, the perpetrators in our processes have mostly been straight, male-identified and white. We recognize that many people of color and people from different marginalized groups have practiced transformative justice long before our group began and we both value and strive to learn from their work. We want to specifically recognize and appreciate INCITE!, CARA, Creative Interventions, GenerationFive, as well as indigenous communities and communities for whom calling the police was never a feasible option, for developing and sharing their strategies. This curriculum intentionally includes

materials written by people of color, queer and gender non-conforming people, and people of differing class backgrounds and educational experiences, and we strived to include more as our processes and structures developed over the years.

For more information, contact us at [supportnewyork@gmail.com](mailto:supportnewyork@gmail.com) or visit [supportny.org](http://supportny.org). Please note: After 11 years in operation, as of 2016 we are no longer working as a collective but will occasionally still check e-mail.

# Section One – Introductions & Trust Building

## Session 1

This is the initial meeting/getting to know each other session where we encourage the perpetrator to bring someone from their life who will support them in accountability; we recommend that it be someone who understands the goals of the process and will be willing to challenge them while being supportive in the difficult shifts they will go through. Support New York members describe who we are, the layout of the process, and general expectations. We ask the perpetrator to describe whatever they'd like to about the situation they are asked to be accountable for, and we aim to create a space where they can talk openly about their experience. We hear the perpetrator's narrative in order to start to build trust, and to begin working from their experience with the aim to eventually create space for them to understand and empathize with others, particularly accepting that different people can have different experiences even of the same event. This can begin a nuanced discussion of the motivations of their actions such as the 'whys' or their fears. The hope is to create building blocks to move from denial and defensiveness into the real work of being accountable for one's actions.

Our tone here, and throughout the process, is generally firm yet respectful; we try to model holding good boundaries while also seeing the humanity of the person we're working with. In body language, we try to mitigate

any ‘us vs. them’ dynamics by being conscious of seating at the meeting (not having the team sit across from the perpetrator) and only engaging with other team members in ways we are also comfortable engaging with the perpetrator (e.g. hugging at the end of a meeting).

### **ACTIVITY**

Towards the end of the meeting we give out a copy of our process agreements and point out that, after this meeting, certain things will not be accepted (such as name-calling of the survivor, etc.). We address concerns and questions, talk about what we do, and discuss the responsibilities we each have towards making an accountability process work. This includes checking in about how the process is going on a continual basis, and creating room for feedback and evaluation as it unfolds. We suggest checking in on progress every three months, but the group can decide what works best for the particular process.

It might be helpful for the accountability team to get contact information for someone who can support the perpetrator in the event of a crisis. This may be the person who came to the meeting with them, or someone else who they have identified to act as a support throughout the process. Additionally, we discuss options for therapy with the perpetrator, in order to help them find more support and explore any trauma they may be dealing with. We provide them with referrals if desired.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

- “Taking the First Step: Suggestions for People Called Out for Abusive Behavior,” by Wispy Cockles

*Write about two or three times when you did follow a suggestion from the reading, and two or three times when you didn't (examples don't have to be related to the specific actions that led to the accountability process). What were the motivations, fears, and desires behind your actions? Why did you make these choices? Analyzing this can be a starting point to understanding patterns of behaviors.*

## **Session 2**

Talk about the reading and the perpetrator's written response. This reading is useful in that it sidesteps the common initial reaction of claiming being 'falsely accused,' since the writer talks about being accountable to the community despite finding out that his call-out was due to a miscommunication. At this point in the process, we generally try to balance challenging the participant while still focusing on trust-building and maintaining faith that the participant will grow throughout the process.

### **ACTIVITY**

- Pages 1-7 of Section 4F (Taking Accountability) of the Creative Interventions Toolkit

Begin to discuss what the initial steps in this process will be. For instance, does the violence need to stop? Has the violence stopped, but the perpetrator hasn't acknowledged it? If the survivor hasn't made any particular requests, this reading can provide a framework for some possible goals in the accountability process and starting points for things to work on. It

could also be useful to come back to these bullet points throughout the process as a reference for what has been achieved.

If the survivor has made requests or demands, discuss any that would need to be addressed immediately (i.e. safety concerns, issues of sharing space, what communication will look like). Take some time to discuss what these agreements will look like while the process is happening noting that it is possible that they will be altered once the process is concluded. We typically do not introduce a lengthy list of demands here – rather, we focus on what needs to be addressed more immediately, and save the rest for either the second session of Section Two or the third session of Section Five.

