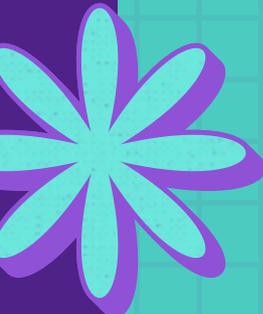
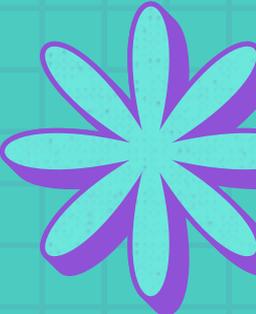


SURVIVING AND SUPPORTING GUIDEBOOK



 **Acadia Sexualized Violence
Response and Education**



For survivors of
sexual violence
navigating feelings
and next steps



And the allies and
supporters helping
them through it



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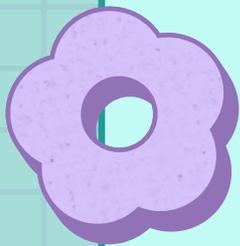
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Message for Survivors

From the SVREC

To Acadia Students:

Thank you for picking up a copy of this guidebook. Whether you are a survivor yourself, a survivor's support person, or if you feel drawn to this publication for other reasons, please know that we are here for you at Acadia and we're so glad you're here. I hope the following pages bring you some comfort, strength, and hope. You deserve all of these things and more. Healing is a complex, sometimes beautiful, sometimes messy journey. Please always be gentle with yourself in your path forward. And please reach out for support anytime. You are not alone. You are part of a community that values you, believes you, and wants to see you thrive. Even on your darkest days, you have a light that the world can never dim.

Allison Smith (she/they)
SVREC



Terms to Know

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One of the things which can make experiencing and understanding sexualized violence difficult is the language. It can be confusing, complicated. This page defines the terms and acronyms we use. These are consistent with the language in Acadia's Sexualized Violence Policy, where you can find expanded definitions of each term.

Consent: "an agreement to engage in a sexual activity". It must be fully voluntary, clearly communicated, and ongoing. - All sexual activities, including cyber sexual activity (e.g. sending/sharing/posting nude images or sexually explicit texts), that are engaged in must be consented to.

Rape Culture: an environment where sexualized violence, victim blaming, and myths about sexualized violence are pervasive, normalized, and accepted as inevitable. Rape culture does not necessarily mean that individuals or society promote sexualized violence in an outward, active manner.

Sexualized Violence: any sexual act directed against a person's sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression, including use of coercion or under circumstances in which consent cannot be given (e.g. alcohol or drug intoxication), by any person in any setting.

Sexual Assault: any form of sexual contact that occurs without ongoing and freely given consent. It includes any form of sexual contact where consent has not been given (non-consensual touching that is sexual in nature, kissing, fondling, oral or anal sex, intercourse, all forms of penetration, any unwanted contact of a sexual nature, removal of a condom without consent, lying about using a condom, rape).

Sexual Harassment: sexual conduct or a course of comment that is known or ought reasonably to be known as unwelcome. This may include a sexual advance where one individual is in a position to give or deny a benefit to the individual to whom the advance is made. It can also include an act or threat of retaliation for rejecting a sexual advance.

Survivor: anyone who has experienced an act of sexualized violence

Victim: a survivor who has experienced some form of violence and identifies as such.

SVREC = Sexualized Violence Response and Education Coordinator

SVP = Sexualized Violence Policy

SV = Sexualized Violence

ALL ABOUT

ACADIA SVRE



Acadia Sexualized Violence Response and Education is Acadia University's office to help build consent culture, investigate incidents, and support survivors.

The office is run by the Sexualized Violence Response and Education Coordinator (SVREC). They offer confidential and compassionate support and provide information about your options. Responses to sexualized violence vary according to the needs, feelings, and concerns of each person. How you respond and who you tell are your choices.

What are some services we offer?



Disclosing (sharing for support) and reporting (beginning an investigation)

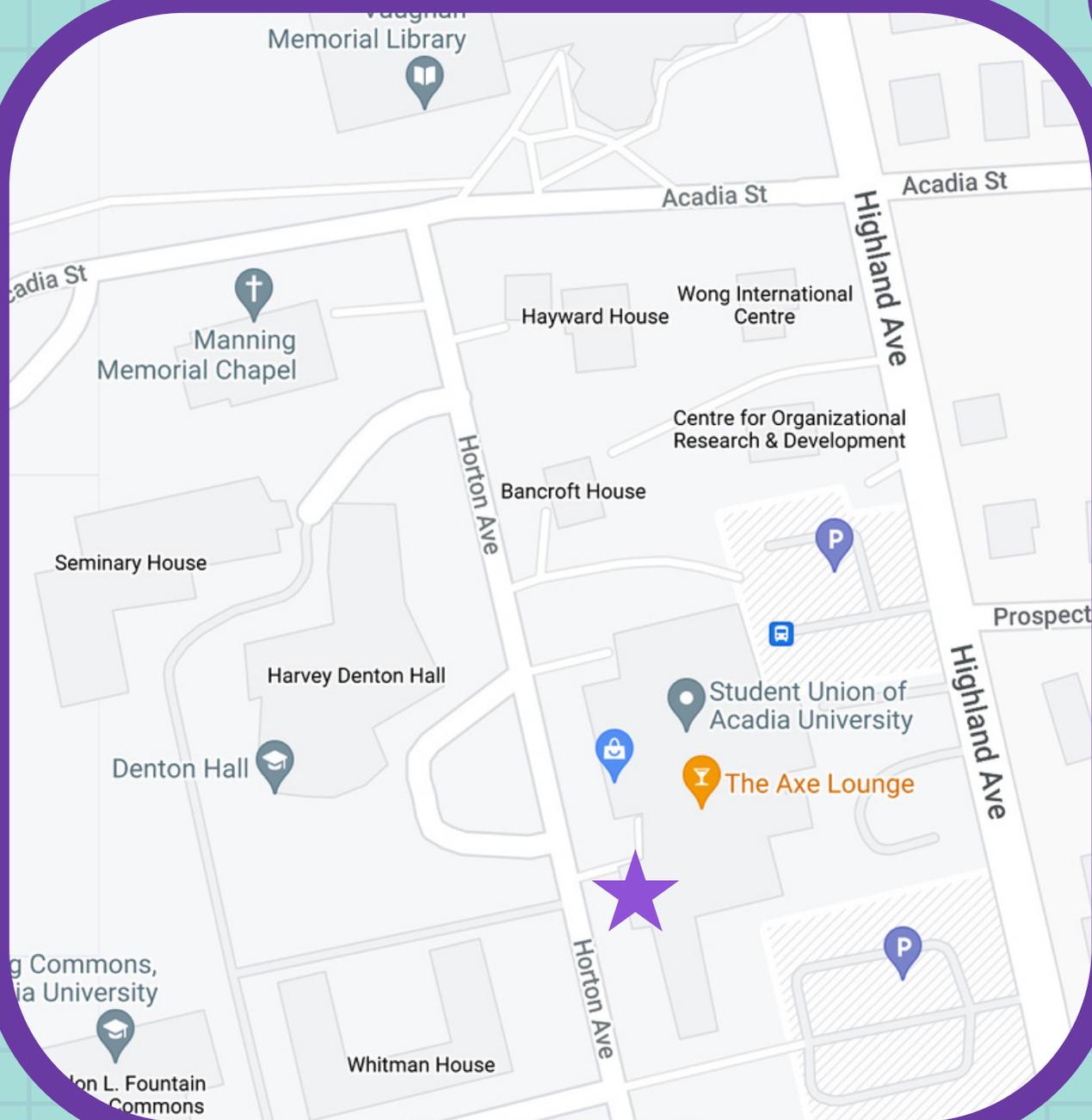
Internal reports (Acadia) and support preparing external reports (police)

