THE ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS:A SKILL BUILDING WORKSHOP

MAY 2020

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The Anti-Violence Project would like to acknowledge the Communities and Nations in whose territories we do our work: the Lekwungen and WSANEC peoples. We understand that our work of addressing gender-based violence and sexualized violence is inherently connected and rooted to Canada's own ongoing history of occupying lands without consent, disrespecting territorial boundaries and infringing on people's bodies with violence and coercion.

The Anti-Violence Project (AVP) is the on-campus sexual assault centre at the University of Victoria. We strive to provide anti-oppressive and sex-positive services, advocacy and education to people of all genders. We are committed to addressing, resisting and ending gender-based violence and all intersecting forms of violence on campus and beyond through collaborative action.

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If you have feedback or questions, please email us at info@antiviolenceproject.org

SOME DEFINITIONS TO START:

Definitions can be helpful to introduce folks to new language but often do not lend themselves to the magnitude of complexity and experiences. Please feel free to read, use, complicate, and expand on these ideas.

Sexualized violence - Anything that disrespects your sexuality (including disrespect of asexuality) or is violence in a sexualized context. This is many things and can look like comments, leering, intimidation, coercion, expectations, discrimination, non consensual touching, sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc.

Sexual assault - Any unwanted sexual contact.

Gender-based violence - Violence rooted in gender-based oppression and power inequalities based on gender identity, perceived gender identity and/or gender expression, such as sexism, cissexism, misogyny, and transmisogyny. Any act of interpersonal, institutional or systemic violence (physical, sexual, economic, emotional, spiritual, social) that devalues and/or reinforces expected entitlement to women, girls, and trans, Two-Spirit, genderqueer, non-binary, and gender non-conforming bodies and lives.

More info on the Anti-Violence Project website: https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/glossary/

LISTEN-BELEIVE-REFER-CARE MODEL

In the event that someone discloses something traumatic to you, or you feel overwhelmed by their situation, it can be helpful to think of the words "Listen, Believe, Refer, Care", to help you feel confident, empathetic, supportive and helpful. As you gain confidence and knowledge, your friends may think of you when they need support, or don't know what resources are available to them.

LISTEN

If someone chooses to tell you that they're having troubles, they are probably simply looking for someone to hear them, and they trust you. Let them take their time – don't cut them off, rush them, or ask a million questions. You don't have to get any details or give any advice – just listen. Remain calm and attentive. Use open and engaged body language (e.g. face them, uncross your arms), and be respectful of their personal space.

1. **Initiate a supportive, concerned and non-judgemental relationship.**

- Introduce yourself (if they don't know you) and what your role is.
- Provide both emotional and physical safety/privacy.
- Use active listening for clarifying and to convey your understanding.
- Ensure confidentiality (are you somewhere safe and private to talk? do you have any professional obligations to break confidentiality? when?).
- Convey a sense of hope. "I'm really glad you've come here. We're/I'm going to do everything we/I can to help you."
- "I'm sorry this happened to you."
- Don't be afraid to be honest with your reactions if you think they will be helpful.

2. **Allow for emotional ventilation and expression of needs.**

- Listen carefully, focusing on expression of needs/feelings.
- Allow the survivor to set the emotional tone in order to maintain control of their process as much as possible.
- Respect existing defence mechanisms, such as what you might think is denial, rationalization, justification, avoidance, and so on. Know that these are part of the survivor taking care of themselves through this experience.
- Ventilation of anger may be an important part of this process.
- Respond with understanding. Reserve all judgement about what has happened.

BELIEVE

Many people are afraid to tell someone about something they think is scary, sad, or embarrassing that has happened to them. Our society often makes people feel that violent things are their fault, and they should get over their feelings without any help. If someone chooses to confide in you, it's because they trust you, and it's important to let them know that you believe them.

People rarely make up stories or falsely report. Reinforce that they are not to blame – it's never the survivor's fault that they were sexually assaulted.

3. **Provide reassurance.**

- Reassure the survivor that this was not their fault. You might say "I'm so sorry this has happened. This is not your fault."
- Explain that their reactions are common under the circumstances; everyone responds to crisis or traumatic experiences differently.
- Validate and normalize the survivor's feelings and reactions.

4. **Focus on immediate safety. (Note: this may be the first question asked if the survivor is on the phone and physical safety has not yet been established)**

- Identify immediate concerns and needs. (e.g. Where are they staying? Injured? Support people?)
- Give attention to physical safety and specific medical concerns.
- More info on safety planning later in this resource.

5. **Give back control.**

- Ask the survivor to identify their main concerns and what they would like to do (e.g. "What do you want to do at this point?" or "What's feeling like the best next step right now?")
- Discuss strengths and existing coping mechanisms. How have they gotten through difficult situations in the past? Draw on their own internal and external resources.
- Explore options and solutions.
- Allow them to make their own choices.

