

## 4.F. Taking Accountability. How Do We Change Violence?

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## F.1. What Is Taking Accountability?

### *Taking Accountability: Key Questions*

- What could make the violence stop?
- What could prevent further violence?
- Who/What does the person doing harm care about?

### *What is Accountability?*

In brief, accountability is the ability to *recognize, end and take responsibility* for violence. We usually think of the person doing harm as the one to be *accountable* for violence. Community accountability also means that communities are accountable for sometimes ignoring, minimizing or even encouraging violence. Communities must also *recognize, end and take responsibility* for violence by becoming more knowledgeable, skillful and willing to take action to intervene in violence and to support social norms and conditions that prevent violence from happening in the first place.

Note that this Toolkit and this section focuses primarily on the accountability of the person doing harm. However, this information and these tools can also apply to communities that have directly caused harm and/or communities that have allowed harm to happen.

Also note that a beginning step of accountability may be getting violence to stop. Depending upon the willingness and openness of the person doing harm to take accountability, the ability of the survivor or victim or the allies to push for these changes, and such factors as how serious the level of violence, the step of stopping violence may be the result of pressure or even force. This Toolkit encourages a process of accountability that relies upon changes that the person doing harm (or the community) actively participates in making. The level of participation and willingness of the person doing harm to take accountability, however, may change significantly as the intervention process moves along. And the direction of change, positive or negative, can differ widely and shift dramatically over time, even within a single intervention and with a single individual.

### *Accountability Means Many Things*

Accountability involves listening, learning, taking responsibility, and changing. It involves conscientiously creating opportunities in our families and communities for direct communication, understanding and repairing of harm, readjustment of power toward empowerment and equal sharing of power, and rebuilding of relationships and communities toward safety, respect, and happiness.

While it would certainly be a simpler world if accountability were one concept and one conversation, the reality of accountability is complex. Many different people have different ideas about what accountability is and what it looks like. Accountability is a many-sided word. What we mean by accountability shifts depending on whether we are looking at the short term, the long term, how we take accountability ourselves, and how we support others to take accountability.

The word “accountability” can also bring up all kinds of images and feelings for different people at different times. Often, we think of accountability as linked to punishment, “paying” for what someone did, or even going to prison.

For Creative Interventions, we are trying to have a different way of thinking about accountability – one that is more positive, that is tied to responsibility and change, but not to punishment and revenge. One that can be driven by connection and care rather than fear and anger alone. This is not to take away from the fact that violence and abuse cause fear, anger and outrage. It does. And such emotions have their place.

But the change from violence to compassion, safety, respect and health also needs to come from the values that we want to see even if these might be difficult to feel when we are facing violence.

Interpersonal violence primarily takes place within our families, friendship networks, neighborhoods and communities. They happen among people we know and sometimes among those we are closest to. Therefore, we are promoting accountability as a way to 1) stop violence; 2) acknowledge violence; 3) acknowledge the harms resulting from violence – even if unintended; 4) repair those harms; and 5) fundamentally change those attitudes and actions responsible for the violence.

We are promoting accountability as a way to keep our communities whole, safe and healthy, rather than a way to punish, separate and send away.

This does NOT mean that survivors or victims need to forgive the people who do harm, or that we simply ask for an apology and everything is fine, or that relationships and families need to stay together. None of these fit the definition of accountability, although it is possible that forgiveness, apologies and even staying together may be part of what some people decide that they want and may even be able to reach.

A person’s choice to make a change is key. Toward that goal, “*taking responsibility*” or even “*taking accountability*” work better as approaches and phrases than “*holding someone accountable*.” When we say ‘people need to be *held accountable*,’ we are likely to come across sounding punitive and controlling. The person who is expected to be accountable is not ever going to choose to want to *be held accountable*. Who would choose that? Anyone would struggle against

it. And if we want success, we need that person, someplace in themselves, to *want* to make a change. They have to be and feel active.

It can just mean supporting someone to learn something new and change out of old patterns.

### *Accountability as a Process*

We can think of accountability in several ways.

1. Accountability can happen over a continuum of time.

Accountability is something someone can take in the *short term*. We might:

- Stop using violence.
- Slow down and listen to understand how our actions have impacted those around us.
- Take action to repair the harm that our actions have caused others.
- Identify and try out new ways of thinking and behaving.
- Get support and encouragement for our efforts and successes.

Taking accountability or accountability is also a *long-term* and *life-long process*. We might:

- Grow our confidence to face our imperfections and turn away from patterns that harm others (and ultimately ourselves).
- Grow our ability to *feel* our emotions without *acting them out*.
- Practice and promote behaviors that honor ourselves and others.
- Humbly support others around us to do the same.
- Learn from and move beyond mistakes and set-backs.
- Practice self-awareness and self-reflection to build mutually supportive and enjoyable relationships.

2. Accountability can happen along a continuum of depth.

Any of the following can be thought of as elements of accountability:

- Being confronted *at all, even just once* about the violence that was done.

- Experiencing and understanding that violence has natural negative consequences (for example, recognizing that one's violence caused their friends to be shocked and scared – finding that friends began to avoid them).
- Stopping or reducing violence – even if doing so is a response to social pressures from friends or community, or to a threat of losing relationships due to continued use of violence – and not because of deep change.
- Listening to the person who was harmed talk about their experience of violence – without being defensive, interrupting or reacting against this story.
- Acknowledging the reality of the experience for the person who was harmed – even if this is not at all what was intended.
- Acknowledging that the use of violence was ultimately a choice – not something caused by someone else.
- Expressing sincere apology, taking responsibility, and showing care to the person who was harmed.
- Giving financial repairs (or reparations) to the person harmed.
- Giving other significant repairs, perhaps in the form of service, replacement of property, and so on, to the person harmed.
- Agreeing and taking every step possible to assure that these harms will not be committed again.
- Knowing and agreeing that any future acts of harm will result in certain negative consequences.
- Telling others about one's own uses of violence not in order to gain followers or sympathizers, but to stop hiding private interpersonal violence.
- Telling others about one's own uses of violence to ask for support in changing.
- Telling others about one's own uses of violence to show that taking accountability can be an act of honor and courage.
- Making it one's own choice, commitment and goal to address root causes of violence, to learn new skills, and to deeply transform violent behaviors.
- Showing actual changes in thinking and behavior in good times.

- Showing actual changes to thinking and behavior in hard and stressful times.
- Supporting others who have used or are using violence to take steps to take accountability.

### *Accountability as a Staircase*

In this Toolkit, we talk about accountability as a *staircase*. You can start one step at a time, and you can measure progress each step of the way.

Although we use this staircase to show steps towards accountability and a vision of positive and transformative change, an intervention may never reach any of these steps. Intervention goals may only anticipate reaching Step 1 as a measure of success.

And, rather than walking up the staircase one step at a time, one might consider the progression as more of a dance -- one may be dealing with more than one step at a time and at times may move from one step to another and back again.

Step 6	Become a healthy member of your community
Step 5	Change harmful attitudes and behaviors so that violence is not repeated
Step 4	Make repairs for the harm
Step 3	Recognize the consequences of violence without excuses, even if unintended
Step 2	Recognize the violence
Step 1	Stop immediate violence

### *Accountability Looks Different with Each Situation*

There is no blueprint for accountability. People are different. Situations and types of violence or risk are different. Some processes do well with lots of time and intense involvement. Other processes work best when they are short, to the point, and are allowed to show their impact over time.