Potential accommodations for your classes, residence, or on campus job

Potential interim non-disciplinary conditions for the subject of a report

Navigating resources for longer term emotional and/or legal support

HOW TO FIND US



The ★ on the map marks our office location.

Email svrec@acadiau.ca to set up an appointment. Messages are promptly responded to Monday-Friday, 8:30-4:30

Our instagram is [@acadiasvre](https://www.instagram.com/acadiasvre). This account is for education purposes only, if you need to set up an appointment please email.

SVRE FAQ'S

I'm supporting a survivor. Can this office help me?

If a survivor has confided in you, you are welcome to reach out. You can talk to the SVREC about how to care for your own needs while also ensuring the survivor gets the care and support that they deserve.

I don't know if my experience was sexualized violence. Can I still access support?

Absolutely. You can speak to the SVREC and get support no matter your experience. Many people are not ready to name their experience, some people never use the term sexualized violence, and that's okay. If you have experienced harm, you can always find support with us no matter what labels feel right to you. We will never pressure you to use language or terms that do not feel comfortable. We honour your right to tell your story in your own way. You deserve support no matter what.

Is everything I tell the SVREC confidential?

Everything shared is confidential. This means it will not be shared with anyone unless you give permission (for example, if you give consent for your information to be shared with an investigator). The only limit to this is if there is an imminent risk of severe harm to the survivor or another person. In this case, the SVREC may be required to notify someone who can help, but will only share information required to ensure safety.



What options are available to me under the Sexualized Violence Policy?

Every survivor has different needs and priorities. We respect your right to choose what is right for you. Some may wish to file a formal complaint under the Policy. Others may wish to access informal or restorative options. Some survivors may need accommodations, such as residence room changes, academic accommodations, or other supports. When you speak to the SVREC, they will work with you to understand your needs and what is important to you.



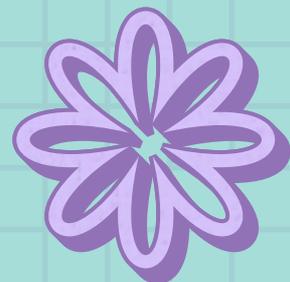
What will happen at my first meeting with the Sexualized Violence Response and Education Coordinator?

The SVREC will explain their role and give you space to tell your story. You only need to share what you are comfortable with. We want you to feel safe and supported. You may have a clear idea of what you want to happen next, and you are welcome to share this with the SVREC. A first meeting is about emotional support and exploring options and resources.



Can I bring someone with me when I meet with the SVREC?

Absolutely. We know it can be overwhelming to share your experience with someone you may not have met before. You are welcome to bring a friend with you when you meet with the SVREC. If there is anything else that would help you feel more comfortable in your first meeting with the SVREC, let us know. We want to prioritize your emotional safety and needs.



Affirmations

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Experiencing trauma such as sexual violence can have lasting effects on the brain and self esteem. One way to help combat these feelings is by using affirmations. An affirmation is a statement or phrase used to confirm and validate. By saying these things out loud, it can help remind you of who you are, and heal from your trauma.

I have no reason to feel shame or embarrassment.

I am so much more than what happened to me.

What happened in my past does not control my future.

I can make my home a haven of peace, warmth, and safety, for myself and for others.

I did not cause this. The blame lies with my abuser, not with me.

I deserve to set and maintain boundaries

I am worthy of love and respect just the way I am.

Recovery is not linear. I heal at my own pace.

Grounding

Exercises

ooo

Trauma can have disorienting effects on the body and mind. Grounding exercises are easy things you can do in the moment to calm and reconnect your body, mind, and environment. Try these when you feel out of control or lost.

Squeeze an ice cube

What does it feel like at first? How long does it take to start melting? How does the sensation change when the ice begins to melt?

Put your hands in water

Focus on the temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms, and backs of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand?

Use warm water first, then cold. Next, try cold water first, then warm. Does it feel different to switch from cold to warm water versus warm to cold?

1-2-3-4-5 Method



Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. Make an effort to notice the little things you might not always pay attention to:

1. five things you hear
2. four things you see
3. three things you can touch right now
4. two things you can smell
5. one thing you can taste

Other options:



- Deep breathing exercises
- Simple, intentional movement
- Picture favourite places or people
- Slowly eat a snack, focus on each bite
- Listen to calming music or sounds
- Describe your surroundings in detail
- Recite favourite poems or songs
- Focus on a comforting scent
- Counting or simple math
- Make lists
- Sit with a pet
- Repeat affirmations

Journal Prompts

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Journaling can offer survivors of sexualized violence a powerful tool for healing and recovery. Writing about their experiences and emotions in a safe and private space can provide an outlet to process complex feelings, fears, and traumas. By putting their thoughts into words, survivors can gain a sense of control over their narrative and regain agency in their lives. The act of journaling itself can be a form of self-care, offering moments of introspection and self-validation. Over time, this practice can contribute to a sense of empowerment, self-discovery, and a gradual reclamation of one's sense of self.