REFER

Let the person know that there are places that can help, including phone crisis lines, school resources and community organizations. Even if you don't know them all off the top of your head (who does?), you can help them research their options or get in touch with one of us.

You might say: "It sounds like you might want some support now.
I know there are places that might be useful – can I help you find them?"

6. **Make appropriate referrals.**

- It is crucial to follow the lead of the survivor, in terms of what they want for themselves. This may not always look like what you think is "best."
- Listen and offer referrals in a consensual way. This includes respecting a survivor's decisions regarding reporting, seeking medical attention, seeking out additional support or speaking to law enforcement. There are many reasons why these services may not be an option for someone, such as previous violence from police, community organizations, or medical professionals.
- If someone is interested, provide information about relevant community groups, agencies and service that may be able to help meet the needs of the survivor (e.g. shelter, emotional support, information on reporting, etc.)
- Emotional support can also be offered to key people in the survivor's life, such as parents, friends, partners, etc through various organizations. This support includes how to help the survivor.
- It can be helpful to discuss any existing support systems they may want to lean on at this time.
- Keep information simple and to the point.
- Provide any available written material or website links to them to review at a later date.

CARE

There are two important components of care - showing care when supporting a survivor and caring for yourself as a supporter.

SHOWING CARE

Listening and believing are two important elements of care but so is our ability to show empathy when we support someone. As supporters, our role is not to save or rescue anyone. As researcher Brené Brown says "The truth is, rarely can a response make something better, what makes something better is connection." Here are some other things important to consider when supporting a survivor:

- Don't take away their right to name their own experience by re-naming it yourself. If they aren't calling it sexual assault, that's their choice. Follow their lead.
- Gently bust myths if they are coming up for the survivor. Let them know that you don't believe those societal myths about sexual assault (i.e. that it was their fault or that they "deserved it")
- Reinforce resistance – whatever the survivor did was what they needed to do to survive and get out of the situation safely. Where there is violence, there is always resistance. They have resisted and that is powerful.
- Seeking help – Whether the violence happened recently or a while ago, reiterate that they deserve to and have the right to seek healing at any time.

SELF CARE

Take care of yourself. It can be tough to be a supporter, as it takes time and energy. Make sure that you talk to someone (without breaking confidentiality) and take care of your needs, too. It can be a good idea to call a phone support line to debrief after talking about something heavy. You can always speak to AVP staff or come by our drop in support hours.

Self care is different for everyone, for some it's a bubble bath or for others it's a long walk. It's best to start by figuring out what self care is for you. Maybe it's engaging in certain activities, visiting your favourite places, or seeking support from your favourite people or animals. Self care isn't selfish, it allows you to care and be there for others.

SAFETY PLANNING AND COVID-19

What is Safety Planning:

Safety planning is a personalized plan that can help folks navigate dangerous situations and consider ways to react when in danger There are many reasons someone might want to have a safety plan They might be planning to leave a dangerous relationship or living situation, or in the process of leaving.They may have already left or may be looking for ways to keep themselves as safe as possible in their current situation.

NOTE: Information about safety planning is often geared towards people experiencing domestic or intimate partner violence, but anyone can create a safety plan. Safety plans come in all shapes and sizes; they should be unique to the survivor's needs in the moment (loveisrespect.org).

It is important to remember that safety planning is one tool for increasing safety, but it doesn't work for everyone, and will look different depending on a variety of factors. That is why we have structured this workshop to first provide you with our survivor support model. Having tools to listen to survivors, believe their experiences and make space for them to lead the process is the foundation of safety planning.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS DURING COVID-19:

Before we outline some helpful questions to ask when safety planning we wanted to consider some of the unique challenges currently facing survivors in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Thinking through these considerations can help us to be better equipped and more informed while discussing safety planning.

1) Safety is different for everyone, especially right now:

We recognize that people surviving violence could be experiencing increased isolation and danger as physical and social distancing measures continue to be enforced. Practicing self-isolation and limiting our interactions with others is crucial to reducing the spread of COVID-19, but we understand that being at home may not be the safest option for everyone.

- Consider that for some folks, the need for at home support continues despite the isolation restrictions (eg. elderly folks, folks with disabilities, or limited mobility)
- Though staying home may help to reduce the curve, it can also decrease safety for survivors who may need to be outside their homes to access support or make disclosures

Listening and believing survivors is integral. Take direction from the survivors and listen to their suggestions on options and choices. Remember that a survivor's decisions can intersect with all facets of their identity and experience.