Accountability does not have to be punitive, painful, terrifying, or retaliatory. We can make it clear, encouraging, firm, and practical. We can make aspects of it feel like a relief. Accountability can help us be seen and understood by those around us. It can help us not be and feel so alone, and can help us develop the kinds of relationships we want in our lives.

At the same time, accountability does not make sense as a primary goal for *every* violent situation or intervention. Sometimes a community does not have the resources, time, or opportunity to engage a person to take accountability for their violence. Sometimes people doing harm are not ready or willing to make *any* acknowledgement of or effort to change their viewpoints and violence. Sometimes the violence committed is so morally heinous to us or so progressed

and long-standing that we feel hatred, anger, and disgust, and cannot find anyone who might engage the person doing harm with intent free of aggression or vengeance. Sometimes the most thoughtful, open, non-penalizing, and supportive invitation to accountability from a friend, community member or leader does not result in most of the levels of accountability listed earlier. And sometimes people doing harm show that any confrontation or request for accountability results only in escalating their harmful behaviors.

But these efforts are *something*.

Though resulting positive changes might not be immediate, visible, “enough” or lasting, these efforts to intervene in violence *are a big deal*. They rise above silence, passivity, and inaction, and make peace and wellness in our families and communities something we work, not wait for.

### *Why Is It Important?*

This Toolkit is based upon the belief that communities working together can overcome violence, and the vision that each of us as individuals are capable of meaningful change towards that end. Our vision of accountability as a process or as a staircase of change means that we value any step leading towards the end of or reduction of violence and that we also see each small step as one that can lead to our bigger vision of community well-being and, ultimately, liberation.

### *Using the Tools in This Section*

This section has lengthy tools to use for the process of *Taking Accountability*. Tool F1. *Staircase of Change* introduces the concept of accountability as a process. It offers a way for you to see your own situation through the lens of these steps and allows for you to adapt them to your particular circumstances.

Tool F2. *Level of Participation for Survivors or Victims Chart* acknowledges that survivors or victims may have very different levels of involvement in a process of taking accountability. It breaks these possibilities down so that you can more clearly keep in mind how survivors or victims have chosen to stay involved and what kind of communication you will need to keep up. Tool F3. *Self-Reflection and Guiding Questions for Survivors or Victims and Allies* offers special tools for survivors or victims to think about their involvement in the accountability process.

Allies also have special needs regarding their involvement in the accountability process. Tool F4. *Self-Reflection and Practice for Allies. Practice Questions* offers some practical guiding questions and statements to help with what can be a difficult process.

*Taking Accountability* can be particularly challenging for people doing harm. Tool F5. *Breaking through Defensiveness. Guiding Questions for the Person*

*Doing Harm* and Tool F6. *Preparing for Direct Communication. Affirmations and Guided Questions for the Person Doing Harm* offer some constructive support for people doing harm as they deal with the common pattern of defensiveness.



## F.2. *Taking Accountability* Across the 4 Phases

In Section 3.6. *Interventions Over Time: 4 Phases*, the Toolkit introduced the idea of 4 possible phases of interventions: 1) Getting Started, 2) Planning/Preparation, 3) Taking Action, and 4) Following Up.

*Taking Accountability* can look very different depending upon the phase of intervention.

### *Phase 1: Getting Started*

Interventions generally begin with some need to address, reduce, end or prevent violence. Interventions will likely follow along one, two, or all three of the following areas (See Section 3.5. *What Are We Trying to Achieve: 3 Key Intervention Areas*):

- 1) Supporting survivors or victims (See Section 4.E. *Supporting Survivors or Victims*).
- 2) Accountability of person doing harm,
- 3) Community accountability or social change.

Accountability of the person doing harm or of a community that was responsible for allowing harm may never be part of an intervention. It may seem too dangerous: the person doing harm may not be known, or people may simply be unable to think of any way in which they could possibly participate in a process of change. On the other hand, accountability may be a primary goal from the very beginning. It is even possible that an intervention begins with the person doing harm wanting to change and starting a process of taking responsibility for that change.

While it is impossible to generalize about how taking accountability might factor into an intervention at the beginning stages, it is likely that taking accountability, if pursued at all, will begin with some kind of difficult communication with the person doing harm. This may look like energetic resistance to violence, a confrontation, a challenging conversation. Even if this initial communication takes place with love, compassion and support, it is likely to be a difficult connection with perhaps uncertain results. It may be met with resistance, denial, minimization, victim blaming, or even violence. It may be welcomed, only to be denied later on. The process of taking accountability, in most cases, is a difficult one. We need a process that takes into account this difficulty while staying firm enough to support increasing levels of responsibility or accountability.

### *Phase 2: Planning/Preparation*

If taking accountability is part of the intervention, then there may be a period of planning and preparation to effectively communicate with and work together with the person doing harm. Some of this planning and preparation may involve deciding what are your goals that you expect from the intervention, what specific harms you want to address, what specific things you expect the person doing harm to do, and what will be the consequences if the expectations are not met. It may help to identify the person who is best to directly deal with the person doing harm, who has enough confidence to handle what may be a very difficult process; who does the person doing harm respect; how can the process be safe for the people intervening, the survivor or victim, and the person doing harm; what is the best process for talking with and supporting the person doing harm.

### *Phase 3: Taking Action*

Taking action may refer to time spent with the person doing harm; discussions regarding the intervention, the expectations, and the possible outcomes; support for the person doing harm to move through a process of change; connection with helpful resources; and a process to give feedback to the person doing harm regarding these changes.

### *Phase 4: Following Up*

If the intervention reaches a point of closure because goals have been met, then taking accountability may move towards a process of maintaining the positive changes reached and checking in to make sure that there is not a return to violent attitudes or behaviors. Systems may be set up to check in regularly.

It is also possible to bring closure even if goals are not met. The group may run out of resources to continue, the survivor or victim may move on and choose another pathway or strategy, or the person doing harm may resist involvement. In all of these situations, the intervention may still be considered a success in some way. Closure in this case may include some process where people can identify the areas of success and what aspects of the intervention may need following up. Plans can be made on how to make those steps happen.

### *Related Sections*

A process of taking accountability is often accompanied by or a part of supporting survivors or victims. See Section 4.E. *Supporting Survivors and Victims* for information and tools.

Section 4.B. *Staying Safe* has tools to help determine risks and plan for safety. These may be important steps to make when working with a person doing harm throughout an intervention.

**In order to think through which people or organizations may be helpful in directly communicating with and supporting a person doing harm, see Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers*. These tools can be helpful in thinking about which people might be particularly good to positively communicate with and work with a person doing harm. This section may also identify who is likely to continue to support or excuse their violence and who, therefore, may be barriers to an intervention.**

### F.3. Taking Accountability Tips

#### **1. Accountability is a process; it may take many types of strategies along the way.**

In this Toolkit, we present accountability as a *staircase*. The first step on that staircase is stopping violence – or stopping it *enough* to be able to take the next step. It is difficult for someone to take responsibility in the middle of violence or in the middle of a cycle of violence that keeps continuing over and over again. It is difficult to ask for change and expect change to be lasting within a pattern or cycle of violence.

This Toolkit encourages us to take resistance to accountability into account. As we will repeat, we need to create systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time.