— □ ×

What emotions are most present for me today? How do they manifest physically?

— □ ×

Write down a mantra or affirmation that resonates with you and helps you stay grounded. Reflect on what it means to you.

ooo

List three or more things you appreciate about your body and its resilience.

— □ ×

Reflect on a moment of strength that you've experienced since the incident. How did it make you feel?

ooo

What would I say to a friend going through the same thing?

— □ ×

Explore a positive quality about yourself that has helped or could help you navigate your journey of healing.



CALMING ACTIVITIES

FOLLOW ALONG

● ● ● YOGA

Hannah Uiri runs a trauma informed yoga youtube channel. Her channel and practice "is rooted in the knowing that you are whole, even as you are healing". She has over 100 videos you can follow along with. She describes her practice as: " I teach slowly, with attention to inner reflection and a deep trust that you know exactly what will serve your body best."

ARTS AND CRAFTS ● ● ●

Artist Andrea Nelson runs a youtube channel and tiktok page where she leads art projects in a way that is accessible to anyone. Using her background in special education, Andrea teaches with gentleness and encouragement through every step. she covers a wide variety of mediums and levels of complexity. Her motto is: " It's gonna be fine. I'm here to help."

FOLLOW ALONG

MEDITATION

Tara Brach holds a PhD in clinical psychology which she uses to: "blend Western psychology and Eastern spiritual practices", creating a practice centred "in mindful attention to our inner life, and a full, compassionate engagement with our world". Tara has a [library of guided meditations](#). They are also available as a podcast on [apple podcasts](#) and [spotify](#).

COLOURING

Sometimes it's best to just keep it simple. The following pages are colouring sheets made for you by the SVRE office. We aimed to provide a fun design with a message of encouragement. Take some time to relax and focus on filling in the shapes and taking in the message. Tag us in or send photos of your colouring pages to [@acadiasvre!](#)

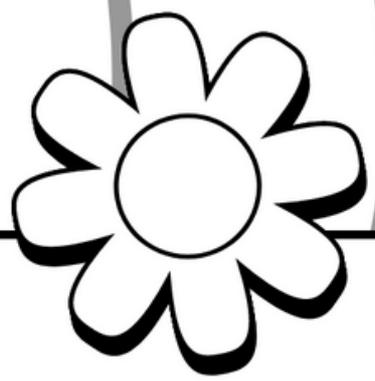
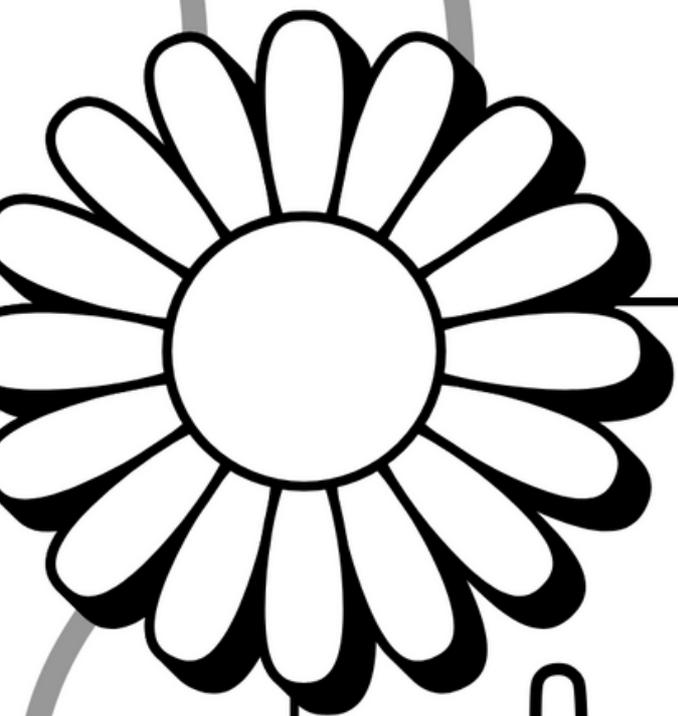


Healing

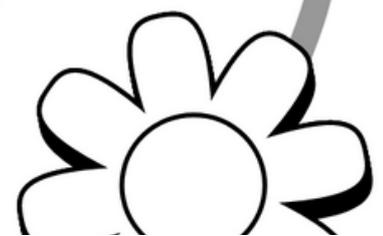
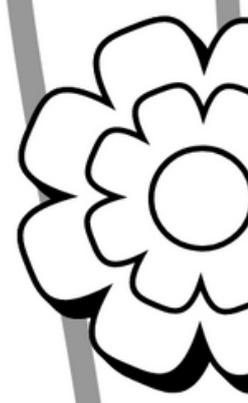
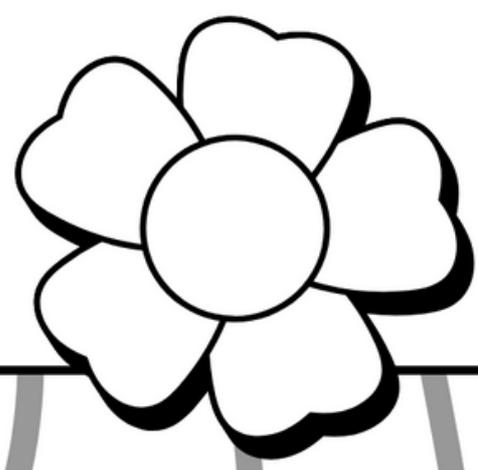
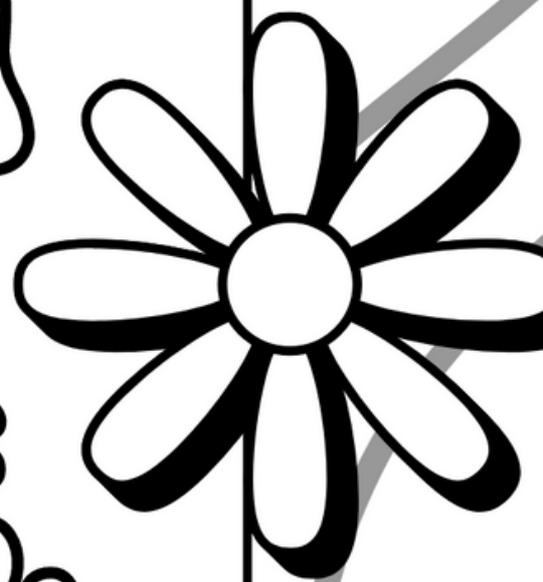
is a

Journey





I AM
SAFE.





