

HARM AND ACCOUNTABILITY CONVERSATION SEED PACKET



A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO SUPPORT
SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS
AS YOU HOLD CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HARM,
ACCOUNTABILITY, AND HEALING

“

*What would
it look like
if accountability
wasn't scary?*

”

Mia Mingus

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1:

WHY THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE? WHY NOW?

Why this discussion guide? Why Now?	<u>9</u>
Essential questions for our movement	<u>10</u>
What is accountability?	<u>11</u>
Foundational values of this guide	<u>13</u>
How to use this discussion guide	<u>14</u>
Origins of this guide	<u>15</u>
Contributors	<u>15</u>
Thank you to our teachers	<u>16</u>

CHAPTER 2:

WHAT IS HARM?

What is harm?	<u>18</u>
Harms committed by individuals	<u>19</u>
Harms committed by systems	<u>20</u>
A few definitions	<u>22</u>
Conversation Starters	
▪ Exercise #1: How we respond to individual harms vs. harms committed by systems	<u>25</u>
▪ Exercise #2: Centering the needs of survivors	<u>26</u>
▪ Exercise #3: How shame can block accountability	<u>27</u>



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3:

“PERPETRATOR” VS. “VICTIM”: ADDRESSING THE BINARIES IN OUR WORK

Addressing the binaries in our work	<u>29</u>
Carceral logic and a crime-centered frame	<u>30</u>
Conversation Starters	
▪ Exercise #4: Examining gray areas	<u>34</u>
▪ Exercise #5: Self-reflection	<u>35</u>
▪ Exercise #6: Changing our frame	<u>36</u>

CHAPTER 4:

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

What is accountability?	<u>39</u>
Accountability vs. punishment	<u>40</u>
5 key elements of accountability	<u>42</u>
Restorative approaches vs. punitive approaches	<u>44</u>
A trauma-informed approach to consequences	<u>46</u>
What is healing justice?	<u>48</u>
Conversation Starters	
▪ Exercise #7: Defining accountability	<u>50</u>
▪ Exercise #8: Our personal experiences with accountability	<u>51</u>
▪ Exercise #9: Getting clear on terms	<u>52</u>
▪ Exercise #10: Thinking through accountability and repair in our work	<u>53</u>
▪ Exercise #11: Accountability and punishment Venn diagram	<u>54</u>



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5: SUPPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS

Supporting accountability in ourselves and others	<u>57</u>
Proactive self-accountability practices	<u>59</u>
Self-accountability after doing harm	<u>59</u>
Community accountability practices	<u>60</u>
10 guiding questions for any community accountability process	<u>61</u>
10 strategies for cultivating community accountability	<u>62</u>
Models of accountability: alternatives to incarceration	<u>65</u>
Healing and accountability wheel	<u>71</u>
Conversation Starters	
▪ Exercise #12: Healing and accountability wheel	<u>73</u>
▪ Exercise #13: Dreaming accountability	<u>75</u>
▪ Exercise #14: What are the obstacles to accountability	<u>76</u>
▪ Exercise #15: Self-accountability	<u>77</u>
▪ Exercise #16: Supporting harm doers in being accountable	<u>78</u>
▪ Exercise #17: How to give a genuine apology	<u>79</u>



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 6: TURNING WILL INTO ACTION

Turning will into action	<u>81</u>
On an individual level	<u>82</u>
On an organizational level	<u>82</u>
▪ Option: Craft an organizational Harm, Healing, and Accountability Statement	
▪ Option: Cultivate a culture of accountability in your organization	
On a community level	<u>83</u>
▪ Option: Establish an accountability workgroup in your community	

CHAPTER 7: DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING (RESOURCE LIST BASED ON TOPIC)

Advocacy	<u>86</u>
Community Accountability	<u>87</u>
Conflict	<u>88</u>
Criminal Legal Reform/Prison Abolition	<u>89</u>
Harm	<u>90</u>
Healing Justice	<u>90</u>
Individual Accountability	<u>91</u>
Organizing	<u>92</u>
Restorative Justice and Community Accountability in Practice	<u>93</u>
Action Alliance Resources	<u>96</u>

WRITINGS

Turning to one another, Margaret Wheatley	<u>97</u>
“Dreaming Accountability” excerpts, Mia Mingus	<u>98</u>



Content warning

This toolkit explores the notions of violence, abuse, trauma, harm, and punishment.

Some of the exercises touch upon the topics of harm, shame, and punishment, including:

- Exercise 1: involves stories of suffering and death due to poisoning.
- Exercise 3: discusses how shame can impede accountability.
- Exercise 5: asks group members to explore their limits of compassion toward people who commit harm.
- Exercise 8: asks group members to reflect on personal experiences with accountability.
- Exercise 10: involves group members discussing consequences for several public figures who have committed harm.

Consent to engage with this text and the affiliated exercises should be informed and fully voluntary.



CHAPTER 1

WHY THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE?





*What would it look like if
accountability wasn't scary?*

Mia Mingus



1: WHY THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE?

The movement to address and prevent sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, and other forms of interpersonal violence, has invested decades into making the criminal legal system more responsive to survivors.

The reason for this investment has been not only to increase safety for survivors, but to also hold perpetrators accountable.

But here's the question: Does the criminal legal system—and other systems that punish as a response to harm—really deliver accountability?

When punishment happens—whether it's a child who is admonished, a student who is suspended, or an adult who is incarcerated—how often does that involve the person taking responsibility for their behavior and acknowledging its impact? How often does it involve the person who caused harm to take steps to repair what they did and change for the better?

How many times have you sat with a survivor who's said, *I just want them to understand how they hurt me...and to never do that to me or anyone else again.*

Consider the times in your life when someone has hurt you and you've been more able to move on once they take responsibility for their behavior and acknowledge its impact.

Perhaps it is time to think more critically about what accountability actually means, what paths exist for promoting accountability, and how we can practice it in our own lives to model it for our friends, families, coworkers, and communities.

This discussion guide was written to help those of us working in sexual and domestic violence programs to begin to think more broadly about what accountability should look like...not only after harm is committed, but also in all aspects of our lives...in our relationships, families, workplaces and communities.



This is a guide for holding discussions in your workplace, communities, and families. It is *not* a directive or mandate. It *does not* proclaim that sexual and domestic violence agencies should divest from working with criminal legal system partners.

It *does* ask us to consider what systems for supporting accountability currently exist, and to imagine new ways of approaching our responses to harm... approaches that not only reinforce accountability but also strengthen connection and healing.

A good way to begin to imagine new ways of being is to discuss and learn together.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR OUR MOVEMENT

Why does our primary response to violence rely on using a system that replicates many of the dynamics of abuse (by isolating, controlling, and further harming individuals and families)? Can we dream up another option that is more humane and more effective at changing behavior?

- What if we invested as many resources in transforming the behavior of people who commit harm as we invest in punishing them?
- What if the decisions we made took into consideration how our future generations would benefit from choices we make today?
- What if we treated people who commit harm as *not* disposable?
- **What if we invested in primary prevention^[1] as much as we invest in responding to survivors and to people who commit harm?**
- What if we shaped our system responses to violence by what survivors tell us they want and need?

These are some of the queries that lead us to think more deeply about the ways in which we are accountable to survivors and to future generations.

[1] Primary prevention means addressing the roots and drivers of violence. The aim of primary prevention is to stop violence before it happens. This means primary prevention is different to other kinds of interventions that address sexual or intimate partner violence. Source: <https://action.ourwatch.org.au/what-is-prevention/what-is-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women/>



WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

We use the word *accountability* practically every day in our work. But what does it really mean? What does accountability look like when it's happening?

Accountability is both straightforward and complex. The nature of it changes depending on the kind of harm that happened, whether it is an individual or collective harm, the impact of what happened, the relationship between the parties involved, and whether we are taking accountability ourselves or supporting others to take accountability.

In the simplest terms, accountability is recognizing and taking responsibility for one's actions, acknowledging the impact of those actions, taking steps to repair the harm as much as possible, and taking steps not to repeat that harm in the future.

Even though this sounds simple, most of us are pretty terrible at it.

But that's not entirely our fault. In mainstream American society, accountability has been linked to punishment and even revenge, and not many people enthusiastically volunteer to be punished. So we shy away from holding ourselves accountable to protect ourselves from the social costs of taking responsibility for harming someone.

However, if we think accountability is about punishment, we're getting it wrong. Accountability is about communication, acknowledgment, and repair... not punishment. It can (re)build trust and relationships, deepen understanding, help share power, and even lead to personal transformation.

Unlike punishment, which is always reactive, accountability can be proactive and future-oriented. Accountability can be present even when no harm has occurred.

What if we welcomed accountability as a gift or sacred commitment, rather than shied away from it?^[2] What if we practiced accountability on a daily basis rather than just talking about it?

^[2] See Mia Mingus' piece, "Dreaming Accountability" on her blog, Leaving Evidence: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/05/05/dreaming-accountability-dreaming-a-returning-to-ourselves-and-each-other/>



Connection is an essential human experience that is often shattered or lost when we experience harm or trauma. Accountability drives connection by investing the time and energy it takes to acknowledge harm and repair it. In this way, accountability practices are healing practices.

At their best, both healing and accountability can offer restoration for people and communities on a path to wholeness.

This is not to ignore the fact that we may feel fear or outrage when we have been harmed...particularly when the harm is in the form of violence or abuse. To be clear, strong emotions are entirely appropriate during an accountability process, and forgiving the person(s) who has harmed us is not a necessary part of accountability.

Let's repeat that: forgiveness is not a required part of the accountability process. Why? Because being accountable after harm is the responsibility of the person(s) who committed harm. Whether forgiveness happens or not is the work of the person(s) who was/were harmed. Being forgiven does not have to happen for someone to be accountable.

In order to be able to practice effective accountability at the organizational or community level, we must first practice accountability in our personal lives with our friends and family.



FOUNDATIONAL VALUES OF THIS GUIDE

In November 2022, the Action Alliance crafted its own “Healing, Harm and Accountability” Statement to guide us internally as we do our work. Both this discussion guide and the Action Alliance’s internal statement are grounded in the following core values and lessons of our movement: [3]

- A belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people;
- An ongoing effort to center the experiences of survivors as a guide to inform the responses and changes that are most urgent;
- A commitment to support healing in each person who experiences the trauma of violence;
- A fundamental understanding that those who use violence and harm have often experienced violence and harm themselves;
- An acknowledgement that our movement’s reliance on punishment and the carceral state has inflicted profound harm on communities of color;
- An understanding that individual healing is rooted in collective healing, and;
- A commitment that people who use violence against others will be supported in their process in accountability including repairing harm that has been done.

“CAN'T YOU JUST GIVE ME AN ACCOUNTABILITY CHECKLIST?”

Just as there is no “one size fits all” safety plan for intimate partner violence, an accountability process must be tailored to the kind of harm that has happened, the relationship between the people who are involved, and the community and/or culture in which the accountability process is happening. Context is important.

[3] Action Alliance “Harm, Healing and Accountability Statement”, November 2022.



HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

We call this discussion guide a “seed packet” for a reason. Much of the work to think about true accountability in our movement and how it affects our work in ending sexual and domestic violence is in its very early stages. To extend the metaphor, many of us are barely seedlings when it comes to understanding accountability. And that’s okay. We are all learning, all the time.