Strategies may include:

- a) Communicating and showing connection and care.
- b) Gathering people and power to widen the community net, shift community norms, increase leverage, and increase caring connection and support.
- c) Using some measure of pressure, threats, force or coercion if no other means are possible or if necessary to prevent further violence. By this we do not mean the use of physical violence, but acts such as asking someone to stay away or leave, letting someone know that there will be consequences if violence continues, or physically restraining someone from acting out violently at that moment.

No matter what the strategy or level of resistance, create options and leave an open door to the possibility of someone becoming a "participant" in an intervention, and not just a "target."

There are times that violence must simply be stopped before any other meaningful action can take place. There are times that violence must be stopped immediately to prevent any further harm, injury or even death. There are times that taking accountability does not begin as a voluntary act. Sometimes, it begins with force.

But we urge caution. If force or any of these acts are used as punishment, vengeance, a way to get even, to let them know how it feels, to hurt them for the sake of making them feel the pain, then this may not be a justifiable form of force. However, if some level of force is the only reasonable and available way to get

someone to stop their violence and to try to prevent further violence, then this can be considered a form of self-defense.

In some cases, people doing harm may be ready and willing, from the beginning, to take responsibility for their actions and change their behavior. This, however, is not often the case. More commonly, change and accountability are resisted, at least at first, and often over time.

Orienting attitudes, values, and options towards compassion and connection rather than punishment and revenge can help to keep an open pathway to a holistic solution — one that takes into account the wellbeing and participation of the survivor or victim, the community allies *and* the person doing harm.

## **2. Remember context; it matters.**

It is important to think about the relationship context of the violence through the lens of accountability. Remember to ask yourself: What kind of violent situation are you addressing?

In our experience, we have seen 4 common contexts for relationships. They are listed below. As you think with others about how to support a survivor, engage a person using violence to take responsibility, and/or involve a community in increasing safety and reducing or ending violence, remember always to bear in mind the context of your situation and how it impacts your approach and your goals.

### **4 Common Types of Relationship Contexts**

- a. The survivor or victim and the person doing harm are in an intimate or close relationship and are both trying to stay in a relationship which has been and may continue to be violent. Changing violence and shifting power dynamics over time might be the primary goal. A goal may also be that they live peacefully, or peacefully enough, with each other.
- b. The survivor or victim and the person doing harm are not in an intimate or close relationship but do live in close shared community. They need to build understanding, responsibility, and repair to a degree that allows both to function in shared community, but *not* in the context of an ongoing intimate or close relationship. A goal may be that they co-exist in the same shared community without conflict.
- c. The survivor or victim and the person doing harm are *not* living in shared community and/or are no longer in an intimate or close relationship. The violence happened a while ago and there is no intention to rebuild a relationship, or need to find a way to function well in shared community spaces. A goal may not include anything about their ongoing relationship — or may just want to put closure on a previous relationship.

- d. A stranger or distant acquaintance commits an act of interpersonal violence. Perhaps neighbors or community members saw and did not intervene or create safety and support for the person harmed, or worsened some dynamics of interpersonal violence in their treatment of the harmed person after the violence. A goal may be that the community takes accountability for not doing enough to provide safety, for not taking action to stop the harm or to take responsibility to make sure that kind of harm does not happen again.

### **3. Make sure that people keep “connected” to the person doing harm.**

If the intervention seriously takes on the process of taking accountability, then it is important to keep connected to the person doing harm. Because people are often uncomfortable dealing directly with the person doing harm, that person can be kept out of the loop and left hanging. Because people may be unsure about how to handle accountability, things can move slowly.

People can easily forget to update them on what’s going on and can want to handle communication through the least personal forms of communication – like email. The person doing harm who is willing to participate can begin to build up anxiety especially if no communication is made or the only communication is vague and seemingly impersonal.

Keep connected. You may need to choose someone whose role is to keep the person doing harm informed, to keep connected to them, and to let them know that while stopping violence is important – supporting the person doing harm towards long-term change is also important.

### **4. Keep an eye on safety.**

If the group is working with the person doing harm, then safety may be a major concern. The person doing harm could react with violence to a process of accountability. This could be directly when being pressed to make changes. This could also happen behind the scenes. For example, they could be trying to turn other people against the survivor or victim in retaliation; they could be trying to damage the reputations of the people working on the intervention; they could be getting their own supporters to do some kind of damage.

In some situations, these safety concerns may be minimal. In others, even if the person seems to be cooperating with the process or has not shown a high level of violence in the past, they may still be capable of significant harm.

It is easy to be too concerned about safety – so concerned that no action is taken. It is also easy to forget that safety is an issue – and act carelessly, perhaps exposing oneself and the survivor or victim to harm.

Harm may also be an issue for the person who has caused harm. Others may be out to get them, hoping that the process of accountability will be hurtful and

punishing – or thinking that it is not punishing enough. People may be targeting the person doing harm for punishment or revenge.

### **5. Remember that communities are also responsible for violence – pay attention to the community’s responsibility.**

Community accountability reminds us that interpersonal violence is a community problem, not just an individual problem. It reminds us that communities have the responsibility to address, reduce, end and prevent violence, and that they have both the responsibility and the power to change violence.

It also reminds us that communities (including those who are actively working on this intervention) have had a role to play in allowing violence to happen.

Holding a process of accountability for a community to recognize the ways we have caused violence or allowed violence to happen, to recognize consequences even if unintended, to take steps to repair the harm, and to change community attitudes and actions is an important part of taking accountability.

This process of community accountability can serve as an important model of accountability for the person doing harm. And it can show the broader community (this may be at the level of family, friendship networks, organization, local community and so on) the big changes that communities need to make in order to prevent violence in the future.

### **6. Focus on accountability for violence, not for “everything I didn’t like or judge now as a problem.”**

When working to make accountability and movement away from violence possible, remember that we are encouraging a community standard around violence, not dictating or micro-managing people’s lives and relationships. There may be *tons* of things you don’t like about the person doing harm, or that you don’t like about the other person’s or people’s responses in the situation. There may be numerous actions or behaviors that you find frustrating, unhelpful or problematic in the person doing harm. You may also feel this way about the survivor or victim of violence.

If you find yourself or other involved people starting to list out all of the things you don’t approve of or can’t stand or want to look different, find a way to step back from being self-righteous; remember humility; and refocus on intervention goals.

Expecting people to change their core personalities as a result of a single community intervention is unwise and unrealistic. Expecting people to relate to other people in radically different ways after one conversation is very unlikely. Remember that there are thousands of different ways to be in relationship with other people that are not violent, but might not be a perfect model of clear



communication, conflict resolution, love, and equality. We as community members do not need to “answer” to each other for our differences. We have to answer to our community about the violence we use, and then continue on our journey of learning how to relate to others in respectful, responsible, fulfilling, and sustaining ways.

### **7. Seek out the middle ground.**

When working to support people in taking responsibility, it can be easy to move toward the extremes: to have either extremely high (unrealistic, rigid, etc.) demands for accountability or to have very minimal expectations and to think that the smallest of actions show that they must have changed. It is helpful to check in with oneself and whoever else is involved, so as not to expect too much or too little about the response we want to see from a person doing harm.

### **8. Accountability goals; consider making them about what YOU can do.**

Sometimes we get so focused on other people and what we want them to do or stop doing, we forget that the accountability goals we can be sure to achieve are the ones that involve what *we will do* to make accountability and change possible. When working toward engaging people to stop violence, take responsibility, and make new choices, stay away from making all of your goals reflect how you’d like other people to respond to you and your requests. Avoid thinking of success as only what you get the other person to stop doing or start doing or change. You can never guarantee someone else’s response. And you can never monitor someone’s every move. Remember that you can make some of your intervention’s accountability goals reflect your *own* efforts to make accountability and responsibility possible. These can have positive ripple effects across your community.