I can do
INCREDIBLE
Things



MY



BOUNDARIES

ARE VALID

Next Steps

ooo

There are many steps and options you can take if you have experienced sexualized violence. For some people making these decisions is empowering, and for others it can be overwhelming and even triggering. Here we have laid out several steps. None of these are required, but each of them will be important to know about.

Reach Out for Support: It is helpful to talk to someone you trust about what happened. This can anyone you trust and feel safe with; perhaps a friend, family member, partner, or counselor. Having someone to confide in can provide some much needed emotional relief in a difficult time. You only need to share as much as you feel comfortable with.

Medical Attention: You should consider seeking medical attention. Even if there are no visible injuries, a medical professional can ensure your overall health, collect evidence for legal purposes, and provide information about potential risks, such as sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy.

Medical Evidence Collection: A medical forensic examination or Sexual Assault Evidence Kit, commonly known as a rape kit, can collect evidence that may be helpful if you decide to pursue legal action in the future. If you want to do this you should avoid showering, changing clothes, or washing any potential evidence before the exam.

Self-Care: This is an important time to prioritize taking care of yourself. Starting with making sure to keep up regular habits of eating, bathing, and other life basics. Extra self-care might include engaging in activities that bring you joy or comfort, practicing relaxation techniques, and trying new things such as journaling to explore your emotions.

Counseling and Therapy: We highly recommend survivors seek professional help, such as counseling or therapy. A trained mental health professional can provide emotional support, coping strategies, and help work through the trauma. You take the lead in this process and are allowed to discuss things only when you feel comfortable.

Reporting: This is completely optional, and entirely the survivor's decision. If you choose to report, you can report to Acadia by contacting the SVREC and beginning the process. You can also report the assault to the police, but it can be a difficult and potentially re-traumatizing process. It's advisable to do so as soon as possible to preserve evidence.

Legal Measures: If considering legal action, it's worth consulting with an attorney specializing in sexual assault. They can guide you through the process and explain your rights and options. In Nova Scotia the Independent Legal Advice program provides free legal advice to survivors. 211 Nova Scotia handles registration; participants remain confidential.

RECLAIMING

SEXUALITY

ooo

Sexual assault is about power, not sex. Reminding yourself your experience was an abuse of power and not sex or desire can help separate the event from your personal perception of sex.

Trauma can cause complicated feelings about sex. Reclaiming sexuality can help to regain a sense of control over your body, identity, well-being, and improve intimate relationships. It empowers making choices about sexuality on your terms, free from the influence of trauma. These pages have advice to help you on this journey. Remember there is no timeline to follow, it is all about your comfort and safety.

x

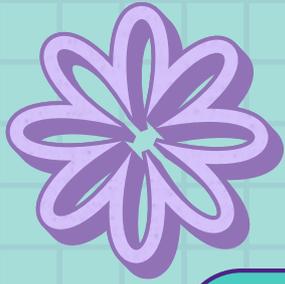
Lots of people question their sexual orientation or gender identity after experiencing sexualized violence

x

Sexuality and feelings about sex are always fluid. They change as we meet new people, learn, and experience new things. Experiencing sexualized violence is just one element that may influence your sexual experience. Though this is a terrible thing that shouldn't have happened, there are many wonderful things in the world that can have a positive influence on your sex life, even after trauma.

— □ x

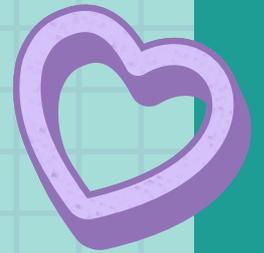
It is okay if your desires and sexual interests change after assault. Contrary to popular belief, many survivors report an interest in rough sex even after assault, some others become averse to sex for a period of time. There is no "right" way for you to feel about your body and desires.



It is helpful to pair sex with relaxation practices. This may take the form of meditating beforehand, pausing throughout to take deep breaths or some cleansing stretches, or having some comforting mantras or affirmations to repeat before and throughout.



Create a code with your partner. Have a safeword or words to trigger certain actions. Trauma can make it difficult to communicate about or during sex, so you may want to try physical signals. For example, tapping your partner on their left shoulder three times as a signal to stop. Choose whatever feels right to you.