This guide is meant to plant seeds by sparking important and sometimes complex discussions within and among your families, colleagues, and community allies and partners. Shifting how we think about and approach accountability is a long-term process; it will require more than one convening and one conversation.

Each section contains a set of conversation starters at the end. You may want to start with the first section on harm and begin a dialogue using the conversation starters at the end, or you are welcome to skip around to find a section and/or a set of conversation starters that fit best with your context.

You are invited to use the conversation starters in this discussion guide to initiate conversations within your family, organization, friend group, book club, coordinated community response group, in schools as part of prevention work (yes, helping people learn how to hold themselves accountable builds protective factors and is primary prevention!)... wherever you think appropriate.



THE ORIGINS OF THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

When the Action Alliance was drafting our own “Healing, Harm, and Accountability” Statement to use internally, a group of Executive Directors of Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies (SDVAs) asked the Action Alliance to create a discussion guide to help SDVAs hold similar discussions in their organizations and communities.

To ensure this guide resonates with what would be helpful to Sexual & Domestic Violence Agencies, the Communications and Development Governance Group (a committee within the Action Alliance Governing Body) held a series of listening sessions with Executive Directors in July 2022 and with front-line advocates in September 2022. The purpose of the listening sessions was to gain an understanding of what kinds of conversations are currently happening within SDVAs, the barriers that exist to having these conversations, and what would be most helpful to SDVAs.

Action Alliance staff reviewed the results of the listening sessions and drafted this discussion guide with feedback from the members of the Communications and Development Governance Group.

CONTRIBUTORS

This discussion guide is a product of the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance and its Communications and Development Governance Group.

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THANK YOU TO OUR TEACHERS

We are grateful to the following leaders for what they continue to teach us about living into a world that we long for. They help us envision a world in which we are able to respond to violence without further violence, a world where people enthusiastically hold themselves accountable, and a world where personal and collective transformation is possible.

- adrienne maree brown and We Will Not Cancel Us
- Angela Davis
- Barnard Center for Research on Women
- Beth Richie
- Danielle Sered and Common Justice
- Dean Spade
- Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- INCITE! Women and Trans People of Color Against Violence
- Jane Doe Inc., the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
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- Shira Hassan and Just Practice
- Vanessa Timmons
- Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

It is primarily women of color and indigenous communities we have to thank for dreaming up liberated, non-punitive paths toward accountability.



CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS HARM?





How can we respond to violence without using violence?



2: WHAT IS HARM?

Harm is an enormously broad term. It can include a wide range of suffering, including homicide. Even though different types of harm may look like they have nothing in common, there are common threads between all types of harm, such as suffering and loss.

Harm can affect people on an individual or a collective level. It can be caused by individuals, families, communities, and by entire systems, such as the education, military, criminal, employment or housing system.

For the purposes of this discussion guide, we will focus on a subset of harm: violence and abuse.

WHAT IS HARM?

Harm is the suffering, loss, pain and impact that can occur both in conflict and in instances of abuse, as well as in misunderstandings steeped in differences of life experience, opinion, or needs. Harm is what needs healing—working with individual healers, therapists, and in community to understand where the hurt is and what it would look like to not be ruled by it. [5]

[1] We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice, adrienne maree brown, 2020



HARMS COMMITTED BY INDIVIDUALS

Generally, in the field of sexual and domestic violence, we encounter harms of violence and abuse that fall under these categories of violence and abuse:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Emotional abuse
- Economic abuse
- Threats or violence against family/children/pets

Within each of these categories lies a range—or continuum—of violence and abuse. For example: a continuum of physical violence may include:

- Pinch / Squeeze
- Push / Shove
- Shake / Jerk
- Slap
- Bite
- Punch / Hit
- Kick
- Throwing objects
- Targeted physical blows to specific parts of the body
- Use of household objects as weapons
- Throwing partner
- Restraining and physical blows
- Abuse that requires medical treatment
- Abuse that results in lacerations, broken bones, internal injuries, or miscarriage
- Use of conventional weapons
- Abuse that leads to disfigurement or disability
- Strangulation
- Murder



HARMS COMMITTED BY SYSTEMS [5]

Violence and abuse that are committed by systems are often less visible than harms committed by individuals—especially for people who are not members of a targeted group. For example, as this discussion guide is being written, legislative bills are being introduced in a number of states that seek to deny gender-affirming care to trans minors. This is a form of physical and psychological abuse, yet many people who either support such bills or feel neutrally toward them do not identify them as abuse. With these bills, the entity committing the abuse is the state, which is a system.

EXAMPLES OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE COMMITTED BY U.S. SYSTEMS

- Restricted or no access to reproductive care
- Medical schools that wrongly teach students that Black patients have a higher pain tolerance than their white counterparts
- Pervasive negative depictions and portrayals of a particular group that reinforces messages of members of the group being less human/valuable/worthy
- Creating a culture of fear and unpredictability through messages which condone harassment and/or violence towards certain groups of people
- Police brutality towards people of color
- Diverting taxpayer resources into private schools and away from public schools that serve students of color
- Criminalization of people of color
- Banning books in schools that humanize marginalized groups, like queer families, immigrant families, non-Christian families, etc.
- Creating toxic neighborhoods, e.g. poisoning water in Flint Michigan

Most of these types of harm listed are legally sanctioned. Many are socially sanctioned as well.

[5] A system is a large, connected group of institutions that are each working toward a similar goal, including the legal, educational, health care, social service, government, media and the criminal legal system.



HARMS COMMITTED BY SYSTEMS, CONTINUED

Many survivors see the criminal legal system as their only option when they have suffered violence.

As a society, we have not built a criminal legal system that works for survivors. One indication of this is how few of us try to use the system to begin with. Fewer than half of us contact the criminal justice system after experiencing harm, and 56% of cases in which a person was injured go unreported.[6]

Even people who do call the police often do not get what they seek from the criminal legal system. For crime victims who seek an arrest and conviction, a significant portion of reported crimes do not result in arrest, many arrests do not result in convictions, and the results of convictions – including incarceration – often do not meet victims' needs.[7]

Data from survivors of sexual violence who use the services of Virginia's Sexual and Domestic Violence Programs indicate that "filing a police report" and "going to court" were among the top three **least helpful** self-advocacy tactics they tried after being assaulted.[7a]

It's time for us as a movement to help create avenues for accountability that exist outside of the criminal legal system. Survivors deserve more than one option.

“ *Why do so many of us turn to systems when harm has been committed, versus turning to our communities?* ”

[6] Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration and a Road to Repair* (The New Press, 2019). Lynn Langton et al., *Victimizations Not Reported to the Police 2006-2010* (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012).

[7] Danielle Sered, *Accounting for Violence: How to Increase Safety and Break Our Failed Reliance on Mass Incarceration*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Reporting Program, *Crime in the United States, 2015*, (Washington, DC: FBI, 2016), <https://perma.cc/BH8Q-HAAD> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Criminal Cases," (Washington, DC: BJS), <https://perma.cc/X7YL-9CT5> and Judith L. Herman, "The Mental Health of Crime Victims: Impact of Legal Intervention," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 16, no. 2 (2003), 159-166, doi:10.1023/A:1022847223135

[7a] *Advocacy in Virginia 2022: A Report on Data from Virginia's Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies*, Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance.



A FEW DEFINITIONS

In our movement, we often apply the terms “harm”, “trauma”, and “safety” loosely. Someone might feel that they have been *harmed* by a friend, partner, or colleague, when another person would describe it as *conflict*. Someone might say they don’t feel *safe* having a direct conversation with another person when a more accurate description is that they are *uncomfortable*. Within each of these terms exist a continuum.

When we use words like “unsafe” or “traumatic” to describe discomfort, it can be a way to avoid engaging in conversation that causes discomfort. We are not necessarily entitled to comfort, but we should all experience safety.

Being able to hold conversations--even uncomfortable ones--are necessary if we wish to avoid treating people and relationships as disposable.

Abuse is behaviors (physical, emotional, economic, sexual, and many more) intended to gain, exert, maintain power over another person or group. When abuse is present, professional support, space, and boundaries are needed.[8]

Conflict is disagreement, difference, or argument between two or more people. This can be personal, political, structural. There may be power differences. Conflicts can be direct and named, or indirect and felt. Conflicts can be resolved or managed by naming the dynamics, facing the roots of the issues, and honest conversation (which may or may not be supported with a mediator).[9]

Harm is suffering, loss, pain and impact that can occur both in conflict and instances of abuse. Harm is what needs healing—working with individual healers, therapists, and in community to understand where the hurt is and what it would look like not to be ruled by it.[10]

It’s important to get clear on the differences between comfort and safety. Ask yourself, “Is this conflict? Is this harm? Is this uncomfortable or is this unsafe?” Reflect on what you need to feel safe. This may involve naming and mitigating power differentials.

[8] We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice, adrienne maree brown, 2020, page 27

[9] *ibid*

[10] *ibid*

Power exists at the individual, social and institutional levels. Power is the ability to influence. It can influence having access to resources, having decision-making autonomy, and being given assumed authority. Power itself is neutral; it can be leveraged to do harm or to promote good.

Safety is a set of conditions that positively describes the physical and emotional well-being of a person. A person is considered safe when there are no threats of harm present or when the protective capacities can manage any foreseeable threats of harm. Safety is not to be confused with comfort; a person may be safe yet uncomfortable (for example, the kind of discomfort that arises in situations of interpersonal conflict).

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Trauma can occur individually or collectively; trauma inflicted on a group in the past can continue to have effects on current and future generations. [11]

THINK OF A TIME...

Think of a time when a friend has hurt you. Maybe they hurt your feelings, dismissed you, talked behind your back, disrespected you.

- What happened?
- What were the circumstances?
- What did you do about it?
- What did you want or need to heal?

Can you think of a time when you've done something for which you feel a sense of shame or regret?

- What did you want or need in order to talk about it?
- What would it take for you to make repair and/or move forward?

[11] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

WHAT IS HARM?

CONVERSATION STARTERS



EXERCISE # 1

HOW WE RESPOND TO INDIVIDUAL HARMS VS. HARMS COMMITTED BY SYSTEMS (APPROX. 30 MINS)

Content warning: this exercise involves stories of suffering and death due to poisoning.

DIRECTIONS:

Consider the difference in response to a mother poisoning her family^[11a] (life imprisonment without parole) vs. the Flint Michigan water poisoning crisis:

- In 2018, Diane Staudte was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder in the poisoning deaths of her husband and son.
- Former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder was charged in 2021 for his role in the Flint water crisis, an environmental disaster that contaminated the majority Black city's drinking water with lead for two years (April 2014-June 2016). Snyder faced two misdemeanor counts of willful neglect of duty, but the charges were dropped in December 2022. Snyder was Michigan's top executive when state-appointed officials decided to switch the city's drinking water source from Detroit's water system to the Flint River in 2014. Tens of thousands of Flint residents, many of them children, were exposed to dangerous levels of lead, and outbreaks of Legionnaire disease killed at least 12 people and sickened dozens more. No one has been held legally responsible for the poisoning of nearly 100,000 city residents who were exposed to lead through their drinking water – close to 9,000 of whom were children under the age 6.

DISCUSS:

- How are these two crimes similar? Different?
- What factors account for the differences in who is held responsible?
- What would have been the most appropriate responses to these two situations? If you could wave a magic wand, what would accountability look like in each situation?