### **9. Accountability goals; bigger is not usually better.**

If our accountability goals are small or contained, it is not because we are weak, not demanding enough, not fierce enough, or not allowing room for transformation. It is because we are matching our actions to fit the situation. It is because we are not basing a plan on magical thinking. Small change that really happens *is* transformational! In community-based interventions that include efforts at accountability, we want to take thoughtful risks that allow for the possibility of lasting change—not take wild risks (for the sake of risk-taking or for the glory of quick, righteous action) that might open our intervention and the people involved in it to serious vulnerability and danger.

If we set a giant or all-inclusive goal that we can’t realistically achieve, we risk losing our sense of accomplishment, direction, and hope. If we set a small goal and achieve it, we can set a next one, and then a next one after that. Our momentum grows.



## **10. Be prepared; figuring out who is the survivor or victim and who is the person doing harm can be complicated.**

Sometimes violent dynamics are very clear and obvious. Being able to tell who is the primary person using violence and who is being harmed can be pretty obvious. Of course, we know from Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know* that even when it is obvious, some people still choose to deny the violence or blame the victim – this is still true even though people are much more aware about domestic violence and sexual assault.

Other times the dynamics of violence can be confusing and cause intense debate. Two (or more) people can tell their sides of the story to their friends and community and get two sides to be in opposition to each other on their behalf. Both sides might be crying out that they are the victim of the other person's wrongdoing and that the other person needs "to be held accountable." Especially in domestic violence situations, sometimes the person loudly calling the community together for support is actually the person doing harm. Sometimes they are doing this to make sure that the survivor or victim of their violence does not have access to any community support or resources. Sometimes they are calling for a huge response to an act of violence or resistance that their partner *finally* used in self-defense, in retaliation, or to finally say "no" to the violence by using violence as self-defense.

Often times, it is easy to tell who is responsible for the violence in the beginning when people come together to support their friend or family member who has told them about their experience of interpersonal violence. But later when those same people think about engaging (communicating with) the person who used the violence to take responsibility or accountability, they might decide to bring in other allies who may develop another perspective.

For example, bringing in an ally who can make a positive, influential connection to the person doing harm can be helpful to the intervention. However, once this ally talks with the person doing harm, they may hear another story – perhaps a story that the person doing harm is making up or exaggerating in order to blame the victim or get out of accountability. This is very common.

The community member might then have a different opinion than the other people who started the intervention or who invited them. They might think that the intervention is unfair or is even targeting the wrong person. Sometimes *that* is when assessment gets more complicated—when people tell another side to the story.

A list of some possible scenarios is below:

- a. People carrying out an intervention are clear about who is the survivor or victim and who is the person doing harm. Even though others in the community might argue especially if they do not have an understanding about

interpersonal violence, the key people doing the intervention are clear and agree upon how they view the basic dynamics of violence and who is responsible for accountability.

- b. It is clear who is the survivor or victim and who is the person doing harm. However, people also have questions about or problems with the survivor or victim. They are not the “perfect” victim. They may have behaved in ways that are annoying or even seem abusive. Perhaps they carried out an intervention in a way that people disagree with. Even so, people are still clear about who is the survivor or victim and who is the person doing harm.
- c. The group is split. Some people think there is a clear pattern of violence and a clear survivor or victim and person doing harm. Others think that both people or parties are significantly or equally accountable for the violent situation.

Because it is unclear, people use the questions in Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know*:

- Who is more afraid?
- Who starts the violence?
- Who ends up getting harmed?
- Who is changing and adapting to meet another’s needs or moods?
- Who is more vulnerable?
- Who is using violence for power and control (abusive violence)? Who is using violence to try to maintain safety or integrity in an already violent situation (self-defense)?
- Who always has to win?

This can play out in the following ways:

- After more discussion (and re-reading Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know*), the group sorts through victim blaming and concludes that the violence is or was being used by one person against the other.
- The group reaches the conclusion that the situation really does involve a pattern of unhealthy behavior in which both people have significant patterns of using intimidation, control, manipulation, and/or use violence against each other.

- Sometimes the situation will be too hard to figure out. Sometimes you'll make a mistake that you'll learn about later, as you encounter more information about the situation or the people involved.

If you're trying to help everybody learn not to use violence and control tactics in their interpersonal relationships, what will you do if both people are using violence against each other? You may end up working with two or more people. Maybe you'll be supporting one person to address and repair from violence in ways that do not involve the use of retaliation. Maybe you'll be supporting another person to realize that they cannot use controlling or abusive attitudes and behavior against others in order to deal with their feelings of insecurity or need to feel powerful and in control.

Just be prepared to discover that figuring out or agreeing on who is the survivor or victim and who is the person doing harm is not always simple. This can add to complications when you need to find allies who can engage the person or people using violence.

### **11. Remember, imperfect behavior by the survivor or victim does NOT excuse violence.**

Even though it's *possible* that both (if this directly involves two) people could be using violence as a control tactic against each other, this is not the norm. In relationships that involve violence and abuse, there is usually a pattern in which one person does this more than the other; one person starts abusive behavior more than the other; one person has to win or be right; the other person feels more afraid.

It is common that the survivor or victim also acts aggressively, seems manipulative or does not appear like a completely "innocent victim." We cannot expect survivors or victims to look like pure, innocent victims like puppy dogs or helpless children on TV. Even so, they may still be survivors or victims of interpersonal violence, deserving support and interventions to violence that primarily ask the person harming them to be the one to take accountability. (See Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know*).

### **12. Beware of calls for accountability as a way to avoid direct communication.**

What we have also found is that in communities in which the ideas about *community accountability* have become common or popular, community accountability and processes for accountability sometimes become a substitute for direct communication. We live in a world where we are regularly insensitive, where we make mistakes, where we are unaware of our impact over others. While some of these attitudes and behaviors calls for the types of interventions we are talking about in this Toolkit, there are times when people can begin with direct communication. They can think about the attitudes or behaviors that were

hurtful and speak directly to the person who caused harm. They can get help and support to think more clearly about what they want to say in order to prepare for this communication. They can bring somebody with them to stand by in order to support them and to make sure that someone else is there to hear and see the other person's response – or to provide for emotional or physical safety. They can state the harm, talk about how they felt, and ask that the other person listen without excuses, interruptions, or arguments. They can ask the other person to think about what was said and come back at another time for continued discussion.

This may be an intervention on a small scale. And in some cases, this is a good starting place. Even with these small-scale interventions, getting allies to help support you to carry it out, make sure you think about safety, and make sure that this is an appropriate way to move forward are important steps to take. Looking through and using tools in this *Taking Accountability* section, may be helpful and appropriate.

You may want to see Section 2.B. *Seeking Safety* to find tools to figure out whether direct communication is a reasonable and safe enough approach to take and to take precautions just in case. Staying safe is reasonable and wise. However, in some situations, nervousness about doing something difficult and discomfort with conflict may not be so much about safety. It may call for us to move beyond our comfort zone and take healthy risks that can lead to positive change – and live with the real possibility that the changes we want from other people may not result.

