

# ENDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

A Transformative  
Justice Handbook

generationFIVE



# INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

 Our long-term vision is of a just world. A society made up of communities, relationships, and individuals that are liberated from the cycles of violence that we see today. To transform our society, we must be able to imagine the future that we want, for ourselves and the generations that will come after us, and to make an honest assessment about how our current choices and conditions do and don't line up with that vision. Meaningful change is only possible when we are willing to face and take action to address the gaps between the future we long for and the realities we are living.

We live inside a set of stories about child sexual abuse which shape how most of us make sense of the world. A common one is that child sexual abuse is committed by just a few bad people who need to be found and weeded out. This story is used to justify policies, laws, and practices that focus on punishment, surveillance, and isolation. Individuals who are identified as having sexually abused a child or children are arrested, ostracized, dehumanized, and isolated. We are meant to believe, through this story, that if we know who “the bad guys” are, we can take adequate precautions to prevent the children we know from being harmed. There is little evidence that any of these interventions are effective in changing the behavior of individuals who have sexually abused children. This story also misses the critically important fact that incidences of child sexual abuse do not happen in a vacuum.

The framework of Transformative Justice proposes a different story about harm, healing, power, and relationship. It is in some ways a more difficult story, but also a story that more closely reflects what we know about the realities of sexual violence against children.

In this story we see a much wider picture. Not only the moment in which someone makes the choice to sexually abuse a child, but all the moments which preceded that choice. This second story of child sexual abuse implicates many more people than just the individual who chooses to sexually abuse a child. To effectively respond to child sexual abuse, we must address all these people—shifting the cultural norms, the behaviors, actions, feelings, beliefs, hearts, and minds of all of us, who, knowingly or unknowingly, allow child sexual abuse to occur.

Clearly, this is a much bigger project than simply weeding out “a few bad apples.” The problem of child sexual abuse is far more pervasive, and personal, than most of us would like to believe.

We believe that the first story—the dominant story of our culture—remains popular for exactly this reason: it protects us from having to confront the prevalence and the proximity of child sexual abuse. At the same time, this story leaves us with very few options for preventing child sexual abuse, for responding to incidences when they occur, and certainly without options for transforming the conditions we live in to ensure that children

are never sexually abused. We believe that this sense of powerlessness is a huge part of what drives acknowledgment of child sexual abuse so deep underground. If we feel powerless about a situation, denial becomes a strategy to avoid having to feel the pain of helplessness.

What if, instead of powerlessness, we knew we had the tools and skills to confront the problem? To intervene in ways that support the person who experienced sexual abuse to heal from the impacts? To respond in a way that allows and requires the person who sexually abused a child to take accountability, and to truly transform their behavior? What if we had responses that allowed families and communities to see all of the choices and circumstances—big and small—that allowed this harm to occur, and inspired them to make different choices so that the context of community made it far more difficult for someone to sexually abuse a child?

Transformative Justice is a pathway towards that future. A path which asks us to take responsibility for creating the conditions that will prevent child sexual abuse from continuing. It begins with the acknowledgment that we have the capacity—individually and collectively—to reflect on the world we want, and to align our behavior and our choices with that vision.

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In 2007, at the US Social Forum in Atlanta, GA, generationFIVE released *Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Ending Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence*. That document is one part of an ongoing conversation on the Left about how best to respond to specific incidents of violence in ways that also challenge systemic oppression and State violence. This means documenting, imagining, and creating responses to violence that treat individual justice and collective liberation as fundamentally intertwined. This also means shrinking or ending our reliance on policing and imprisonment.

Over the past decade, conversations about Transformative Justice and other community-based responses to violence have spread much more widely and grown much richer. Numerous organizations, community groups, and individuals have engaged in further thinking, practice, and documentation about various efforts to put the principles of Transformative Justice into practice. There is clearly a great deal of interest and need for these conversations.

*Ending Child Sexual Abuse: A Transformative Justice Handbook* draws on this decade of learning and is designed to be of practical use to family members and people in our intimate networks, to teachers, community leaders, health and mental health practitioners, and to anyone seeking to address the child sexual abuse in their lives and in the lives of those around them.

Many people have contributed to the thinking and material presented in this document. In particular, I want to acknowledge the original authors of *Toward Transformative Justice*, whose vision and voices form the backdrop of this newer document: Sara Kershner, Staci Haines, Gillian Harkins, Alan Greig, Raquel Laviña, Cindy Wiesner, Mich Levy, Palak Shah, Mimi Kim, and Jesse Carr.

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This project would never have reached this point without the loving attention, care, and commitment of RJ Maccani. Thank you for your wise counsel, your political rigor, and your ongoing support in making this a reality.

— Nathaniel Shara on  
behalf of generationFIVE  
June 2017



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# WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

**T**o address child sexual abuse (or CSA), and to develop effective responses, we must start by naming, defining, and understanding the problem. One of the greatest barriers to ending child sexual abuse is the profound silence and denial that surrounds it. CSA is generally considered an unacceptable topic of conversation, so most of us haven't had access to meaningful education about what constitutes child sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence is also notoriously difficult to measure, making it impossible to gather a complete picture of the problem through data. This overwhelming lack of information about child sexual abuse within most of our communities, along with considerable misinformation, means that there are many myths and misconceptions about what it is and isn't.<sup>2</sup>

Naming and defining child sexual abuse is an important part of breaking the silence and denial. Acknowledging abuse, and allowing people who have experienced abuse to describe their experiences without blame, can reduce shame and contribute to healing.

**At the most fundamental level, child sexual abuse is an abuse of power.** Child sexual abuse occurs when someone with more power exploits the vulnerability of someone who is younger, or under eighteen years of age, and in a position of less power. Child sexual abuse is an overarching term that includes any form of sexual activity that is imposed upon or manipulated from a child or youth by an individual or group in a position of power, authority, and/or influence.

*Child sexual abuse occurs when someone with more power exploits the vulnerability of someone who is younger, or under eighteen years of age, and in a position of less power.*



Mimi Kim of Creative Interventions writes:  
“People with less power can be more vulnerable to violence because they are an easier target, because they are less likely to be protected, more likely to be blamed, and [probably have fewer] places to go to get help.”<sup>3</sup>

Child sexual abuse can include:

- Sexual exposure/Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism or exposing oneself to a child or young person
- Sexual exploitation
- Genital contact
- Penetration
- Threats of physical, sexual and/or emotional harm
- Fondling
- Sexual jokes
- Violence that targets a child's genitals
- Invasive hygienic practices
- Producing, owning, or sharing pornographic images or movies of children
- Sexual humiliation
- “Selling” or “buying” a child or youth for sex. Sex trafficking of children or youth (locally, nationally or internationally).
- Obscene phone calls, text messages, or virtual interaction
- Sexualized or invasive attention, sexual preoccupation with a child
- Overexposure of a child to adult sexual activity or behavior
- Any other sexual conduct that is harmful to a child's mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual welfare
- Sexual interaction between youth that puts a child at risk for manipulation and abuse due to differences in age (2-5 years), developmental stages, weight, and power.

A major factor in understanding and defining child sexual abuse is consent. While definitions of consent vary, and can include legal, moral, and philosophical dimensions, we are most concerned with the dynamics of power in a situation, and the potential abuse of that power. The capacity to consent requires being able to feel and know what we need and want, perceiving that we have the power to choose, and the ability to express that knowledge to another. The capacity to exercise and give consent develops according to an individual's age and stage of development, along with the socialization we receive about exercising self-determination. For example, when children are repeatedly told to “be polite” or “do as you're told,” or are made to believe that their bodies and sexuality are for someone else's pleasure, and are scolded, punished, or criticized for asserting boundaries or expressing preferences, their capacity to fully exercise consent is compromised.

In the U.S., legal definitions of consent vary from state to state, and the legal age of consent ranges from 14 to 18 years of age.<sup>4</sup> While definitions and understandings of consent can be very important in assessing possible abuse, the variability in legal definitions can at times obscure the central question of power and the abuse of power.

To explore this question, we need to ask: Is the person with less power in this situation able to consent? Is there a dynamic of power present that creates a pressured or false “consent”? Answering these questions may require more information about the specific relationship between the people involved and the context surrounding an incident.

## PREVALENCE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is one of the most widespread and persistent forms of violence, regardless of nation, race, class, religion, gender, or culture.<sup>5</sup> Because CSA often goes unnamed and unreported, it is hard to determine its prevalence. Experts agree

that the incidence of child sexual abuse is far greater than what is reported to authorities.

Data from the 2014 National Crime Victim Survey indicates that at least 300,000 children are sexually abused each year in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services received 62,939 reports on cases of child sexual abuse in 2012.<sup>7</sup> In public health terms, these numbers constitute an epidemic. And while these rates are staggering on their own, they don't account for most cases, which are never reported to authorities. Initial research on reporting rates suggests that fewer than 30% of cases of child sexual abuse are ever reported,<sup>8</sup> and that actual rates of CSA may be as much as 30 times greater than the rates published in official reports, such as those from child protective services and the police.<sup>9</sup>

In 1997, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a landmark study on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), which indicated that as many as 30-45% of women and 13-16% of men experience sexual abuse before the age of 18, or roughly one in three girls and one in six boys.<sup>10</sup> Children with developmental disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, and are sexually abused at nearly twice the rate of non-disabled children.

Given the messages that boys receive about gender, sexuality, and homophobia, many boys (and later men) tend to not report their experiences of CSA, which may skew these statistics. Boys' experiences of sexual abuse are often framed and understood as a "first" sexual experience, or as an initiation, and may not be acknowledged as CSA. Male survivors of CSA are often overlooked, and studies consistently indicate that boys and men are less likely to be asked about sexual abuse by mental health professionals, and that their experiences of abuse are less likely to be recognized as CSA.<sup>11</sup>

Over the last 20 years, research on the

prevalence of child sexual abuse indicates that rates of abuse have been declining,<sup>12</sup> with current studies indicating that roughly one in five girls and one in ten boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18.<sup>13</sup> As of mid 2017, we do not yet know how to account for this apparent decrease in prevalence. Our hope is that increased awareness and public information about the harms of CSA, along with innovative promising practices (such as CoSAs, which are discussed in section five) have played a role in preventing abuse through increasing protective behavior on the part of adults.

Contrary to popular media portrayal of sexual abusers as strangers, studies consistently reveal that most people who sexually abuse children are known to the child or to the child's family. Researchers have documented that as many as 90% of people who experience sexual abuse under the age of 18 know the person who abused them.<sup>14</sup> Among these, 34.2% of the individuals who abused were family members of the child,<sup>15</sup> and 58.7% were acquaintances. Only 7% of the people who sexually abused were strangers to the child they abused. This stereotype of the "stranger molester" is one of the most pervasive myths about who sexually abuses children, despite the hundreds of thousands of survivors who attest otherwise. We need to get curious about why we, collectively, continue to believe this stereotype. What feelings, fears, and choices would we be confronted with if we accepted the fact that most people who sexually abuse are closer to us than we tend to believe? What might we have to face to acknowledge that we know, and have relationships with, people that sexually abuse children and that we might even love them? Why might it be worthwhile to face this fact? To end child sexual abuse, we must become willing to ask ourselves these questions and to act on what we know.

A common reaction that many of us have upon hearing the rates of child sexual abuse is to assume that these numbers don't apply to our

own communities or social group. In fact, in the U.S., child sexual abuse happens at relatively consistent rates across race, geography, class, gender, religious affiliation, and culture. **All children are vulnerable to child sexual abuse.**

At the same time, there are significant differences in impact and reporting based on social factors such as race, class, and national origin, due to patterns of oppression and discrimination against poor and working class families and communities of color.<sup>16</sup> What this means is that, while CSA occurs at similar rates across lines of race, class, and nationality, poor and working class families, particularly Black and brown families, are disproportionately the subjects of reports to child protective services,<sup>17</sup> investigations into allegations of child sexual abuse, charges, and prosecutions when compared with White families, and families with more financial access or wealth who are also impacted by sexual abuse.<sup>18</sup> These and other structural barriers, such as language access or immigration status, may also influence a family's or community's willingness to report experiences of child sexual abuse.<sup>19</sup>

In looking at the problem of child sexual abuse, it is important to understand the larger social context of power that creates and perpetuates this crisis. If we don't recognize and account for the broader systemic power relations that shape the problem, we run the risk of mistakenly presuming that sexual abuse only happens in certain communities. This conclusion reinforces abusive cycles of racism and class oppression while leaving many families and communities at risk of disregarding the realities of CSA within their own relationship networks.

An estimated 60 million people have survived child sexual abuse and are living with its often-devastating consequences for health and wellbeing.<sup>20</sup> For context, 60 million people is the equivalent of saying that every person in the states of New York, Florida, Illinois, Colorado,

Georgia, and Oregon had been sexually abused as a child. Or that 19% of the U.S. population or nearly 1 in 5 people are survivors of CSA. While it may be tempting to point the finger towards other communities and identity groups, saying "that doesn't happen in our community," we see that child sexual abuse occurs in all communities, and at similar rates.

**Most people know someone who has been sexually abused and, whether we are aware of it or not, most of us know someone who has sexually abused children.** This means each of us can play a role, either in maintaining the status quo or by taking actions to challenge the ongoing violence in our midst.

## CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

There are many variables that affect how child sexual abuse is defined across culture, and others that remain the same across cultures. Some of these variables are:

- Definitions of "child" and the age that defines "child"—for example, in some countries children are of marriageable age at 12 or 13 years old
- Definitions of sex and what is considered sexual behavior—for example, in many countries as well as for people with fewer resources within the U.S., a parent sharing a bed or even a shower with a child up to age 12 may not have sexual connotations, but it could trigger an investigation of child sexual abuse in the U.S.
- Legal and social understandings and interpretations of consent
- Age differences between the abusive person and the child
- Culturally specific ideas about and perceptions of abuse and sex

- Types of abuse
- The relationship between the abusive person and the child

Across cultures and countries, penetration or forced oral sex of a child by a parent or sibling is considered child sexual abuse.

## IMPACTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

*“Imagine a...disease that affects one in five girls and one in seven boys\* before they reach 18; a disease that can cause ... severe misconduct disorders among those exposed...can have profound implications for...future health by increasing the risk of problems such as substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and suicidal behavior; a disease that replicates itself by causing some of its victims to expose future generations...Imagine what we... would do... We would spare no expense. We would invest...in research. We would ...identify those affected and...treat them. We would...broadly implement prevention campaigns to protect our children. Wouldn't we? Such a disease does exist—it's called child sexual abuse.”*

*-James Mercy, M.D.,  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999<sup>21</sup>*

*\*conservative statistics based on reported cases of child sexual abuse.*

Child sexual abuse has difficult and lasting impacts that show up differently for different people. Survivors of CSA experience a wide range of responses to the abuse, from severe post-traumatic stress symptoms such as recurring nightmares and flashbacks to still

distressing, though less severe, forms of pain, stress, and confusion. Impacts of CSA can include dissociation or “checking out,” feeling isolated and alone, hypervigilance, distrust of self and others, a deep sense of being bad, wrong, worthless, and a difficulty or fear of intimacy and closeness with others.<sup>22</sup> These effects are not left in childhood. Rather, if left unaddressed and unhealed, many of these effects can last a lifetime, showing up through symptoms that are more and more disconnected from the original experiences.<sup>23</sup>

Many of us may feel confused when we encounter this information about child sexual abuse. If 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys experience sexual abuse, then huge swaths of the population and many people we know must be directly impacted in their families and in our communities. The very scope of the problem can make it hard to fathom what these statistics mean. It can be difficult to know how we should feel or what we should do about such a serious and far-reaching social problem.

Upon learning about child sexual abuse, many of us try to find some way to shrink the unbearable reality into something more manageable. Most of us tend to go back and forth between two beliefs: either (a) child sexual abuse is absolutely devastating—and it must not happen as often as these statistics say, or (b) it must not be *that* bad if so many people have experienced it and are surviving it “just fine.” Emotionally, we can understand these reactions as ways to try to tolerate information that overwhelms our sense of reality. Often, our perception of the harm of child sexual abuse gets adjusted in relation to our sense of its prevalence—we minimize either the harm or the prevalence to make the picture more bearable. This tendency to minimize intends to protect us from things that we do not know how to deal with. While this strategy is useful, it has a cost. Building our capacity to stay present with feelings, ideas, and information that challenge our understanding of ourselves and the world around

us is a necessary practice for addressing child sexual abuse.