[11a] <https://abcnews.go.com/US/mother-convicted-poisoning-family-maintains-innocence/story?id=82780856>



EXERCISE #2

CENTERING THE NEEDS OF SURVIVORS (APPROX. 30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch video: [Centering the Needs of Survivors, Part 2](#)
(10 minutes, 55 seconds)
Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- “Who gets to be a survivor?” is a question raised in this video. What does this question mean to you?
- What are the differences between “survivor-centered” and “survivor-informed”?
- What does Esteban Kelly mean in saying that accountability processes need to include the broader community, not just the people who are immediately affected by harm? (10:03 in the video)

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

FEATURING RJ MACCANI, PRIYA RAI, RACHEL HERZING, AND ESTEBAN KELLY

Survivor-centeredness is an important value in transformative justice. But what does it actually mean to center the needs of survivors? In this 2-part video, people with years of experience facilitating community accountability processes with survivors of harm and people who have caused harm address whether centering survivors means that survivors define or drive transformative justice processes. This video considers the complexities of honoring and upholding survivors' agency while balancing other concerns and interests. How do facilitators give survivors the time, space, and support they need while also making sure that other considerations are also incorporated into transformative justice and community accountability processes?

This video is part of the Building Accountable Communities video series. The Building Accountable Communities Project promotes non-punitive responses to harm by developing resources for transformative justice practitioners and organizing convenings and workshops that educate the public.

Created by Project Nia and the Barnard Center for Research on Women. Video produced by Mariame Kaba, Dean Spade, and Hope Dector.



EXERCISE #3

HOW SHAME CAN BLOCK ACCOUNTABILITY (APPROX. 15 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch video: [How Shame Can Block Accountability](#)

(4 minutes)

Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- What things in our culture can contribute to feeling shame?
- How does shame relate to accountability? How can shame impede accountability?
- How do our responses to harm increase or mitigate feelings of shame?

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

FEATURING STAS SCHMEIDT AND LEA ROTH

Why do we tend towards performative apology when we work from a basis of shame?

In this video, people with years of experience facilitating processes between survivors of harm and people who have done harm talk about how coming from a framework of shame can shut us down and get in the way of authentic accountability. This video is part of the Building Accountable Communities video series.



CHAPTER 3

"PERPETRATOR" VS. "VICTIM"

ADDRESSING THE BINARIES IN OUR WORK



“

*How do we choose compassion
for all, not just for some of us?*

”

3: “PERPETRATOR” VS. “VICTIM”: ADDRESSING THE BINARIES IN OUR WORK

Most people who commit violence have also survived it, and few have received formal support to heal. The *survivor/perpetrator binary* describes the habit of dividing people into one of two categories: either “survivors” or “perpetrators”. These terms have been a part of our movement’s language for decades.

But it’s important to recognize that most of us who have been harmed have committed harm as well. And when it comes to people who perpetrate violence, most are also survivors...and were survivors first. So most of us are both/and, rather than either/or.

When we invest in carceral systems that create more trauma survivors [11a] and when we fight for harsher penalties in the name of “victim safety”, **our actions communicate that only certain types of survivors are worth protecting.**

It’s important for us as victim advocates to remember that prisons and jails hold some of the most traumatized people in the world.

*When we say we believe in the inherent worth
and dignity of all people, how are we upholding the
dignity of people who commit violence?*

[11a] CNN: Study finds nearly 1 in 10 state prisoners is sexually abused while incarcerated. <https://www.cnn.com/2012/05/17/us/us-state-prisons-abuse/index.html>. Retrieved 8/9/2023



"CARCERAL LOGIC" AND A CRIME-CENTERED FRAME

Carceral logic [11b] believes punishment is the best way to address harm and achieve justice. It divides us into victims and perpetrators as though they are personality traits, whereas most other forms of accountability approach harm with the assumption that we are not necessarily one or the other; we are people who do good things and bad things.

Another factor that contributes to thinking in binary ways is how we frame the problem of sexual and domestic violence. **When we frame sexual and domestic violence as a criminal issue rather than, for example, a civil rights, human rights[12], or public health[13] issue, some of the scope, causes, consequences, and remedies for this type of violence become more narrow.**

For example, a crime-centered frame makes us focus on interpersonal violence...one where a “perpetrator” (which is a crime-based term) harms a “victim”.

“A crime-centered frame makes invisible the ways in which structural inequalities—many of which are the product of state action – make some people—especially women, trans and nonbinary people, people of color, and people without status as a citizen--more vulnerable to violence.” [14]

[11b] <https://sunflowerjournal.medium.com/what-do-we-mean-when-we-use-the-word-carceral-8da00333d8f3>. Retrieved 8/9/2023.

[12] A human rights frame believes that every human being is entitled to protection of, and respect for, their fundamental rights and freedoms. Human rights are those activities, conditions, and privileges that all human beings deserve to enjoy, by virtue of their humanity. They include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Human rights are inherent, inalienable, interdependent, and indivisible. This means we have these rights no matter what, the enjoyment of one right affects the enjoyment of others, and every human right must be respected. Source: [We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice, adrienne maree brown, 2020](#)

[13] A Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of populations—from neighborhoods to cities to countries to world regions—through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, research toward prevention of disease and injury, and detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious diseases. Public health experts analyze the effect on health of genetics, personal choice, and the environment to develop interventions and policies that protect the health of families and communities.

Source: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/communications-guide/what-is-public-health/>

[14] Danielle Sered. Accounting for Violence: How to Increase Safety and Break Our Failed Reliance on Mass Incarceration. New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017.



Using a crime-centered frame also renders some violence invisible. Violence perpetrated by the state is hidden when “violence against women” is limited to intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking – as is the case with the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).[15]

When you think about the term, “violence against women”, what comes to mind? Most likely, what comes to mind are acts like domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, and/or trafficking which are generally committed by individuals.

What about violence which is committed by the state, like:

- Shackling incarcerated people while they give birth?
- Sexual violence in correctional facilities?
- Passing laws that prevent pregnant people from receiving adequate reproductive care?
- Criminalizing gender-affirming surgeries and demonizing trans people?

Why do we not generally think of violence committed by state actors as “violence against women”? It is likely because we have been approaching our work solely through a crime-centered frame, which primarily sees violence on an individual level, not a collective one.

“*Instead of asking whether anyone should be locked up or go free, why don’t we think about why we solve problems by repeating the kind of behavior that brought us the problem in the first place?*”

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

[15] Ibid.



“

*We live in a society
based on disposability.
If we want to build
a different way
of being together,
we have to look closely
at the feelings
and behaviors
that generate the desire
to throw people away.*

”

Dean Spade

"PERPETRATOR" VS. "VICTIM"

ADDRESSING THE BINARIES
IN OUR WORK

CONVERSATION STARTERS



EXERCISE #4

EXAMINING GRAY AREAS (THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE VICTIM/PERPETRATOR BINARY) (APPROX. 30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

- Think about the people you know whom you consider “survivors”. In what ways have they used abusive or controlling behaviors to resist abuse and to survive?
 - **Facilitator note:** Here are some examples for groups who are having difficulty identifying problematic behaviors:
 - Reading someone’s mail/looking through their phone
 - Pressuring partner to have sex
 - Giving away family pets without informing the family
 - Yelling at children or threatening to hit them if they are being loud
- Think about the people you know whom you consider “perpetrators”. In what ways have they been abused or otherwise victimized?
- In what ways do our current responses to sexual and domestic violence empower people and/or help them heal? Consider both those who are harmed and those who cause harm.
- In what ways do our current responses to violence uphold the dignity of people who have been harmed? Of people who have caused harm?
- In what ways do our current responses to sexual and domestic violence victimize and/or disempower people? Consider both those who are harmed and those who cause harm.



EXERCISE #5

SELF-REFLECTION (APPROX. 30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Consider the following questions and hold a small group conversation about your thoughts.

- What does it mean to be compassionate?
- When has someone shown you compassion? When have you shown compassion to someone else?
- Can I be compassionate toward someone who has caused domestic violence? Are there certain types of domestic violence where I cannot?
- Can I be compassionate toward someone who has caused sexual violence? Are there certain types of sexual violence where I cannot?
- Where do I draw the line? What influences where I draw that line?



EXERCISE #6

CHANGING THE FRAME (APPROX. 60 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

This chapter touches on how our approach to violence narrows when we use a crime-centered frame. What would change if we saw it another way?

DISCUSS:

Consider and discuss how our approach might change if we look at sexual and domestic violence through a human rights frame or a public health frame. If we change the frame, how does that change how we think of...

- How we define the problem?
- The root causes of the problem?
- The scope and consequences of the problem?
- How to respond to the problem?
- How to solve the problem?
- Does accountability look different when our frame changes?
- Which of these frames (crime, human rights, or public health) seem to fit closest to our approach to violence in mainstream American society?

FACILITATOR NOTES:

- **What is a human rights frame?** A human rights frame believes that every human being is entitled to protection of, and respect for, their fundamental rights and freedoms. Human rights are those activities, conditions, and privileges that all human beings deserve to enjoy, by virtue of their humanity. They include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Human rights are inherent, inalienable, interdependent, and indivisible. This means we have these rights no matter what, the enjoyment of one right affects the enjoyment of others, and every human right must be respected.[16]
 - Under this frame, we might **define the problem** as any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, trans, and nonbinary people. This would include violence in the family, in the community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state (e.g. shackling incarcerated people while giving birth).
 - Under this frame, **the scope of the problem** might include poverty, access to reproductive care, unequal pay, anti-trans violence and other forms of discrimination.
 - The **root causes** may include gender inequality, discrimination and harmful cultural and social norms.
 - **Responses to the problem** may include the state stepping in to protect vulnerable groups, ensuring equitable treatment under the law, eliminating poverty, offering free and accessible daycare, and a wide array of other interventions.

[16] International Justice Resource Center <https://ijrcenter.org/ihr-reading-room/overview-of-the-human-rights-framework/>

[17] Harvard University School of Public Health <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/communications-guide/what-is-public-health/>



EXERCISE #6, CONTINUED

CHANGING THE FRAME (APPROX. 60 MINS)

FACILITATOR NOTES:

- **What is a public health frame?** Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of populations—from neighborhoods to cities to countries to world regions—through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, research toward prevention of disease and injury, and detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious diseases. Public health experts analyze the effect on health of genetics, personal choice, and the environment to develop interventions and policies that protect the health of families and communities.
[17]
 - Using a public health frame, we might **define the problem** as intimate partner and sexual violence causing serious short- and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for women, trans, and nonbinary people. This in turn affects the well-being of their children.
 - The **scope of the problem** might see factors that improve health as the same factors that can reduce violence, such as affordable and safe housing, access to education and transportation, and sustainable economic conditions.
 - Because public health focuses on the health, safety, and well-being of entire populations, one way we would **respond to the problem** is by focusing on solutions that strive to enhance the physical and emotional health for broad populations of people.
 - **Solutions to the problem** might include primary prevention strategies, early detection and intervention through healthcare and other settings, and community education.
- **How does this differ from a criminal frame?** Here are a few examples for this frame:
 - The **scope of the problem** would be narrowed to those behaviors that are against the law (when in reality, most controlling and abusive behavior is not against the law). Incidents of violence that are not reported to the state would be considered less valid than those which are reported.
 - The **consequences of using a criminal frame** is that we solely pay attention to violence that is committed on an individual level, not a collective one. And violations are seen as a crime against the state, not as a crime against the person (in a prosecution, the crime victim is the state's witness, and the state determines the course of the prosecution, not the victim).
 - We might try to **solve the problem** by expanding criminal laws, enforcing laws, prosecuting and convicting more people who violate laws, and incarcerating more people who are found guilty.