### **13. Mindset matters; not all people doing harm are the same.**

Strategies to create accountability are more successful when they meet the people doing harm “where they are at.” Though it is common that people can use surprisingly similar tactics to hurt, control or manipulate the people they choose to harm, people who use violence are not all the same. Some differences matter more than others, and examining them can help us make our efforts at engaging people doing harm to unlearn violence more likely to succeed.

The statements below are examples of general mindsets or starting points for a person doing harm. They reflect possible points of “where they are at” with regard to relating to others and to their own violent attitudes, values, and behaviors.

- “My closest friends, my community and I find my violence acceptable and normal. I see no problem with my violence but see a problem with someone who challenges it.”
- “I find my violence acceptable and normal. Maybe others don't, but I don't care about them or what they think.”

- “I do not have enough emotional capacity or level of maturity to acknowledge or handle feelings of discomfort or healthy shame without self-destruction and/or violent destruction of others. Because of this, I will destroy you before you have a chance to hurt me.”
- “I blame my violence on other people. Although somewhere deep inside, I may feel embarrassed and know that my violence is not okay, I will never admit this or show this to anyone. I have never done so and will not do it now – even if sometimes I wish I could.”
- “I always or almost always blame my violence on other people, although I have at rare times expressed embarrassment or shame about my use of it. Even though I blame others, I sometimes wonder if it is my fault, but I would never admit this to others.”
- “I usually blame my violence on other people. But sometimes I can see that it is my fault and can even admit it. But I hate that feeling of it being my fault and really hate it when somebody else starts blaming me – so sooner or later, I blame other people again. I only change for a short while and, over time, never really change.”
- “I have a fundamental belief that violence is not a good thing. I take some responsibility for my violent actions but am quick to get defensive. I want to change but the thought of what it might take to change makes me uncomfortable.”
- “I don’t want to have a harmful impact on others, and I have some healthy shame around what is happening (or I would if I understood it just a bit better). I need some help, but I don’t know how to get it or don’t believe that anyone knows the right way to help me.”
- “I realize that my behavior has a cost that is higher than I’d like to pay. I’d like to change.”
- “I have done things that I never thought were possible – and are against my values. I may be afraid of change, but I am willing to take the challenge and do whatever I need to do to make that change.”

Looking at patterns of mindsets such as these can help us decide whether or how to engage someone using violence. They can impact how we think about what short term change can look like, what steps we can plan, and how we can ground our discussions and expectations about accountability in reality. It can also help us understand what might be important to the person doing harm and what might be most effective in reaching out to them.

#### **14. Figure out the level of “engage-ability” – how likely is it that you can make a positive and effective connection with the person doing harm.**

Remember that community interventions should engage (communicate with, work with, and support) the person doing harm to the degree that makes sense based on the situation you have to work with. While this model values engagement of the person doing harm, it is NOT a requirement. In some cases, it will simply be too dangerous; the person may be too unwilling or too difficult to reach; or we may not have the right people or right conditions to be able to connect with and engage with the person doing harm.

The level of violence that the person doing harm has committed in the past may or may not affect their ability to change. Their level of danger is obviously influenced by this but is not always equivalent to their level of danger. For example, someone who has used weapons or used a high level of violence against someone in the past can reasonably be considered capable of a high level of danger. However, this does not necessarily mean that that person is less capable of change. Situations vary greatly, and one's values and the quality of one's social connections can say a lot about one's "engage-ability."

As you assess “engage-ability” in your own situation, consider the presence or absence of the following factors.

##### **Factors Related to the Engage-ability of the Person Doing Harm**

- a. The person doing harm has no friends or social connections – engage-ability may be low.
- b. Issues related to substance abuse and/or mental illness impair the person doing harm’s ability to have meaningful social connections – and/or make them unable to figure out and follow through with positive change – engage-ability may be low or may change depending upon their state of mental illness or substance use.
- c. The person doing harm has some friends but they all collude with the violence by directly supporting it or encouraging it, or by excusing it or doing nothing about it – engage-ability may be low.
- d. The person doing harm has some friends but disengages with anyone who challenges them – they turn against or cut off from any person who challenges them – engage-ability may be low.
- e. The person doing harm’s only connection is with the survivor or victim of harm and not with anybody else. This may be positive if their care and connection for the survivor or victim becomes a motivation for change. But it also can simply mean that their connection is also based upon the dynamic of



- violence. This may put survivors or victims in an impossible situation of being responsible for changing the violence that they never caused in the first place – engage-ability may be low.
- f. There are people who support accountability who are not necessarily the close friends of the person doing harm, but whom the person respects and whose opinions matter – engage-ability may be moderate or high.
  - g. The person doing harm has close relationships with community members who are willing and able to engage the person doing harm to stop using violence and use new behaviors; the person doing harm has the ability to talk about difficult things and to be vulnerable with people – engage-ability may be moderate or high.

The more interpersonal connections the person doing harm has and cares about, the more likely you are to find a point of access or leverage for using community to support a person to change. Usually when people have nothing to lose, they have no motivation to change.

### **15. Be thoughtful about finding the best people to engage with the person doing harm to take accountability.**

In this model of violence intervention, it is easier to take accountability with the support of others. Who can support the person doing harm to make choices toward accountability for violence and change? This may be a very different set of people than those more directly supporting survivors or victims.

Taking accountability is challenging. It may take changes of the most fundamental ways that people think about things, make decisions, and take actions. People may be asked to take accountability in a situation where emotions are heated. People may be angry or fearful. They may feel disgust or even contempt for people who have caused harm.

And the person doing harm may feel cornered, ashamed and exposed. It may remind this person of other situations that may have felt threatening. Or this may be the first time that someone has ever faced a situation in which they have been named as someone causing harm which can also feel threatening.

It may be important to make sure that we look deeper for opportunities (and people) to engage the person doing harm to learn and change, and not back away when accountability gets hard.

See Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers*, Tool C.5. *Allies to Work with the Person Doing Harm Chart* for tips on finding allies to work with the person doing harm.

**16. Expect that people often resist taking accountability. Create systems flexible enough to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and strong enough to withstand and diminish these tactics over time.**

Most of us struggle with accountability and experience it as a rejection, a threat, and an unjust imposition. We need to create responses that take this struggle into account.

All of us have experienced occasions when we have needed to be accountable. Even if we apologize and are accountable at first, we often want to slip out of full accountability using a series of tactics such as the following:

- Leaving the community, relationship, organization to avoid accountability
- Showing change early on in hopes to get people to stop holding us accountable – then going back to old behavior when there's less pressure
- Hoping people forget
- Hoping people feel sorry for us so they leave us alone or blame others
- Making people scared of us or scared of our anger
- Making people depend on us so that they feel too guilty or scared to challenge us
- Creating delaying tactics
- Creating distractions
- Blaming others
- Blaming our past
- Blaming the survivor or victim
- Blaming those who are trying to hold us accountable
- Making the accountability process be the problem, not our own harmful attitudes, behaviors and frameworks for thinking and acting
- Wanting our own version of accountability to be the right one – controlling the accountability process

It is unrealistic and a recipe for frustration and failure if we expect change to happen with one conversation or one meeting; if we expect a pattern of attitudes and behavior to change quickly; or if we believe that positive changes early on



mean that changes will be long-lasting. While this is not impossible, this is rarely the case.

Instead, we need to create systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time.

We need to rely upon ourselves and the support of others who understand interpersonal violence and who understand the nature of accountability (which can be helped through this Toolkit) to keep up a system that can support change over time.