Children are deeply harmed by witnessing and/or experiencing violence. These impacts are often more severe if their parents, family members, or caregivers are involved. For children, the possible impacts of child sexual abuse include<sup>24</sup>:

- **Physical harm:** a child may experience harm, and even death, either directly through physical violence that the child experiences, or through resisting violence being done to a parent, sibling, or someone else. Physical warning signs of sexual abuse are extremely rare, however children who are sexually abused may develop urinary problems, yeast infections, or in some cases experience pain, bleeding, or discharge of the genitals. Physical harm can also result from changes in a child's eating habits, or through self-harming behaviors. Research on the longer-term impacts of CSA suggest that sexual abuse may also increase an individual's risk of several chronic health conditions.<sup>25 26</sup>
- **Emotional harm:** CSA creates profound emotional harm to children, both through direct emotional targeting of the child (being coerced, manipulated, humiliated, etc.), and through ongoing feelings of danger and worry, confusing feelings of fear and love towards those doing harm, as well as confusing feelings of love, disappointment in, or disrespect for those being harmed. This can also include mistrust of self and others, and a profound mistrust of relationship.

Most people who sexually abuse children cultivate some level of trust with the child to make sure they will comply and not tell. This can include asking children to keep secrets with them, giving them gifts, or making them feel special. As a result, many children experience a profound sense of confusion and isolation after being abused, which over time can become worry, self-doubt, anger, sadness,

depression, self-harm, illness, disconnection from one's body, and a pervasive sense of fear, shame, and aloneness.

Many people who sexually abuse children also, or instead, use spoken and unspoken threats to ensure that the child is under their control. Even long after the abuse has ended, some survivors carry a deep feeling of shame, in part because this manipulation is intended to make the child feel like they "allowed" the abuse to happen, or that it was their fault.

- **Increased vulnerability** to experience further harm, including sexual abuse, community violence, and substance abuse. Exposure to violence can also create an increased vulnerability to self-harm, including cutting or other self-injury, and addictive behaviors.
- **Increased likelihood of engaging in behaviors that are harmful to others**, including other children, pets or other animals.
- **An unreasonable sense of responsibility** for the child to comfort or protect others from harm, including siblings, parents, or others—even the person that abused them.
- **Longer-lasting impacts to physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and sexual well-being and relationship.**

When no one around a child speaks of child sexual abuse, intervenes, or takes accountability, it can leave the survivor with confusion, mistrust, fear and/or an aversion towards family, home, love, and community. Close relationship may come to feel dangerous. Love, affection, and healthy sexuality can easily become confused with violence and harm. CSA can create deeply held beliefs that no one in our family or community will intervene or speak out to prevent violence, or protect us from violence. These experiences can also create a lasting belief that violence is how to get what one wants.

As a result, many survivors experience distrust of themselves and others, along with shame,

anger, grief, betrayal, a sense of having lost themselves or of being “tainted,” and persistent low self-esteem. Many report a higher use of numbing devices including drugs and alcohol, and lots of confusion with boundaries and safety. Without loving attention, meaningful support, and opportunities for healing, these struggles can grow and become defining aspects of our lives.

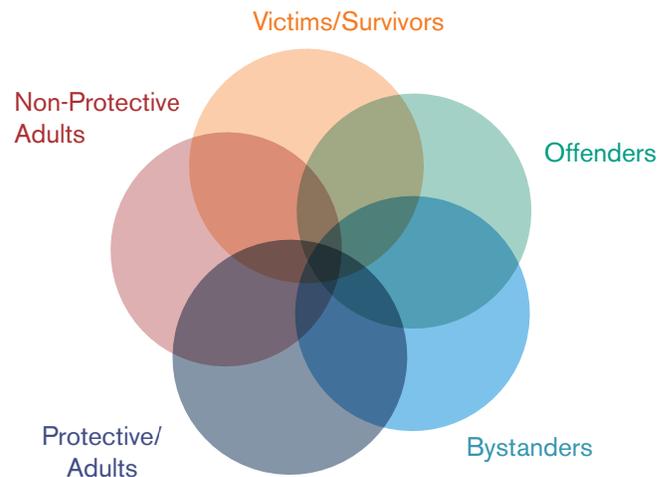
**We find great hope in the knowledge that many survivors have healed from the impacts of CSA.** While it isn’t possible for survivors to go back in time and make the abuse not happen, or to ever entirely be the person that we were before the abuse happened, it is possible, with loving care and skillful attention, to relearn boundaries and choices, to reclaim our bodies and sexuality, and to trust other humans again. It is possible to feel whole, to have hope, and to create a life and relationships that are not defined by the abuses.<sup>27</sup>

At the broader levels of community and society, we also see that having a supportive family and/or community that can acknowledge the abuse without shaming or blaming the victim can make a profound difference in the healing process. Children who receive support from a non-offending parent or from other protective adults seem to fare better, despite the negative impacts of the abuse.<sup>28</sup>

While the research on resilience factors that support healing from child sexual abuse is still in its early stages, initial findings<sup>29</sup> reflect what many organizations and individuals working with survivors have been saying for years: When the person who has been sexually abusive is able to take accountability for their actions and to make meaningful reparations, greater healing is possible for everyone involved. Furthermore, when there are opportunities for survivors to connect with others to share their experiences, to speak out against abuse, and to take actions towards ending violence in their community, the

long-term harms of child sexual abuse can be significantly reduced.

## ROLES WITHIN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



On the rare occasion when child sexual abuse is talked about, the conversation usually focuses entirely on the person abusing a child and/or children, and the child or children experiencing abuse. What often gets left out in this discussion is how many people are involved in, and play a role in child sexual abuse: people who are harmed, people who perpetuate the sexual abuse of children, and the many people who are positioned to respond to or prevent it.

Whether we’re talking about abuse that happened many years ago, a current experience of CSA, or preventing further incidences, understanding these different roles is an important step toward determining options. Some questions that can help us identify the people in these roles are:

1. Who was hurt or needs safety?
2. Who can intervene? How can they intervene, given their relationships and roles within the community?

3. How might they be able to intervene most effectively?
4. Who did the harm? How willing are they to change or be accountable?
5. What community engagement or organizing can help change the broader social fabric that allows for CSA?

**Note:** Throughout this document, we will refer to people by the role they played in the abuse, rather than the traditional references of abuser, victim, etc. The latter reduces people to their actions, and does not acknowledge that often people who have caused harm have also been victims of harm. These roles are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. People in any of these roles can also become active in acting with other people to respond to, prevent, educate, and organize to end child sexual abuse.

***People who are victims of abuse:***

This term is used to refer to people who are currently being violated. For people who have been violated and feel that they were or remain a victim of the experience. It is also used to acknowledge people who did not survive the violence they experienced.

***People who are survivors of abuse:***

The term “survivor” is often used by the sexual assault movement and other activists. It is used by and to refer to people who have experienced abuse, and who choose to identify with the fact that they survived. People who have experienced CSA may or may not want to identify as a survivor. Some may choose to identify neither as victim nor survivor, but simply as someone who experienced abuse.

***People who have caused harm:***

This term is used to refer to people who have violated others. There are many variables in how people offend, including the level of violence, whether the violence was a single occurrence or has been repeated, whether the exchange of

money or profit was a part of the violation, and the likelihood of re-offense.

***Bystanders:***

The term “bystanders” refers to people who are not immediately involved in a situation but could be engaged to prevent or respond to child sexual abuse and become allies. This can include other family members or members of a community.

**We see the role of bystander as critical in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse effectively.** When we consider how many people are needed to truly transform the social conditions that permit child sexual abuse, we see bystanders as key if we are going to generate the collective force that we need to end the sexual abuse of children.

***Non-protective Bystanders:***

This term refers to the subset of bystanders who do not act protectively: adults who are unable or unwilling to act to protect a child or intervene when the child is experiencing CSA.

***Protective Bystanders:***

This term refers to bystanders who act protectively: adults who act to protect a child, who intervene in cases of CSA, and who take actions to address the conditions that create and perpetuate violence.

It is important to note that a bystander’s intent and impact may be different. A bystander may *intend* to be protective, but the impact of their actions can be non-protective. For example, even if a bystander intends to protect a survivor through vigilantism (seeking out the person who caused harm and attacking or punishing them), it may result in more harm toward the survivor, or not be aligned with their wishes or values. Outing them (disclosing about the abuse without the survivor’s consent) may also result in more harm for the survivor, and can reinforce an experience of disempowerment.

Parents, guardians, and extended family are very

important bystanders in the lives of children. They can be the first to identify if something is happening for their children and, with support and resources, can meaningfully respond. They are also often the main source of resilience for their children.

As parents or guardians of children, we cannot always control what experiences children have. And while the extent to which parents have control is greatly limited by broader social and material conditions, all parents, guardians, and family can support their children's healing and resilience following negative experiences.

Adults can also prepare children through our protective responses, by unlearning oppressive ways of relating to children and young people, and in learning ways to empower the children in our lives by supporting their voices and teaching them empowering skills, such as trusting their intuition and knowing whom in their lives they can go to for help.

## WHO SEXUALLY ABUSES CHILDREN?

In many ways, people who have caused harm are the most focused-upon and the least understood role in incidences of abuse and violence, particularly child sexual abuse. In part, we see this pattern as the natural byproduct of the prevailing myth about CSA: that only monstrous people abuse children, and that if only “we” found and got rid of “them,” we could rest assured that children would no longer be sexually abused.

In fact, we know that child sexual abuse is committed by many kinds of people—including members of our communities who are respected and liked by many people. Perhaps we ourselves, at some point, have been concerned or felt unsure about our behaviors with a child. Recent research shows us that a very broad range of adults perpetrate sexual abuse, which makes it

difficult to come up with any single profile (or set of trackable behaviors and/or demographics) of a child sexual offender.<sup>30</sup>

If you looked at a graph that charted the profile and demographics of child sexual offenders in the United States, it would match the profile and demographics of the average adult man in the country. This does not mean that every man in the U.S. is sexually abusing children. Rather, it underscores the fact that a wide range of people commit sexual abuse. While some women also sexually abuse,<sup>31</sup> the vast majority of people who sexually abuse children are adult men.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond these basic statistics, the existing research is very clear that there is significant variation among people who abuse children sexually. Differences in factors such as age, social history, attitudes toward sexuality, criminal background, and sexual arousal vary considerably among people who commit sexual abuse. There is also great deal of variation in how sexual offenses against children are perpetrated. This includes the type of relationship that someone cultivates with a child, the methods used to avoid detection, and the degree of “intrusiveness” of the offense.<sup>33</sup> What this means is that there is no easy or stereotypical way to identify or require sexual offenders to access support and treatment.

Furthermore, thirty to fifty percent of those who sexually abuse a child are children or adolescents themselves.<sup>34</sup> As with adults, multiple factors contribute to an adolescent or a child sexually abusing another child. Adolescents and children are more likely to abuse younger children, and while some youth will continue to sexually abuse others into adulthood, treatment programs have been shown to effectively reduce sexual re-offense. Adolescents are more likely than adults to stop their abusive behaviors and live safely in the community.<sup>35</sup>

Another common stereotype is that all adults who sexually abuse children are pedophiles, people

whose main sexual attraction is to children under the age of puberty. This stereotype suggests that there is a specific group of adults who seek out sex with children, and that these people are different from adults who have sexual relations with other adults. This is not the case.

Professionals who work with sexual offenders sometimes place offenders into two broad categories: “repeat offenders” and what they refer to as “opportunistic” or “situational offenders.” Repeat offenders are adults who repeatedly seek out children to sexually abuse, and often these offenders are pedophiles. But most of the adults who sexually abuse children are not pedophiles, and the vast majority are situational offenders.

Situational offenders are those adults who abuse children in the context of a specific opportunity. These offenders mostly abuse children within their immediate family or network, and most do not show a broader sexual interest in children. Many situational offenders have ongoing sexual relations with adults, and sexually abuse children.

There is still much that we do not know about the complex interplay of socialization, biology, emotional development, and other factors that contribute to someone sexually abusing a child. Studies of incarcerated offenders show high levels of neglect, exposure to violence, humiliation, and other forms of abuse.<sup>36</sup> Men with histories of child sexual abuse are more likely to perpetrate it than women with histories of child sexual abuse.<sup>37</sup> This difference also presses us to consider the impacts of social norms and gender training on creating the conditions for violence and harm.

CSA is bound up with homophobia and violence against queer communities. Gay and queer men are consistently targeted as pedophiles, and LGBTQ people in general are targeted as sexual “deviants.” In addition to targeting of queer and trans parents and families, the “deviance” label is used to prevent healthy relationships between queer adults and children through social stigma

and discrimination against schoolteachers, boy and girl scout leaders, and other youth providers who are identified as not-heterosexual. The overarching lack of sex education in U.S. society, never mind developmentally appropriate, sex-positive, LGBTQ-inclusive sex education can also leave lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer children and youth particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and targeting.

## “BUT WHY WOULD SOMEONE SEXUALLY ABUSE A CHILD?”

There are no simple explanations for why someone sexually abuses a child. It is a diverse group of individuals who sexually abuse children, with a wide range of motivations. To answer “why” we must look at multiple factors, including their individual makeup and personal history, the relationships and community surrounding the sexual abuse, and the societal beliefs and norms within which child sexual abuse is rampant.

This hyper-focus on “the monsters” does a disservice to all of us—it severely limits our collective ability to accurately perceive warning signs of abuse. It immobilizes people who abuse from taking responsibility for their action out of a fear of being rejected and ostracized as monsters. And, it keeps us from engaging in the challenging and rewarding work of building child-affirming family and community cultures, and challenging the social conditions that promote “power over” (domination and exploitation) rather than “power with.”

We must continue to develop our capacity to fathom that people we know and respect may be sexually abusing children. We must continue to develop our capacities to prioritize safety, accountability, and healing amidst seemingly overwhelming impulses to lash out or shut down or disconnect. And we must continue to cultivate the hope that there is another way.

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## SECTION TWO

# WHAT ALLOWS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TO CONTINUE?

**A**s we face the staggering prevalence and impact of CSA, many of us may find ourselves asking: “How can this be happening?” “How can we be letting this happen?” Given the sweeping nature of the problem, there are many answers to these questions. Different interpretations, analyses, and schools of thought on what causes child sexual abuse each produce different strategies for intervention. In order for us to build enough power together to truly end child sexual abuse, we believe that it is essential to develop more shared analysis about what allows CSA to continue.

Child sexual abuse is not just an individual issue, though it has a deep and unique impact on us as individuals. And while CSA causes trauma and lasting psychological impacts on people, we do not see it primarily as a mental health issue. We also don't see child sexual abuse as primarily a criminal or legal issue to be solved through the protection and punishment promised by criminal legal systems.

We see child sexual abuse as an expression of power dynamics that are woven throughout the fabric of our society. We live within social conditions that create countless opportunities for objectification, violence, and abuse to occur unchecked. CSA is one of many harms caused by systems of oppression, domination, and exploitation. It also supports these systems,

perpetuating the exact dynamics that allow children to be sexually abused.

**We see ending child sexual abuse as a struggle for collective liberation, and one that asks us to take up personal, community, and social transformation as interdependent parts of a larger struggle.**



One essential aspect of this struggle is that we have to confront how we teach children that their feelings, needs, and preferences don't matter. When a child is told to "stop being rude," when they protest at being told to greet an uncle with a hug, or are instructed to go sit on a grandparent's lap, they receive the message that it is more important to do what grown-ups say than to trust their own feelings. While many of us may have come to view this as "just part of being a kid," we see that taken together, these moments make children still more vulnerable to the exploitation of sexual abuse.

Examples like these are commonplace in our families and communities. Moreover, the premise: that young people cannot know what is right for them, is built into the structures of our society. While it is a fact that children are physiologically, emotionally and socially dependent on adults and require support, guidance and education in order to make healthy choices, children and young people possess a far greater capacity for self-determination than they are permitted to exercise.

