

NASCO Survivor Support Skills Fall 2014

Workshop description:

While it is challenging to get accurate statistics, there is a good chance that most of us know someone (or perhaps many people) that are survivors of sexual assault. We believe that everyone should have access to information on how to best support each other, within our own communities. This workshop introduces some basic tips for supporting and talking to a survivor such as listening, believing, and validating. We will also talk about some practices that might seem like good ways to support a survivor, but should actually be avoided in most circumstances. We hope that participants will leave with skills they can use with survivors of sexualized violence, and maybe other forms of trauma as well.

Check-ins (5 minutes)

- names, pronouns
- Check in Q: What do you hope to get out of this training? As much or as little as you feel like sharing.

Intro (10 minutes)

Preamble (we will just read through this!)

- Hi! We are Oberlin College Cooperative Association's (OSCA) Sexual Offense Policy Advocates. We are peer advocates. We also provide educational workshops about issues surrounding sexualized violence such as consent, support skills, etc.
- Before anything, we like to say that: Although we've tried to design this workshop to be accessible, some language in the workshop may be *triggering*. We feel strongly that self-care is crucial in any situation. Please feel free to leave the room, to get a drink, use the bathroom, get some space, dance, whatever.
- We have a lot to cover and some of it contains difficult subjects, but it is very important to discuss these issues and keep them out in the open.
- We encourage any and all forms of participation so feel free to ask us any questions, interrupt us, give comments, etc.
- Our Framework: We believe sexualized violence is inclusive of all acts of gender/or sex-based harassment, stalking, all forms of sexual assault, and domestic violence. Anyone can experience sexualized violence, but it doesn't happen in a vacuum. Systems of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism and other forms of oppression are connected to our conversation around sexualized violence. People with marginalized identities are at the highest risk of experiencing violence, and have the least access to support resources.
- Acknowledge that there may be survivors in the room
- If you have a tap-out person explain what that means and what they do
- What is sexualized Violence? We believe sexualized violence includes all acts of gender/or sex-based harassment, stalking, all forms of sexual assault, and domestic violence. We also operate with an understanding

that sexualized violence, like everything in our world, does not happen in a vacuum. So people with marginalized identities are at the highest risk of experiencing sexualized violence, and have the least access to support resources.

- Language: the word survivor
 - Why “survivor” and not “victim” for more general use??
 - 1. acknowledgement of process & achievement of survival: **not everyone survives life after sexualized violence**. Not everyone continues to live in the way they want to or need to.
 - 2. Someone can claim the identity of victim if they want -- not everyone is surviving, has survived. A person might claim the term victim if they don't feel like they are surviving.
 - 3. Don't label people with labels you're not sure they want used. “People who have experienced sexualized violence” is a phrase that acknowledges experience without calling it anything.
 - 4. This is a conversation that is happening with in communities who do this work right now. There's not a right answer.

Discussion (10 minutes)

- Ask the question: How do you think that sexualized violence (esp. the normalization of sexualized violence) plays out in your community?
- Some themes that might emerge:
 - is sexualized violence a problem for your community?
 - how do rape jokes, casual harassment, play into the campus atmosphere
 - mental health effects
 - connections to language used on this campus--racial slurs, transphobic comments, violent jokes, as well derogatory gender & sexually explicit things; without much accountability to what was said.

Break (10 minutes)

- Pass around post-its during break and have people write down: What does support look like to you/what is a time when you have felt supported?

Post-it Activity (10 minutes)

- Everyone hands in the post-its/they are redistributed so people have an anonymous response in their hands
- Go around the room and read responses aloud/if not enough time, take a few volunteers

Survivor Support (10 minutes)

- Someone may choose to disclose to you directly after the fact, or months of years later. Don't expect to be able to “fix it”, and know that healing from trauma takes a long time.
- Recognizing significance that they told you about their trauma/that they are survivor

What do I do now?

- **General Principles:**
 - 1. Believe them.
 - 2. Give choice to the survivor.
 - 3. Give support/options, not advice.