### **17. It's okay to remind someone of community consequences to using violence.**

To guide someone toward taking responsibility for violence, it is sometimes necessary to point to or allow for the consequences of violence. While this Toolkit does not support the use of punishment, revenge and humiliation as a way to support accountability, it does recognize that violence can lead to negative consequences.

This can involve the loss of respect, the loss of status, the loss of trust, the loss of a position of responsibility, and the loss of relationships and friends. In some cases, this can lead to the loss of a home and community. Even if we do not support punishment and revenge, we also cannot force others to continue to like us and respect us. We may never gain someone's trust even if we change. These are some of the possible consequences that we may have to realize are the costs of our harmful attitudes and behaviors.

Pointing out social or community consequences of using violence is not the same as holding a threat over someone's head. Sometimes people doing harm are in denial or just plain unaware of the consequences of their violence. Sometimes they might blame the consequences on everyone else (the survivor, the survivor's family members, the other people in the community, people involved in the intervention, etc.). Sometimes they believe people will just forget or care less about the violence over time. Sometimes they have convinced themselves (seriously) that they are invincible – and unlike ordinary human beings, are not subject to repercussions or consequences.

And oftentimes communities will protect people using violence from ever experiencing community consequences of their actions. People cannot take responsibility for their violence and make new choices if they are protected from the consequences of their own behavior. It is important to help them make the connection that they risk losing others' respect, compassion, trust, favors, relationships, friendships, their job, etc. when they hurt people with violence. When their violence causes them to lose something, it is important not to protect them from ever having to feel regret, sadness, fear, or loss. Again, these are not

necessarily punishments. These are the possible human costs for causing harm and suffering.

For some people, facing these possible consequences of violence may make them feel like change is not worth it. If they lose everything, then why bother? They may only try to change because they think that there will be certain rewards that they will be able to keep relationships, trust, a job, or respect. While these things may be possible for some people, there is simply no guarantee that this will be the case.

When taking accountability, one must eventually accept those losses that one cannot control and try to create new attitudes and behaviors that will lead to self-respect, trust in oneself and the potential for new, meaningful relationships.

### **18. Look out for shifting targets...when an ally becomes the new enemy.**

Be prepared that after being engaged by an ally to take responsibility for violence, the person doing harm might shift their anger toward that ally and away from the survivor or victim. Look out for attempts to make the ally the new “enemy” and to re-make the relationship or history with the survivor or victim as if it is problem-free, or not the *real* problem. Plan for how to support allies and create safety for them after they engage the person doing harm.

For the survivor or victim, be aware of your vulnerability to also make someone else the problem if this dynamic comes about. A shift from yourself to another person as the target can be a huge relief and bring about positive feelings that you may have experienced in the past with the person doing harm. Think about how long this experience of closeness or relief will last – and how your alliance with the person doing harm may eventually cost you your own allies. Even if you take a moment to benefit from a period of relief, beware of accepting this as a new reality and take care to get real about the pattern of violence or harms that you experienced in the past.

### **19. Remember that we can only control ourselves.**

We cannot control or guarantee anyone else’s response. Our intervention may have specific goals concerning the types of attitudes and behaviors we expect from the person doing harm. However, attempts to tightly control someone else or demand very exact verbal or behavioral responses may be unrealistic. In community-based interventions and *especially* in conversations inviting someone to self-reflect and take responsibility, we have to be persistent and patient to help someone take small steps in the right direction.

If you are the survivor or victim and are trying to maintain a relationship with the person doing harm, then it is important to be aware of the basic types of attitudes and behaviors you expect and deserve. Expressing this and being specific about

this with the person doing harm as a part of accountability is important. It can be difficult to tell the difference between being patient and letting someone cross the line. Get help from your allies to keep you on the right track regarding your goals and whether or not they are being met.

## **20. Stay specific. Then give it time.**

Community interventions that include efforts to invite someone to take responsibility and make positive changes can be exhausting, and it is important to make every effort to stay specific, focus on behaviors that we want to address and behaviors that we want to see in the future, and then give things time. Take care of yourself and your loved ones! A 100% focus on the intensity of pain that violence causes, the stress of confrontation, the distress of rejection, the hardship that comes when we see things differently within our communities is unsustainable for any person or group. When you encounter moments, hours, and days that feel unbearable, know that they will change with time. Persistently seek out opportunities to remind yourself of the good things—the strengths, the opportunities, the fun, the resilience, and every other bit of joy in life. They are as important a part of community interventions as any other effort.

#### F.4. Taking Accountability Special Considerations

The process of *taking accountability* is a difficult one. It can be a long and complicated process. It can move forward and backward and can easily confuse and wear people down. It can also look very different depending upon the position you have to the situation of violence.

No matter who you are in relationship to accountability, it is useful to read this entire section on *taking accountability* in order to get information that might be particularly useful to you.

Again, the process of taking accountability is not a one-time event. It often requires creating systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time.

This system involves supporting a person doing harm through a process of accountability that may begin with elements of force and coercion that move towards self-reflection and deep levels of change.

This system supports the survivor or victim to address and begin to repair the harms committed against them – to take collective action and break from the isolation of victimization – and to participate in and benefit from a process that may support a process of accountability from the person doing harm.

This system supports the community to take a more active role in recognizing individual and interpersonal levels of violence as a community problem. It organizes community power to support survivors or victims and actively support people doing harm to become agents of positive change rather than perpetrators of harm.

Again, an intervention may not have taking accountability as a goal. But if it does, then these are some special considerations.

##### *Survivor or Victim*

The survivor or victim may be in very different positions regarding taking accountability. One factor to look at is the *relationship of the survivor or victim* to the person doing harm. If this is an intimate or close relationship, the survivor or victim may wish to stay in relationship with the person doing harm. The survivor or victim and the person doing harm may never have been in a relationship and may even be strangers. They may have once been in relationship but are no longer connected in any way, They may be sharing community even if not in relationship, thereby making some form of co-existence without conflict a goal (See F.3. *Taking Accountability Tips*).

The survivor or victim may have very different positions regarding his or her level of participation in the intervention. He or she may be taking a lead role in every aspect of the intervention; the victim or survivor's goals and directions may be prioritized over all others but with the input of others. The victim or survivor may have a high level of participation but with goals and directions shared with others. Other times, the survivor or victim may take a back seat and only give feedback, may not be involved at all, or may even disagree with the intervention (See Section 4.E. *Supporting Survivors or Victims*).

In all of these cases, the Toolkit encourages the intervention to give special consideration to the goals and safety of the survivor or victim. Even if they are strangers or are no longer in relationship, the intervention and steps towards a process of accountability could provoke resistance, retaliation or other forms of harm from the person doing harm and others who may not agree with the intervention. It can also involve strong emotions that can impact the survivor or victim and affect their well-being and ability to concentrate or deal with their daily lives. Because each situation is different and each survivor or victim will experience their intervention in different ways, the impact on and necessary support for the survivor or victim needs to be considered throughout the intervention.

For example, if the survivor or victim is in a current relationship with the person doing harm, then taking accountability can be complicated by strong emotions tied to the experience of violence and harm and emotions regarding the promise of change. It can be common to feel anger and fear about the violence or the memory of violence. It can also be common to feel guilt about putting someone through a process of accountability. Failures to follow through with accountability or perhaps return to abusive attitudes and behaviors – all common events – can bring about feelings of anger, frustration and fear. Often the person doing harm is keenly aware of the survivor or victim's emotions and vulnerabilities. It is easy for them to take advantage of these emotions and use them to get their way or to dodge accountability, even if they are not completely aware that they are doing so.