In [Helping Teens Stop Violence, Build Community and Stand for Justice](#), youth educators Allan Creighton and Paul Kivel write:

*"When you think back to your years as a young person, you probably recall how much you wanted to do and how little power you had to do it. You wanted to go places you couldn't, and you wanted to do things you weren't supposed to do. You wanted to affect and change your school, your community, or your neighborhood, and you weren't able to. You most likely did not have the money, transportation, friends, influence or credibility to make a difference... [P]robably few adults listened to you, allowed you to participate, trusted you, or even really noticed you and your fellow young people.*

*[...W]hen adults systematically don't listen to you or allow you to participate in meaningful decisions, your sense of self-worth deteriorates. When they grade you continually on something like your academic performance, your concept of your own value can hinge on that opinion, too. If, on top of this, they belittle, randomly punish, or molest you, your self-esteem can plummet, your level of delinquency might soar...you might feel alienated or pushed toward doing whatever you need to survive.<sup>1</sup>"*

This pervasive pattern of children and youth being denied the right to exercise self-determination is called **adulthoodism**. It means the everyday, systematic, and institutionalized ways that young people are prohibited from making choices about their own lives, and instead adults decide most aspects of young people's lives, including where they go, whom they see, how they dress, and how they socialize. These choices are further limited by the impacts of racism, gender discrimination, class inequality, and ableism. Youth of color are regularly subjected to disciplinary actions that are grossly disproportionate to white peers engaging in the same behaviors; girls are prevented from accessing equal academic, employment, athletic, and creative opportunities; transgender and gender non-conforming youth face routine bullying, targeting, and harassment; youth in poor and working class communities lack access to the same quality of food, education, and healthcare that their wealthier peers maintain; and youth with disabilities are often isolated from their peers, segregated into separate institutions, and systematically denied access to participate as equal members in social, public, and political life.

*“Childhood is the one political condition, the one disenfranchised group through which all people pass. The one constituency of the oppressed in which all surviving members eventually stop being members and have the option of becoming administrators of the same conditions for new members.”*

— Aurora Levins Morales,  
*Medicine Stories*<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the devastating impacts of disempowerment to a young person’s wellbeing, one of the most destructive effects of adultism is the way that it conditions each successive generation to accept an adult world built on systems of injustice and oppression.<sup>3</sup>

## DEFINING OPPRESSION

Oppression systemically grants power to some people over others, concentrating power and privilege into the hands of the few rather than all. The institutions, rules, and practices of our society all reinforce this dynamic of who is valuable and who is not.

We are living within social, economic, and political systems that fundamentally operate on a premise of “power-over.” By power-over, we mean that our world gets divided into those individuals or groups who are considered valid, real, worthy, and human and those that are considered less valuable, unimportant, or not-fully-human based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, dis/ability, religion, and age. For many children, sexual abuse is part of our process of socialization into a power-over worldview. This

worldview is also a critical part of the system that allows child sexual abuse and other forms of violence to continue.

One way we can think about this is by considering who gets to exercise self-determination within a society, and who does not. The term “agency” can be useful in talking about these differences: Agents are people who are in charge of themselves. They are able to take action in their world, experience reasonable consequences for their actions, learn from those consequences, and then act again.<sup>4</sup> Another way of saying it is that agency means getting to be the author of your own life, rather than an object in someone else’s story.

To illustrate this, let’s say that a student receives a low or failing grade on a test. Reasonable consequences for getting a low grade might include:

- a. The student feeling disappointed, frustrated or guilty.
- b. The student’s teacher asking the child what happened.
- c. The teacher reaching out to the student’s parents or caregivers.
- d. The adults in the student’s life asking them what study support they need.

Any of these consequences could help the student reflect on the circumstances that led to the low grade. “Did they prepare for the test, or blow off studying?” “Were they stressed or distracted by something else?” “Did they need extra support before the test?” “Was there anything about the testing conditions that made it difficult to think or work?”

Unreasonable consequences, on the other hand, might include:

- a. Being humiliated by a teacher, other students, or a parent.
- b. Witnessing the adults having an explosive

argument or blaming one another for the child's low grade.

- c. Being physically punished.
- d. Being offered no attention or acknowledgment of the low grade at all by the adults in their life.

As a result of these latter consequences, the child may be left with the sense that it is not safe or okay to receive a low grade. They may feel that there is something wrong with them, or come to fear the impacts that their school performance might have on family dynamics.

If it was a one-time occurrence, we might say the student could dismiss the unreasonable consequences as disproportionate. However, if this is an ongoing part of their life, particularly if they are vulnerable or isolated, these types of consequences can leave a person profoundly disconnected from their own process of growth, as more and more of their attention, effort, and life-force goes towards trying to avoid the pain of these consequences.

Oppression functions as a much broader version of this same dynamic impacting entire societies. If we look at who has access to shelter, food, education, and healthcare within the US—or look even closer to observe the treatment that individuals experience within social systems (i.e. hospitals, courts, schools, the military, and public assistance, etc.), we come to see that there are profound inequalities in the distribution of resources. This inequality follows a consistent pattern according to race, class, gender, dis/ability, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and religion. In studying these patterns, we can see that entire groups of people are consistently subjected to unreasonable consequences, simply for existing.<sup>5</sup>

Groups that are systemically overvalued and privileged have greater access to social, financial, and institutional power. This power and privilege enhances one's chances of getting what they need in order to lead a fulfilling and healthy life

with the possibility for a positive future. We see eight consistent systems of oppression, or patterns of power-over, that define contemporary life in the United States according to:

- Race
- Age
- Economic Class
- Religion
- Gender
- Dis/ability
- Sexual Orientation
- Nationality/Immigration Status

While each system of oppression is different, all of these systems share several characteristics:<sup>6</sup>

- *Oppression grants some systemic power.* Within each system of oppression, one group has greater resources, mobility, and decision-making based on their membership within the privileged social group. Oppression concentrates resources, wealth, and power into smaller and smaller percentages of the population.
- *Oppression is perpetuated by a process of socialization.* Each of us is born without prejudice into a world that teaches us to discriminate against others and to accept an oppressive system.
- *Oppression is pervasive.* We find the term “oppression” useful, rather than prejudice or bigotry, because it highlights the ways that these social inequalities are woven throughout the fabric of our entire society and not just individual attitudes. The idea that one group is better than another group gets embedded in the institutions of the society—laws, public policies, policing, the educational system and in hiring policies, media images, social norms, etc.<sup>7</sup>
- *Oppression is restrictive.* On the most basic level, oppression blocks individuals,

families, or communities access to resources and possibilities. Social justice educators Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin write: “Oppression restricts both self-development and self-determination.”<sup>8</sup>

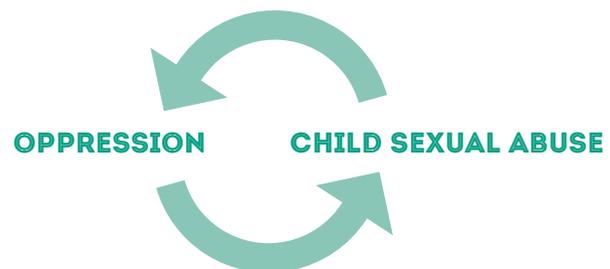
- *Oppression is hierarchical.* Oppression creates and recreates which groups of people are “better-than” and which groups are “less-than” - some people are more intelligent, harder working, stronger, more capable, more honest, more deserving, more advanced, chosen, and superior, etc. The dominant groups hold this idea about themselves, and the opposite qualities are attributed to other groups—stupid, lazy, weak, incompetent, worthless, less deserving, backward, and inferior, etc. These hierarchies allow dominant or privileged groups to exploit and take advantage of oppressed groups, often in unconscious ways.
- *Oppression is intersectional.* Because each of us is a member of multiple social groups, our access to power and privilege is complex. Sometimes we have access to power based on parts of our identities and social location and experience discrimination based on others.
- *Oppression gets in us. It becomes internalized.* Oppression doesn’t only exist in external social institutions and practices, it also gets lodged in our bodies and psyches. We have been told that we are worthless, unintelligent, and incapable of achievement throughout our lives, it is not surprising that we would come to believe it. This belief is painful, and has harmful impacts to our bodies, minds, emotions, spirits, and relationships.

## OPPRESSION AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In looking at the problem of child sexual abuse, we see an interdependent relationship between each of these systems of oppression and CSA.

The conditions of oppression make children vulnerable to sexual abuse and, at the same time, the fear and threat of sexual abuse is used to maintain these systems of oppression. For example, because current social conditions dictate rigid gender roles for all people, and normalize homophobic violence, many LGBTQ youth experience rejection from their families and social isolation from their peers. This lack of acceptance and belonging can make gender-nonconforming young people particularly vulnerable to attention and interest from adults who intend to sexually abuse. Furthermore, a common manifestation of homophobia is the stereotype that LGBTQ sexual and gender identity is “caused” by childhood experiences of sexual abuse. While CSA does impact peoples’ sexualities, it does not “make” people queer. The percentages of survivors, people who sexually abuse children, and bystanders within LGBTQ communities are similar to the percentages within heterosexual communities.

At the same time, LGBTQ and gender nonconforming adults have consistently been labeled “deviant,” and denied roles that involve working with children, such as schoolteachers, boy and girl scout leaders, and other youth provider roles. While it has been statistically shown that it is largely heterosexual men who end up serially sexually abusing prepubescent girls and boys, there is significantly more tracking, surveillance and prosecution of gay men. Similar targeting happens with men of color around all forms of sexual violence.



The relationships between CSA and each system of oppression are wide-ranging and co-

dependent. The most extreme systems responses to CSA, within both public and criminal legal systems, are reserved for poor people, communities of color, and immigrant communities who lack access to other kinds of advocacy and support services. These communities are also heavily policed and targeted in the name of maintaining “quality of life” for middle-class and wealthier communities. Examples of this include laws that charge people with sexual offenses for urinating in public. People who are homeless and have no other options for accessing a bathroom are more likely to be charged with these “crimes”. Laws such as these use the fear of sexual violence to target people without resources.

## ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

We live within an economic system of capitalism, within which natural resources (including land and human labor) are used in order to produce profits for those who control these resources. Under capitalism, children are widely considered the property of their parents and/or caregivers. While social narratives and laws about children have changed considerably over time, adults can still exploit children through different forms of sexual abuse ranging from prostitution to pornography. Global sex trafficking of children is a growing and blatantly advertised example of the sexual objectification of children. One count conservatively estimates that more than 200,000 children are sexually trafficked in the United States annually<sup>9</sup>, and the US Department of Justice estimates that somewhere between 100,000 to 3 million children are sexually exploited in the US alone. The domination at the heart of child sexual abuse is rooted in a system of economic exploitation that treats human life as a commodity and which encourages the exploitation and control of a person’s body for another’s use. To end CSA, we must consider what types of economic and political structures support and value the dignity of all people.

## WHITE SUPREMACY

Looking historically, we see that the sexual abuse of children has been used for centuries in service of genocide, colonization, and slavery. The arrival of colonial settlers on the land that became the United States of America marked the beginning of centuries of ongoing systemic violence towards the indigenous, Native, and First Nations inhabitants. Numerous accounts document the ways that White settlers intentionally used sexual violence in order to assert dominion over the people and places they invaded. Current-day statistics on rates of CSA for indigenous and Native youth indicate that these patterns of violence continue unabated.<sup>10</sup>

The legacy of slavery within the United States, and the ongoing exploitation and objectification of Black people in the U.S. serve as a constant reminder that the State “must be seen as a primary perpetrator of violence, rather than as a solution to ending violence.”<sup>11</sup> Documenting the historic legacy and contemporary experiences of African American women surviving sexual violence, researchers Shaquita Tillman, Thema Bryant-Davis, Kimberly Smith and Alison Marks write:

*“African American female sexual victimization perpetrated by White men was first initiated during the middle passage, continued unrestricted during the slave era, the quasislave systems of sharecropping and Jim Crow, and interracial and intraracial rape persists into the present day. During the slave era, rape and sexual exploitation were used as a means to dominate and oppress enslaved African females; the sexual victimization of African American women was legal and deemed justified by their status as property of the plantation owner.”<sup>12</sup>*

This legacy of State-sanctioned rape and sexual violation of African American women continues in multiple forms today.<sup>13</sup>

In studying enslavement, war, and missionary expeditions, we see that invading armies, missionaries, and colonial settlers have sexually abused children as part of conquering groups of people. Controlling children's bodies is one way to assert power over the future of a people. In this light, we can understand that any strategy to reduce or eliminate violence within a community can be linked to strategies to eliminate violence against these communities—including State violence such as policing, criminalization, economic exploitation, militarism, racism, and colonialism.

## MALE SUPREMACY

*“Violence against women, contempt for women’s intellectual lives, the devaluing of women’s work, and fear of both our sexuality and our spirituality are so historically pervasive that they have been, to a large degree, normalized.”*

— *Aurora Levins Morales,*  
*Medicine Stories*<sup>14</sup>

Child sexual abuse is driven in part by histories and practices of male supremacy and sexual violence. Sexual desire is frequently characterized as something that men cannot control. Furthermore, the norms of heterosexual patriarchy grant men access to the bodies of women and children. The perceived sense of entitlement to sexual gratification that boys and men are socialized into is directly connected to child sexual abuse.

The impacts of child sexual abuse on adult women survivors further emphasize the impacts of male supremacy: women with a history of sexual abuse are two to four times as likely to experience sexual assault during adulthood. Among women with substance abuse problems, up to 90 percent have a history of child sexual abuse,<sup>15</sup> and 69% of female prisoners in one prison survey reported sexual abuse in their childhood.<sup>16</sup>

Looking at these figures through the lens of male supremacy and class oppression-- *while holding a critique of cultural stereotypes about substance use, imprisonment, and sex work* -- it seems evident that the impact of child sexual abuse not only takes power away from people early on in their lives, but that it can also keep them from accessing their power throughout their lives.

## ABLEISM

Child sexual abuse is also woven in with the systemic targeting of people who live with physical, cognitive, psychological, and learning disabilities. Broadly, people with disabilities are sexually assaulted at nearly three times the rate of people without disabilities, and disabled children and adults are twice as likely to be victims of child sexual abuse.<sup>17</sup> Activists within the disability justice movement have also pointed out that by focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities, we must also grapple with the ways that “child” gets defined. People with developmental disabilities are often described as “children” or in terms like “She’s 23 but, developmentally, she’s an eight-year-old.” The fact that people with developmental disabilities experience far higher rates of sexual abuse, at all ages, than people without disabilities underscores the interlocking nature of ableism, adultism, and abuse.

*“Most of us learn from very young to ignore our own needs and desires—are socialized into domination before we have language or consciousness to resist: “What better way to maintain a power structure—white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, a binary and rigid gender system—than to drill the lessons of who is dominant and subordinate into the bodies of children.”*

*— Eli Clare, Exile and Pride<sup>18</sup>*

Child sexual abuse is early training in how to submit to, carry out, or collude with domination. This training, compounded by other forms of internalized oppression, can leave survivors with a pervasive shame that can compromise a sense of power, agency, or self-determination.

These intersecting oppressions highlight the need for us to address individual incidents of CSA as well as broader, systemic conditions. Oppression relies on inaction. It requires that we throw up our hands and see ourselves as helpless. It asks us to direct our frustrations with the existing system at those with less power than we have.

The daily realities of violence and oppression in our society can make it difficult for many people and communities to envision and create a more life-affirming world. One of the greatest thefts of oppression and trauma is the limitations it puts on our human capacity to imagine. In order to heal enough to believe that another world is possible, we need different ways of healing and responding to the impacts of violence and abuse in our communities and society.

For any of us who believe in social justice and the transformation of society, we know that we also have to be able to confront the structures of institutional power in order to shift conditions. We see this as a potent historical moment, and believe we have profound opportunities to innovate and experiment with meaningful responses to violence.

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## SECTION THREE

# WHY DO WE KEEP DOING SO MANY THINGS THAT DON'T WORK?

### CURRENT INTERVENTIONS TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**W**hen we look at the options that we, and our communities, have to respond to violence, we see a painfully narrow set of choices. Most state and federal law and policy interventions essentially reinforce the belief that child sexual abuse is inevitable, and that the only possible outcomes are “incarceration, punishment without rehabilitation, ostracization, and shame for everyone involved.”<sup>1</sup>

### CRIMINALIZATION

*“This basic contradiction between who the state is set up to protect and who it is set up to harm forms the backdrop...”*

*– Morgan Bassichis, in “Rethinking Queer & Trans Safety” from The Revolution Starts at Home<sup>2</sup>*

For the most part, people are told that when they encounter child sexual abuse, they should turn to the institutions of the State, such as the criminal legal system (including cops, courts, parole) and the child welfare system (which includes

mandatory reporting, Child Protective Services, and foster care). However, while laws prohibiting child sexual abuse have existed in the US since the 1800s, these laws do little to actually stop child sexual abuse from happening.<sup>3</sup> Like most legislation, these laws have a mainly retributive function, meaning no action is taken on the law until it has been broken, which is to say, until after a child has already experienced sexual abuse.