[16] International Justice Resource Center <https://ijrcenter.org/ihr-reading-room/overview-of-the-human-rights-framework/>

[17] Harvard University School of Public Health <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/communications-guide/what-is-public-health/>



CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?



“

We can only move at the speed of trust.

”

4: WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Many of us use the word “accountability” on a regular basis. But do we really know what it means?

In this country, we often think accountability and punishment are interchangeable. We say, “that person needs to be held accountable for the violence they committed” when what we really mean is, “that person needs to be punished.” However, accountability and punishment are actually very different processes.

We must stop conflating these two ideas because accountability and punishment are not the same thing. Indeed, they actually rarely overlap. So what do they mean, and what are the differences?

What if accountability wasn't rooted in punishment, revenge or superficiality, but rooted in our values, growth, transformation, healing, freedom, and liberation?

What if the work of accountability was held as so supremely sacred, that people who got to practice it—truly practice it—were considered lucky and those who had the honor of supporting it and witnessing it were also changed for the better from its power? [18]

Mia Mingus

[18] Mia Mingus: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/05/05/dreaming-accountability-dreaming-a-returning-to-ourselves-and-each-other/>



ACCOUNTABILITY VS. PUNISHMENT [19]

WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Accountability is taking responsibility for one's actions. When harm is done, it also means taking the steps necessary to repair the harm. The process of accountability is founded on the premise that when harm is caused, that creates an obligation to the person harmed, and often to others in a group or community.

Accountability builds connection by acknowledging the harm and its impact. It is often active and can be proactive, meaning the one who committed harm can initiate the accountability process rather than waiting for a consequence to be imposed on them.

The most effective accountability processes are voluntary and ongoing-- they are more of a process than a single event. The person or persons who were harmed are active participants along with the person who committed harm.

Accountability is practiced by the person who caused the harm. The person or persons who were harmed are active participants in the accountability process.

WHAT IS PUNISHMENT?

Punishment is imposing suffering or deprivation as a way of enforcing rules. Punishment is often a continuation of harm. Sometimes the process of punishment can be violent or shaming. It is usually coerced in that most of us don't volunteer to be punished. The type of punishment may or may not be decided in consultation with the "victim".

Whether it's a time out, a suspension, being expelled, or being incarcerated, punishment often involves being removed from one's community. This can cause feelings of shame and isolation.

[19] Kate McCord, Punishment is Not Accountability, Action Alliance Blog, November 15, 2020. https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/punishment-is-not-accountability/#edn3



As Danielle Sered of Common Justice has pointed out, being punished only requires that we endure the suffering imposed upon us. It is passive. **All one has to do to be punished is not escape. It requires neither agency nor dignity, nor does it require work.** The issue of repair is rarely if ever addressed; the focus is on retribution, rather than repair or healing.

Punishment is meted out by someone other than the one who caused harm—often by a third party who was not directly harmed.

Punishment is steeped in either/or thinking: one is either guilty or not guilty, a perpetrator or a victim. **To explore and find alternatives to punishment, we must move away from simple binaries and acknowledge that most if not all of us both commit and suffer harm at some point in our lives.**

Accountability is the courageous and loving act of taking responsibility. It is an honest accounting of the impact and consequences of one's choices.

It requires clear acknowledgment of any harm and active steps toward repair.

The Action Alliance's "Harm, Healing and Accountability" Statement



THE 5 KEY ELEMENTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability requires five key elements[20]

1. Acknowledging one's responsibility for one's actions;
2. Acknowledging the impact of one's actions on others;
3. Expressing genuine remorse when harm is caused;
4. Taking actions to repair the harm to the degree possible; and
5. Making changes so one no longer commits similar harm.

In this country, we have built a vast array of punishing systems—from canceling people to school suspensions to incarceration to the death penalty; yet punishing systems rarely if ever deliver accountability, as defined above.

On the contrary, punishing systems impede accountability by forcing the person who caused the harm (often literally called the “defendant”) to defend, deny, and deflect, rather than take responsibility and acknowledge the impact of their actions.

In addition to punishing systems failing to deliver accountability, many people who are harmed either choose not to engage with punishing systems or are harmed by them when they do engage.

WHAT ABOUT “HOLDING OTHERS ACCOUNTABLE?”

If accountability is a voluntary process where a person takes responsibility for their actions, acknowledges the impact, and takes steps to repair and change, is it even possible to “hold someone accountable”? Or is it only possible for someone to hold oneself accountable?

[20] Danielle Sered. *Accounting for Violence: How to Increase Safety and Break Our Failed Reliance on Mass Incarceration*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017.



PUNISHMENT vs. ACCOUNTABILITY

- often a continuation of harm
- "rules must be enforced"
- sometimes shaming
- sometimes violent
- usually coerced (not voluntary)
- isolating
- reactive
- passive (just endure it)
- often determined by outside person/group
- does not address repair

- addresses harm
- "harm creates obligations"
- builds connection
- active and often proactive
- ongoing
- voluntary
- determined by person who harmed + people who were affected by the harm
- acknowledges impact
- takes responsibility
- seeks repair

What if we saw "justice" as entirely separate from punishment?

- What if justice was adequate housing, clean water, healthy food, education, and healthcare?
- What if justice was people getting what they need to thrive?
- How does that compare with how we typically think of "justice" in this country?

RESTORATIVE APPROACHES VS. PUNITIVE APPROACHES

PUNITIVE APPROACHES (for example, traditional forms of discipline in school and the criminal legal system) focus on addressing the offender, enforcing rules, and often punishment.

- The **questions** we ask in traditional discipline are: “*What rule was broken? What punishment is warranted?*”
- The **results** are often exclusion and isolation, perhaps stigmatization of the offender, while the victim/survivor has not been heard.
- Long-term consequences** for this type of discipline in schools often means lower attendance and graduation rates, larger disparities, and recidivism. In the criminal legal system, long-term consequences may include steep fines and fees, incarceration, losing contact with family, losing custody of one’s children, loss of employment that can send a family into poverty, and perhaps being physically harmed while incarcerated.

RESTORATIVE APPROACHES address the harm, building relationships and community, and healing and growth for all involved.

- The **questions** we ask in restorative practices are: “*What harm was done? How do we repair the harm?*”
- The **results** are often inclusion and connectedness, reparations and strengthened relationships, the person who committed the harm taking responsibility, the person who was harmed having a chance to be heard, and social and emotional learning.
- Long-term consequences** in schools include improved school climate, lower suspensions and recidivism, higher attendance and graduation rates, and reduced disparities. Long-term consequences in adulthood could include learning how to take responsibility for future choices, positive behavior change, lower recidivism, and potentially healing.



Restorative practices are one example of a trauma-informed approach. You can see the similarities between restorative practices and trauma-informed responses when you look at them side by side (see graphic on page 46). Similar to a restorative approach, a trauma-informed approach frames responses to harm in the following way:

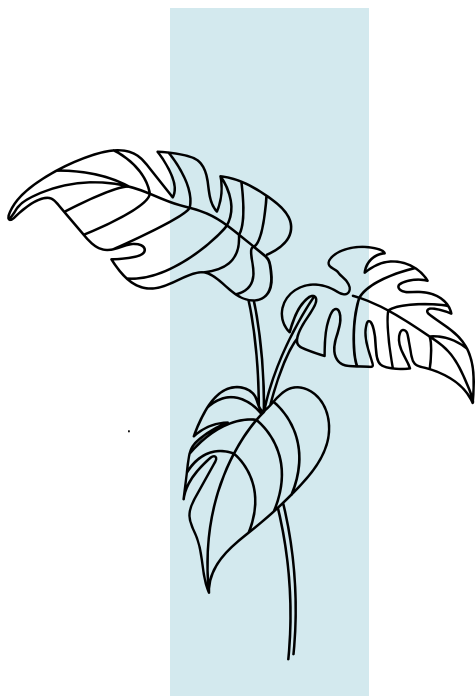
A trauma-informed response asks:

- Who has been hurt?
- What are their needs?
- How can safety, connection, and autonomy be re-established?

A trauma-informed response believes:

- Trauma causes disconnection, a feeling of loss of control, and isolation
- Trauma healing can be facilitated through transparency, safety, peer support, trustworthiness, collaboration, and empowerment.

Accountability processes should be grounded in understanding the impact of trauma, and focus on inclusion, connectedness, responsibility and reparations. Accountability processes can be a crucial step in helping traumatized people start a healing journey.



A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO CONSEQUENCES

We can shift away from punitive responses to more healing and transformative responses.

Whether we are applying accountability practices in our work or personal life, it's possible to approach harm and wrongdoing from a healing and transformative perspective rather than a punitive approach which focuses on punishment and retribution.

Trauma-informed care and **healing justice** are two frameworks that help us approach harm in a more generative way.

WHAT ARE THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE?

Trauma-informed care broadly refers to a set of principles that guide how we view the impact of severe/traumatic harm on people's mental, physical, and emotional health. Trauma-informed care encourages support for the person, rather than focusing on only treating individual symptoms or specific behaviors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have described these six principles as a trauma-informed approach to working with survivors:[21]

- **Safety:** Ensuring physical and emotional safety
- **Trustworthiness:** Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, and maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **Choice:** Prioritizing survivor choice and control
- **Collaboration:** Maximizing collaboration and sharing of power with survivors
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing survivor empowerment and skill-building, as well as helping to build their resilience
- **Cultural, historical, and gender issues:** Actively move past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography), offers gender responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

[21] https://www.cdc.gov/orr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm



Trauma-informed care is a valuable approach to centering the needs of people who have been victimized, yet it has its limitations. First, a trauma-informed approach is often practiced under the assumption that the trauma experienced is on an individual level, not a collective one.[22]

Second, trauma-informed care requires that we treat trauma in people but provides little insight into how we might address the root causes of trauma in families, communities, and society in general.

A healing-centered approach is strengths-based and focuses on what is needed to foster healing and thrive. This approach is holistic and involves culture, spirituality, civic action, and collective healing.[23]

We'll define this in more detail in the next section.

PUNITIVE RESPONSE

ASKS:

- What rules/laws have been broken?
- Who did it?
- What do they deserve?

BELIEVES:

- Crime is a violation of the law and the state.
- Violations create guilt.
- Justice requires the state to determine blame (guilt) and impose punishment.

TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE

ASKS:

- Who has been hurt?
- What are their needs?
- How can safety, connection, and autonomy be re-established?

BELIEVES:

- Trauma causes disconnection, a feeling of loss of control, and isolation.
- Trauma healing can be facilitated through transparency, safety, peer support, trustworthiness, collaboration, and empowerment.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

ASKS:

- What harm has been done?
- What obligations arise?
- How can repair happen?

BELIEVES:

- Harm is violation of people, relationship and obligations to one another.
- Violations create obligations.
- Justice involves everyone in an effort to address the harm.

Source: (punitive justice and restorative justice only) "The Little Book of Restorative Justice", Howard Zehr



[22] Jesse Hartley, The Future is Healing Centered Engagement, New Orleans ACES Connection Blog, September 15, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/orr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm

[23] *ibid.*



WHAT IS HEALING JUSTICE?