This is to say that there can be powerful and confusing emotions for a survivor or victim who is also interested in the changes that accountability promises to bring. Having no hope for change or not caring about change can, in fact, at least protect one's emotions from the ups and downs that can go along with emotional ties to change. If one's safety and survival depend on positive change, then what one has to gain or lose can be even more serious.

It can be difficult to tell whether one is expecting too much, expecting changes that are unreasonable in a short amount of time or for any human being to possibly achieve – or if one is expecting too little, seeing every small positive change as proof of transformation or excusing every set-back or returning act of violence as something that will eventually change.

***If you are the survivor or victim***, you may consider some steps to help you stay steady and not tie your present and your future to every up and down that the person doing harm may take in the accountability process.

*If you are still closely connected (physically and/or emotionally) to the person doing harm*, the process of taking accountability can be particularly confusing. Some steps you can take are:

1. Setting your goals and your bottom-lines in a process with allies and separate from the person doing harm (See Section 4.D. *Goal Setting*).
2. Writing these goals and bottom-lines down and returning to them on a regular basis with the support of an ally or group of allies.
3. Working on including other important people or activities separate from the person doing harm in your life.
4. Making sure not take on the responsibility or burden of accountability for the person doing harm. Make sure that their process of taking accountability is supported by people other than you and a process outside your direct involvement even if you are somewhat involved.
5. Getting support so that you can work through confusing feelings that can include cycles of hope, fear, anger, guilt, and disappointment.
6. Watching out for a situation in which the intervention process and/or allies in the intervention process become the new enemy shared by you and the person doing harm. This is a common dynamic that can bring about relief, shared perspectives and even pleasure as you and the person doing harm find a common enemy. But this can also jeopardize their process of accountability and your safety. If you cannot resist, then see if you can take this relief in a small dose, enjoy the brief sense of rest or pleasure it may bring, and then get real quickly – most importantly, with yourself. If you know you are doing this, then ultimately, this is your dynamic to control. Do not rely upon the person taking accountability to do this for you. Resistance and testing on their part is in some ways to be expected. Part of the accountability process for the person doing harm is to recognize resistance tactics and to stop using them. But it is also your responsibility not to give in to these dynamics – once you understand them for what they are.

Of course, it is also possible that you really disagree with the intervention process, and you are starting to see them as the enemy. If so, think about the following: 1) Are you frustrated that change is not happening quickly and so you are taking it out on the intervention? 2) Are you frustrated that the person doing harm is not being accountable and so you are taking it out on the intervention? 3) If you are really having problems with the accountability process, can you meet with the group or a particular trusted person or support people to make these



issues known? Can you give this as feedback to the process – to let the intervention team know what’s working and what’s not?

### *Community Ally*

In this intervention approach, community allies may be very actively communicating with and working together with the person doing harm to support their process of accountability. In particular, the survivor or victim may take a less active role in face-to-face communication because it may be unsafe. They may not be able to feel or express any level of positive connection to the person doing harm, or it may well be the community’s responsibility to take on this aspect of an intervention.

Supporting a process of accountability works best if it includes a person or people who have the respect of the person doing harm – who can both apply the “push” of community pressure and also the “pull” of positive role-modeling and community connection. They may know the person doing harm and understand the personal experiences and values that might make it easier to connect accountability to what this person thinks is important – what the person doing harm could gain and strengthen by taking accountability and also what they could lose if they do not.

It is important for the people working together to support accountability to share goals and values, or at least agree enough to not work at cross purposes. It is important for them to share some level of care and even respect for the person doing harm – even if what this person has done offends them greatly.

And it is important for those working most closely in direct communication with the person doing harm to actually be connected to them and to have a long-term commitment to supporting their change, whether or not they are able to achieve this change.

***If you are a community ally***, you may be taking a very important role in supporting the process of taking accountability. This can be a very difficult role. The process of taking accountability can be long. It can move forward and then backwards. It can get you very emotionally involved in hoping for change, being frustrated, trusting and not trusting the person doing harm, or perhaps feeling frustrated with the survivor or victim or other allies.

As community allies supporting the process of accountability, you may need to form systems of support for each other, including ways to prepare and then debrief after meeting with the person doing harm, and ways to check in during difficult times, so that you can keep steady and stay healthy.

If you are actively participating in the process of taking accountability, you may think about the following:

1. Return to the goals and values of the intervention and use them to guide the process of taking accountability. If these goals or values do not seem to fit or seem to steer you in ways that do not feel right, then go back to the group and request that you as a group look at these goals and/or values again.
2. Do not do this alone. At times, we seek a lone hero to confront the person doing harm and make things right. Even if there may be times that you meet with the person doing harm or take on some aspect of the intervention yourself, make sure that you have the support of the group, some people within the group or other useful resources for preparation and check-in as you move forward.
3. Think about safety for the survivor or victim, yourself, other allies, and for the person doing harm. This may include immediate physical safety, things that could jeopardize the safety of the survivor or victim and feed into acts of retaliation, or things that could throw off the intervention. Think about what information you will share, what should remain confidential, and back-up support for safety. Make sure that your ideas regarding these points are consistent with other people who are involved in this intervention. See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe* and use the safety tools for help.
4. Remember that support does not always look like you are “taking the side” of the person doing harm. It may mean that you are challenging their sense of reality, calling them out if they lie, or checking to see if they followed up with demands or what they said that they would do. Supporting someone to take accountability rests on the belief that stopping violence and harm is, in the long run, beneficial not only to the survivors or victims or the community, but also to the person doing harm.
5. Watch out if you find the process of *Taking Accountability* splitting off from the process of *Supporting Survivors or Victims*. It is easy for the process of taking accountability to begin to take a life of its own. It can become the full focus of an intervention, sometimes leaving the survivor or victim isolated and alone – without any active support or with support that is completely unconnected with the rest of the intervention. It can begin to take on different goals than a holistic intervention that would also prioritize or take into account the needs and goals of the survivor or victim.

People working directly with the person doing harm may begin to hear their “side of the story.” They may start feeling more sympathy for the person doing harm than for the survivor or victim. They may hear new stories that seem to present a different picture than the one they had. They may begin to feel like they’re on the “team” of the person doing harm and start working for them rather than working on behalf of the entire intervention.

The terms for engagement may start to be set by the person doing harm who may use pressure, coercion or emotional pulls such as crying, pleas for sympathy, telling the worst stories about the survivor or victim to get allies to go easy on



them, throw them off, or even begin to view the person doing harm as the survivor or victim rather than the other way around. They may completely believe this story. It may reflect their sense of truth. They may be completely manipulative – using anything possible to get out of accountability and “get back” at the survivor or victim.

These dynamics are very common aspects of interventions to interpersonal violence. They should be anticipated and become part of the process of intervention and taking accountability – as much as is possible. And if these come up along the way, these are the very points that community allies should look at, reflect upon, and share with others in order to keep on the path to accountability and keep systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time.

6. Prepare and make space for reflection and follow-up with each step of taking accountability. The process of accountability is usually a winding road. Figuring out what has moved forward, what are barriers and possible ways to move forward can be an important part of reaching your long-term goals. Use tools in this Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* and Section 4.H. *Keeping on Track* for help.

Concerns that the person doing harm raises or concerns that you yourself have may simply be part of the normal “dodging and delaying” tactics around accountability. But they may also reflect real concerns.