This is one of several reasons that we say the criminal legal system is not set up to prevent child sexual abuse.

Because of the often-close relationship between the person who cause the harm of the sexual abuse and the victim of the abuse, most cases of child sexual abuse don't ever enter into the legal system. Many people are reluctant to report child sexual abuse to the authorities, and when they do, cases involving incest or abuse by a family member are unlikely to be prosecuted.<sup>4</sup> Only 12% of all estimated child sexual abuse cases go through the legal system.<sup>5</sup>

Though these systems have been growing in size and reach in recent decades, rates of child sexual abuse remain at epidemic levels. In fact, some research suggests that the legal trend over the last decades towards more severe criminal sentencing has made communities more reluctant to turn to these systems for help when they are experiencing CSA.<sup>6</sup>

Within these systems, courts are ill equipped to work with the complex dynamics of CSA and dynamics of trauma and power, particularly within family and custody cases. Judges and court personnel lack training on abuse, and are often unskilled in engaging with children's allegations of abuse, particularly allegations of sexual abuse despite numerous national studies indicating that false allegations of sexual abuse in custody cases are extremely rare.<sup>7</sup> Families and communities often end up trading intimate violence for the violence of the system. Oftentimes, in cases when law enforcement or child welfare are involved, there is very little "permissible evidence" to prove that the incident occurred, which leaves survivors and families in exactly the same situation, except that now the person who experienced the abuse may be vulnerable to even greater harm as a result of an investigation (such as increased abuse, intimidation, threats, and silencing). In cases where law enforcement and child welfare do intervene in a family, families are often torn

apart, which may leave remaining members in a more precarious position.

These dynamics often result in victims being further traumatized by the legal process when cases do enter the legal system.<sup>8</sup> People who have sexually abused children rarely receive treatment and families frequently do not feel served by the experience. Rarely, if ever, do these responses produce healing, true accountability, or transformation. These approaches also fail to ask about or address the root causes of CSA. In 2016, the Alliance for Safety and Justice conducted the first-ever national survey of victims' views on safety and justice and report that crime victims overwhelmingly said they support spending money on treatment and crime prevention rather than on prisons and jails.<sup>9</sup>

## INCARCERATION

One of the primary solutions offered by State systems to address the problem of child sexual abuse has been to increase incarceration rates and terms for sexual offenders—to arrest more people who are found to be sexually abusing children, and to keep them in prison for longer. On the one hand, we see this as an understandable impulse. Like domestic violence and other forms of abuse, child sexual abuse has not always been taken seriously by the police or by the courts, and it can be affirming to have something as "official" as a law to point to as a consequence for violent or harmful behavior. Some victim advocacy groups feel that increasing the legal penalties for child sexual abuse would help to prevent the problem, sending a strong message to potential offenders that the U.S. has zero tolerance for child sexual abuse.

From our view however, locking up people who abuse children will not ultimately solve the problem of child sexual abuse. For one, the reality and scope of child sexual abuse is just too big and it is not a feasible solution to put everyone

who has sexually abused a child in jail. More importantly, putting people in jail and prison has proven to be unsuccessful in preventing abuse, changing behavior, or making restitution to those impacted by child sexual abuse.

When we look at the outcomes produced through criminalization and incarceration we see that far from supporting accountability, treatment, and healing, the prison system consistently creates further harm to individuals, families, communities, and society, particularly young people, people of color, queer people, women, poor people, political dissenters, and immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Stable housing, consistent legal ways to make a living, enough food, and education have all been shown to work to make individuals and communities stronger.<sup>11</sup> Yet government resources continue to be funneled into a prison system, which puts people in jail or prison rather than offering treatment, which isolates and abuses people, rather than supporting them to change their behavior and take accountability.

Stricter sentencing threatens to drive child sexual abuse more underground leaving offenders, victims, and impacted communities without effective means of intervention. When the only option families have is to turn to the State and conventional criminal justice systems, there is a significant chance that justice will remain unattainable. In general, we see that people impacted by child sexual abuse are more willing to use options that do not immediately criminalize the offender.

While we believe that it is crucial to develop robust processes for accountability that stop abuse and offer effective solutions to victims and families, we do not believe that a criminal justice approach can achieve these goals.

## SEX OFFENDER REGISTRIES & COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION

Another proposed solution to the problem of child sexual abuse has been the formation of The National Sex Offender Registry that was created out of Megan's Law named after a girl who was kidnapped, raped, and murdered by a man named Jesse Timmendequas, (a stranger to the family) who had been in prison for prior sex offenses.<sup>12</sup> Her family organized for this law because they felt they had no information by which to protect their daughter or to know that someone who had previously been incarcerated for sexual abuse had moved close to their neighborhood.

Most adults who are sent to jail for sexual abuses are eventually released back into the community. As a result of this law, people who have been convicted of sexual abuse are required, upon release, to register as a sex offender, and their record is made public nationally through the National Sex Offender Registry. These records are available to the public through community police stations, libraries, and via the Internet. Some county fairs host a booth with a sex offender registry.<sup>13</sup> People who have records as previous sex offenders remain in the directory indeterminately, even after their sentence has been served. As of 2015, over 740,000 people living in communities throughout the United States were registered as "sex offenders."<sup>14</sup>

Multiple studies have now demonstrated that the National Sex Offender Registry does little, if anything, to reduce rates of sexual abuse.<sup>15</sup> For one, only people convicted for sex offenses are included in the sex offender registry. The majority of people who sexually abuse children never come in contact with the criminal legal system. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence that in practice, these registries are consistently used to further criminalize and marginalize communities of color, poor people, and youth. When

individuals are convicted as sex offenders for public urination, consensual sex between minors, or “sexting,” they encounter the same stigma and barriers to housing and employment as individuals who have been sexually violent or abusive.

Perhaps more significantly, research indicates that the isolation of people who sexually abuse is a key factor in re-offending (called recidivism).<sup>16</sup> People who have been incarcerated for sexually abusing children are not prepared for their release into a community as a registered sex offender, and communities are not prepared for someone who has been sexually abusive to move into their community. Oftentimes, this creates a set-up for failure.<sup>17</sup> Individuals or communities who discover that someone is registered as a sex offender in their community are not offered resources or any kind of orientation as to how to respond to this information. If the person who is or was abusive is a stranger and the community has some resources, the person is usually quickly driven out of the community. Often this means a higher concentration of convicted sex offenders in poorer communities, which reinforces the vulnerability of lower-income families to sexual abuse.

“In tracking the rates of recidivism among a group of released sex offenders, the Minnesota Department of Corrections concluded, ‘not a single re-offense would have been prevented by an ordinance restricting where sex offenders could live.’”<sup>18</sup> In a 2011 report published by the Association of Sex Offender Treatment, authors Joan Tabachnik and Alisa Klein write:

*“In creating a legislative policy environment that may inhibit the willingness of individuals, families, and communities to face, prevent, and respond to child sexual abuse, our society does a disservice to its children. If no hopeful, rehabilitative solutions are available and made publicly known, people who witness signs of risk for*

*victimization and/or perpetration may be less motivated to take the steps necessary to prevent child sexual abuse, intervene in situations of risk, and come forward when a child is sexually abused. Experts agree that a criminal justice response alone cannot prevent sexual abuse or keep communities safe. Yet, tougher sentencing and increased monitoring of sex offenders are fully funded in many states.”<sup>19</sup>*

It is clear that most current responses to child sexual abuse are not working, and yet communities, governments, and policymakers push forward in creating more laws with harsher penalties in their attempts to address the problem. In Section Five, we discuss some promising practices that appear to be more effective than the prevailing punish-and-surveil approach. Looking again at the roots of why we continue to do things that often do not work presses us to look more closely at the nature of trauma and the reactions that trauma produces.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF TRAUMA IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE<sup>20</sup>

“Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering.” – Peter Levine<sup>21</sup>

We use the word “trauma” to describe the **impacts** of overwhelming experiences that threaten the physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and/or spiritual integrity of a person. Trauma can be caused by a wide variety of events, however there are a few consistent themes: traumatic experiences overwhelm and break down our sense of safety, connection, and dignity.<sup>22</sup>

Trauma can be caused by individual experiences such as child sexual abuse, invasive medical

procedures, life-threatening illnesses, torture or domestic and other forms of intimate violence. Individual and collective trauma can result from group experiences such as genocide, displacement, poverty, imprisonment, war, mass sexual violence, or natural disasters.

At an individual level, trauma affects our body, mind, emotions, our spirit, and our relationships.<sup>23</sup> These impacts can persist long after an immediate threat or abusive experience is over, and can leave us confused in our ability to distinguish the past from the present. Oftentimes when we are traumatized by our histories, we get caught in recurring patterns of automatic reactions that are based in past experiences even when the present moment no longer reflects these same dangers. This leaves us with less choice in the present, because we're reacting in the moment as if we are actually in the past. From this state of being “caught” in a historical reaction, we are unable to effectively take action to protect our selves or those we care about, or to respond to our feelings, needs, and wants.

For families, communities, and groups of people, the impacts of trauma can live on in a family, group, or culture for years and even generations. Our experiences of violence and trauma can become barriers to being in and building relationship with one another. When experienced by a group, trauma limits our individual, relational and group capacity to build health, wellness, and collective power.

Each one of us has a unique relationship to violence and abuse, which plays a significant role in our ability to respond to injustice in our own life and community. Without access to healing and transformation, our historic and current experiences of trauma and oppression can keep us stuck in a cycle of violence, within which we may take the pain and anger that we feel from experiencing harm and pass it on to another by harming them, as an attempt to retain some sense of our own agency and power. This

stuckness also significantly limits what we are able to imagine for ourselves and for our peoples, as well as our ability to exercise and build power to transform our lives and communities.

When we look collectively, we see that the impacts of trauma and oppression can leave whole communities with a limited capacity to respond effectively to violence and harm,<sup>24</sup> both within the community and from outside the community. We see these limits as the direct results of systemic injustice and abusive power, as communities are repeatedly and calculatedly denied the very resources and supports they need most.

### *Understanding Common Reactions to Child Sexual Abuse*

The impacts of trauma follow certain predictable patterns, and often leave us with a limited range of options for responding to violence. By far, the most common reaction to violence between individuals, as well as within families and communities is inaction; knowing that harm is happening and not doing anything about it. Whether that means walking past a couple having a loud and violent argument on the sidewalk, or individuals within a family or community ignoring signs that another family member or a community leader is interacting with youth in inappropriate ways, we see that most of us choose over and over to ignore the harms—big and small—happening in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

From our view, this is both understandable and unacceptable. Understandable, because few of us have had the supports or resources, individually or collectively, to heal and transform these reactions. Unacceptable, because these reactions keep us caught in, and contributing to, cycles of abuse that have huge physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational costs for us all. Trauma, by definition, keeps us caught in strategies that are no longer appropriate to our

current-time realities. Out of these impacts we may enact strategies as an attempt to keep our families, our communities, and ourselves safe that actually perpetuate abuse.

Through our work to address child sexual abuse over the last fifteen years, we've observed consistent patterns in the responses that individuals and communities have in response to child sexual abuse. These include:

- *Denial:* This reaction shows up as we try to make the epidemic of child sexual abuse go away or separate it from people we care about or are related to. This can sound like: "Kids just make that stuff up to get attention," and "Those numbers are inflated, it doesn't happen that much, I don't know anyone who that's happened to." We also hear it in comments like "It doesn't happen in my community but I know it does in (pick any community that we do not identify with)." Or "I'm sure it does happen, but (name of person who is abusive) could never have done that. I know him/her." Denial also shows up as changing the subject or not being able to tolerate the conversation for more than a few minutes.
- *Minimization:* This reaction looks like someone acknowledging that CSA happens, while simultaneously dismissing either the prevalence or how lasting the effects are, as discussed in section one. This can sound like: "Kids forget that stuff, hey I can't even remember half of my childhood and I turned out ok," or "Why can't people just move on? I've gotten over the things that happened to me; you can't get trapped in the past like that."
- *Horror:* This can be a reaction of disgust or shock that can leave another person feeling ashamed for having experienced sexual abuse, or for speaking about it. Horror rarely leads to useful action, and often keeps people in a place of avoidance. It is difficult to face things that we find horrifying, which can perpetuate denial that CSA occurs and is occurring.

- *Blame:* Sadly, blame usually focuses on the survivor of the abuse for disclosing CSA, bringing it up in the first place, asking for action or healing, and more. This means the person who was harmed is treated as the one who needs to be accountable, rather than the person who actually caused the harm. Comments like "He/She (the person who survived the harm) is a (drug user, poor, on the street, from a different ethnic group, a man, etc.)... you're going to believe her/him?" Or, "Why didn't she fight back, she's 12 and big enough to protect herself." Or, "He probably liked it, how many boys get to have sex with an older woman that early." Or "She should have known better with those boys. Why did she go over there anyway?" Or, "Why didn't she tell?" These comments are painful for anyone who has survived violence to hear and damaging in their implications. Blaming people who are victims of violence often uses oppression-based stereotypes about people to further target them.

People who raise concerns or try to confront the abuse may also experience blame and targeting. As people committed to ending child sexual abuse, we need to prepare for blame. Blame also can be an attempt to protect people who abuse, or to defend community or social norms. Often when we don't know what to do with our feelings of rage, despair, or helplessness, we blame the messenger or the person who survived for reminding us of something that we don't know how to bear.

- *Rage/Vigilantism:* This can include rage at the person who abuses and outrage that child sexual abuse has happened. While rage may be a very understandable response, the outrage can get channeled in problematic directions. Rage can get directed at the person who was abused in the form of blame, or it can also turn into vigilantism and destructive reactivity, as in: "I'm going to kill that asshole." Many people also express rage

but do nothing. Getting rid of “bad people” doesn’t transform conditions or prevent further abuse.

- Pity: Though many people may feel concern or compassion when hearing about child sexual abuse, often there is so much discomfort alongside that concern that it can come across more like pity: “That’s so awful, I can’t even believe that happens to people; Can you imagine living through that?; Why do people even do that?; You seem so together, I don’t know how you did it,” etc. Pity doesn’t lead to sustained engagement, deeper conversations or action.

In order to practice Transformative Justice responses to child sexual abuse, we have to become prepared to engage with the range of reactions that communities and individuals will predictably have upon learning about sexual abuse within their own community—including our own. We must develop our understanding about the function of each of these responses, and learn to feel and navigate these deep emotions in ourselves, and to anticipate and plan for those of others. We must build the skills and the capacity to support one another to move from harmful, minimizing, blaming, or non-protective reactions towards a compassionate response and committed action to end CSA.

As we become more familiar with these reactions to child sexual abuse, we come to see that these very same reactions are driving most of the current societal interventions to violence and harm. In many respects, a trauma analysis can help us understand what keeps us employing strategies that do not work and to shift our worldview about what is needed in order to truly transform child sexual abuse. Zooming out, we can see these same themes and reactions embodied within our society, as we look at the logic driving the social structures, institutions, and systems we have created to intervene in CSA.

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## SECTION FOUR

# WHAT ARE MORE TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO JUSTICE?

### TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*“Peacebuilding is part of our human nature and collective memory.”*

*– Manny Lares of Barrios Unidos, via the LA Youth Justice Coalition<sup>1</sup>*

Liberation

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Shifting Power

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Safety

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Accountability

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Collective Action

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Cultural Responsiveness

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Sustainability

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Resilience

**T**ransformative Justice is an approach for how we—as individuals, families, communities, and society— can prevent, respond to, and transform the harms that we see happening in our world. In the context of ending child sexual abuse, Transformative Justice is an approach that seeks healing, justice, and accountability for child sexual abuse, while also transforming the ongoing social conditions that allowed the abuse to occur.

As we see it, Transformative Justice approaches require us to develop and connect:

- Social analysis and critique of “power-over” dynamics and relationships.
- Community education regarding dynamics of violence.
- Understandings of trauma and healing.
- Community-based interventions.
- Community organizing to change social and political institutions, norms, and access to resources.