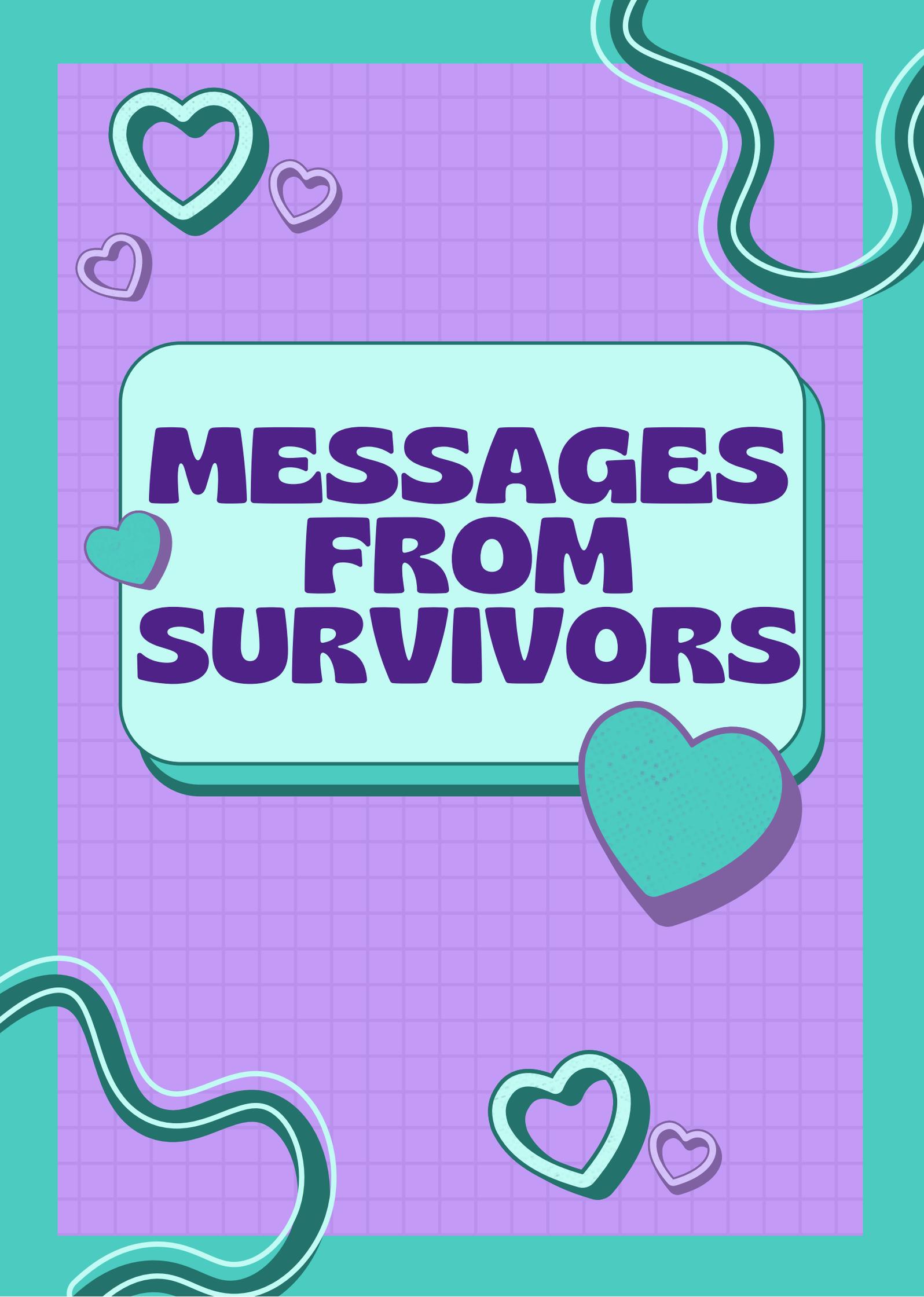


**RULE #1:
BE KIND AND
GENTLE WITH
YOURSELF**



Sex (and sexualized violence) is not limited to penetrative sex. When reclaiming sexuality it is helpful to focus on different sex acts. Try only using hands or mouths, explore mutual masturbation, try positions and paces than you haven't before. Be open to sex without the goal of "finishing". Do what feels good, as long as it feels good. Enjoy pleasure just for the sake of it.

You deserve a partner or partners who are patient and kind throughout this process. If you don't feel supported and safe with a sexual partner, especially when you have communicated your experiences and need to them, they are not deserving of your time and energy.



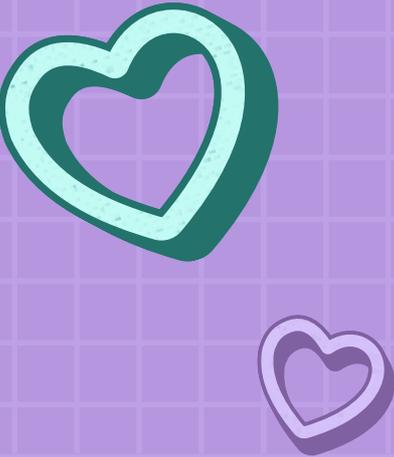
**MESSAGES
FROM
SURVIVORS**

TO YOU WITH HOPE

The following pages are filled with messages from survivors of sexualized violence who have been on their own path to healing. We asked them to share messages of hope. These are for you.

NOTE:

Survivors could chose to contribute anonymously or use a name or pseudonym.



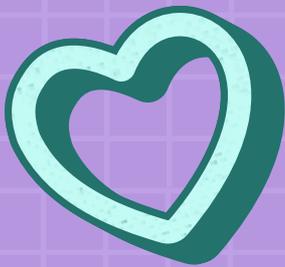
“ One day it will be a good cry, a warm sunny day soaking in your skin like you were a child feeling things for the first time again. In these moments I reflect on the girl I was who made it through. I will always struggle with anxiety, depression and C-PTSD, the trigger however no longer is the end of the world, rather me stubbing my toe. These ups and downs are typical experiences, you are not alone, and cry. Scream at the ocean, be unapologetic, selfish and take back your life one day at a time. I believe we all can flourish in the lives we will dream of when we are ready. -M.W”

“ Often the trauma of your experience can be consuming and it becomes hard to view life through any other lense. It may feel as if your whole identity has been altered by your experience. Seeking professional help to properly process my sexual trauma has been life changing for me. It has given me my life back. I now view myself and the world in such a way that I understand I am more than what has happened to me. ”

-Anonymous

A lot of people in this world can say and do some nasty things to others, but please know their actions don't reflect on your potential. Your voice is better heard than silenced and you don't have to hide anymore. Healing is a long journey and isn't always linear, this isn't your fault. Never, ever blame yourself or doubt your worth after going through this traumatic experience. Keep going, it may hurt now but we believe that you are worth the time and patience to heal. Whether you are a new survivor or a past survivor, you can control what happens next, pull yourself out of harm's way and focus on making sure you are being taken care of. They don't get the satisfaction of knocking us down anymore, or making us move on, grief is a natural process, things will start to look up

-Alex. F

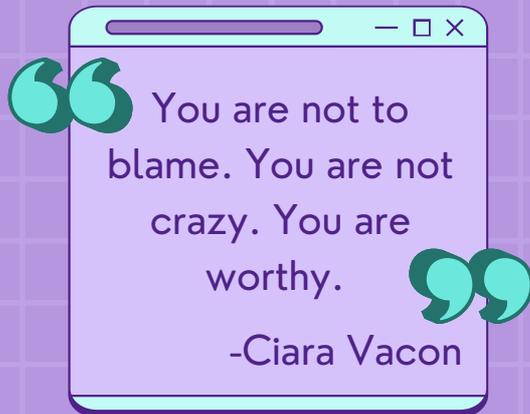


Regardless of how it happened, you are never at fault. You will never be responsible for their actions.