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

*Reflect on any connections between survivor requests (or community requests, whether expressed or perceived) and the idea presented in the Toolkit section utilized in the activity above of accountability as a process and a staircase. This could mean journaling, drawing, or just making lists. What does accountability mean to you in this context? What emotions come up when thinking through this? Save this reflection as it may be useful to come back to it towards the end.*



# Section Two – Power, Control & Entitlement

## Session 1

Review the assignment about accountability as a staircase and check in about any initial demands that were discussed at the last meeting. *Are you fulfilling them? Does this bring up issues about relinquishing some amount of control? How is that feeling?* Because defensiveness is a common reaction at this point, the next readings are meant to address this.

### ACTIVITY

Read and discuss as a group:

- “The Myth of Mutual Abuse” from *The Revolution Starts at Home*

Additionally, use short readings to focus on any issues that the survivor specified as relevant, perhaps looking at a particular issue of power, consent, or harm.

Examples include:

- Excerpts from “Filling the Void” zine on substance use (optional)
- “S/M is Not Abuse/Abuse is Not S/M” by the Northwest Network (optional)
- “10 Realistic Rules for Good Non-Monogamous Relationships” by Andrea Zanin (optional)
- Texts from the Readings spreadsheet or online for articles regarding Time Management, Anger Management, etc. (optional)

These issues will likely resurface throughout the process so it is important to address them at the beginning.

## **ASSIGNMENT**

- “The Lie of Entitlement” by Terrance Crowley
- “Learning to Listen” by Richard S. Orton

Both articles are from *Transforming a Rape Culture*.

*Write reactions to each reading. Include personal answers to the questions posed by Crowley in paragraph 12, and answer the questions reflected in Orton’s reading: ‘What blank spots do you have? What was a time when you had a harmful effect on someone that you didn’t intend?’* We recognize that these readings were written by white men from a second wave feminist frame of reference, but we have found them valuable in initiating a dialogue about what it means to open up to recognizing privilege and power.

- Kiese Laymon’s “My Vassar College Faculty ID Makes Everything OK”

This text offers a different perspective around access to power and entitlement and could be included to broaden the conversation around safety, racism and white supremacy, and trauma.

## **Session 2**

Review the assignment and start to unpack the difference between intention and effect. This section moves from a more politicized view of rape culture to a more personal one. Intellectualizing is a common defense mechanism on the part of someone who has

caused harm, but it can open the door to a discussion on how oppressions combine and play out in personal abuse. This involves a discussion that balances systematic oppression with personal responsibility and accountability for choices made. The previous readings are useful in that they describe people who thought they were 'immune' from being perpetrators because they did good work, but come to realize the ways that they assumed entitlement and power through privilege. We use them to start a discussion on entitlement and 'blank spots' in each of our lives. Examine individual issues or specific patterns that may have played out in the perpetrator's relationship, particularly any identified by the survivor(s). Discuss the importance of recognizing the effects of actions, especially when the effect differs from the intention.

#### **ACTIVITY**

- Power/Control and Equality Wheels

Use whichever version of the wheel is most appropriate to the situation. Have the perpetrator place their actions in the power wheels or name specific behaviors they have engaged in, or what might have occurred if behaviors continued or escalated. Start to analyze what power dynamics were at play in the relationship. Viewing abuse on a continuum sometimes helps us engage perpetrators who are still defensive at this stage.

Depending on the nature of any survivor demands provided to the accountability team, as well as the team's assessment of the perpetrator's capacity to hear them, this can be a good session to introduce some demands that were not previously discussed, leaving

whatever is left to session three of Section Five. We generally leave most non-immediate demands to the latter portion of the curriculum, when a perpetrator has often gained trust in the process and the motivation to fulfill demands intentionally and sincerely.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

- “Selective Blindness of Rape Culture”
- “We Live in a Rape Culture” by Mohadesa Najumi

*Write a brief response identifying a few ways you have seen rape culture at play in your experience based on your reading of both texts and visual analysis of the imagery in the first. Include a few examples of images or pop culture references (for instance, pick a song lyric, advertisement, or movie plot element), and describe how relationship dynamics are conceived and how the example affirms and/or challenges rape culture.*

Also, this is a good time to have the perpetrator begin a rough draft of the letter that will be completed later. This version is mostly used as a tool to help the perpetrator process through some of the power dynamics named in the activity and any survivor’s demands that have been shared. The group doesn’t necessarily have to spend time reviewing the content of the letter yet, but it’s good to check in at the next meeting about how it felt to write it.