Transformative Justice responds to the need for a truly liberatory approach to violence. It is rooted in an understanding of trauma and resilience, as well as an understanding of how oppression and systemic injustice both create and encourage child sexual abuse. **A defining feature of TJ is its commitment to change conditions in order to prevent further and/or future harms.**

When people who have experienced abuse are asked what kind of response they hope for, survivors consistently ask for *justice*. But what justice means in practice depends largely on how we understand this term. For many of us, the existing criminal legal system is the primary framework for conceptualizing justice. Within this framework, the laws of society are considered “just” and when an individual takes an action that contradicts these laws, their action is considered a “crime.” If a person has or is accused of committing a crime, they may be charged, arrested, tried, and sentenced to punishment.

Shifting our focus from punishment-based interventions to more transformation-based approaches to justice takes us into the complicated realities of individual incidents, the contexts and relationships involved, and the conditions impacting each individual. In order to navigate this highly complex terrain, the principles of Transformative justice offer an important compass to guide our choices.

## LIBERATION

“Liberation” invokes a vision of a society defined by safety, connection, and dignity for all. One in which every individual is able to exercise agency in their lives, while building relationships guided by mutual support and accountability. In order for this to be possible, we need social, political, and economic structures which affirm life, including equal access to food, water, shelter, education, healthcare, and jobs that contribute to the greater good rather than profit.

We want approaches to justice that allow our communities to meet their own needs and challenge State and systemic violence, rather than just trying to make reforms. In securing individual justice in cases of child sexual abuse, we must also be working towards a vision of social justice and collective liberation. This means building community-based practices that insure a

world without child sexual abuse. To do this, we seek to increase the capacity of organizations, communities, and intimate networks to respond to the needs of individuals and relationships from this broader vision of liberation.

## SHIFTING POWER

Pursuing transformation asks us to take on the lifelong practice of discerning between power-over and power-together. While it may be tempting to believe that we can always recognize one from the other, the distinctions between forms of power are not always obvious. We have all internalized aspects of the dominant systems we live within.

This principle invites us to ask the questions:

- Who has control over resources, currently and historically?
- Who has decision-making authority?
- Whom do we automatically give our attention to?
- Who is taken seriously when they declare what is true/right/real?

We can consider these at every level of our lives: between individuals, within a family, inside of an organization, at workplace or institution, in a community or geographical area, and across countries, societies or historical periods.

Unequal power creates the conditions for violence.<sup>2</sup> In societies where gender roles are rigid and polarized, violence against women occurs with greater frequency and intensity.<sup>3</sup> Sociological data reveals that violence within a society increases in direct proportion as the gap between those who have financial resources and those who do not widens. Shifting power means reallocating resources and access more equitably.

Transformative approaches to justice ask us to consider power in every circumstance, be that among individuals, within a family, inside a community, or within a whole society. In each case, the principle of shifting power asks us to confront and divest from forms of power based on domination, exploitation, violence, privilege, and entitlement. Instead our intention is to build and cultivate power based on equity, cooperation, and self-determination.

Historically, survivors' experiences have been silenced in order to maintain the status quo. Shifting power means supporting survivors' self-determination, and a survivor's decision to challenge, prevent, or respond to a violation intended to take their power.

At the same time, Transformative Justice is deliberately a community-based intervention, which means that a survivor does not have the sole responsibility of deciding what justice will look like. We see the responsibility for intervening in and preventing child sexual abuse (and other forms of violence) as our collective responsibility. This is especially important for interventions in current-time child sexual abuse, since the immediate survivor is a child. Given the power relationship between children and adults, children cannot hold sole responsibility for disclosing abuse or for making decisions about how to intervene. We honor the voices, experiences, and rights of children and strive to create cultures that allow children to express their age-appropriate self-determination.

There may be times when an individual survivor wants something that contradicts the political commitments of the community—for example, a survivor would prefer to “move on,” while the community may believe it's necessary to confront the offending behavior. Or a survivor may want to see the person who abused them physically hurt or kicked out of the community, while the community may be seeking justice without

removing the person who sexually abused a child or engaging in violence. These can be very challenging moments that ask us to grapple with individual survivor self-determination on the one hand, and collective will on the other.

In these situations, we need to be rigorous and creative in taking actions that support the survivor, while also being committed to broader transformation and collective liberation. This could mean that the survivor is not involved in the interventions themselves. It could mean that they remain informed about the intervention but not directly involved. It could mean that the pace of the process is shifted to encourage for more communication in the hopes of aligning the survivor's needs and those of the community.

No matter what, the survivor's safety and well-being are central to any plan for intervention and prevention. CSA is an attack on individuals and on our collective safety, values, and principles. We all have a vital stake in intervention. If we are truly going to shift power and transform our relationships, families, and communities, we need the voices, experiences and leadership of everyone involved.

## SAFETY

We can understand safety as freedom from violence and exploitation and from the threat of further violence and exploitation. At an individual level, a survivor's safety from immediate violence and the threat of further violence is central. On a community level, safety is possible only when community members can trust the community will challenge violence if/when it occurs, and consistently offers connection, respect and dignity to each individual.

We believe that safety is not a *state* to arrive at, but a dynamic set of questions, choices, and skills that allow each of us to exercise agency: making choices, owning those choices, reflecting upon

the outcomes of those choices, and letting our learning inform future actions.

Safety includes each individual having:

- Access to external supports to remind us of our agency, to help us see options, to offer encouragement and support, to provide material assistance and skills, and to support our ongoing healing and accountability.
- Access to knowledge and expertise in various domains, from knowing how to drive a car to being skilled at caring for children. It could also mean each of us would have the ability to deal with our own emotions, including fear, anger, or overwhelming feelings. We would be encouraged to build resilience through prayer and/or other practices like somatics that help us to feel joy or to re-center on what matters to us.
- Access to the practical and economic resources that we need in order to meet our basic needs including food, water, and shelter, etc.

Absolute safety is not a guarantee and risk is inherent when we resist abusive power. However, resistance can be an act of courage when *chosen* with full consciousness of the potential consequences and the potential for liberation.

**Individual Safety** includes: Freedom from immediate violence and exploitation, and freedom from threat of further violence and exploitation.

**Community Safety** includes: Community practices which challenge violence and move towards collective liberation, while allowing for each individual's wholeness. **Societal Safety** includes: Systems built on equitable power relationships, mutual accountability, and strong alliances.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a powerful tool of transformation. Contrary to criminal legal proceedings, it is not a one-time event, but an ongoing and evolving process with multiple actions that are relational, intellectual, emotional, material, and spiritual.

Accountability is a human skill of being responsible to yourself and those around you for your choices and for the consequences of your choices. We cannot make someone else be accountable, we can only create conditions that make taking accountability more rewarding and compelling than avoiding it.<sup>4</sup>

People who commit violence are not born to do so, they are spurred on by their particular histories and given permission by social conditions and interpersonal practices which reward power-over. Transformative Justice approaches seek concrete accountability from individuals who cause harm using sanctions, agreements, consequences for non-compliance with agreements, and other forms of leverage to mobilize the individual towards willingness to account for their harmful actions.

Some measures of accountability include:

- Stopping the harmful behavior.
- Listening to the person or people impacted, and acknowledging the negative impacts of the harm done to the individual(s) and the community.
- Apologizing for the harm.
- Making appropriate reparations to individuals and the community.
- Being available to receive requests for accountability and healing from the person(s) harmed.
- Committing to stop the harmful behavior and agreeing not to repeat it with anyone.

- Committing to deeper personal work to understand the root causes of the harmful behavior and engaging in healing and transformation to prevent further violence.
- Engaging with others to shift the conditions and to contribute to collective liberation.

Transformative Justice approaches also seek accountability, with compassion and complexity, from bystanders for their part in allowing the harms to occur. We can empathize with bystanders' histories of trauma and violence without dismissing the consequences of their actions and inaction. We can acknowledge their relationships with those who caused harm, and understand their fear and love of the individual people whom they allowed to sexually abuse children, while continuing to assert that non-protection is not okay. The goal of Transformative Justice is to move non-protective bystanders towards taking protective actions to stop violence, to create a culture of accountability, and to engage in shifting power towards more equity.

Some markers of bystander accountability may include:

- Setting limits with, confronting, and challenging those who exercise power in abusive ways, without dehumanizing them.
- Listening to the person or people impacted, acknowledging their experience and the negative impacts of the harm.
- Acknowledging behavior that intentionally or unintentionally colluded with abuse, and acknowledging the negative impacts of this behavior.
- Building movements that can shift social conditions to prevent further harm and to promote liberation, including challenging/ confronting State power.
- Building movements that can create alternative institutions and practices which allow communities to get their needs met/meet one another's needs.

## COLLECTIVE ACTION

One of the central aspects of child sexual abuse is the isolation that the abuse occurs within and creates. Breaking this isolation, rebuilding connection, and taking collective action to end child sexual abuse must be key components of a transformative approach to justice.

Taking action together changes people individually and collectively. Research from various disciplines supports this, as does the history of social movements throughout the world.<sup>5</sup> This principle invites people to build relationships and power with others, while addressing child sexual abuse. Collective Action - reaching out, asking for help, offering support, taking risks together, reflecting with one another, and inviting others to participate – breaks apart the profound isolation that violence creates and breeds.

An individual or small group of people trying to intervene in or prevent child sexual abuse are taking a stand against entrenched dynamics of oppressive power within our society. The individual or group is simultaneously more powerful and more vulnerable to backlash from those who feel threatened by this challenge to the status quo. Given the intensely charged emotions and reactions that child sexual abuse creates, an isolated group will have a hard time engaging in Transformative Justice work over time. Practicing the principle of collective action reminds us to always build alliances and to broaden the network of supports around our efforts. The more connected we are to others who share our principles of liberation and shifting power, the more difficult it will be for oppressive and abusive power to extinguish our efforts to transform our communities and society.

By building collective action, we demonstrate our commitment to challenge violence and abuse in all their forms. When other communities are targeted, we can demonstrate our commitment to liberation by showing up for them too. We can

build powerful movements that both challenge abuse, and create viable, life-affirming alternatives for all people to live in conditions that offer safety, connection, and dignity.

## CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Any community-based Transformative Justice approach must include and respond to the specific experiences of that community, including its history, culture, geography, and population. We know and honor that culture plays an important role in transmitting resilience across generations, and in passing on legacies of resistance to oppression. Whenever possible, Transformative Justice approaches should draw on existing resilience practices, and integrate community values that encourage members to ally themselves with those who have been most directly impacted.

Simultaneously, Transformative Justice approaches must challenge cultural norms that support abusive power and systemic oppression. We see the ongoing harmful effects of “cultural relativism,” which means treating cultural traditions as fixed and untouchable. Cultural relativism assumes that shifting traditions is dangerous, rather than liberatory. It assumes that harmful or abusive practices are innate within a culture, rather than developed over time. We see that people who do not wish to address child sexual abuse or grapple with the shifts in power-arrangements use these kinds of arguments to justify violence. Examples include statements like, “He didn’t mean to, because in our culture...” or “I don’t think they think of sexual abuse the same way we do.”

Challenging cultural practices is complex terrain. Most communities and cultural groups understandably defend their cultural practices against critiques from the outside, likely because they suffered from racism, colonization, and

appropriation, etc. For this reason, people who are part of the culture in which oppressive practices and abusive behavior takes place are in the best position to challenge cultural relativism.

We find it helpful to hold the perspective that differences cannot be understood in terms of “better” and “worse.” All cultural norms and practices have evolved in relation to a social, political, economic, and environmental context and its historic conditions. Strategies, values, and priorities will vary depending on a community and culture. This principle challenges us to keep practicing flexibility and responsiveness to each situation. No two incidents or communities are identical. Unlike the rigidity of the State, which claims to deliver standardized punishments for standardized “crimes,” we must keep practicing responsiveness to the exact needs and circumstances of each situation in its context.

This principle also reminds us never to leverage oppression to force accountability. For example, using white supremacy or ableism in our interventions will only create further harm. This reminder underscores the importance of collective action: we will need many eyes and perspectives to make sure we are not reinforcing embedded dynamics of power-over.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Given our long-term vision of true liberation, we have a responsibility to create intervention and prevention strategies that are sustainable over time. We mean sustainable in a few different ways: in the sense that the outcomes of any Transformative Justice response should last, and also sustainable in the sense that people will be enlivened, rather than depleted, by their choice to participate in these interventions and/or prevention efforts. In a perhaps more immediate sense, we see that any group supporting Transformative Justice-based interventions must be conscious and transparent about the support

it can offer and the limitations of what it can provide at any given stage of an intervention. We also have to acknowledge the real challenges of Transformative Justice approaches and processes, never mind of building alternative institutions and a more equitable society.

At a very concrete level, it is important to consider the many types of resources that are required to sustain Transformative Justice responses and organizing. There are many conversations in popular media about the cost of criminal punishment, and many people have critiqued the exorbitant amount of wealth that is funneled into a racist, oppressive system of mass incarceration in the US. That said, it would be naïve to assume that Transformative Justice approaches require fewer resources—in fact, we could easily argue that these responses require more resources than traditional criminal/legal responses.

This list includes such things as:

- Supporting people to develop strong internal commitments to challenge child sexual abuse and to seek more equitable, accountable, and dignified ways of organizing our communities and society.
- Providing accessible methods of individual and collective healing.
- Developing effective community mechanisms of accountability to support collective action.
- Creating opportunities for individual and collective consciousness-raising to increase buy-in to confront abusive power.
- Building strategic relationships with key community members and culture-keepers, relevant allies, and others who share our commitments.

Different communities have different relationships to State resources, institutions, violence, and support. For some communities, calling the police to address violence may seem like an

obvious solution. For many other communities, it is a dangerous option because of the brutality experienced at the hands of the police. At the same time, communities' access to alternative options will also vary. For example, families with more wealth or financial resources can afford therapy to address sexual abuse rather than engaging with State-based systems. People with less community support may see the State as their only resource.

Knowing what we know about the harm that State-based responses tend to produce, it is an important part of our work to create compelling and effective options within our communities that don't rely on policing, courts, and incarceration. At the same time, we know that it can be difficult to maintain healthy boundaries, to put limits on what we can offer, and to stay committed to a process over time in the face of the devastation and urgency caused by violence in our lives.

Showing up in a moment of crisis matters. Showing up one month later, six months later, one and two and five years later also matters as people heal, strive for accountability, and deepen relationships. This doesn't mean that we're always going to get it right. This principle asks us to be conscious and transparent about the support we can offer and the limitations of what we can provide throughout an intervention—and if we overstep these limits, to acknowledge it and to be responsive as we can.

We believe that building community, challenging oppression, and developing alternative institutions can sustain us if we are able to build adequate support through collective action. There is life and energy to be found in doing meaningful work with others over time.

## RESILIENCE<sup>6</sup>

Resilience is the ability to holistically respond to and renew ourselves during and after an adverse

experience (“holistic” meaning: our mind, body, emotions, spirit, and relationships). It is the ability to shift ourselves from automatic survival reactions to a connected, open, and choiceful state. For example, someone may have learned to engage in intense conflict as a survival strategy that helped them survive violence within their family. The ability to tolerate conflict can be a very useful for self-protection or in activism to challenge those who are abusive, oppressive, or acting out of privilege. However, if we don’t have the ability to contain this response, it can wreak havoc in our organizations, family, and communities. Resilience, and building resilience through practice, can help us choose this strategy when it’s useful, and to not use it when it might be destructive to our relationships or work.

Supporting people’s healing is in part about building their resilience. In order to heal the impacts of child sexual abuse, and prevent future abuse, we consider it a requirement to intentionally support and cultivate resilience, both for individuals and, where possible, within community spaces as a whole.

## ENDNOTES

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- 5 **“...as does the history of social movements throughout the world”**  
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- 6 **Resilience**  
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# TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE GOALS

**T**ransformative Justice seeks to provide people who experience violence with immediate safety, long-term healing and reparations; to demand that people who have done harm take accountability for their harmful actions, while holding the possibility for their transformation and humanity; and to mobilize communities to shift the oppressive social and systemic conditions that create the context for violence.