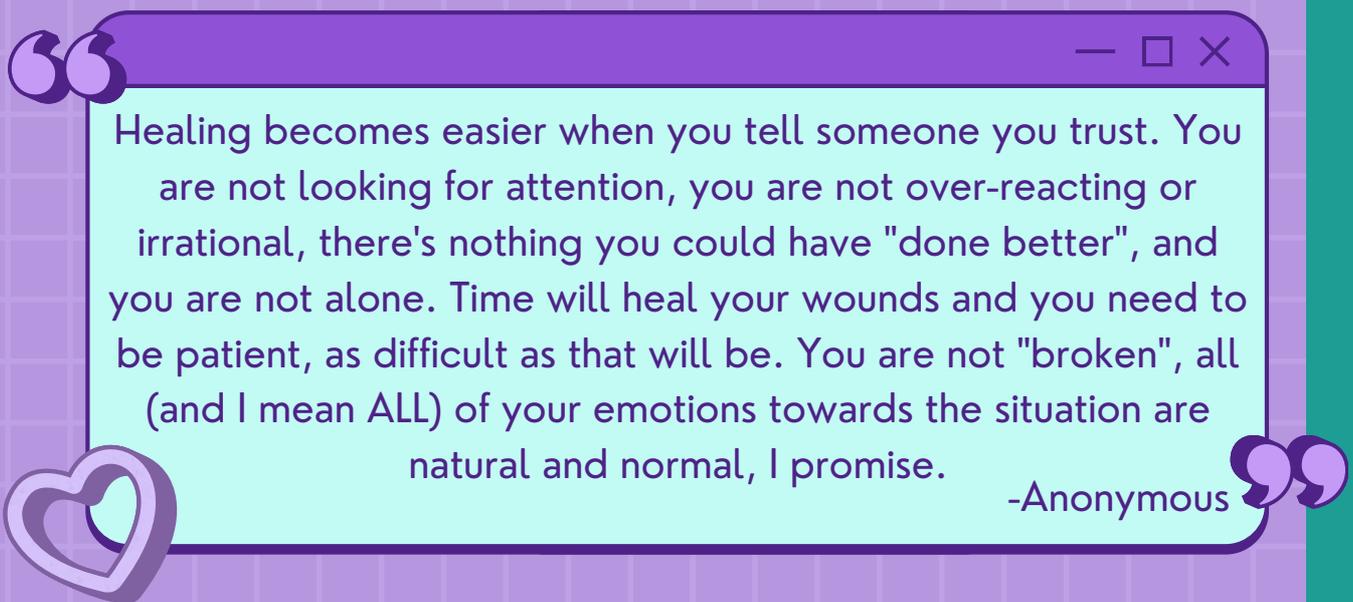
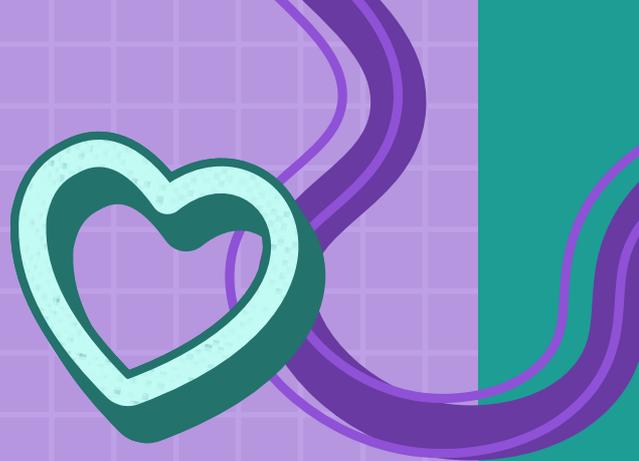
-Anonymous

There is no right or wrong answer when deciding to disclose your assault. You are a survivor no matter what. Cases can go undisclosed for years. You are still a survivor.