# Section Three – Gender, Privilege, Socialization & Sexuality

## Session 1

Spend a little bit of time discussing how it was for the perpetrator to begin the letter, and let them know that it will be revisited in later sessions. If it seems like there are any particular issues that have arisen already (e.g. the perpetrator is backhandedly blaming the victim, or passing off their responsibility, etc.), then the accountability team should take note and make sure that these issues get addressed at some point during the rest of the process.

Discuss the response to the readings and further discuss rape culture and gender oppression, highlighting how these concepts might shift or manifest differently depending on factors such as perceived race, gender identity and expression, ability, and citizenship status, among others. Discuss the image “Don’t ~~Get~~Raped” at the beginning of “We Live In a Rape Culture” from the previous assignment – *how does this image switch the messages we usually hear about whose responsibility it is to avoid rape?* Discuss rape culture as one part of many systems of oppression.

This section can be framed in different ways according to the gender identities of the perpetrator and the members involved in the process. While not all people who assault and abuse are cisgender men, patriarchy is the system that upholds rape culture and gender oppression and people on the masculine spectrum tend

to have privileges that others don't. Checklists can be interesting tools to call attention to things we take for granted, but they are usually simplistic versions of a person's experience, so it's best to take the time to talk through this section face-to-face to minimize defensive reactions and complicate the dialogue. If it seems helpful for people to start with agreeing on a definition of privilege, use as a starting point:

- "A Primer on Privilege: What It Is and What It Isn't" (optional)

### **ACTIVITY**

- Ken Hardy's "Tasks of Participants in Discussions about Race and Other Aspects of Social Identity"

Specify that this reading will be discussed only in how it relates to the perpetrator rather than applying any of the tasks to the person/people who called for the process. Pair with one or two of the checklists below, and discuss the points that feel most relevant:

- "The Male Privilege Checklist" (optional)
- "The Cis Privilege Checklist" (optional)
- "10 Things All 'Allies' Need to Know" by Jamie Utt (optional)
- "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (optional)
- "The DFAB (Designated Female At Birth) Trans\* Privilege Checklist" (optional)
- One or more checklists on a variety of topics available at: <http://privilege101.tumblr.com/post/5988512297/list-of-privileges-permanently-in-progress>

## ASSIGNMENT

- “Understanding Patriarchy” by bell hooks (Chapter 2 from *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*) (optional)
- “Coming to Class Consciousness” Chapter 2 and/or “Money Hungry” Chapter 4 of *Where We Stand: Class Matters* by bell hooks (optional)
- “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (optional)

Use “Understanding Patriarchy” if the survivor and/or accountability team wants to highlight the abuse of power along gender lines, as it is a personal account of our society’s desperation to enforce gender roles to the detriment of everyone (trigger warning – describes violence/child abuse). If more discussion is needed on intersectionality of gender oppression with race or class-based oppression, use the second or third texts.

*Write a short response to the reading(s) and how they relate to your experience and/or create a diagram to examine rape culture (what are the interconnected factors that hold it up, such as on different social levels – the personal, social systems, and larger cultural norms, i.e. along the lines of the Power and Control Wheel. Keep this map and use it if needed later in the process.*

## Session 2

Discuss the mapping assignment: *Why is it important to pay attention to the ways that patriarchy affects people of different genders? How does patriarchy intersect with*

*other forms of oppression? How did you learn your social role in your family, your school, your community, and your friend group? How did you see this change over time? What do you see as the relationship between power and safety?*

## **ASSIGNMENT**

- First four pages (front and back) of “Hooking Up with Healthy Sexuality” by Brad Perry

Starting with a personal story of a first sexual experience, this expresses some of the dynamics involved in learning sexuality, such as males being socialized only to “get as far as they can” while not considering female sexuality or desire. It is helpful in that it describes a non-consensual encounter where the writer ignores non-verbal signs but stops when told “no” verbally. Also read one of the following readings written by transmasculine authors:

- “Femme-Ally Conversation Starter” by Sunny Drake
- “Navigating Masculinity as a Black Transman: I Will Never Straighten Out My Wrist” by Kai Green

*In a written response, engage these questions: What were some early influences on your view of sexuality? How did you learn about sex and sexuality (through media, role models, friends, family, etc.)? What were the first messages you internalized? Within these experiences, where did you see yourself having access to power and where did you see power being retained by others? How have these ideas and experiences changed for you over the years? Questions (switching the gender within the question if needed) could also be added from:*



- Getting to Know Yourself: Some Questions for *Men from On the Road to Healing: A booklet for men against sexism* Issue #1
- “Against Patriarchy: Tools for Men to Further Feminist Revolution” by Chris Crass (optional)

The second reading could be an alternate or in addition to the questions.