As an approach for responding to all forms of violence, the goals of Transformative Justice are:

- **Survivor safety, healing, and agency**
- **Accountability and transformation of those who abuse**
- **Community response and accountability**
- **Transformation of the community and social conditions that create and perpetuate violence**

At a pragmatic level, each of these goals can easily become a world of its own. Many people commit their lives to efforts that fall within one or another of these categories. As with roles within child sexual abuse (i.e. person who is sexually abused, bystander, person who sexually abuses, community, etc.), these goals are not mutually exclusive. In a TJ approach, they work to advance one another. There are no easy prescriptions for this type of work: each situation and community needs and deserves its own adaptations. Angela

Davis of INCITE! Women and Trans People Against Violence calls this a “revolution of trial and error.”<sup>1</sup>

That said, the following subsections are meant to be a springboard for new possibilities, actions, learning, and conversations to emerge. Rather than proclaiming a “how to...” we have opted to raise key questions and point to promising practices in each area of TJ work. Each one of these goals asks us to develop new skills and competencies.

To practice TJ related to child sexual abuse, we see that collectively we need skills in; trauma analysis and healing, political education and analysis, community organizing, offender treatment and accountability, and group facilitation.

**We encourage you to try things out, to push back on these suggestions and, together, to come up with new and compelling responses that make sense for the contexts in which you live.**

## **SAFETY, HEALING & AGENCY FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY VIOLENCE**

The people most directly impacted by violence are at the heart of Transformative Justice. In the context of child sexual abuse, this means the children currently



experiencing sexual abuse, children and young people who were sexually abused in the past, and adults who experienced sexual abuse during childhood and/or adolescence. Though the resources, questions, and skills needed to ensure safety, healing, and agency for any one survivor vary depending on the context and conditions surrounding their experiences, a commitment to survivors' safety, healing, and agency is central to both the vision and the practice of Transformative Justice.

## INTERVENING IN CURRENT-TIME CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**Children cannot and should never be expected to prevent or interrupt abuse they experience. The responsibility for abuse lies with the person or people doing the harm, and it is the responsibility of the adults in a child's life to protect a child from abuse.** Knowledge about CSA can make a huge difference in our ability to prevent, recognize, and intervene when someone is sexually abusing a child. Knowing what child sexual abuse is and understanding how to recognize the warning signs of abuse greatly increases our chances of making effective interventions.<sup>2</sup>

Children who are being sexually abused are caught in a situation that they likely don't have the capacity to deal with on their own. Children know that something wrong is happening, that it feels bad and violating. And, because they are children, they have few to no options, other than doing what they need to survive. A child may not know what words to use to describe what has happened, and also may be frightened that no one will believe them, or that they will be punished if they tell.<sup>3</sup> The person abusing the child may have used threats and coercion to add to these fears and, even if they did not, differences in power, size, age, etc. can easily leave a child with a sense of threat to their survival, or the survival of the people they care about.

For adults in a child's life, it can be very upsetting to learn that a child you care about may be experiencing sexual abuse. As discussed in section three, the reality of child sexual abuse can bring up overwhelming feelings of horror, rage, fear, and other difficult emotions. It is very important for us to seek support around these feelings, while also taking action to protect the child or children in the situation. An adult's initial response to a disclosure of sexual abuse can make a hugely important difference in helping a child to feel safer immediately.

*“Reacting to a child's disclosure of sexual abuse with the right amount of appropriateness, care and sensitivity is not easy. No one ever does it perfectly. Do the best you can and get help.”*

*- Stop it Now, “How Should I Respond to the Child”<sup>4</sup>*

If you believe a child is being sexually abused or a child has just disclosed to you that they are being sexually abused:

- **Prioritize the child's safety and wellbeing.** It is understandable that you may be having intense feelings about what you've just learned, and feel the need to react, or to express these feelings in the moment. While this is natural, it is very important that the child's experience and well being remains at the center of your interactions with them. Staying calm and present with the child will support their safety and healing in both the short and long term. Try not to have the disclosure become about you, or about your fear or rage at who has hurt them.

- **Affirm the child’s attempts to communicate about the abuse.** Let them know that you believe them, and that it was the right thing to do to share this with you.
- **Communicate to the child that the abuse was not their fault.** Without support, it is very common for children who experience CSA to assume that the abuse happened because of something they did or failed to do, i.e. “It’s my fault because I didn’t say stop,” or “I wasn’t supposed to talk to strangers and I did,” Or “I liked him/her, and they were nice to me.” It is very important that the child consistently hears the message “This was not your fault,” when discussing the abuse. Over time, it will also be important for the child to be able to share their beliefs about the abuse, and to learn to distinguish between questions of responsibility and having choice. We want the child to know/ internalize that the abuse was not their fault, even if they didn’t talk to a grownup or say “No,” when the abuse happened. We also want to support the child to seek out a trusted grownup to talk with when they are confused or scared, and to learn to set boundaries (when they have the power to) in the future.
- **Assure the child that you will do whatever you can to prevent the abuse from happening again.** It is very important to let a child know that they will be protected. It is vital for adults to demonstrate to the child that they deserve protection, including by limiting contact with the person who has been abusive.<sup>5</sup> “Be careful though, not to make absolute promises that the abuse will stop” caution advocates from CSA-prevention organization Stop It Now. “Broken promises are harmful to any child—especially one who is already feeling betrayed. Rather, reassure the child that once he/she—and the person who is harming them—receive help, the situation can get better.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Seek additional support, resources, and help.** Intervening in child sexual

abuse is not a single event, but requires an ongoing commitment to keep showing up over time to support healing, accountability, and transformation. Everyone involved in an incident of CSA will need support. The multiple needs of each person will require a variety of skills and resources, held by different people within a community or network. Start identifying potential allies, resources and supports early. Because a transformative justice response is not yet the norm, often you’ll need to educate and engage your support in TJ as well. Know this process will take time and community.

- **Prevent further abuse.** While it may not be immediately apparent how to do so, strive to eliminate all opportunities for the abuse to occur again. This includes developing immediate strategies to prevent the person doing the harm from being alone with the child experiencing the abuse and from being alone with other children in the family or community.
- **Assess the risks and present danger in the situation,** as well as your ability to respond to that danger, along with other allies in the situation. The Creative Interventions tool “[Staying Safe. How Do We Stay Safe?](#)”<sup>7</sup> is a useful resource for making these assessments.
- **Develop short and long-term safety strategies that prioritize the safety of the child/ren being abused, and the safety of everyone involved.** These safety strategies must also take into account the safety of other community members, including non-offending family members who may be at additional risk if they disclose information about the abuse. In the case of sibling sexual abuse, it is very important to ask if the person who committed the abuse learned the sexually abusive behavior from someone else, such as a parent, relative, older child or caregiver. A transformative approach to justice additionally asks us to commit to strategies that ensure that the person or people who caused the harm also remain safe from violent

retribution. While our strategies for demanding accountability may cause discomfort for the person who caused harm, they should also align with the principles of transformation and be forms of redress, rather than violence or retribution.

- **Create non-pressured opportunities for the child to share more about their experience(s) of abuse with a safe adult or adults.** Over time, it will be important for the child to be able to share what happened, and to make meaning of the abuse in age appropriate terms and ways. Skilled healers and therapists with training in working with child survivors can be powerful allies in this process. Note that some support people may be mandated reporters in your state. Talk with support about a TJ approach to see if they are aligned, before sharing all details.
- **Positively affirm the child's sharing and be responsive to the child's pace.** A child may share a lot at once, and then not want to talk about the abuse the next time you speak with them. Allowing the child's pace to dictate the process is another way of affirming and restoring the child's sense of choice and self-determination.
- **Minimize negative consequences to the child as a result of disclosing.** It can be confusing and frightening for a child to see and experience adults' having volatile reactions to the abuse, or to experience sudden dramatic changes in their family or home environment. While routines, caregiving, and other norms a child is used to may need to shift in order to prioritize a child's safety, it is important to explain that these are not their fault, and to offer age-appropriate explanations that help the child make sense of what is happening in a non-shaming way. Keep in mind that threats of violence, or actual harm to the person who abused them can be even more frightening for a child, particularly if they still have positive feelings towards this person.<sup>8</sup>

- **Support the child's resilience.** We all have inherent resilience. This is not numbing or dissociating, or "getting through." Resilience can be found in experiences that have us feel more alive, more whole, more connected. Resilience gives us a felt sense of hope and possibility, that we are more than the violence or violation. Notice what brings the child resilience. It could be animals or nature, playing and running, their spiritual connection, art and music or more. Try to create opportunities for the child to do these things and talk with them about how it feels. Let other adults in their life know about this too.

## INTERVENING WHEN A YOUNG PERSON DISCLOSES ABUSE IN THEIR PAST

In some cases, a child or young person may be disclosing about sexual abuse that they experienced in the past, whether months or many years ago. As in a current instance of sexual abuse, it is hugely important that the individual disclosing the abuse is affirmed for making the disclosure, is believed, and receives immediate support and protection.

Given the pervasiveness of victim-blaming messaging within most parts of society, it is critical for every survivor of child sexual abuse to get the consistent message that the abuse was not their fault, regardless of what they did or did not do, what they did "wrong", or what they think they did wrong.

The messages, interventions and resources mentioned above (See: ***Intervening in Current-Time Child Sexual Abuse***) are also relevant when a child or adolescent discloses past abuse. Though an older child or teen may be more able to articulate their experiences of abuse than a younger child, and more able to assert

preferences about their needs and choices, it is still the responsibility of adults in the young person's life to prevent further abuse, address the impacts of the harm, and to act protectively on behalf of the young person.

For any of us supporting young people around their experiences of CSA, it is important to consider the individual young person's age and stage of development, their access to other supportive people, their access to and eligibility for resources such as counseling, and their ways of accessing resilience. Each person's experience is unique, and every survivor requires attention and consideration for their specific needs.

Because child sexual abuse occurs in secrecy and isolates people from each other, we see honest and respectful connection as a core element of healing. This means, among other things, that people who have been sexually abused need access to spaces where they are supported and allowed to share what has been kept secret, and where they can experience belonging, compassion, dignity and acceptance around these experiences.

The typical reactions of communities and public systems, which we've outlined in previous sections, offer few if any incentives for youth who have been sexually abused to come out about past or current abuse. This tends to create an almost paradoxical reality for survivors: child sexual abuse is simultaneously denied and demonized. Both of these attitudes silence people further.

Over and over, people who have been sexually abused report that what they need is to:

- Tell their own stories about their own experiences, within a container of trust and safety
- Be able to ask questions and receive answers about the abuse they experienced and the ways it has impacted them

- Experience validation that the harm they experienced was and is real
- Have a skilled place to heal from the impacts of abuse, over time
- Observe that the person who sexually abused them feels remorse and is accountable for their actions
- Receive support that counteracts isolation and self-blame
- Have choice and input into the resolution of the harm they experienced
- Be accepted and encouraged, not shamed and blamed, for coming forward by their families, peers and communities

*“Recovery from trauma requires creating and telling another story about the experience of violence and the nature of the participants, a story powerful enough to restore a sense of our own humanity to the abused.”*

*— Aurora Levins Morales,  
Medicine Stories<sup>9</sup>*

For any of us who have experienced abuse, it can be a powerful and important part of our healing to be able to describe our experience to others who are able to listen and able to hear us. Being listened to, and feeling heard, on its own can help to reduce shame and to remind us that, despite these painful experiences, connection can be safe and trustworthy. Because of the impact of harm and trauma, people who have been sexually abused also need a visceral processing of the

abuse -- a transformation of the betrayal and “fight/flight” responses that are a normal part of surviving. Understanding and being understood is vital and mind/body/ relational healing is needed as well.

**People who have experienced child sexual abuse need access to skills, tools, resources and messages, which include:**<sup>10</sup>

**Access to a safe, compassionate listener** with whom it feels possible to acknowledge that the abuse happened—or to begin exploring the possibility that maybe it did.

**Education about child sexual abuse:** Most survivors have been made to feel—whether by the person who perpetrated the sexual abuse, their family, community, society at large, or all of the above—that the abuse was their fault, or that they somehow caused it. Meaningful political education on the realities of child sexual abuse, its prevalence, and the relationship between CSA and broader systems of oppression (white supremacy, patriarchy, class oppression, religious oppression, ableism, adultism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.) are all critically important in supporting survivors to heal shame and locate accountability where it belongs. Seeing CSA inside of a broader political analysis can be both relieving and empowering. It also can help to set a larger framework for healing.

**Allies who can develop a safety strategy** to ensure that the person who was sexually abused does not continue to experience the abuse, and that they will not experience consequences for having disclosed.

**Support for a person who was sexually abused to develop more awareness of, and connection to their own reality,** including being more connected to their body and sensations, feelings and emotions, their thoughts and internal dialogue, and their patterns of relating with other people. Many people who have

experienced CSA report that they don't know what they need, or think, or feel, or that they either feel numb and disconnected from their body, or overwhelmed by the intensity of sensations and feelings in their body. Reconnecting with our bodies, our emotions and our whole selves can be an empowering pathway of restoring choice and agency. This can happen with skilled support (healer, therapist, coach who knows these processes), community healing spaces, ritual, and body based practices.

**Opportunities to regenerate a sense of safety,** in part through making choices and exercising self-determination. This includes relearning boundaries, or learning them for the first time. This also includes learning to identify our own needs, becoming able to make requests to take care of these needs, and developing the ability to exercise consent-- including authentically being able to say yes, no and maybe across a wide range of contexts and relationships.

**The chance to establish or reestablish the belief that others will show up, care for, and support the survivor.**

**Recurring opportunities to actually feel the emotions of the impact of sexual abuse;** despair, rage, terror, grief, etc., and to let them come to expression, followed by completion and integration. It is important to support a person who was sexually abused to increase their emotional capacity over time.

**Opportunities to find or rebuild more authentic connection and relationships,** which are based on what the person healing cares about and wants in relationship, rather than defaulting into relationships that may not include their safety or dignity.

**Opportunities to practice mutual intimacy and sexuality,** with resources and supports to navigate triggers or memories that may arise within the context of sexual relationship and/or

intimacy. This includes widely available resources and supports for partners of survivors, as well.

**Skills for tolerating conflict, and even letting it become a positive force,** rather than something that evokes the fear or threat of the abuse.

**Opportunities to learn about the impacts of trauma,** understanding the ways that child sexual abuse shapes our reactions and survival strategies in ways that make sense given our experiences of abuse, and which may now be creating challenges in other parts of our lives.

**Support in identifying and cultivating resilience:** What gives you hope, brings you joy, and restores your sense of possibility in having a positive future? How can you practice this or access it more regularly? Cultivating resilience means staying connected to, and growing more resourced by, people, places and things that support you to be more present, open, and connected.

**Opportunities to heal shame:** Being allowed to name, feel, and share the deepest and most painful places in our lives. Finding more hope and aliveness over the course of the healing process.

**Support and guidance to cultivate self-forgiveness:** For many survivors, one of the most difficult aspects of healing is the process of coming to believe that it was/is not our fault that someone sexually abused us.

**Support and guidance to learn centered accountability:** Nothing about the experience of being sexually abused was your fault. And, out of our survival strategies and trauma reactions, we may have learned to be both over accountable (thinking we are responsible for things that are not our fault or within our influence) and/or under accountable. We may have caused harm to other people in our lives. Learning centered accountability means having the opportunity

to acknowledge and take accountability for harms caused to others, while simultaneously acknowledging the larger conditions that shaped us, and influenced these actions. For any of us who may have sexually abused others, this means integrating the work of accountability into our healing path, rather than waiting until “after we’ve healed” to address the impacts of our own harmful behavior.

The aspects of healing referred to above are influenced by Generative Somatics, and the Somatics and Trauma courses they offer to social and environmental justice leaders, organizers and healers. [www.generativesomatics.org](http://www.generativesomatics.org).

**Taking action to shift conditions within a family, community, and society:** Getting involved in social and environmental justice can be healing and empowering. It let’s us work together to change the social and economic conditions that perpetuate violence in many forms. It may be that you want to get involved to advocate for your needs, to support other’s who have experienced CSA, and to work to transform CSA as a social issue. There is no formula or prescribed approach for what this means or should look like. For some survivors of CSA this may include initiating conversations with people within your own family and community about the abuse you experienced; for others this may involve becoming engaged in activism and community organizing for survivors’ rights or ending sex trafficking. It may be that you want to engage in activism or organizing in other parts of social and environmental justice movements like; economic equality, climate justice, reproductive justice, or another site of liberation struggle. For many of us, taking action to end child sexual abuse (as well as other forms of violence and injustice) can become an empowering expression of our survival, our resilience, and our right to be whole and to thrive.