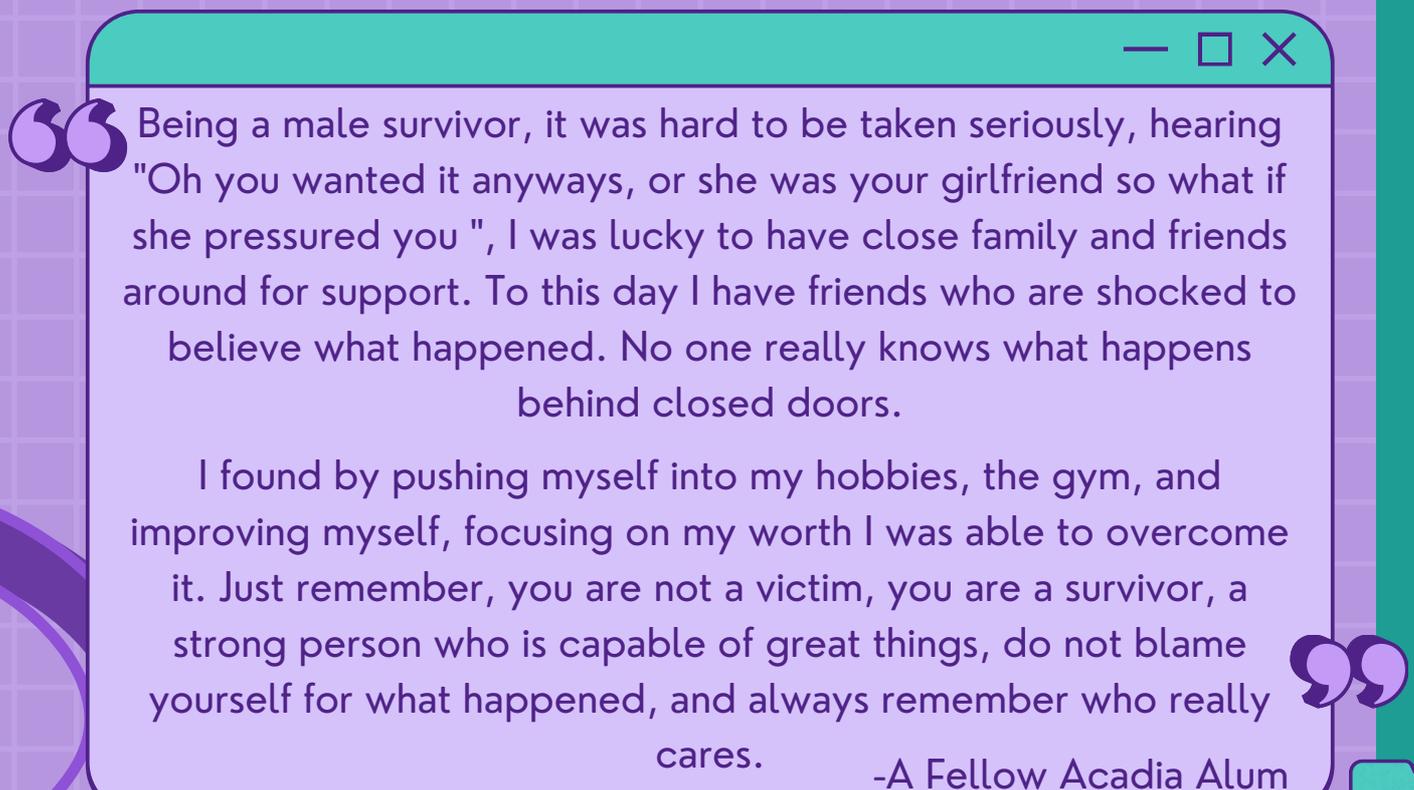
-SM



“ You are not to blame. You are not crazy. You are worthy. ”
-Ciara Vacon



“ Healing becomes easier when you tell someone you trust. You are not looking for attention, you are not over-reacting or irrational, there's nothing you could have "done better", and you are not alone. Time will heal your wounds and you need to be patient, as difficult as that will be. You are not "broken", all (and I mean ALL) of your emotions towards the situation are natural and normal, I promise. ”
-Anonymous

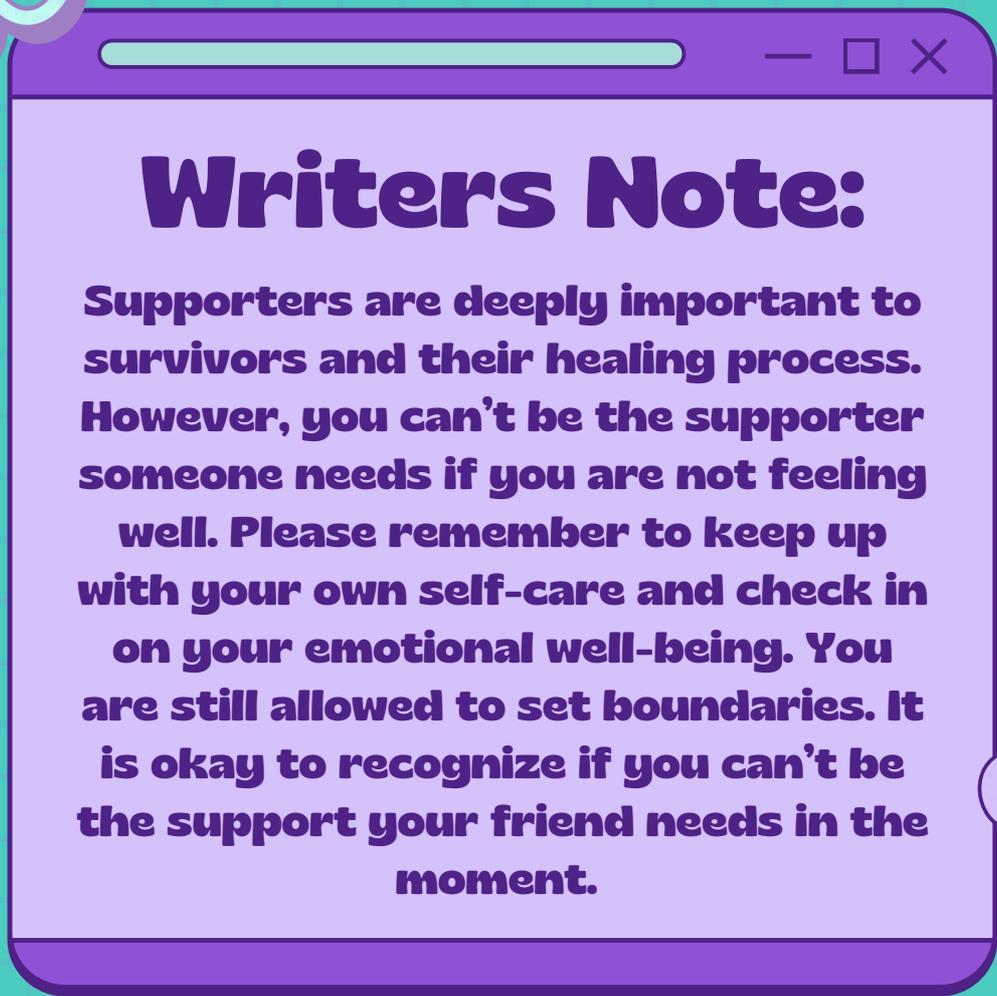
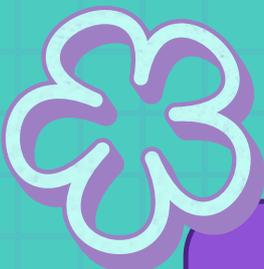
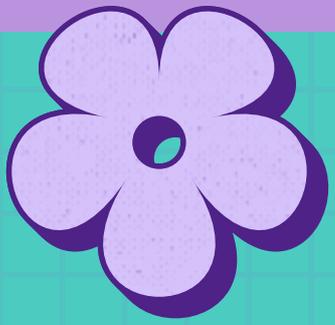


“ Being a male survivor, it was hard to be taken seriously, hearing "Oh you wanted it anyways, or she was your girlfriend so what if she pressured you ", I was lucky to have close family and friends around for support. To this day I have friends who are shocked to believe what happened. No one really knows what happens behind closed doors.

I found by pushing myself into my hobbies, the gym, and improving myself, focusing on my worth I was able to overcome it. Just remember, you are not a victim, you are a survivor, a strong person who is capable of great things, do not blame yourself for what happened, and always remember who really cares. ”
-A Fellow Acadia Alum

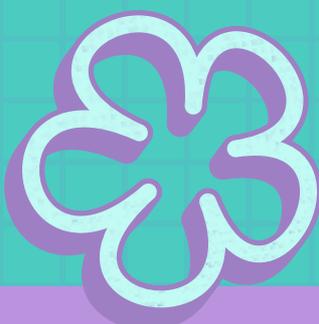
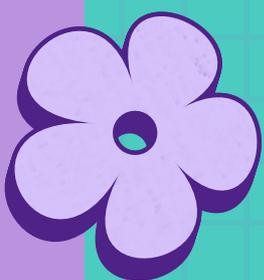
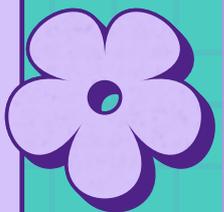


**FOR
SUPPORTERS**



Writers Note:

Supporters are deeply important to survivors and their healing process. However, you can't be the supporter someone needs if you are not feeling well. Please remember to keep up with your own self-care and check in on your emotional well-being. You are still allowed to set boundaries. It is okay to recognize if you can't be the support your friend needs in the moment.