Healing justice is a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene in generational trauma and violence and bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds. [24]

Healing Justice means we all deserve to heal on our own terms and we confront oppressive systems that get in our way. We honor the trauma and resilience of generations that came before us and use interactive, daily practices that anyone can do.[25]

Healing Justice is a reminder to social movements that the concept of action should be expanded to support the self-determination, interdependence, resilience, and resistance of those more impacted by oppression.

Healing Justice is revolutionary in confronting the capitalist, colonial, individualistic paradigms that wrongly tell us we are alone when we seek out healing.[26]

Healing is more complex than treating a wound or transcending suffering; it is a progression toward wholeness, balance, and connection.

Healing also requires dismantling the root causes of oppression and repairing their effects. The process of healing is different from person to person, from community to community, and from one day to the next. It is not linear.

The Action Alliance’s “Harm, Healing and Accountability” Statement

[24] <https://www.iffdn.org/healing-justice>

[25] From Young Women’s Empowerment Project and the Chicago Healing Justice Learning Circle, as referenced in *Fumbling Towards Repair*, page 9

[26] *ibid*



WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

CONVERSATION STARTERS



EXERCISE #7

DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY (APPROX.30-45 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch video: [What is Accountability?](#)

(16 minutes, 32 seconds)

Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- How do you define accountability?
- What are the elements of accountability?
- How might accountability look different in these areas:
 - accountability to self
 - accountability in relationships
 - community accountability

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

In this video, transformative and restorative justice practitioners discuss how accountability is enacted and some challenges in the journey. Featuring: Mia Mingus, Priya Rai, RJ Maccani, Esteban Kelly, Sonya Shah, Shira Hassan, Elliott Fukui, adrienne marie brown, Stas Schmiedt, Lea Roth, kai lumumba barrow, Martina Kartman, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, nuri nusrat, and Mimi Kim.

This video is part of the Building Accountable Communities video series. The Building Accountable Communities Project promotes non-punitive responses to harm by developing resources for transformative justice practitioners and organizing convenings and workshops that educate the public.

Created by Project Nia and the Barnard Center for Research on Women.
Video produced by Mariame Kaba, Dean Spade, and Hope Dector.



EXERCISE #8

OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ACCOUNTABILITY (APPROX. 30-45 MINS)

CONTENT WARNING:

This exercise asks participants to reflect on early experiences of accountability, which often leads to participants remembering childhood experiences of punishment. It is important for the facilitator to be intentional in creating as safe a container as possible for this exercise, including explaining the activity in advance, offering the chance to opt out/do a different exercise, and creating closure for the exercise before moving on to a different topic.

DIRECTIONS:

Ask participants to reflect on the following questions individually, taking their own notes as needed (explain they will not be asked to share their notes). Then discuss in pairs or groups of 3.

1. Describe your experiences with what accountability looked like / felt like in the family in which you spent your childhood.
2. As an adult, what have you noticed about what works and what doesn't work around supporting accountability in others?
3. What are the ways in which you've resisted accountability in the past? Why? What would have helped you feel more supported in taking accountability?
4. Describe a situation of holding yourself accountable in a way that led you to heal and change.
5. What themes are emerging as we discuss this?

FACILITATOR NOTES:

Point out any clear themes, especially perspectives on punishment, accountability, and healing that are informed by the cultures we are raised in and live in.



EXERCISE #9

GETTING CLEAR ON TERMS (APPROX.30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

- **Discuss:** What do these terms mean to you? How are they different (in terms of impact, results, locus of control, etc)? How have your definitions of these words evolved over time for you?
 - Punishment
 - Consequences
 - Accountability
 - Justice

FACILITATOR NOTES:

Here are some examples of definitions [28]

- **Punishment:** suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution. Penalty or fee for wrongdoing.
- **Consequences:** the results or effects of an action or condition.
- **Accountability:** willingness to accept responsibility for one's harmful actions or behaviors.
- **Justice:** recognition of harm done, restitution; having resources to begin our healing path; putting in place resources to prevent more harm in the future.



EXERCISE #10

THINKING THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPAIR IN OUR WORK (APPROX.45 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Break into small groups, and assign one of the people below to each group. Describe the crime(s) that they have been accused of. Ask each group to describe what punishment vs accountability looks like for their person. Alternatively, each group could describe what punitive justice vs. restorative justice would look like for each person.

- **Harvey Weinstein:** film producer, reportedly raped or otherwise sexually assaulted 80 women over a period of at least thirty years.
- **Bresha Meadows:** on July 28, 2016, Bresha Meadows, shot and killed her father while he slept. She was 14 years old at the time. Her dad had been sexually abusing her since she was 8 and beating her mother for Bresha's entire life. Bresha had sought help multiple times from school and police to no avail. She said this was the only way she could save the lives of her mother and siblings. Bresha has an ACE score of 7 out of 10.
- **R. Kelly:** who has been accused of kidnapping and sexual slavery by dozens of women.
- **Johnny Depp:** who was awarded \$15M in a civil suit that claimed Amber Heard defamed him in a 2018 op-ed for the Washington Post, by referring to herself as "representing domestic abuse," by stating that she witnessed "how institutions protect men accused of abuse," and by tweeting a link to the online version of the op-ed, which carried the headline "I spoke up against sexual violence—and faced our culture's wrath. That has to change."—none of which mentioned Depp by name. Heard's evidence included text messages from Depp, spinning out violent fantasies of rape and murder. Photographs of cuts, bruises, and swelling, audio recordings of Depp verbally abusing her, and witnesses who attested seeing her injuries.



EXERCISE #11

PUNISHMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY VENN DIAGRAM^[29] (APPROX. 45 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Draw a Venn diagram (two circles that overlap slightly in the middle) on a large sheet of butcher paper, white board, or chalkboard.

Write **Accountability** over one of the circles and **Punishment** over the other circle.

- Ask participants to call out what comes to mind when they think of punishment.
- Encourage people to think of institutions, ideas, cultural concepts, and individuals that they personally associate with punishment or that they understand to be associated with punishment in a broader cultural context.
- Next, ask participants to call out what comes to mind when they think of accountability.
- Again, encourage people to think about institutions, ideas, cultural concepts and individuals they personally associate with justice, as well as those that they have witnessed being associated with justice in broader contexts.
- Finally, as a whole group, observe where overlap exists between concepts of punishment and concepts of accountability. Write the shared concepts in the center of the Venn diagram.
- As a whole group, discuss what can be said about the diagram that you all created.

Ask: What themes do you notice? Are you surprised by anything? Next, discuss the portion of the diagram that only includes accountability.

Ask: what would be needed to achieve this type of accountability?



EXERCISE #11, CONTINUED

PUNISHMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY VENN DIAGRAM

DEBRIEF (APPROX.45 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Ask: What are your initial thoughts on what we created? Is there anything that is surprising to you?

According to the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance, punitive justice (justice based on punishment) intervenes when someone has broken a rule rather than caused harm and is based in punishments that are predetermined. In punitive justice, the offended party is the state (cops, courts, prisons, etc.).

Effects of punitive justice on people who have caused harm:

- Pathologizes people
- Defines people by their actions
- Assumes punishment and incarceration rehabilitates
- Blames individual actions rather than addressing systemic problems
- Assumes that removing one person solves the problem
- Isolates people

Effects of punitive justice on survivors:

- Strips survivors of agency
- Places the burden of proof on survivors
- Forces survivors to establish linear narrative
- Blames survivor
- Has a low rate of successful conviction



CHAPTER 5

SUPPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY

IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS



“

When it comes to accountability work, we can start small and build up our capacities to be able to respond to big things such as violence, harm and abuse.

”

Mia Mingus

5: SUPPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS

PRACTICES FOR SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY [30]

Being accountable to others and ourselves is something we must learn how to do well, just like anything else. These are hard skills that require the discipline of practice, commitment and faith, knowing that we will make mistakes and fall short many times—most times. This is especially true in a society steeped in punishment, privilege and criminalization. A society that actively avoids accountability and does not encourage the kind of culture, relationships or skills needed to support true accountability.

It is important to remember that **resisting accountability is a natural part of accountability.** It doesn't mean we are bad people, it means we are human. Rather than responding to someone resisting accountability as something to be outraged or thrown-off-guard by, we can instead work to understand it and plan for it, knowing that all of us have resisted accountability at some point in our life and will again. Get a plan in place for when you will inevitably resist accountability. Practicing this in small ways can help us down the line when the stakes are much higher.

[30] This section (the following 3 paragraphs) is from Mia Mingus' blog, "New Year Intentions and Practicing Accountability", January 4, 2018, Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective blog, <https://batjc.wordpress.com/2018/01/04/new-year-intentions-and-practicing-accountability/>



A good reminder is to get support from those you trust around your accountability.

For example, if you are trying to start a new daily practice, set-up an accountability buddy that you text every day—even if your text is “I didn’t do my practice today.”

Or connect with others who are working on similar goals.

Or find someone that you can check in with consistently who will be able to support you and with whom you can have nuanced conversations about your accountability.

Note: it is not their job to “hold you accountable,” that is your job.

How can we motivate people around us to practice accountability?

In simple terms, being accountable is something that a person must choose to do. However, when we model accountability ourselves, it becomes easier for people to see it as a fulfilling and meaningful practice.

Modeling these changes for our friends, family, and coworkers, is a critical step that we can each take to change our culture about punishment and accountability.



PROACTIVE SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES: [31]

1. Check in with yourself about the choices you're making.
2. Become aware of the values you have in any given situation.
3. Be honest with yourself about how you feel and what you want.
4. Ask yourself why you made the choices that you did in the past.
(What was going on for you at the time?)
5. Think about what you need in order to make choices in the future, or in order to change your behaviors so that your actions are more in line with your values.

PRACTICES FOR SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY AFTER DOING HARM [32]

1. Remove yourself from situations in which you have abused your power in the past.
2. Be transparent about your process.
3. Ask close friends if they will actively support your accountability efforts on a day-to-day basis, check in with you to see if you're doing the work, and/or check you if you do or say something out of line.
4. Do not expect your taking accountability to solve the harm you've done in the past. Trust can only be repaired if both parties agree that it can. All you can do is go forward in the future and try not to cause more harm.
5. Do not seek for praise from the public for doing this work.

[31] Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators, Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan 2019

[32] ibid



COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

Community accountability strategies aim at preventing, intervening in, responding to, and healing from violence through strengthening relationships and communities. **Community accountability emphasizes mutual responsibility for addressing the conditions that allow violence to take place, and holding people accountable for violence and harm.** This includes a wide range of creative strategies for addressing violence as part of organizing efforts in communities when you can't or don't want to access state systems for safety. [33]

Community accountability is a process in which a community—a group of friends, a family, a church, a workplace, an apartment complex, a neighborhood, etc.--works together to do the following things: [34]

1. Create and affirm values and practices that resist abuse and oppression and encourage safety, support, and accountability.
2. Develop sustainable strategies to address community members' abusive behavior, creating a process for them to account for their actions and transform their behavior.
3. Commit to ongoing development of all members of the community, and the community itself, to transform the political conditions that reinforce oppression and violence.
4. Provide safety and support to community members who are violently targeted that respects their self-determination.