## SUPPORTING ADULT SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

*“No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest.”*

— Judith Lewis Herman,  
*Trauma and Recovery*<sup>11</sup>

Many people do not disclose about child sexual abuse until many years after the abuse. Some people who have been sexually abused as children may not remember until well into their adulthood. This is called traumatic amnesia and is well understood by healers and now, neuroscience. Sometimes, these memories are triggered by current-time incidents of sexual abuse within a community, by depictions of sexual abuse on TV or in films, or by having a safe, intimate relationship.

As in any instance of sexual abuse, it is very important that the person disclosing the abuse is affirmed for making the disclosure and offered immediate support.

The messages, interventions and resources outlined in the previous section (See: ***Intervening When a Young Person Discloses Abuse in Their Past***) are also relevant when an adult discloses past abuse. Though adults may be more able to articulate their experiences of abuse than younger people, and more able to assert preferences about their needs and choices, they still need people in their lives to be engaged allies in healing. This includes listening, supporting them to address the impacts

of the harm, and helping them to make choices that reclaim and assert their right to whole, dignified, thriving lives.

Many of us have experienced gross injustices that have deepened our commitment to understanding the world as it is and to creating new visions. We know that, alongside the limitations that can keep us from our full potential, these experiences of trauma can also produce incredible forms of creativity, resilience and resistance.

*“You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.”*

-*Still I Rise*, Maya Angelou

## ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSFORMATION OF THOSE WHO ABUSE

Our stories matter. The stories we tell, and the stories we don't tell. What we keep hidden inside of ourselves can shape our experience of the world, and managing these aspects of our history can limit our energy, as well as our imagination about what is possible for our future. Choosing to put attention on the things that scare us-- things we may feel ashamed of or which we don't understand-- can be an act of both courage and resilience.

Accountability is central to any practice of justice. Transformative Justice interventions seek concrete accountability from individuals who act abusively, while also engaging community members in the creating conditions that invite and demand real accountability and change. This includes creating spaces and encouragement for people who are currently sexually abusing children to disclose and to take other steps toward accountability for their past and present

experiences of abusing. Disclosure is a step toward accountability that will only happen if backlash is *not* the first and only response.

The vast majority of people who sexually abuse children deny their behavior and shirk accountability. As we discussed in section three, existing responses to child sexual abuse offer very few community or social supports to counteract this. Given most of the interventions currently in use, there is very little incentive for any of us to acknowledge sexually abusive behavior to others, and often very little capacity to even acknowledge it to oneself. It is vital that we create spaces and encouragement for people who have sexually abused children, or who feel they might sexually abuse children in the future to be able to share their concerns. In order to create conditions within which people who have caused harm feel compelled to take accountability, we need to transform the dominant paradigm of accountability that we have inherited.

Most of us have been deeply shaped by the false notion that in order for people to behave better they need to feel worse. In practice, we see that humans are, in fact, far more likely to change in desirable ways when they are more resourced, not less.

For example, in exploring the effects of various disciplinary methods with young children who were acting out, parents and researchers observed that children who were offered containment (being sent to their bedroom, or a comfortable space) along with opportunities for self-soothing (letting them have their teddy bear, a blanket, a book, etc.) were able to experience their emotions and re-regulate to a calm, relationally available state much sooner than children who were put into an agitating environment, or were deprived of opportunities for this kind of self-soothing.

This finding reveals a principle that appears to repeat itself throughout the research on

interventions with people who are sexually abusive: offering support, resources, connection, and help to people who have sexually abused others appears to cause significant reduction in reoffending, in contrast with more punishment-based or demonizing interventions.

For example, at this time, there is no existing support within the US for treating people with pedophilic urges. Individuals who self-identify as having these desires have had to self-organize their own anonymous online support groups for non-offending pedophiles. In contrast, Prevention Project Dunkelfeld developed a program in 2005 in Berlin, Germany that offered treatment and support to anyone who stepped forward to seek help with pedophilic urges. Even with a limited public outreach campaign, between 2005 and 2008 over 800 individuals contacted the program.<sup>12</sup> By 2010, 1,134 men had responded. 499 had a completed diagnosis, and 255 had been offered a place in therapy.<sup>13</sup> More than half reported having previously attempted to find therapy without success.<sup>14</sup>

The promise of confidentiality for those who come forward has been a key component of the project since its inception. “According to the German legal code, therapists are forbidden from revealing anything that happens in the context of treatment,” says Laura Kuhle, a clinical psychologist with Project Dunkelfeld, who was interviewed by the UK Guardian newspaper in 2015.<sup>15</sup> “If people mention anything in therapy that could make them criminally culpable, they are protected. In other countries, that’s not the case.” Kuhle and other advocates for Dunkelfeld are convinced that if patients were not guaranteed confidentiality, most would not voluntarily enter the program and those who did would not be fully honest about their behaviors and impulses. “We need them to be completely open about what has happened in their pasts, so that we can work with them as effectively as possible. What situations have they found themselves in? What were the individual events that led up to what’s

happened to them until now? You can't answer questions like that if you are afraid," Kuhle said.<sup>16</sup>

Since 2011, the project has grown into a nationwide network called "don't offend" and now runs ten outpatient centers across the country. More centers are being planned so that eventually the program will be easily accessible for anyone in Germany. These centers provide free weekly group therapy and have provided treatment for approximately 4,500 people over the last decade. The project's slogan is "You are not guilty because of your sexual desire, but you are responsible for your sexual behavior. There is help! Don't become an offender!"

While some have criticized the project for putting resources and attention towards those who may perpetrate abuse rather than those impacted by abuse, many survivors groups have supported these efforts, within Germany and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

Significantly, Germany does not have any mandatory reporting laws in effect. Experts such as Kuhle share that they often meet colleagues from other countries who would like to introduce similar programs offering these types of therapy but are prevented from doing so by the legal restrictions within their state or country. If these therapist were to help someone who had and was worried about sexually abusing children, their license would be at risk, and it would be an act of civil disobedience.

This approach offers one possible template of what it can look like to incentivize accountability and offer accessible pathways for people who have done harm, or who are vulnerable to doing harm, to access support, accountability, and healing to prevent further abuse. As one survivor of CSA affiliated with Stop it Now says: "Unless there is help available, why would an offender admit his crimes? None of us wants to expose our darkness, especially when there is no light to shine down and heal it."<sup>18</sup>

Two similar programs have been tested in the

US. Prior to changes in mandatory reporting laws, the Johns Hopkins Sexual Disorders Clinic tracked the number of people with urges to sexually abuse and people who had been sexually abusive who voluntarily came forward for treatment. When reporting became mandatory, the rate of self-referrals dropped from roughly 7 per year (73 over a 10-year period) to zero. The rate of voluntary disclosures during treatment also dropped to zero. According to one doctor affiliated with the clinic, these changes in laws may have prevented the clinic from intervening in the lives of children who may still be at risk.<sup>19</sup>

Another inspiring model for supporting the accountability and transformation of people who have caused harm is the example of CoSAs, which stands for "Circles of Support and Accountability," which started in Canada. According to Canada's Ottawa Program for Circles of Support and Accountability, the first CoSA was started by a Mennonite pastor named Harry Nigh, who befriended a man who had been in and out of institutions throughout his life, and convicted for repeated sexual offenses. Alongside other parishioners, Nigh developed a support group model within which 4-6 trained volunteers from the community from what they call "an inner circle" around the person who caused harm. This circle meets regularly to facilitate the core member's (the person who caused harm) practical needs getting met (such as housing and other services to reintegrate following incarceration), and to provide emotional support and challenge behaviors that may be associated with a risk of re-offending.<sup>20</sup> CoSAs currently exist in several countries, as well as 6 U.S. states.<sup>21</sup> Current interventions with those who sexually abuse children rely heavily on punishment, isolation, public systems, and violence. Criminal proceedings in the US provide few, if any, incentives for a person accused of a crime to admit that they caused harm. Because the system relies on a framework of opposition and punishment, when the State presses charges and a person is accused of sexually abusing a

child, the person accused is most often advised by defense attorneys to plead innocence. These reactions to CSA are not effective. They do not prevent abuse, nor do they transform the impacts of abuse or the person whom has done harm. One intended outcome of a TJ approach is to make proactive accountability safe and even compelling.

Our vision challenges us to create a collective culture of growth and dynamic support. One that acknowledges and supports each individual's inherent dignity and worthiness of connection, while simultaneously demanding rigorous practices of self and mutual accountability. Within a transformative approach, we aim for forms of accountability that enable transformation. Transformation of survivor experience, of sexually abusive behavior, of bystander engagement, and—more generally—of the broader conditions that allow child sexual abuse to continue.

We see that abuse happens when one person believes, consciously or unconsciously, that their needs, wants, and preferences take precedence over others. People engaging in abusive behaviors are often numb to, or seemingly unable to feel, the impacts of their behaviors on others.

A process of accountability and transformation requires that the person who has been harmful:

- Stops doing the harm
- Recognizes and acknowledges the harm they have caused
- Feels remorse/ sorryness/ for the pain of the impact of their actions
- Takes measures to address the harm caused—restitution, reparation
- Takes measures to prevent future harm
- Works to understand the root causes of their harmful behavior, and to feel and heal the wounds that created this dehumanizing action
- Engages in the ongoing work of accountability,

healing, and integration

- Takes action and organizes to support others to heal, or to be a part of changing community and social conditions that allow for CSA and other forms of violence.

These tasks are only possible in the context of relationships, characterized by support, accountability, connection, boundaries, and standards. Rather than removing from community and punishing people who have done harm, accountability for past behavior and transformation of future behavior has to be supported and enforced by those with whom they have invested relationship.

TJ and accountability call on those in relationship to the person who has caused harm to leverage their courage and emotional capacity. While it may be an understandable impulse to villainize, banish, or enact violence upon the person who has sexually abused, we must engage, name the harm, and call upon this person's dignity in order to hold standards that support safety, connection, and dignity for everyone involved, and above all for those most directly impacted by the harm.

When it comes to leverage, each situation and context will need different methods and mechanisms for confronting abusive power. The method depends on factors such as the likelihood that the person who caused harm may re-offend, the level of support and/or resistance to intervene in the abuse within a family or community, and the level of commitment to accountability and transformation that the person who harmed shows.

Different levels of concern about the behavior, likelihood of re-offending, ability to mobilize support/defense of the abusive behavior, and commitment to transformation all call for different accountability methods and mechanisms. These will have to evolve as the process unfolds, and as the person who was abusive shifts their behavior

and attitudes, and begins to demonstrate accountability.

Healing also includes the needs of people who sexually abuse children. In addition to being accountable for what they have done, most people who abuse are also in need of healing in order to help them make the changes necessary for them to stop sexually abusing in the future. For many people, the idea of giving attention to the healing needs of a person who has been sexually abusive is difficult to tolerate, particularly when there are limited resources available to support the healing of those who have been abused. It is important to center the needs of those most directly impacted by the harm in a situation. We also hold that recognizing and attending to the humanity of those who harm is a central aspect of transforming our families, communities, and society in a real and sustained way. Seeing and dignifying the healing needs of people who abuse also runs counter to the idea that some people “out there” are “monsters” who are expendable, or need to be “weeded out.” By standing for everyone’s need for healing, we challenge the dehumanizing logic that is central to systems of oppression, domination, and abuse. By standing for everyone’s need for healing, we maintain our commitment to a vision of true liberation.

*“People who sexually abuse children are built, not born. What do we need to change about our family, community and social norms, to stop building them?”*

*— generationFIVE,  
Community Response Project*

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*“A stance of opposition creates a small liberated territory, a psychological space in which we can act on the belief that we deserve complete freedom and dignity even when achieving such freedom collectively is still out of reach. The refusal to cooperate with our dehumanization even when we may not yet be able to stop it increases our reserves of dignity and hope... In that moment we have begun the process of recovery—of reclaimed humanity—that is both the ultimate outcome and the most essential ingredient of our liberation.”*

*— Aurora Levins Morales,  
Medicine Stories<sup>22</sup>*

*“We call on our communities to recognize that turning privileged backs on other peoples’ suffering will never make the hurt go away, or make our communities whole.”*

*— Southerners on New Ground, in “Our People Are Worth the Risks”<sup>23</sup>*

Roughly a decade ago, CSA-prevention organization Stop It Now! interviewed a number of people about their own responses to violence. When asked if they would confront someone who was about to drive drunk, 75% of participants said yes, they would intervene. When asked if they would confront someone who was sexually abusing a child, only 9% said yes. Time and again, when asked what would prevent them from saying or doing something, people say that they would not intervene because they wouldn’t know what to do or what to say.<sup>24</sup>

Just as child sexual abuse is an extreme expression of power dynamics that are evident in everyday life, these moments when adults fail to act in response to knowledge of abuse is a particularly painful example of what we know is common for many of us in the face of stress: denial, minimization, avoidance, collapse, shame, and disconnection.

We see a very important link between our collective ability to respond to child sexual abuse, and our ability to respond effectively to the many types of violence and harm that regularly occur in our society across all spheres of social life. People often stay silent and don't take action in the face of domestic violence and child abuse, worker exploitation and harassment, gentrification and displacement, police and prison violence, military force, war, and genocide among many other forms of harm that deepen human suffering and perpetuate global injustice.

We want each one of the people who say they would not intervene if they knew someone was sexually abusing a child—along with all the people who aren't sure whether they would intervene—to have the knowledge, skills, and capacity to intervene in child sexual abuse and other forms of violence readily. We want people to know that there is a robust set of options to choose from. That there are resources that can help them figure out what they can do to address CSA in their community, and how to go about it in ways that take care of everyone involved, particularly those most directly impacted by the abuse.

In some cases of CSA, it may be necessary to identify specific individuals and community institutions that need to be engaged, either to provide support to all parties, to shift their own practices that facilitate the abuse, or to build new capacities. For example, it may be critically important for a child's sports coach, music teacher, or grandparent to be trained and coached to be a supportive ally in the child's process of healing and making meaning of the

abuse. In seeking accountability from the person who perpetrated the abuse, it may be necessary to confront and enlist the participation of community faith leaders, matriarch(s)/patriarch(s), and employers in creating both leverage and incentives towards accountability. If community members have colluded with the abuse-- knowingly ignoring signs of harmful behavior, or denying a child's disclosure, for example-- these individuals must also be supported to see the consequences of their choices, and guided through the same steps of accountability outlined in the previous section. All of these people will likely need to be educated and engaged in a Transformative Justice approach.

Communities have very few models to look to in developing new approaches to child sexual abuse that do not rely on punishment, banishment, and continued violence or denial. Because there are so few choices, communities are regularly forced to rely on oppressive State systems—inviting those systems into their homes and communities. Given the limited options available, we understand why this happens. We firmly reject the idea that individuals and communities are “selling out” when, in desperation, they turn to the main interventions that are widely available. However, in order to develop responses to violence and CSA that hold humanity, dignity, and the possibility of healing and transformation for all, and engage in changing social conditions, we see that much more is needed. There are a number of ways that communities can build their will and capacity together. Some of these practices include:

**Discuss child sexual abuse with people you know and within the communities you are part of.** Practice identifying and naming the conditions that allow this abuse to occur, and continue to develop this understanding along with others. These include systems of domination and “power over,” all forms of oppression, “ownership” of children and more, as well as reactions to trauma such denial, minimization, “they won't

remember anyway," etc. Keep taking appropriate risks to widen the conversation, talking with more and more people in your life, community and work place. Naming and defining child sexual abuse breaks the silence and secrecy that so often cloak CSA. Speaking about child sexual abuse can create space for people in all roles to recognize and share their experiences, and take important steps towards healing, accountability, and meaningful action.

One approach could be organizing to connect CSA community education programs that have a political analysis to state sponsored community informing related to the national sex offender registry.