### **Session 3**

This session provides the opportunity to delve deeper into conversations around complications with power and privilege, and the ways that people who have perpetuated violence may also have real experiences of disempowerment. By looking at early experiences of sexuality, as well as race or other aspects of identity that are deeply intertwined with gender, the perpetrator can begin to focus on having empathy for themselves. We recognize that many people who have been called out for abuse and assault are also survivors of trauma, and we definitely don't want to ignore this fact throughout the process. We hope to hold the ways that traumatic experiences and/or oppression have affected the people we're working with, however, in these processes we aim to focus on the experience of the survivor and the accountability of the perpetrator.

In this sense, it's important to understand that this session is not an opportunity to find excuses for the perpetrator's behavior, but rather to acknowledge the cycle of violence and the ways that powerlessness and internalized oppression becomes directed at others. The hope is that this will help the perpetrator

compartmentalize less, and begin to generate empathy for the person who was harmed.

### **ACTIVITY**

Use the reading assignments as a starting point to discuss how different genders are socialized to express sexuality and formative personal experiences. Explore the answers to the questions in the previous assignment, focusing towards the end on the questions about access to power, internalized oppression and internalized privilege as Sunny Drake discusses.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

- “The Four ‘I’s’ of Oppression”
- “Internalized Racism: A Definition” by Donna Bivens

Thinking about both these readings and the previous ones, write a letter to your past self or to someone who was influential in your development. What do you wish someone had told you when you were younger? What do you maybe wish you had understood about structures of power, gender, and sexuality, and how have you come to understand them better?

View:

- Brene Brown’s talk on vulnerability

Think about what messages you might have received in life about vulnerability, strength, stoicism, and care. *How have they affected how you respond to and express emotion? How do they relate to other power structures and dynamics? In what ways have emotional expression and/or containment allowed you to succeed or thrive,*

*and how have they held you back? What would it take to feel vulnerable?* This activity is intended to build self-empathy as well as examine emotional dynamics.

In preparation for the next session, the accountability group and perpetrator each choose one of the exercises from Somatic Resourcing Exercises for everyone to do before the next meeting, recommending to do so in a safe place with access to support and to process the experience with a friend or counselor if needed (as in any body-based approach, these exercises are potentially triggering or may bring up painful feelings or memories but may be transformative in a more profound way than verbal processing). We believe the somatic exercises on the link above are relatively simple and safe especially when done in a conscious manner. If someone responds well to somatic processing, they could explore taking classes and/or seeing a somatic therapist to delve deeper. *Remember to do the Weather Report before and after the exercises. You can also write about how you experienced them, how you felt before and after doing them, and describe 1-2 examples where you responded with biological reactions in your life and what you would think about doing in those occasions to refocus or consciously change your reactions.*

# Section Four – Physical Boundaries: Conscious and Consensual Touch

## Session 1

Start out by discussing the experience with the somatic exercises and the usefulness of somatic experiencing in counter-balancing cognitive approaches to relating. *How comfortable were you being in touch with your body in that way? How in touch with your body are you on a day-to-day basis?* This next section comes from a strongly sex-positive standpoint, and emphasizes the importance of all parties being aware of their physical boundaries, being comfortable with their bodies, and enjoying conscious and consensual touch.

### ACTIVITY

Discuss the letter writing activity from the assignment. This is an opportunity to begin to also discuss consent in the context of gender socialization, the importance of reading body language and asking consent (the ways that internalized oppression, dissociation or past trauma may contribute to a person's difficulty with expressing their discomfort verbally).

### ASSIGNMENT

- “Frozen Inside: Questions on Sexual Assault & Consent” by Cindy Crabb also found in the *Support* zine
- “Somatics, Neuroscience and Leadership”

Pick 3-5 of the questions from the first text to discuss at the next meeting (each team member and the perpetrator can choose one). *After reading the second text, try to identify whether your default mechanism is fight, flight, freeze or appease as described in the Centering section of “Somatics, Neuroscience and Leadership.” Consider instances where that has worked in your favor and instances that it has not.*

## **Session 2**

Discuss the readings and previous somatics assignment. Everyone in the accountability group discusses their default mechanism, which helps show that the default of the perpetrator may be causing harm to others and how the dynamic changes depending on what another person’s default is. Here we also discuss what it looks like to override your default mechanism by using tools such as centering. Since this session is more focused on consent, it’s important to create as safe a space as possible – it might be good to have frequent check-ins, for instance.