Tactics:

- **Listen, listen, listen**
 - You will not know what the survivor needs unless you listen to them
 - Give space for survivor to vent, feel believed and listened to
 - Use active listening techniques like eye contact, nodding.
- **Believe the survivor**
 - Part of victim-blaming includes not believing the survivor's side of the story. Leave doubt at the door as much as you can. It is not your job as a provider of support to investigate the events of a situation.
 - Not interrogating for info b/c this can come off as minimizing what they are experiencing and invalidating what they're feeling.
 - ^^ **a good rule of thumb in general: when someone tells you they are upset about something that happened, the response is not "why did it make you feel that way?? what exactly did they say/do? what exactly happened?"**
 - You don't need all the info to believe and validate!!
- **Validate and normalize emotions. For example, "It makes sense that you feel frustrated."**
 - ALWAYS. **EXCEPT** when survivor blames themselves in some way or say they deserved it. This is the time when you must not validate/normalize
 - IT WASN'T your fault,
 - YOU didn't deserve this, NO one deserves this
 - "I should have done xyz" -- "It makes sense to have those feelings, but doing what you did in that moment was completely right for you, it's what you needed to do and there's nothing wrong with that. What happened is NOT your fault. there is nothing you did/didn't do that made it happen."
- **Use reflective language (use the same vocabulary)**
 - give example ?
- **Silence is okay (can lend space and freedom to conversation)**
 - can let them know that you are there either way
- **Give options**
 - What are some resources available to survivors on campus? locally?
 - What are some less official outlets?
- **React to survivor's decisions about what they need**
 - For example, if someone wants cake and you have the time/resources to provide said cake, provide the cake!

- With the exception of harming themselves or others, there is no way for a survivor to react to a crisis that is not valid or appropriate (wanting to smoke a cigarette, eat candy etc is not “harming themselves”).
- **Use best consent practices when it comes to any type of physical contact.**
 - Pay attention to body language.
 - If you really, really think the survivor would like a hug, shoulder rub, etc., ask first.
 - Offer levels of contact: “Would you like a hug or a hand squeeze?”

Things that might seem like a good idea, but might not be!

- **Don’t give specific advice unless it is asked for!!!**
- **and even if it is...avoid “should”**
 - Words like “should” imply that there are right and wrong things to do during a crisis
 - Decisions are opportunities to exercise control in one’s life.
 - The only thing that a survivor *should* do is what they decide that they *want* to do.
 - This doesn’t mean you can’t help a survivor come to a decision, but always remember it is *their* decision to make.
- **Avoid “how” or “why” questions, try “would you feel comfortable___?”**
 - “How” or “why” questions can come off as blaming-- e.g. “how did that happen?” or “why did they do that”
 - More open-ended questions can empower the survivor to make their own decisions about what they feel comfortable talking about
- **Don’t talk about yourself, unless you have been listening for some time and think it will be particularly useful**
 - It can seem like you’re not listening, or not present with the situation.
- **Don’t express anger or violence, even towards a perpetrator. If survivor does so then continue to validate emotions**
 - strong responses like anger, or intense reactions can be really triggering or traumatizing to a survivor
 - this is already a difficult topic to be discussing & this makes it harder
 - This relates to using reflective language, but instead it’s emotional. Respond to the survivor’s emotions.
 - e.g. if survivor is having a strong emotional response (anger, sadness, panic attack), your response needs to match them in energy/engagement.
 - e.g. don’t sit there calmly / blank-faced while survivor is panicking/crying, etc. that can be very very invalidating and isolating
 - also don’t say “don’t cry” or “stop crying” or “calm down” or “shhh”

- instead ask them what they need, and validate their emotional expression -- “let it out, cry as much as you need to”, “would you like me to rub your back?”, “it’s ok, i am here”
- Anger can be a natural reaction for a supporter, but not always the emotional response survivors are looking for.
- **Don’t promise to do something/offer some kind of support if you can’t follow through. A part of supporting is knowing your boundaries.**
 - **This is about RELIABILITY**
 - offering & then letting down can be much worse than no offer at all
 - doesn’t mean you have to constantly be doing things for them, always on call, but rather that you are reliable when you say you will do something
 - you SHOW UP when you say you will

Does anyone have any questions about any of these practices?

(5 minutes) **Resources:**

Closing: Before we close, we wanted to talk to you about the most important thing you can do while supporting a survivor. I know, we already said that listening and believing are the most fundamental tools. But if listening and believing are the hammer, then this next thing is the hand holding the hammer!

We’re talking about self-care!

FIND SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF TOO. Supporting folks is hard, and really important work. Don't forget to take care of yourself.

Questions/Check Out (5-10 minutes)