**Develop mechanisms to support immediate and long-term safety for people who are being abused as well as everyone impacted by sexual abuse.** While the safety of children and survivors is the primary priority, we are also committed to the safety of everyone, including the person who is or has been abusive. In developing strategies for safety, consider:

- Physical safety: food, shelter, access to money, freedom from physical abuse
- Emotional safety: emotional support, interruption of community blame or shaming
- Sexual safety: security from further abuse, now and into the future, and opportunity to define one's own sexual preferences/ orientation
- Political safety: freedom from deportation, loss of legal rights (i.e. voting, etc.), sexist, racist or homophobic attacks or backlash
- Community safety: the safety of the broader community from either new or further violence from within or outside of the community

**Identify the needs for resources that support survivor healing and broader family and community healing.** Are there practitioners and healers with expertise in supporting survivors of CSA within your community? Are there funds

for survivors to access these services at low or no cost? Are there support groups or resources available for parents and caregivers of children who have been sexually abused? Are there books in the public library about CSA, are there visible messages or community bulletins that include hotline numbers or other resources for families who may be suspicious or concerned about possible CSA?

**Develop mechanisms of accountability.** This must include accountability mechanisms for those who are violent; support for those who have the potential to abuse to be prevented from doing so; and ongoing support and accountability for the deeper transformation of the history and impulses that drive their abusive behavior.

One approach could be organizing to bring the Circles of Support and Accountability model to your community.

**Provide education and training for bystanders to support their capacity to respond to and prevent CSA.** For example, two-thirds of teachers do not receive specific training in preventing, recognizing, or responding to child sexual abuse in either their college coursework or as part of their professional development.<sup>25</sup> Childcare workers, coaches, healthcare providers, grandparents, parents, school bus drivers, and all the rest of us need support in order to recognize and intervene in CSA.

One approach could be organizing to connect TJ education to the education many teachers and therapist receive about mandated reporting.

**Build power within communities to identify and confront the internal and external conditions that allow CSA and other forms of violence to continue.** This includes engaging with and forming community based organizations that are able to challenge and confront the social, economic and political conditions that perpetuate CSA.

**Create and seek education for community**

**members to support and sustain relationships with families experiencing CSA and its impacts.** Often, once CSA comes to light, people recoil from the individuals or family that is impacted. Communities may need education and support in order to continue to reach out to and extend support towards families that are grappling with CSA.

**Develop community norms to support children's empowerment and participation in family and community decision-making.**

Community capacity can be developed in numerous ways, including through cultural work, consciousness-raising groups, education and organizing campaigns, violence intervention and prevention work. Whether it's a community support group for new parents, participation in a statewide campaign for affordable housing, providing sanctuary to communities experiencing harassment and hate violence, or taking in a community member who is struggling to find stable housing, this groundwork helps to cultivate a transformative response.

## **TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY & SOCIAL CONDITIONS THAT CREATE AND PERPETUATE VIOLENCE**

We cannot end child sexual abuse if we do not work to end the conditions that allow it to occur and to continue across generations. Unfortunately there are countless ways that community and social conditions both create and perpetuate violence. From the dramatic waves of displacement and gentrification impacting every urban center in the United States, to the ongoing targeting and violence that communities of color, and Black and Indigenous communities in particular, experience at the hands of law enforcement, we find evidence of oppression and injustice in every direction. We are living in

social norms, an economy and institutions based on a "power over" framework that depends on exploitation of people and the planet.

Simultaneously, we live in a time of courageous and inspiring movements of resistance that are challenging these inequalities and are asserting demands and dreams that another world is possible. During the course of this writing, we have seen the release of the bold, powerful and inspiring Movement for Black Lives policy platform,<sup>26</sup> the incredible courage and spirit of water protectors at Standing Rock<sup>27</sup> and the international show of solidarity with the No Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) struggle, as well as the 2017 Women's March for migrants rights, access to healthcare, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ liberation, racial justice, religious freedom, worker's rights and environmental justice, which was the largest single-day protest in U.S. history.<sup>28</sup> We can all draw inspiration from these struggles as we confront, unlearn and transform the oppressive conditions that have made us think violence is normal, or inevitable. It is not.

While there are infinite avenues and opportunities for resistance, we believe that efforts to impact social conditions are most effective when large groups of people are able to come together to push back on oppressive systems, and to develop liberatory ways of meeting their needs. Community organizing is one of the most effective strategies for shifting social conditions. What we mean by organizing is the process of bringing people together in order to use our collective power to win improvements in people's lives, and to challenge and shift systems of power towards liberation. Community organizing requires growing our faith that justice is possible, and inspiring one another to take courageous action together for liberation. This process is not idealistic, or abstract, but a necessary political project if we are committed to addressing and ending CSA.

*“People become informed and savvy about those areas of life where they can exercise some power. It is powerlessness that creates passivity. When children are treated with respect, given choice and expected to have opinions that matter, they have opinions and choices.”*

*–Aurora Levins Morales,  
Medicine Stories*

When it comes to child sexual abuse, there are myriad opportunities for intervention and organizing. Some of the many key conditions to shift include:

Shifting From	Towards
The lack of power and abuse that children and youth experience within most families, communities and society.	Children and youth have more power, opportunity and encouragement to express their opinions, participate in and influence decision making, and to contribute their perspectives, creativity and convictions within their families, communities and society.
The systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities over centuries for Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color and poor people.	Full and free access to lifetime education for all Black, Indigenous and other displaced peoples, including: free access and open admissions to public community colleges and universities, technical education (technology, trade and agricultural), educational support programs, retroactive forgiveness of student loans, and support for lifetime learning programs. <sup>29</sup>
An economic system within which most people work long hours, particularly poor and working class people, and often are required to prioritize work over family time, community engagement, and kinship.	An economic system that is ecologically sustainable and equitable for all people, which prioritizes mutually beneficial relationships, and which values all forms of labor (including parenting, caregiving, and the many forms of domestic labor required to maintain life, such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, etc.). <sup>30</sup>
Intersecting systems of oppression create an “ideal” bodymind. People with disabilities and/or people whose bodies, minds and abilities do not fit within this ideal are subjected to ongoing abuse, mistreatment, ostracization and isolation.	Families, communities and society embody an understanding and ethic that all bodies are unique and essential, and that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. <sup>31</sup> People are valued for their abilities and disabilities, and are expected to contribute as they are able and are supported according to need.
Few people having access to healing, particularly effective modes of trauma healing, which means that many of us pass on pain and trauma reactions to future generations, rather than healing and breaking cycles of harm.	Widely accessible, culturally relevant healing spaces and practitioners for both individual and collective trauma healing. Basic education & normalization for all people about emotions, stress, traumatic stress, healing and resilience.
Gender role socialization within which boys and men are taught and encouraged to assume power over girls and women.	All people, including children and young people, have the right to self-identify and “be” their gender in whatever ways feel right to them. Young people are socialized into norms of mutual respect, consent, and interdependence. <sup>32</sup>
Families tend to be isolated from other families, and interactions are limited across generations or age groups.	Those of us raising children have access to multiple sources of information about parenting/caregiving, and are able to have frank, open conversations about our questions and struggles. All of us are regularly interacting and building relationships across families and generations, throughout our lifespan.
Silence and shame that surrounds the “privacy” of intimate life—in general, and particularly with regards to sexuality and abuse.	All people have access to age-appropriate health and sexual health education. People of all ages have regular access to supportive relationships in which they can share honestly about their home life and their intimate relationships, including interpersonal dynamics and sexuality.

Examples of ideas that could be used to build power, shift these conditions, and create alternatives, at the levels of family, community, economy and society:<sup>33</sup>

- Integrate curricula on children's rights, voice, consent, and positive discipline into birth classes, parent education while in hospitals post-delivery, pre-K, public schools, Department of Health & Human Services
- Establish free, quality childcare for all children and working families
- Neighborhood or community-based parent support groups with a focus on real talk about the intimate struggles of family life
- Age-appropriate sex-positive, LGBTQ integrated sex-education at all ages in schools
- Push for significant changes to mandatory reporting laws in order to create more opportunities and openings for children, youth, and families to disclose sexual abuse
- Create free and/or affordable treatment programs for people who come forward about urges to sexually abuse children
- Reauthoring current laws on Sex Offender Registry and Public Notification in order to make Communities of Support and Accountability and other community based interventions more accessible within the U.S. for people who sexually abuse children
- Minimum wage increases to actual living wage
- Public education campaigns and resources to encourage individuals and families to proactively pursue healing, focusing specifically on the notion of "breaking the cycle" of intergenerational violence and harm
- Developmentally appropriate integration of body awareness, emotional intelligence, relationship skills, trauma and healing into standard curricula for students of all ages
- Organizing for a "Just Transition" from an exploitation and fossil fuel based economy to one based on equity, cooperation and sustainability with the planet

Although these are just a few examples of conditions we aim to shift, our hope is that this list offers a taste of the infinite potential we have to imagine possibilities beyond the narrow set of choices we are currently offered.

When communities do try alternative justice models, they challenge this status quo and the unequal power dynamics it maintains. As a result, communities are at increased risk of becoming targeted by the State. This risk is even greater when the communities challenging these power relations are the very same communities that are already subjected to criminalization, surveillance, and other forms of targeting by these institutions.

As we strive to develop meaningful ways of seeking justice within our communities, we also need to build our capacity to respond to targeting. This capacity building includes developing mechanisms of support and accountability across communities so that we are able to challenge the power that protects and defends violence. The principles of Safety, Accountability, Collective Action, and Sustainability remind us that relationships and alliances build our collective capacity to defend our communities against State targeting.

While we should always consider the specific context within which we are trying to make demands or to create alternatives—and be strategic in choosing our battles, based on the power and capacity we have built together—we also must continue to challenge each other to be creative and courageous in constantly seeking to create meaningful and liberatory change in the conditions of our lives. We believe that another world is possible, and that we can find hope, resilience, dignity and belonging as we strive to create it together.

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- 27 **“...water protectors at Standing Rock”**  
See [www.nodapl.life/](http://www.nodapl.life/) and [https://www.democracynow.org/topics/dakota\\_access](https://www.democracynow.org/topics/dakota_access)
- 28 **“...the largest single-day protest in U.S. history”**  
Wikipedia contributors. “2017 Women’s March.” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 04 April. 2017. Web. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_Women%27s\\_March](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Women%27s_March). Accessed 4 May. 2017
- 29 **“Full and free access to lifetime education...”**  
**Movement for Black Lives, A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice** (*Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform, 2016*). <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>
- 30 **“An economic system that is ecologically sustainable, equitable and just...”**  
Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project, comp. “From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring.” Movement Generation. N.p., 15 Dec. 2016. Web. [movementgen.electricmembers.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT\\_booklet\\_English\\_SPREADs\\_web.pdf](http://movementgen.electricmembers.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/JT_booklet_English_SPREADs_web.pdf) Accessed on 27 Jan. 2017.
- 31 **“...all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met”**  
Berne, Patty. “Disability Justice – a working draft.” Sins Invalid. N.p., 10 June 2015. Web. [sinsinvalid.org/blog/disability-justice-a-working-draft-by-patty-berne](http://sinsinvalid.org/blog/disability-justice-a-working-draft-by-patty-berne). Accessed on 27 Apr. 2016.
- 32 **“All people...have the right to self-identify and be their gender...”**  
Creighton, Allan, and Paul Kivel. *Helping Teens Stop Violence, Build Community and Stand for Justice: 20th Anniversary Edition*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 2011. Pg. 106.
- 33 **“...ideas that could be used to build power, shift these conditions and create alternatives”**  
Herman Brand, Briana. Personal correspondence. 29 August, 2016.

# FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

## SELECTED RESOURCES FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND YOUTH WORKERS

*Girls Do What They Have to Do to Survive.* The Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP). [ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/girls-do-what-they-have-to-do-to-survive-a-study-of-resilience-and-resistance.pdf](http://ywepchicago.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/girls-do-what-they-have-to-do-to-survive-a-study-of-resilience-and-resistance.pdf)

*Helping Teens Stop Violence, Build Community and Stand for Justice.* Allan Creighton and Paul Kivel. Hunter House Publishers, 2011.

InterGalactic Conspiracy of Childcare Collectives – childcare for social and environmental justice. [intergalactic-childcare.weebly.com](http://intergalactic-childcare.weebly.com)

*The KidPower Book for Caring Adults: Personal Safety, Self-Protection, Confidence and Advocacy for Young People.* Irene Van der Zande. KidPower Press, 2012.

*Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive.* Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell. TarcherPerigee, 2013.

School of Unity and Liberation – youth political education trainings & manuals. [www.schoolofunityandliberation.org](http://www.schoolofunityandliberation.org)

*Trauma-Proofing Your Kids: A Parents' Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy and Resilience.* Peter Levine and Maggie Klein. North Atlantic Books, 2008.

## SELECTED RESOURCES ON PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

*As If They Were Human: A Different Take on Perpetrator Accountability.* Tod Augusta-Scott.  
[azinelibrary.org/other/augusta-scott\\_comp\\_zine-\\_imposed.pdf](http://azinelibrary.org/other/augusta-scott_comp_zine-_imposed.pdf)

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: Building Transformative Justice Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. [batjc.wordpress.com](http://batjc.wordpress.com)

generationFIVE – *Child Sexual Abuse and Transformative Justice* training.  
[www.generationFIVE.org](http://www.generationFIVE.org)

Just Beginnings Collaborative – “a movement building platform designed to initiate, cultivate and fund strategic efforts to end child sexual abuse.” [justbeginnings.org](http://justbeginnings.org)

Living Bridges Project: Documenting Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. [livingbridgesproject.com](http://livingbridgesproject.com)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center – Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Resources. <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/child-sexual-assault-prevention/preventing-child-sexual-abuse-resources>

*Secret Survivors: Using Theater to Break the Silence* – toolkit and discussion guide + documentary. [www.pingchong.org/undesirable-elements/production-archive/secret-survivors/toolkit](http://www.pingchong.org/undesirable-elements/production-archive/secret-survivors/toolkit)

Stop it Now! - resources for adults concerned about a child's behavior, another adult's behavior, one's own behavior, and tools for families to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. See their resource guides for:

- *Healing and Support for Children and Parents:* [www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/healing-and-support-for-children-and-parents](http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/healing-and-support-for-children-and-parents)
- *Resources and Support for Adult Survivors of CSA:* [www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/adult-survivor-resources-and-support](http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/adult-survivor-resources-and-support)
- *Adult-at-Risk Resources:* [www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/treatment-for-adults-at-risk-to-abuse-and-who-have-abused](http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/treatment-for-adults-at-risk-to-abuse-and-who-have-abused)

## SELECTED RESOURCES FOR HEALING FROM CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

*The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse.* Ellen Bass and Laura Davis. Collins Living, 1988.

generative somatics – *Somatics and Trauma* practitioners and courses for social and environmental justice organizers, movement builders, and healers. [generativesomatics.org](http://generativesomatics.org)

*Healing Sex: A Mind-Body Approach to Healing Sexual Trauma.* Staci Haines. Cleis Press, 2007.

*No! The Rape Documentary Study Guide.* Created by Salamishah Tillet, Ph.D and Rachel Afi Quinn, Ph.D., with creative and editorial direction by Aisha Shahidah Simmons, Producer, Writer, and Director of *NO! The Rape Documentary*. [notherapedocumentary.org/no-study-guide](http://notherapedocumentary.org/no-study-guide)

*No Secrets, No Lies: How Black families can heal from Sexual Abuse.* Robin Stone. Harmony, 2005.

*Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse.* Mike Lew. Harper Perennial, 2004.

## SELECTED RESOURCES ON TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY)BASED RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Challenging Male Supremacy Project – resources for men working to end gender-based violence and oppression. [challengingmalesupremacy.org](http://challengingmalesupremacy.org)

*Community Accountability Working Document.* INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. <http://www.incite-national.org/page/community-accountability-working-document>

Creative Interventions – resources for everyday people to end violence. [www.creative-interventions.org](http://www.creative-interventions.org)

Just Practice Collaborative – *Transformative Justice and Community Accountability* training. [www.shirahassan.com/just-practice-collaborative](http://www.shirahassan.com/just-practice-collaborative)

*Know Justice, Know Peace* workshop. Youth Justice Coalition. <https://www.slideshare.net/KimZilla/yjc-know-justice-know-peace-part-1>

*Prison Culture* blog. Mariame Kaba. Includes a resource list on transformative justice and community accountability. <http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/transformative-justice>

*The Revolution Starts at Home*. Edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. South End Press, 2011.

*Transforming Harm* blog - public documentation of a community accountability process. <http://transformharm.tumblr.com>

Vision Change Win – transformative justice training and program development. [www.visionchangewin.com](http://www.visionchangewin.com)



working to interrupt the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse  
bringing together individual justice & collective liberation

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