[33] Definition written by The Audre Lorde Project, National Gathering on Transformative and Communities Accountability, 9/2010)

[34] INCITE! Women and Trans People of Color Against Violence, 2012



10 GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ANY COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS^[35]

- 1.** We want people to recognize their mistakes and commit to improving. **How do we achieve this goal?**
- 2.** **Where is the harm and where is the potential healing?**
- 3.** **Distinguish between abuse and conflict.** Is the harmed party unsafe or uncomfortable?
- 4.** Determine if this is abuse or conflict and **identify who was victimized.** What is the originating action? Is the harm a response to that action?
- 5.** **What does the survivor need right now?**
- 6.** **How can I/we make this better?**
- 7.** **What change are you hoping for?** Do you actually want this person to learn and do better, or just feel bad about what they did? It is important to be honest with ourselves about the answers to these questions.
- 8.** How does this **address and/or transform the root causes of violence?**
- 9.** **Who has the power?** How might they use it?
- 10.** **Evaluation:** Have we actually made things better for the harmed parties?



10 STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY^[36]

- 1. Shift from “what can I do” to “what can we do?”** When faced with abuse and/or violence, people often are not sure what to do. Instead of feeling the burden of responding solely on our own, gather with others connected to the situation – family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, peers, etc. Recognize that each of us is impacted by the abuse/violence whether we are directly involved or not and that collectively our experience, knowledge, and skills could shift the situation.
- 2. Strengthen communication skills.** Making a commitment with people in our families, peer groups, and organizations to practice direct communication about everyday conflicts can create a solid ground for addressing more egregious behavior.
- 3. Practice collective support.** Rather than think about support as something you individually provide to someone else, think about support as something that is collectively created. Build supportive community by gathering in circles to share stories, struggles, resources, and strategies for resistance and resilience.
- 4. Share relationship experiences and resources.** Create intentional spaces to share the ins and outs of relationships. When we invest in each other’s relationships, we are inclined to take accountability for support and intervention when problems arise. The potential for someone to isolate someone else for abuse becomes much more unlikely in such a community.

[36] This section taken from 10 Strategies for Cultivating Community Accountability, Ann Russo, September 9, 2013, https://transformharm.org/ca_resource/10-strategies-for-cultivating-community-accountability/



10 STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY, CONTINUED

5. **Build shared vocabulary.** Create spaces to build shared language on what positive, loving, and caring relationships look and feel like as well as those with mistreatment, abuse, and violence. Often the terms we use – domestic violence, rape, stalking – call up legalistic definitions that require definitive lines of demarcation. They make it hard to talk about the everyday messy ways that mistreatment and abuse live out in our minds, bodies, and hearts.

6. **Practice taking accountability.** If taking accountability for harm became a daily practice, rather than solely something that we demand of others in egregious situations, then taking accountability would be less fraught with guilt, shame, defensiveness, punishment, and retaliation. It would create more compassion for one another when we make mistakes, when we speak and act in harmful and oppressive ways (intentionally or unintentionally), and/or contribute to harm in some way. And it would make it easier to admit wrongdoing.

7. **Create space for concrete accountability steps.** In this society, accountability is often synonymous with punishment, shame and/or retaliatory harm. What if it became synonymous with taking responsibility for harm, making things right, being willing to understand, change and transform the harmful behavior and its underlying motivations. What would accountability look and feel like then? It's a great practice to gather together to brainstorm concrete action steps we might imagine for taking accountability for harm.



10 STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY, CONTINUED

8. **Practice everyday interventions.** Practice shifting our core reactions when we witness small and large-scale violations. Our core reactions may be to fight back, to flee the scene, or to freeze and feel immobilized. All of us have stories of when we have regretted our core reaction to witnessing abuse and/or violence. We may have overlooked it, minimized it, felt helpless in the face of it, and/or responded aggressively and made the situation worse.
9. **Create collective analysis and action on the roots of violence.** Often we respond to oppressive behavior as if it's located within the individual, rather than it being linked to broader systems. Understanding the social roots of violence makes us aware that the problem is larger than any individual and that we are all implicated in the structures that cause the problems. This provides us with the ability and responsibility to work toward transforming the roots.
10. **Practice, practice, practice.** With practice, we are more prepared with ideas for intervention. Most importantly, an emphasis on practice reminds us that it may not always turn out, it will more than likely be messy, and there's no one answer . . . and yet it's through the experience of trying it out that we learn what's possible.



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION^[37]

Community accountability models owe their origins to indigenous cultures across the globe. The following models offer a variety of approaches to accountability that exist outside of incarceration and the criminal legal system. Not all of these models are aligned with the values of the Action Alliance; we share them in the spirit of offering a variety of innovative examples of community accountability.

Masum (India): This group developed community accountability strategies (such as singing outside an abuser’s house until the abuse stopped) without community backlash because they simultaneously provide services such as micro-credit, healthcare, and education. After many years, Masum was seen as a needed community institution, thus had the power to intervene in cases of gender violence where their interventions might otherwise be resisted.

Sistas Liberated Ground (Brooklyn, NY) Boycotts perpetrator’s business or otherwise interferes with perpetrator’s finances. Develops “know your rights” wallet cards for dealing with police or immigration services. Uses street theater to demonstrate how community members can intervene if they see acts of violence.

[37] Many of these examples were gathered by Harm Free Zone, an abolitionist group that is now disbanded.



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

Chilliwack Restorative Justice and Youth Diversion Association (Canada):

When a survivor of harm wants to be involved in the resolution process, a community justice forum is held. The survivor determines the reparations through a resolution agreement. Volunteer mentors monitor each case and reports progress. Businesses, churches, or community organizations also serve as mentors and provide supervision. Sanctions include apology, essay writing, volunteer service work, counseling, support groups, and viewing videos.

Common Justice (New York): Operates the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the U.S. that focuses on violent felonies in adult courts. If the survivors of those crimes consent, Common Justice diverts the cases into a process designed to recognize the harm done, honor the needs and interests of those harmed, and develop appropriate responses to hold the responsible party accountable.

After extensive preparation, responsible parties sit with those they have harmed (or surrogates who take their place), people who support both parties, and a trained facilitator in a restorative justice “circle.” This circle provides those most affected by a crime with the power and opportunity to address questions, impacts, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and foster accountability.



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION, CONTINUED

Together the circle participants reach agreements about what the responsible party can do to make things as right as possible. Program staff monitor responsible parties' adherence to the circle agreements—which may include restitution, extensive community service, and commitments to attend school and work—while supervising their completion of the 12- to 15-month intensive violence intervention program. Responsible parties who successfully complete both their commitments to those they harmed and the violence intervention program do not serve the jail or prison sentences they would otherwise have faced.[38]

Transformative Justice Circles (Yukon, Canada): The main goal of transformative justice is to repair harm. It seeks to transform individuals, communities and society by placing the power to respond to harm in the hands of the people most affected by the harm. The circle comes from aboriginal Yukon communities. Circles are comprised of at least two facilitators, the person who inflicted the harm, the survivor, family members, and community members. Following agreed upon principles, they seek to understand the harm and design a tailor-made response to repair and address the root causes.

Circles are used for harms ranging up to manslaughter. Sanctions can include: compensation, neighbor and peer support, counseling, and drug treatment. Sanctions typically don't lead to prison and have achieved lower rates of recidivism. Circles have also allowed the aboriginal people to claim a measure of self-determination in a racist system.

[38] https://www.commonjustice.org/the_common_justice_model



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION, CONTINUED

The Gacaca System (Rwanda): The word "gacaca" is derived from the Kinyarwanda word for "lawn" or "grass." It is a community-based model of conflict resolution, originally used within local Rwandan communities as an informal means of resolving disputes around issues such as land rights, theft, spousal issues, property damage, even genocide. At core is the creation of space for dialogue between the survivors and those accused of genocide.

Trials are held in jurisdictions nationwide and involve 250,000 popularly elected judges chosen by their communities. Community members serve as witnesses and jurors. Women (for the first time) participate in the judicial process as witnesses and judges. Radio and community meetings publicize upcoming trials.

The meetings are often a first opportunity to talk about justice post-genocide. Some people have family accused and others are survivors of genocide. Judges render decisions based on evidence voiced by the community. Those convicted can choose to serve half of the sentence or community service. Those who confess receive reduced sentences.

Zapatista Justice (Mexico): Using a non-hierarchical structure, justice is administered by the Junta (a rotating body of local community members chosen by the community). The Junta investigates disputes between individuals to identify the motivations that caused the problems. Those found responsible for harm make payment to those they have harmed through a specified period. In cases of murder, restitution to the survivors is life-long.



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION, CONTINUED

Pacific Islander Men’s Program (Hawaii): This program offers a 16-week curriculum for abusive men in Pacific Islander communities. The curriculum addresses violence, male privilege, and the values of respect for women and family. The emphasis is on respect and restoration through the lens of a shared history of colonization.

The curriculum is rooted in uncovering a sense of meaning that has been eroded by racism and colonization. The program is formed around the notion that reconnecting colonized men with their cultural heritage grounds their personal lives in a land- and ancestral-based legacy.

Popular Education as Process of Transformation (Brazil): This is a process where people learn from each other in creating social change. People develop critical analysis of how to resist domination, work and move together to end domination, and how to collectively change individuals and communities. These processes are inseparable in creating relations, communities, and people that are not imagined and produced through domination, but with a free imagination.

The process is a powerful tool in creating a social movement that takes the individual and the collective seriously. Popular education is experience-based and action-oriented, bringing people together for dialogue in a non-hierarchical setting. People analyze the conditions in which they live, and develop plans for collective action based on their own values and needs. Workshops, learning situations, dialogues, discussion circles, and protest theater are among the methods designed and used by people most impacted.



MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION, CONTINUED

Creative Interventions (California): A national resource center to create and promote community-based interventions to interpersonal violence. Creative Interventions was established as one way in which we could use our experiences and knowledge to equip everyday people to confront, challenge and overcome violence. The organization was started with the purpose to develop what it and others call a community-based approach to ending interpersonal violence.

This approach is an alternative to the more common way that organizations typically deal with interpersonal violence. Organizations that deal with domestic violence and sexual assault generally view violence as an individual problem or rely on the police and criminal justice system as a solution. For Creative Interventions, the community-based approach is one in which everyday people such as family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, members of community organizations such as faith institutions, civic organizations or businesses are the people who take action to intervene in violence.



HEALING AND ACCOUNTABILITY WHEEL^[39]

This Healing and Accountability Wheel from the Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective offers a guide for building loving and accountable relationships, whether in intimate relationships, within families, within organizations, or communities.



BLACK EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH
COLLECTIVE

HEALING & ACCOUNTABILITY WHEEL



[39] BEAM Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective. <https://beam.community/>



SUPPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY

CONVERSATION STARTERS



EXERCISE #12

HEALING AND ACCOUNTABILITY WHEEL (APPROX.60 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Use the blank version (found on the next page) of the “Healing and Accountability Wheel” (see page 70). How would you change this wheel to reflect accountability in your organization between colleagues? Accountability between advocate and survivor? Accountability between parent and child? Accountability between intimate partners? Accountability on a community team? Or any other relationship that is relevant to your group (choose the relationship based on your audience).

Break into groups to fill in each work on a spoke of the wheel. Edit the heading as needed and as a group identify 3-4 examples of actions that would fit under each spoke.

LOVE

- Sharing Power
- Creating Safety, Trust and Love

INTIMACY

- Honoring/Affirming feelings
- Staying Present

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Being Accountable
- Pleasure and Consent

COMMUNICATION

- Communicating with Dignity
- Sharing in Economic Decisions

Tip 1: This also makes a good exercise for a support group.