### **ACTIVITY**

Discuss the answers to the questions that were selected from the *Support* zine.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

- “Reclaiming Touch” by Hazel/Cedar Troost from *Yes Means Yes!*
- “Numbers” from the “Learning Good Consent” zine
- “More than Desire” by Viva Flores (optional)

*Try going through a full day asking explicit verbal consent for every instance of physical contact before the next meeting. Also, try playing a few rounds of the game. “Numbers” is helpful if being creative about consent seems helpful in preventing boundary crossings. Add “More than Desire” if alcohol use was a factor in their past boundary crossing(s). Ask them to write a response on their personal relationship with consent in respect to their own body.*

If they responded well to somatics, suggest an optional imagery exercise in lieu of additional readings, making sure that they can identify a friend to help narrate it for them and help process afterward. During the exercise, the narrator would talk the perpetrator through imagining being forced to eat a large amount of distasteful food. It’s generally a good idea to follow a difficult imagery exercise with a pleasant one, such as then detailing a pleasant buffet where one can eat only what and as little or much as one wants. This exercise may sound silly, but imagining being force-fed may be a helpful way to describe the loss of bodily autonomy that occurs in sexual violence and other non-consensual acts.

# Section Five – Survivor Empathy & Survivor Experience

## Session 1

Discuss the previous assignment of explicit verbal consent. This section can be difficult for perpetrators, so don't be surprised if there is some backsliding, and allow extra time. We've found that processes often move in a "two steps forward one step back" pattern, where sometimes things seem to be getting through and sometimes it feels more difficult. Don't panic and trust that things will eventually move forward. It may be appropriate here to go back to the experiences of oppression discussed in Section 3 as a way to generate empathy without excusing any actions. Once again, since the role of facilitators is not to be therapists and discussion of past trauma can potentially be re-traumatizing, facilitators should be careful and intentional in how these experiences are surfaced and discussed.

### ACTIVITY

Discuss written response to personal relationship with consent and begin to talk about ways to empathize with the survivor's experience. Then do a drawing activity: *Draw a 3-D cube. Take an example scenario and imagine it experienced by three different people. In the center of the cube, write a brief description of the event. On each face, write out the experiences, emotions, and concerns felt by each of the people experiencing the scenario on the cube, with each face being a different*

*person. What would each person focus on? What past experiences might resurface for them? How do all of these differ, even though the scenario is the same?*

Afterwards, read:

- “I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape” by Andrea Dworkin

This is a pretty emotional piece, so it’s good to read all together and discuss immediately after. Begin to discuss thoughts around anger in the face of oppression (aka “righteous anger”).

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

- “The Uses of Anger” by Audre Lorde

*In a written response, discuss: 1) a time when someone was angry with you and their response made you angry. Why were you feeling angry? How else could you have responded? 2) How can anger be helpful or necessary vs. unproductive?, and 3) What does solidarity or allyship mean? What does it look like in a heterosexist, male supremacist, racist world?*

If trying to promote empathy with a survivor who had the impulse to fight back physically, add:

- “Sex Worth Fighting For” by Anastasia Higginbotham from *Yes Means Yes!* (optional)
- ‘Survivor Violence’ on Michael Samsel’s Abuse and Relationships website (optional)



## Session 2

Discuss written assignment on anger and solidarity. This session is primarily about broadening the scope of what one might initially consider to be abusive and bring into the discussion many different types of abuse. Additionally, discussing different forms of oppression including one(s) that the perpetrator experiences may be helpful.

### ACTIVITY

Read and discuss the “Am I Being Emotionally Abusive?” questions on page 9 of:

- “Behind Closed Doors: Confronting Emotional Abuse in Intimate Partnerships” by Support New York

### ASSIGNMENT

Choose a few survivor’s accounts to read. Suggestions include:

- Brainscan 21 by Alex Wreck (optional)
- Vignette #1 on pgs. 25-26 and Vignette #3 on pgs. 33-38 in “Ending Oppression. Building Solidarity. Creating Community Solutions.” by Meiver de la Cruz and Carol Gomez (optional)
- “Homewrecker” by Gina de Vries (optional)
- “There is Another Way” by Ana-Maurine Lara (optional)
- “A Sliding Stance” by N. from *The Revolution Starts at Home* (optional)
- “Is Masculinity Always Privileged?: A Transman’s Experience with Intimate Partner Violence” by Mauro Sifuentes (optional)