2) Barriers may be exacerbated during the pandemic:

The many barriers associated with accessing resources may be amplified during this timeThere has been increased racism and xenophobia related to COVID-19 which can make accessing resources even more challenging. Furthermore, social distancing practices are disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, those experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Being aware of these barriers and special considerations can help us to apply a trauma-informed approach to supporting survivors during this time. There is no one-size fits all approach to supporting survivors, but doing our best to navigate these special considerations while prioritizing the elements outlined in our support model, is a good place to start. We may need to use different strategies when discussing violence at home, in relationships and families

3) We may have to use different tools and strategies during the pandemic to increase safety while supporting survivors:

- There may be limited capacity at shelters and other services due to COVID-19, but it is often possible to get onto a waitlists or get more information about other services through these organizationsWith more services moving to online delivery, increased attention to technological safety is needed. Consider learning how to clear browser history and learning about phone safety.
- You may want to use a signal (hand signal, words, jewelry)
- Post and share information about what resources continue to be available throughout the community
- While we may not physically be able to accompany someone, we can
  - schedule debriefs and check ins
  - help folks make a list of things they want to talk about before the meetings
- To continue to stay up to date with strategies related to safety at home, follow anti-violence organizations in your community on social media and online to stay up to date with their practices and advice

GETTING STARTED WITH A SAFETY PLAN:

Safety planning isn't about having all the right answers, it's about centering the survivor and having helpful questions to support them in identifying the places, people and things that may increase their safety. Prior to starting a safety plan, it's important to make sure that folks are safe enough in the moment to actually talk about safety. Some questions to start

- Do you feel safe enough to talk right now? If not, is there anywhere that you can go where you might feel safer?
- Is there another time we can talk that would be safer for you?

Once you have established enough safety to start building a plan, it is helpful work through core elements of a safety plan. We draw on the work of Claudio Rivera here to identify four themes of safety planning:

- People
- Places
- Actions
- Tech and Safety

Consider questions that fit within each theme:

For example for **people**, some questions to start could be:

- Does anyone that you are close to know what's happened?
- Is there someone supportive in your life that you'd feel comfortable reaching out to?
- Can you let supportive people outside of your immediate shelter know in advance that you would like to reach out to them in an emergency?
- If you are concerned that you are still in danger of further violence, is there someone that you can stay with or someone that can come and stay with you?

Places:

- What places feel safer than others in your home right now
- What about outside of your home?

Actions:

- If you need to leave your house quickly, what items would you need to take with you?
- Can you keep those items organized and somewhere accessible at all times?

Tech and Safety:

- How are you able to keep your phone charged and service active?
- Are there ways you can reach out to people if you don't have a phone?
- What word, phrase, or signal can you use as a code to ask your family, friends, or neighbors to call for help?
- Do you know how to clear your browser history and caller ID?
- Here are some links on how to clear your online/phone history: https://www.bwss.org/about-bwss/internet-safety/.

Check out loveisrespect.org for some great online safety planning resources

Remember: Support is not about saving; however, we can remind survivors that they are cared for, that they are the experts of their own experience, and that we are there to support them. Above all, remember that no one ever asks for violence, and it is never a survivor's fault that they have/are experiencing it.

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES:

For more information on these supports and others visit: https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/resources/links/

Women Against Violence Against Women: 1-877-392-7583 (open 24/7): Immediate crisis and long-term support services to survivors of sexualized violence who have shared experiences of gender marginalization: cis and trans women, Two-Spirit, trans and/or non-binary people. We advocate for social and systemic change through education, outreach and activism. (Based in Vancouver.)

Battered Women's Support Services: 604-687-1867 (open 24/7): Emotional support, information and referrals to community resources, specific information about coping, and to help create a safety plan for women who are dealing with violence and/or the effects of abuse. (Based in Vancouver.)

KUU-US Crisis Line: Toll-free line: 1-800-588-8717 | Adult/Elder Crisis Line: 250-723-4050 | Child/Youth Crisis Line: 250-723-2040: Provides 24-hour crisis support for Indigenous folks throughout British Columbia. Once the crisis issue has been identified, the level of severity for call handling is determined. The goal is to establish a non-judgmental approach to listening and problem solving. A support system is put into place where the caller is brought back to a pre-crisis state. (Based in Port Alberni.)

Trans Lifeline, 1-877-330-6366, 7am to 1am / 7 days a week: provides culturally competent services to trans and gender-nonconforming people in crisis.

Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888

REMINDER: Many Universities and Colleges also have Counselling services and Sexualized Violence Prevention Offices. Checkout your institution's website for more information

SOME RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING :

Supporting a Survivor of Sexual Assault (zine) - https://brokenbeautifuldowloads.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/survivor-support.pdf

Brene Brown on Empathy (video with closed captioning) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw

How to Support a Friend or Loved One Who Has Been Sexually Abused (article) - https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/smarter-living/sexual-abuse-assault-support-mental-health.html

Summarizing, Paraphrasing and Reflecting (video with closed captioning) - https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/summarizing-paraphrasing-and-reflecting-4

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