Tip 2: Consider repeating this exercise a year later with staff in your organization.



EXERCISE #12 WORKSHEET



EXERCISE #13

DREAMING ACCOUNTABILITY (APPROX.30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Mia Mingus, a writer, public speaker, community educator and organizer working for disability justice and transformative justice, offers us these important musings about accountability and its promise[40]:

- *“What if accountability wasn’t rooted in punishment, revenge or superficiality, but rooted in our values, growth, transformation, healing, freedom, and liberation?”*
- *“What if the work of accountability was held as so supremely sacred, that people who got to practice it—truly practice it—were considered lucky and those who had the honor of supporting it and witnessing it were also changed for the better from its power?”*

DISCUSS:

Ask participants to read Mia Mingus’ “Dreaming Accountability” blog post on their own. Pose the following discussion questions:

- What surprised you about this piece?
- What thoughts/feelings did this piece bring up?
- Does this piece inspire you to think differently about accountability in your own life/work? If so, how?

[40] Mia Mingus, “Dreaming Accountability”, Leaving Evidence blog, May 5, 2019.
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/05/05/dreaming-accountability-dreaming-a-returning-to-ourselves-and-each-other/>



EXERCISE #14

WHAT ARE OBSTACLES TO ACCOUNTABILITY?

(APPROX.30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch 6:24-11:08 (end) of the [Video: What are Obstacles to Accountability?](#)

Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- What obstacles to accountability exist in our own lives and work?
 - Think about:
 - Our own personal obstacles
 - Obstacles in our work/organization
 - Cultural obstacles
- What options, if any, are there for overcoming these obstacles?

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

Because human beings will inevitably harm each other, we need to develop responses that address the needs engendered by these harms. Often, we rely on punishment as the consequence to harm. However, as criminalization has expanded, many are rethinking punishment and calling instead for accountability. What does that mean? Accountability is, as Connie Burk of the Northwest Network explains it, “an internal resource for recognizing and redressing the harms we have caused to ourselves and others.” It is a practice rather than an end. It is a continuous process rather than just an individual act.

In this video, people with years of experience facilitating transformative, restorative, and community accountability processes between survivors of harm and people who have done harm talk frankly about what gets in the way of accountability.

This video is part of the Building Accountable Communities video series. The Building Accountable Communities Project promotes non-punitive responses to harm by developing resources for transformative justice practitioners and organizing convenings and workshops that educate the public.

Featuring adrienne maree brown, Rachel Herzing, Lea Roth, Leah Lakshmi, Mia Mingus.



EXERCISE #15

WHAT IS SELF-ACCOUNTABILITY? (APPROX. 15 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch: [What Is Self-Accountability?](#)

(3 minutes, 55 seconds)

Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- How do you define self-accountability?
- How is a practice of self-accountability useful in your personal life? In your work life?

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

Accountability is a familiar buzz-word in contemporary social movements, but what does it mean? How do we work toward it? In this series of four short videos, anti-violence activists Kiyomi Fujikawa and Shannon Perez-Darby ask and explore: What does it look like to be accountable to survivors without exiling or dispossing of those who do harm?

Conversation created by Kiyomi Fujikawa and Shannon Perez-Darby. Filmed by Christina Antonakos-Wallace. Videos edited by Dean Spade and Hope Dector. Part of a series of workshops and videos on community accountability and transformative justice; conceived by Mariame Kaba, Just Practice Collaborative, and Project NIA.



EXERCISE #16

SUPPORTING HARM DOERS IN BEING ACCOUNTABLE (APPROX.30-45 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Watch video: [How to Support Harm Doers in Being Accountable](#)
(15 minutes, 48 seconds)
Barnard Center for Research on Women

DISCUSS:

- Why is it important to practice accountability in our daily lives with minor issues (e.g. forgetting to do the dishes) before we begin practicing accountability when harm is done?
- Why are relationships important when it comes to supporting someone in being accountable?
- What role do we hold as survivor advocates, if any, in supporting harm doers in being accountable?

ABOUT THE VIDEO:

Transformative justice practitioners understand that taking accountability is an active process. It involves harm doers choosing to be responsible for their behavior and actions. Therefore, how can we support people who cause harm in taking accountability for their actions? In this video, people with years of experience facilitating processes between survivors of harm and people who have caused harmed talk about what it really takes for people to embrace accountability.

Featuring adrienne marie brown, Stas Schmiedt, Lea Roth, Mimi Kim, RJ Maccani, Priya Rai, Mia Mingus, Martina Kartman, Elliott Fukui, Sonya Shah, Rachel Herzing, Shira Hassan, and Ann Russo.



EXERCISE #17

HOW TO GIVE A GENUINE APOLOGY (APPROX. 15-30 MINS)

DIRECTIONS:

Read this blog post:

The Four Parts of Accountability and How to Give a Genuine Apology

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/>

DISCUSS:

- How have apologies that you have received in the past compared with these elements?
- How have apologies that you have given in the past compared with these elements?
- Is there someone you'd like to practice this with?



CHAPTER 6

TURNING WILL INTO ACTION



6: TURNING WILL INTO ACTION

Now that you've had an opportunity to hold discussions about healing, harm and accountability, what's the next step? Learning is an ever-evolving process, and one way to keep learning is by practicing. As Mia Mingus writes in her blog, *Leaving Evidence* [41],

Being accountable to others and ourselves is something we must learn how to do well, just like anything else. In the same way that we would start small learning any kind of new skill or craft.

For example, if you were to learn how to play the piano, you would practice scales and simple exercises that would help to build your skills to be able to play more complicated pieces. You would practice your two hands separately before you began to play them together. You would learn the notes and beats one by one. You would play things that did not sound like music for a long time until you were able to execute chords, rhythm, melody, treble and bass all at the same time. You would not sit down at a piano, having never played, and expect to be able to play a flawless sonata. And you would not expect this of anyone else who had never played piano before.

Fortunately, there are many ways to practice accountability. Begin by starting with yourself—practicing accountability with your friends and family. Then consider bringing your new-found talents to your organization, community, and/or even statewide work. We need you!

[41] Mia Mingus blog post, "New Year Intentions and Practicing Accountability", January 4, 2018, Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective blog, Mia Mingus, "Dreaming Accountability", *Leaving Evidence* blog, May 5, 2019. <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/05/05/dreaming-accountability-dreaming-a-returning-to-ourselves-and-each-other/>



ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL...

- Follow the guidelines on page 59 for self-accountability. **Identify an accountability buddy** to check in with regularly about your progress and where you have continued areas for growth.
 - **Hold a self-accountability check-up** with your family members by asking them if they have suggestions for ways that you can improve your accountability to them.
 - **Model transparent and accountable behavior** for the children in your life.
-

ON AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Option: Establish an Accountability Workgroup in Your Community

Use this discussion guide and the resources included in this section to start a community of practice.

- Whom would you invite to join the workgroup?
- What is the purpose/objective of the workgroup?
 - For example, will the group focus primarily on learning or discussion? Or creating/establishing accountability measures in your own organization or community? Or serve as a community resource for training and technical assistance? Something else?
 - What level of accountability will the group focus on? Self, relationship, organization, or community?
- Would membership in this workgroup require MOUs or some other formal agreement, or would it be more informal and fluid?
- What goals would you set for the first 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years?
- Would this workgroup be accountable to another body or group? If so, does that mean regular reports or check-ins with the other group? Any other accountability measures?



ON AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL...

Option: Cultivate a Culture of Accountability in Your Organization

- Use this discussion guide and the resources included to start an internal workgroup to establish community accountability guidelines and host roundtable conversations using the conversation starters at the end of each chapter.
-

ON A COMMUNITY LEVEL

Option: Establish an Accountability Workgroup in Your Community

Use this discussion guide and the resources included in this section to start a community of practice.

- Whom would you invite to join the workgroup?
- What is the objective of the workgroup?
- For example, will the group focus primarily on learning or discussion? Or creating/establishing accountability measures in your own organization or community? Or serve as a community resource for training and technical assistance? Something else?
- What level of accountability will the group focus on? Self, relationship, organization, or community?
- Would membership in this workgroup require MOUs or some other formal agreement, or would it be more informal and fluid?
- What goals would you set for the first 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years?
- Would this workgroup be accountable to another body or group? If so, does that mean regular reports or check-ins with the other group? Any other accountability measures?



CHAPTER 7

DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING

RESOURCES



RESOURCE CATEGORIES

ADVOCACY.....PAGE 86

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY.....PAGE 87

CONFLICT.....PAGE 88

CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM/PRISON ABOLITION.....PAGE 98

HARM.....PAGE 90

HEALING JUSTICE.....PAGE 90

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY.....PAGE 91

ORGANIZING.....PAGE 92

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY
ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE.....PAGE 93**

ACTION ALLIANCE RESOURCES.....PAGE 96



ADVOCACY

Centering the Needs of Survivors, Part 2

(Video: 10 minutes, 55 seconds)

Barnard Center for Research on Women

Featuring RJ Maccani, Priya Rai, Rachel Herzing, and Esteban Kelly. Survivor-centeredness is an important value in transformative justice. But what does it actually mean to center the needs of survivors? In this 2-part video, people with years of experience facilitating community accountability processes with survivors of harm and people who have caused harm address whether centering survivors means that survivors define or drive transformative justice processes. This video considers the complexities of honoring and upholding survivors' agency while balancing other concerns and interests. How do facilitators give survivors the time, space, and support they need while also making sure that other considerations are also incorporated into transformative justice and community accountability processes?

This video is part of the Building Accountable Communities video series. The Building Accountable Communities Project promotes non-punitive responses to harm by developing resources for transformative justice practitioners and organizing convenings and workshops that educate the public.

Created by Project Nia and the Barnard Center for Research on Women. Video produced by Mariame Kaba, Dean Spade, and Hope Dector.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MECKdunxjN4&list=PLLLbjNgIS2TANzUi1XI_D-z_aRn3lVr_g&index=35)

[v=MECKdunxjN4&list=PLLLbjNgIS2TANzUi1XI_D-z_aRn3lVr_g&index=35](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MECKdunxjN4&list=PLLLbjNgIS2TANzUi1XI_D-z_aRn3lVr_g&index=35)

RESOURCES



COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

10 Strategies for Cultivating Community Accountability (blog post)

Ann Russo. https://transformharm.org/ca_resource/10-strategies-for-cultivating-community-accountability/

Guiding Principles for Engagement and Intervention with People Who Cause Harm Through Intimate Partner Violence, (planning document)

Center for Court Innovation

https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2022/CCI_Factsheet_DV_Guiding_Principles_IPV_04132022.pdf

Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators (workbook)

A simple yet comprehensive workbook by Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan that includes reflection questions, skill assessments, facilitation tips, helpful definitions, activities, and hard-learned lessons intended to support people who have taken on the coordination and facilitation of formal community accountability processes to address interpersonal harm & violence

Building Accountable Communities (video series)

A 4-part video series from the Center for Research on Women. Accountability is a familiar buzz-word in contemporary social movements, but what does it mean? How do we work toward it? In this series of four short videos, anti-violence activists Kiyomi Fujikawa and Shannon Perez-Darby ask and explore: What does it look like to be accountable to survivors without exiling or disposing those who do harm? The series contains videos on these four topics:

- Part 1: What is Accountability?
- Part 2: What is Self-Accountability?
- Part 3: Self-Accountability and Survivors
- Part 4: People Who do Harm are Not Monsters

<https://bcrw.barnard.edu/event/building-accountable-communities/>

RESOURCES



COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault webpage on Transformative Justice and Community Accountability (webpage):

<https://www.nyscasa.org/get-info/transformative-justice/>

New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault webpage on Restorative Justice (webpage)

<https://www.nyscasa.org/get-info/restorative-justice/>

CONFLICT

In It Together (Digital Hub)

A Framework for Conflict Transformation In Movement-Building Groups. Explore tools and resources that support the use of human-centered, non-punitive accountability practices in movement spaces.