- The rest of “Behind Closed Doors” (optional)

Additionally, create a hypothetical situation using one of the readings you used. For instance, if using Brainscan 21: *Pretend you are organizing a zine fest. Both Alex and Joe have inquired about tabling. You have to decide who gets to and inform each of them of your decision and your reasoning behind it. Next, consider your decision from Alex’s perspective and take some notes about how she might feel about what you decided. Do the same for Joe. Finally, make it personal. Write a short passage about how you feel this reading relates to your history and your process.*

### **Session 3**

Discuss the written assignment using the hypothetical scenario. Now is the time to review the survivor’s experience, the issues/harms they want addressed, or whatever information the survivor chooses to share with the perpetrator either in a letter delivered by the accountability team or through discussion with the survivor liaison and/or accountability team. This is also the time to bring up any of the demands that were not previously discussed or go deeper into any of them if necessary.

#### **ACTIVITY**

Have participant read survivor’s story (if one is provided) out loud. Optionally, record it and listen to it again (some survivors have requested this, and it is a powerful way to get through to a perpetrator).

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Ask perpetrator to connect, in writing, the harms they caused with parts of the power/control and equality wheels used before. If one goal of the process is to write a letter, this activity could be framed as writing one section of the letter and acknowledging both the violence and its consequences.

## Section Six – Communication

Because the previous sessions are often difficult, this may be when a perpetrator starts flaking or meetings get harder to schedule. Keep at it, check in with them often, and zoom out to the bigger picture a little during this session with an activity for everyone. Here we start to delve into healthier forms of communication in part because any issues with communication can reinforce power dynamics, and in part to assist with the apology letter.

### ACTIVITY

Discuss the written application of power and control wheels to the harms described in the survivor's experience. Then hone in on any aspects that were hindered or helped by communication.

### ASSIGNMENT

Read:

- Pages 18-22 of “Ask First!” about active listening
- How-to on NVC (optional)
- “Being Me, Loving You” by Marshall B. Rosenberg on how NVC could be applied within an intimate relationship (optional)
- Silent treatment/withholding (optional)

*Practice active listening by asking someone (or two different people in your life) to share two experiences with you for no more than 5 minutes while you actively listen. Then spend 5 minutes reflecting back to them what you heard, and give them 5 additional minutes to*

*respond to how well you heard them. Have one of the experiences be a pleasant or neutral experience and the other be a negative experience, and see if there is any difference between the quality of your active listening skills depending on the nature of the experience being related.*

# Section Seven – Accountability

## Session 1

Reflect on the previous active listening assignment. *Did it clue you into any circumstances where you may have difficulty communicating? Can you remember any times in the relationship with the survivor where either you or them ‘shut down’ or were unable to communicate?* After this point, we focus on framing the rest of the process to more specifically address what was written in the survivor’s letter, list of demands, or whatever we know of the situation.

### ACTIVITY

Everyone spends the session writing 1) what accountability means to them, 2) who they’re accountable to, 3) who’s accountable to them, and 4) who’s responsible for ensuring accountability? Discuss self-accountability and the importance of a society not relying on partners/bosses/cops, etc. as well as breaking the cycle of violence. Go back to the definitions of accountability on pages 1-7 of Section 4F (Taking Accountability) of the CI Toolkit as a reference point if needed. The accountability team can consider and discuss with the perpetrator the concepts of either under- or over-accountability if they seem to apply. Discuss questions such as: *Is the perpetrator taking responsibility for some of their actions and leaving others unexamined (under-accountability) or taking on responsibility that may be motivated by guilt or shame for dynamics that were not perpetuated by them? How*

*do guilt and shame feel on a somatic level?* If relevant, this might be a good opportunity to refer back to the first assignment of understanding motivations.

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Read the most applicable of the first two readings plus the third; the rest are optional:

- “Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm” on pages 45-54 of Section 4F in the CI Toolkit
- “Stopping Violence as a First Step” on pages 43-44 of Section 4F in the CI Toolkit

The first account is by someone who identifies as being socialized as male; the second is by a queer woman.

- “Guilt & Shame” by Phil Barker
- Pages 8-11 of “Don’t be a Dick” (optional)
- “Still More Thoughts on Rape” from Issue #5 of My World (optional)

## **Session 2**

Begin by checking in about the previous readings.

*How have feelings like guilt and shame played into the perpetrator’s experience?* Next, move into discussing an overview of the relationship with the survivor. Start with how they met and discuss important developments or changes, including both good and bad events. Discuss goals for accountability in specific terms given by the survivor, especially the language in their demands (if any were provided).