SUPPORTING

SURVIVORS

Experiencing trauma such as sexualized violence can be earth-shattering for survivors. It can be difficult to continue your day-to-day routine when your body and mind feel shaken. This is why supporters are so important, it means survivors do not have to go through their experience alone. Being a support to someone can take many forms, they may want you to go to appointments with them or stay on their couch, or they also may just want someone to talk to.

EVERY SURVIVOR IS GOING TO HAVE A DIFFERENT NEED AND A DIFFERENT JOURNEY. WE'RE SHARING GENERAL ADVICE, BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO ALWAYS LISTEN TO THE SURVIVOR.



WHAT TO SAY WHEN SOMEONE DISCLOSES SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

"I believe you."

Shows that you trust their word.

"It is not your fault."

Emphasizes they didn't deserve it.

"Thank you for trusting me."

Validates how important this is.

REMINDER!

It is much more important to listen than it is to talk.



When supporting a survivor it is incredibly important to be patient. You may feel there are clear steps to be taken, but making decisions is going to be difficult for someone who is still processing events.

Allow them time to sit with their thoughts. Check-in regularly to see if they need you.

They need to be in control of every decision. You can tell them about options, but do not pressure or bias them.

SV takes away power and agency. It is important that the survivor be trusted with full power and agency over their own healing.

Try doing self-care and/or soothing activities together. This ensures that the person you are supporting is practicing healthy habits, while also encouraging you to do the same.

Remember and respect the privacy of the survivor at all times. Even if you are well-intentioned, it is not your story to share.

Ensure you're in a good place to be a supporter. If you experienced SV before, are under high stress, or are spread too thin, you may not be able to be their main support right now. That is okay.

Offer to help them choose another supporter or seek a therapist. You can offer support without being their go-to.

ADVICE FROM SURVIVORS



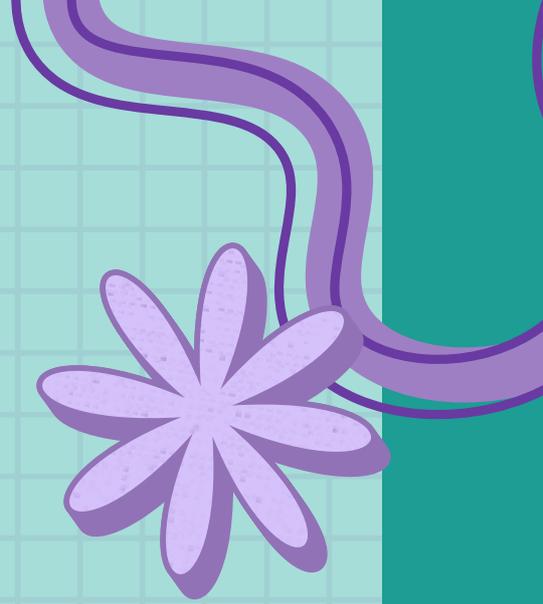
We asked survivors to share the most helpful thing a supporter did for them, or what they wish someone had done. These are their responses.



“Allowing me to share my story and providing emotional support. Rather than asking questions, they let me open up as I was ready, appreciating my journey to healing needed to occur on its own time and should not be rushed.”

“Consistency. Those who were consistently showing up for me in ways I didn't know I needed at the time. Pushing me forward gently, and lifting me up when I needed it. Without the constant arrival of someone else's presence I may have lost myself.”

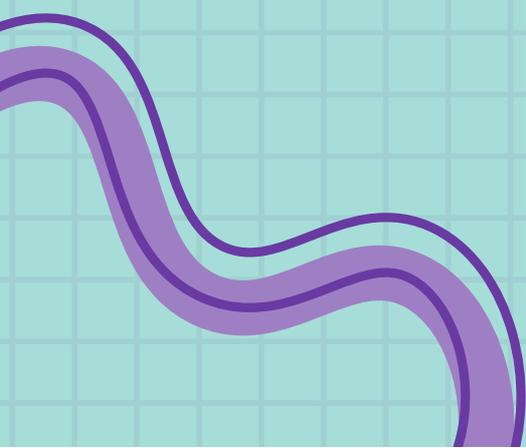
“I wish I had been taken seriously and wish I could have stood up for myself and the other survivors of my abuser, instead I was met with “get over it already” or “maybe you deserved it”. For this reason, I try to provide as much love, kindness and support to anyone I know who is in the healing and recovery process, and listen to anything they need to say. I don't press or pry, but let them have what they need for comfort and safety. Comfort and safety are the most important parts of healing and recovery.”



Introduce me to powerlifting to empower myself and boost my self esteem. I lean on this hobby a lot when I feel down to remind myself of how much I overcame and how strong I am.

EDITOR NOTE!

A new hobby, especially one that helps connect to the body or emotions, can be extremely impactful for survivors.



One of the most impactful things for me was having somebody I could call before and after I reported it to police. Having someone that knew that I was with a constable reporting what had happened, who was available right after just to say hi was so so impactful.

I wish the people in my life who I told supported me emotionally instead of trying to problem-solve. I needed someone to listen to me and tell me that I wasn't be irrational, I did not need someone to tell me ways I could "fix" the situation.

A friend recognized that what I was telling them was a case of SA. I could not see that at the time, they kindly informed me I should talk to someone when I was ready. I did almost a year later.

FOR SURVIVORS AND THE PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT THEM

This guide is meant for people who have survived sexualized violence and are beginning their journey to healing. It can be difficult and confusing to navigate life after trauma. This guide covers different stages and goals of healing, such as considering next steps, calming activities, and relationship with sexuality. This guide also contains advice for those supporting survivors.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Cameron Smith is an Acadia graduate who worked in the Acadia Sexualized Violence Response and Education office for several years. She worked on the Sexualized Violence Policy, the Harassment and Discrimination Policy, and founded Axe Oppression. This guide is the culmination of many years of work and a passion for supporting survivors.