<https://inittogether.cargo.site/>

RESOURCES



CRIMINAL LEGAL REFORM/PRISON ABOLITION

Accounting for Violence: How to Increase Safety and Break Our Failed Reliance on Mass Incarceration, Danielle Sered, 2017.

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/accounting-for-violence.pdf>

Policing Doesn't Protect Women (Article)

As abolitionist frameworks enter the mainstream, addressing gendered and sexual violence is treated like a conceptual trap. It's not.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/158365/policing-doesnt-protect-women>

Beyond Criminal Courts (Digital Hub)

Beyond Criminal Courts is a Digital Resource Hub for organizers, advocates and community members working together to build the organizing-power we need to defund, divest, and ultimately to dismantle criminal courts for good.

<https://beyondcourts.org/en>

Behind the Police (Podcast)

How did American police get so violent? The answer to that question goes back centuries, to the earliest days of this nation. On this special podcast miniseries hosts Robert Evans and rap artist Propaganda (Jason Petty) draw a straight line from the darkest days of slavery to the murder of George Floyd and the mass violence American police meted out to their citizens this summer.

<https://open.spotify.com/show/2ejvdShhn5D9tLVbb5vj9B?si=3jgjHLEQQr6CzgJGSEefAw>

RESOURCES



HARM

Addressing Harm (panel discussion)

Barnard Center for Research on Women “What is Harm?” (at 29:00 “what are the all the ways in which we hurt each other because we don’t know how to heal?” (13:45-29:15)

Adrienne maree Brown, shira hassan, Amita Swadhin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUhaOYD0ZWY>

HEALING JUSTICE

Sana Sana: Healing Justice and Spiritual Accompaniment Practices at Move to End Violence and Beyond (book)

Features the voices and expertise of over a dozen healers across genders, race, ethnicities, modalities of practice, languages, and geographies. Offerings include how to build an altar or healing space; how to use tarot in your healing and understanding; how to move your body in ways that honor its existence; and a section on herbal medicine. Featured contributors include Naimah Efiā, gina Breedlove, Heidi Maria Lopez, ML Daniel, Kifu Faruq, Agua Dulce, Rosana Rodriguez, ramelcy uribe, Tai Simpson, Jennicet Gutierrez, Lisbeth White, Juju Bae, and Chhaya Chhoum.

In addition to the beautiful illustrations and powerful text, the offering also includes videos that offer stories, wisdom, and juicy conversations regardless of where you are in your healing justice practice journey. A great place to start is by watching this video discussion ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) with some of the healers and practitioners MEV has been privileged to work with, who go into further details about the reasons and motivations behind the healing justice work they do.

<https://www.movetoendviolence.org/resources/sana-sana-healing-justice-and-spiritual-accompaniment-practices-at-move-to-end-violence-and-beyond>

RESOURCES



INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Saying “sorry” isn’t enough. You have to DO sorry (video)

A short video (1:23) by Common Justice that covers the five steps to accountability and what it would look like to take them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHSyl1XtoSA&list=PLVji7hDAfho9zV-gfftwpHOJUEYea8L3S&index=2>

9 Ways to Be Accountable When You’ve Been Abusive (blog post)

When we are able to admit that the capacity to harm lies within ourselves – within us all – we become capable of radically transforming the conversation around abuse and rape culture. We can go from simply reacting to abuse and punishing “abusers” to preventing abuse and healing our communities. Written by Kai Cheng Thom. https://transformharm.org/ca_resource/9-ways-to-be-accountable-when-youve-been-abusive/

Thinking Through Perpetrator Accountability (blog post)

A helpful article from Rolling Thunder #8, a quarterly journal by Crimethinc that covers ways to support someone in their own accountability without using formal processes.

https://transformharm.org/ca_resource/thinking-through-perpetrator-accountability/

RESOURCES



ORGANIZING

We Do This 'Til We're Free (Book)

New York Times Bestseller, *Organizing* is both science and art. It is thinking through a vision, a strategy, and then figuring out who your targets are, always being concerned about power, always being concerned about how you're going to actually build power in order to be able to push your issues, in order to be able to get the target to actually move in the way that you want to. What if social transformation and liberation isn't about waiting for someone else to come along and save us? What if ordinary people have the power to collectively free ourselves?

In this timely collection of essays and interviews, Mariame Kaba reflects on the deep work of abolition and transformative political struggle. With a foreword by Naomi Murakawa and chapters on seeking justice beyond the punishment system, transforming how we deal with harm and accountability, and finding hope in collective struggle for abolition, Kaba's work is deeply rooted in the relentless belief that we can fundamentally change the world. As Kaba writes, "Nothing that we do that is worthwhile is done alone."

<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/1664-we-do-this-til-we-free-us>

My Grandmother's Hands (Book)

My Grandmother's Hands is a call to action for all of us to recognize that racism is not only about the head, but about the body, and introduces an alternative view of what we can do to grow beyond our entrenched racialized divide.

<https://www.amazon.com/My-Grandmothers-Hands-Racialized-Pathway/dp/1942094477>

RESOURCES



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

A national portrait of restorative approaches to intimate partner violence: pathways to safety, accountability, healing, and well-being[1]

The Center for Court Innovation recently released a report that documents how restorative approaches are currently being applied to intimate partner violence (A.K.A. domestic violence) in the United States. Through surveys and site visits at 34 programs addressing intimate partner violence and/or sexual assault through restorative, indigenous, culturally-based, or transformative approaches, the study's findings inform a set of guiding principles and practice recommendations for the field.

Read the full report here:

https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2019/Report_IPV_12032019.pdf?utm_source=Restorative+Justice+Initiative+News+and+Updates&utm_campaign=e3819c8d31-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_12_15_10_39&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3a702473fa-e3819c8d31-118721561

Using restorative approaches to address intimate partner violence: a new york city blueprint[1]

In October 2020, the Center for Court Innovation and New York City Mayor's Office to end Domestic and sexual and domestic violence published a report that outlines pathways for developing restorative and community-based approaches to intimate partner violence. Building on years of research and community conversations—locally and nationally—the report aims to expand the knowledge of restorative practices as applied to intimate partner violence and to promote the idea of increasing the options for survivors and their families.

Read the full report here:

<https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/restorative-approaches-address-intimate-partner-violence>

RESOURCES

[42] As posted on New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault's website: <https://www.nyscasa.org/get-info/restorative-justice/>

[43] *ibid*



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

A Diversion discussion guide for Communities (discussion guide)

discussion guide created by Impact Justice on how to build a pre-charge restorative justice diversion program that reduces youth criminalization while meeting the needs of people harmed.

https://rjddiscussion_guide.impactjustice.org/

Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice (website)

Publications, webinars, and other resources to share knowledge about restorative justice practices and programs.

<https://zehr-institute.org/>

Restorative Justice on TransformHarm.org (website)

A collection of articles, multimedia resources, and curricula about restorative justice.

<https://transformharm.org/restorative-justice/>

A Different Path for Confronting Sexual Assault (article)

Written by sujatha baliga in Vox.

<https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/10/10/17953016/what-is-restorative-justice-definition-questions-circle>

Repairing Harm: A Better Alternative to Punishment (blog post and podcast)

Interview with Brad Weinstein and Nathan Maynard, authors of *Hacking School Discipline: 9 Ways to Create a Culture of Empathy & Responsibility Using Restorative Justice*.

<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/repairing-harm/>

Can Restorative Justice Help Child Sexual Abuse Survivors Heal? (blog post and interview)

Well + Good interview with Elizabeth Clemants, founder of Hidden Water.

<https://www.wellandgood.com/restorative-justice-hidden-water/>

RESOURCES



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

Creative Interventions discussion guide: A Practical Guide for Using Community Accountability to Stop Interpersonal Violence (discussion guide)

A practical guide to community-based interventions to stop interpersonal violence. It is written for everyday people: survivors, people who commit harm, and friends and family who want to help without turning to the police or state services.

https://www.creative-interventions.org/discussion-guide/?utm_campaign=c09857536f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_09_12_28&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Just%20Practice&utm_term=0_9192c0db7b-c09857536f-190941581

RESOURCES



ACTION ALLIANCE RESOURCES

SDVAs and Law Enforcement (Blog)

Written by Ruth Micklem detailing the history of Virginia sexual and domestic violence movement with Law Enforcement and how we might consider changing our trajectory moving forward.

https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/sexual-and-domestic-violence-agencies-and-law-enforcement-part-1-of-2/ and

https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/sexual-and-domestic-violence-agencies-and-law-enforcement-part-2-of-2/

Harm and Accountability and a Wedding (blog post)

Written by Kristi VanAudenhove

https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/harm-and-accountability-and-a-wedding/

The Slap: What is meaningful accountability for what happened at the Oscars? (blog post)

Written by Kate McCord, Associate Director

https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/the-slap-what-is-meaningful-accountability-for-what-happened-at-the-oscars/

Punishment is Not Accountability (blog post)

Written by Kate McCord, Associate Director

https://vsdvalliance.org/press_release/punishment-is-not-accountability/

Liberatory Practices for Accountability Across the Social Ecological Model (infographic)

Action Alliance

<https://www.communitysolutionsva.org/index.php/resources/item/liberatory-practices-for-accountability-across-the-social-ecological-model>

RESOURCES



Turning to One Another

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Talk to people you know.

Talk to people you don’t know.

Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear.

Expect to be surprised.

Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible.

Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know.

Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness.

Stay together.

—Margaret Wheatley, “Turning to One Another,” 2002

Excerpt from **Dreaming Accountability**

What if accountability wasn't scary? Take a breath and let that sink in for a second.

...

What if we could understand that in a violent and oppressive world, the work of love is never done?

...

What if accountability wasn't rooted in punishment, revenge or superficiality, but rooted in our values, growth, transformation, healing, freedom, and liberation? What if the work of accountability was held as so supremely sacred, that people who got to practice it—truly practice it—were considered lucky and those who had the honor of supporting it and witnessing it were also changed for the better from its power?

...

What if we understand that no amount of “tough love” or punishment could ever hold a candle to the long and hard labor, fear, and pain of facing our demons and our traumas? What if we learned to desire the challenging and the transformative, instead of the easy and the comfortable? After all, comfort and transformation do not live on the same block.

...

What if we took more time to dream accountability? What it could be and the kind of magic it could grow? What we need in order to practice it more and better, both individually and collectively? What if accountability was so normalized, so everyday, so run-of-the-mill, that it was second nature?

...

What if we cherished opportunities to take accountability as precious opportunities to practice liberation? To practice love?

—Mia Mingus, “Dreaming Accountability”, 2019



HARM AND ACCOUNTABILITY CONVERSATION SEED PACKET

FOR SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS



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