## ACTIVITY

Write out a timeline of the relationship. Read over requests the survivor has made and match the requests to specific harms done – i.e., ask participant to dig deep and see why the survivor would want certain things from them, such as disclosure to new partners or to not go to certain spaces.

## ASSIGNMENT

Letters of apology/acknowledgement from other perpetrators such as:

- The example on pages 62-64 of Section 4F in the CI Toolkit
- Statement from Midnight Special Legal Collective (optional)

The optional reading may be helpful if the abuse manifested within an organization.

*Synthesize a rough draft of the apology/ acknowledgement letter from the pieces that have been written thus far.* This is a good time to let the survivor liaison know that the bulk of the readings have been completed and a draft a letter of apology is beginning, so the survivor can decide whether they would like to receive it or not (if that hasn't already been determined). Go back to the writings from the previous activities (specifically Sec. 1 Sess. 2, Sec. 2 Sess. 2, Sec. 3 Sess. 3, and Sec. 5 Sess. 3) to review what the perpetrator had written, and to see what has changed. We still don't attempt to shape the content of the letter too much at this stage. If it is a helpful exercise, the perpetrator can write the letter at this point in a way



that is not geared towards any particular audience (i.e. the survivor or the community) and will not be sent and modify it for the audience once more of the content is written.

### **Session 3**

Review the rough draft of the letter as a group during the meeting. Use this session to deepen the discussion on any particular issues that the survivor has requested that the perpetrator address, or issues that have arisen throughout previous meetings.

#### **ACTIVITY**

Revisit the topics addressed that the survivor specifically named as relevant in Session 1 of Section 2. *How have these issues surfaced throughout the process and how have your ideas about them changed? Have any patterns emerged for you? Have the subjects covered thus far encompassed all the issues that arose within your relationship with the survivor?* Take a moment to reflect on what has been most significant for you in the process so far.

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

Have participant design next meeting: whatever they feel is missing (so far) from the program, their own ideas for elements to include in a process focusing on the harms described in the survivor's experience, etc. It may be helpful to remind the perpetrator of the need to hold themselves accountable while doing this, and that they can learn from a difficult experience and use

it to become a positive agent for change. They should also continue to work on the letter and integrate the feedback from this session into it.

## **Session 4**

This session should be completely perpetrator-led, maintaining the focus of addressing harms in the survivor's experience. This is a good chance to see how much the participant has really absorbed and if they have been challenging themselves. If this session makes it clear there are some areas that didn't 'take hold,' it's good to go back to those in the next meeting.

### **ACTIVITY**

Continue the review of perpetrator's letter. This is an opportunity to get into more critical feedback on the letter while affirming the progress and efforts that have been made thus far. In general, a letter should acknowledge the experience of the survivor and the harm the perpetrator caused, outline some of the things that the perpetrator learned in the process or new ways that they are understanding the harm, and name the steps that they will take to change their behaviors in the future. Additional questions that can be asked include: *Does the language mirror that which the survivor used, or is there tone or language that is minimizing or blaming? Does it cover various aspects of the survivor's experience, or are there gaps or topics that aren't addressed? Is the tone proper for the intended audience, whether that has been determined to be the survivor or a broader group of people?*

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Have the perpetrator continue to revise the letter and e-mail the second draft to the accountability team prior to the next session.

# Section Eight – Relationship & Group Dynamics

## Session 1

Begin by discussing the past and present interpersonal dynamics of the perpetrator outside of the relationship(s) in which they caused harm. *How were these relationships influenced or affected by the harms? How do some of these behaviors mimic the harmful behaviors within the relationship? Are there amends that should be made in any of these relationships (e.g. roommates or collective members who were peripherally affected by the abuse)?* Many survivors request that perpetrators tell community members or people with whom they start new relationships that they have been abusive, and this is a part in the process that many perpetrators have difficulty with. Drawing attention to the wider impact of the abusive dynamics may help the perpetrator understand the importance of disclosure.

### ACTIVITY

Discuss techniques that the perpetrator can use when disclosing the abuse to people (new friends, roommates, partners, etc.), and role play these if it would be helpful. For a useful framework to guide the discussion on disclosure, see:

- “The Basics” by Philly Stands Up from pages 36-42 of the zine *Learning Good Consent*

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Finalize the letter, whether it is intended for an outside audience or just the accountability team. For instance, the team will want to make sure the apology letter addresses the totality of the perpetrator's behavior without using phrasing that abdicates responsibility. This process may take multiple sessions, but keep at it; these are nearly the final steps!

At this point, the accountability team should work on putting together a summary of the process, and suggestions for things the perpetrator should continue to work on going forward. These will be reviewed together at the next meeting.

## **Session 2**

Almost done! Discuss how the process has been for everyone involved. *Thinking back on where you all started, what has changed? What have you seen as the major struggles, and as the major milestones? What have you learned that stands out as the most significant?*

## **ACTIVITY**

Discuss the personalized summary from the accountability team of how they feel the perpetrator has done, what they've accomplished, and suggestions of what to continue working on. This is also a good time to do some visioning around what kinds of relationships the perpetrator wants to foster in their life going forward, or what role they might want to take on to create more accountable communities. Use:

- “Vision Setting” Exercise by the Couples Institute if a template is desired (optional)
- Page 1 of the “Healthy Relationships Check-Up” by LEAP (optional)

## **ASSIGNMENT**

- “4 Ways to Push Back Against Your Privilege” by Mia McKenzie, also available in *Black Girl Dangerous: On Race, Queerness, Class, and Gender*
- “Interdependency” and “On Collaboration” by Mia Mingus
- “The Collective Process: Overcoming Power” by The Common Wheel Collective (optional, may be helpful if abusive dynamics manifested within an organization)
- “Tools for White Guys Working for Social Change” (optional)

*Write about respecting boundaries in group situations, consensual communication, and acting as an ally in everyday life. Draft a blueprint of what you plan to continue working on.*

## **Session 3**

This is the final meeting where the team hands over the responsibility of accountability to the perpetrator and members of their community. Asking the participant to bring partners, housemates, family, friends, etc. where appropriate is a good way to do this. Just as the person the perpetrator brought to the first meeting should be supportive while still challenging them, the people invited to this meeting should have similar intentions.

It may help to have a number of different people from various parts of the perpetrator's life.

### **ACTIVITY**

Discussion on how to continue accountability within community and how to make this an opportunity for positive community change. Have the perpetrator come up with a list of 'I' statements or commitments to work on that they will continue to do, which may include taking some type of leadership role in working with other perpetrators (if this seems like something that would be positive and within the scope of what's comfortable for the survivor). Remind the perpetrator and their community that there isn't any 'stamp of approval' they get for finishing the process – that the process is lifelong. However, some sort of acknowledgment of the completion of the process can help give it closure, and provide a frame for what has been accomplished.

## Follow-up and Documentation

After the formal end of the process, the facilitators may want to engage in follow-up discussion with the perpetrator. There may be loose ends to tie up in terms of communication with and demands from the survivor that require some further discussion, or it may be helpful to see where the perpetrator is at in their personal journey beyond the process. At some point (often around six months down the road), the facilitators may plan a “check-in” meeting to see how things are coming along with the perpetrator and their community, and if there are any ongoing issues. There is no formula for evaluation and follow-up, but it’s important to remember that the topics covered in accountability processes are actually ideas to continue to reflect on indefinitely.

Additionally, it might be helpful for facilitators to document their experiences with the process and any helpful learning they gleaned for the group to use in later processes. The process reports shared with the perpetrator every few months might be a good opportunity to build this documentation. We also take time during our regular meetings to debrief experiences in the process with group members working on other accountability processes and similarly hear their stories. Some of this may be shared with the survivor liaison and/or survivor if desired so that they may evaluate it. The process may then be evaluated within the accountability team (both with and without the perpetrator present) as well as within the larger collective (if there is one).



## In Conclusion

This is a model our group developed through practice, we hope that this curriculum will be helpful for others who are interested in beginning or already engaged in community accountability and transformative justice work. We welcome questions or comments, as we are making this available in the interest of contributing to the development of better and more sustainable models. There is no end point to unlearning and transforming oppressive tendencies, and we hope that this outline can serve as one useful tool in starting these lifelong processes.

We want to recognize that these processes are not easy, and that it takes a lot of dedication, reflection, loving boundaries, and hope to see them through to the end. Having a larger group to provide support and feedback is invaluable, and finding whatever personal resources you can draw from throughout can help get you through any roadblocks you may encounter. As members of Support New York, we have found it absolutely vital to have the support of each other in group meetings and personal relationships; moments of humor, hard conversation, and hopeful anecdotes are what have kept us going through this work.

We look forward to continuing to learn, dialogue, and create better methods for addressing harm as we attempt to unravel the oppressive systems that form the foundations of abuse.