Listen to these concerns if they are raised by the person doing harm, and watch out not to show reactions that may look like you agree with them. Note these concerns and share them with the group. Use tools in the Toolkit and other resources to see if any of them can help you respond to these.

You can bring these concerns back to your team which may include the survivor or victim for reflection and responses. They can be used to figure out how far someone is in the accountability process; they can help you better respond to the person doing harm. They can be used to reshape an intervention.

7. Be prepared for how personal relationships with the person doing harm affect the intervention and vice versa. Sometimes close friends are the best people to engage with a person doing harm. They may care the most about change, may know the person and their values best, and may be respected by the person doing harm.

At the same time, an intervention process, particularly one that goes on for a long time can seriously affect a friendship. Does your friendship turn into a series of accountability meetings? Do you find yourself liking this person less and less? Or hating the intervention more and more?

Sometimes, finding out about violence committed by someone you care about makes you question the friendship. If you question your friendship but can find a way to continue your care through participating in this intervention, it can be a true act of friendship. Find support to help you figure out feelings of confusion, anger, disappointment, and sadness that may accompany this process.

If you simply cannot continue your relationship with this person (including being part of the intervention), figure out if you can express your feelings about why. This may end up being helpful information for the person doing harm – even if it may be difficult to say and to hear.

If you cannot continue your friendship but can still be involved in the intervention, think about an appropriate role for you to participate in so that the strong feelings that accompany the end of a friendship (on your side and theirs) do not become a barrier to the intervention.

### *Person Doing Harm*

In this approach to intervention, we aim to include the person doing harm as a positive participant in an intervention to violence. We also recognize that this may take a series of steps – and that in some cases, this may be a goal that we never reach.

Because we are talking about interpersonal violence, the survivor or victim and the person doing harm may also love and care about each other or move back and forth between powerful feelings of love and hate.

The person doing harm is not simply and exclusively someone who is violent. This is why this Toolkit does not use labels such as batterer, rapist, perpetrator, perp, abuser, predator, offender or other words usually used by the criminal justice system. They are people who are part of our families, friendship networks and communities.

At the same time, we take interpersonal violence seriously and believe that this is not simply a problem among individuals, or an unimportant problem that we can ignore. Interpersonal violence is a serious problem. Violence committed among those we care about can be extremely damaging, causing injuries at the deepest levels of our being.

This Toolkit invites the person doing harm to participate in change. It also recognizes that change is difficult – it is a long-term process. Change requires the person doing harm to accept change as a goal. Because we are not isolated individuals (although we may feel like it at times), but are people in relationship with family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and neighbors, we need the support of others to help us reach long-term change.

***If you are the person doing harm or are accused of it***, this Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* offers a lot of information and tools for you and others to use in this process.

If you are reading this or someone is giving you this information, then we hope that you have others to support you to change.

We also know that support can be difficult to find. We ask that you at least use the tools in this Toolkit (also found at [www.creative-interventions.org](http://www.creative-interventions.org)) to help you reflect on and figure out a process towards change. If someone is already asking you to change or is offering support, then you can use this Toolkit along with that support to take accountability and transform yourself.

You may be able to find support through local batterer intervention groups or other resources to give you additional help.

If no local help is available, then refer to this Toolkit and use the tools to help guide you. Go to a local library and look up books on violence and changing violence to get whatever help you can find.

If you are able to find other people who may be having the same problem, or local spiritual leaders or community leaders, you can let them know about this Toolkit in order to give them some basic information to guide them to help you better. They can become a “facilitator” – another person that serves as an anchor – to help move this process along.

Changing your violence may not bring back relationships you have lost. You may never be forgiven for your actions – at least, not by the people you may have harmed. You may never regain their trust.

However, you may be able to make deep changes as someone who has the ability to honor and respect yourself and others – and to contribute to your community.

#### F.4. Taking Accountability Facilitator Notes

For the facilitator, the process of *Taking Accountability* can be particularly challenging. The process can be long and consuming. It can become the focus of everyone's attention and energy, perhaps leaving the survivor or victim isolated and without adequate support. And resistance by the person doing harm is commonplace, making the process of taking accountability confusing and frustrating.

As the facilitator, you may be taking the role of keeping things on track and making sure that people do not start working at cross purposes.

If your intervention includes the process of taking accountability, some of these tips may be helpful:

##### **1. Read this Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* carefully and offer information or tools that might help the process.**

Taking accountability is a very difficult process. People most involved in supporting this process (including the allies, survivor or victim, and the person doing harm) can easily become confused along the way. You may be in a good position to notice when questions or problems come up that could be helped with the information or tools in this Toolkit.

##### **2. Keep an eye on safety.**

The process of taking accountability can appear threatening to the person doing harm. Depending on their “mind set,” they may see admitting a wrong and making a change as something to be challenged. Shows of cooperation can go along with plans to threaten survivors or victims, intimidate allies, or undermine the entire accountability process.

See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe* for more tools that people can use to increase safety as they move forward in the process.

##### **3. Remind people of the goals and values and make sure they guide the process.**

The process of taking accountability can take many twists and turns along the way. The progress of the person doing harm to take accountability is ultimately not in the control of any single person or group of people. Things can change dramatically along the way, making a return to simple guidelines helpful. See Section 4.D. *Goal Setting* for more information.

As facilitator, you may be able to remind people of the goals and values that guide the intervention. If the goals or values are no longer helpful or no longer fit, then

you might help the group come back to reconsider what goals and values may make better sense.

#### **4. Make sure that support is at the center.**

The process of taking accountability can be difficult and energy-draining. A supportive environment for everyone is necessary if the process is going to continue for the long time that may be necessary for it to stick.

Help people find support through their own loved ones and through each other. Help create a positive environment so that people can counter frustration with appreciation. And make sure that the survivor or victim does not get forgotten as the group begins to put energy into the process of accountability.

#### **5. Keep a holistic process.**

The process of taking accountability can become the focus of the whole intervention. It can be easier for this process to split off from the process of providing support for the survivor or victim and to find the people working on one aspect of the intervention separated from those working on another. It is easy to forget about the needs of the survivor or victim or to leave them out of the process of accountability. It is easy to put all attention on the person doing harm and forget to pay attention to the community context.

As the facilitator, you may be able to see the bigger picture and make sure that people are communicating with and connected to each other. You may need to think about what aspects of the intervention are being forgotten and make sure that these pieces are picked up.

## F.6. Taking Accountability Real Life Stories and Examples

### **Story F.1. A Cultural Organization Deals with Sexual Assault**

In the summer of 2006, a drumming teacher from South Korea was invited to teach a week-long drumming workshop at a Korean cultural community center in Oakland, California. After an evening of singing, storytelling and drinking, several students stayed the night to rest and recover for the next day. For over two decades, the cultural center had developed a safe space for the teaching of Korean drumming and dance, community performance and cultural and political exchange. That night, safety was shattered when the drumming teacher sexually assaulted one of the students.

People staying at the center immediately heard what had happened, and center leaders quickly pulled together a direct confrontation involving the members and their community-led board. The next day, members and board members gathered at the center to denounce the sexual assault and support the victim. In this situation, the victim refused to name herself as a “survivor” – finding “victim” a better description of her experience of violence.

Liz, the president of the Oakland cultural center at that time, recalls the next day’s meeting. “When we got there, the teacher got on his knees and knelt in front of us which is the deepest sign of respect. And then he asked us, begged us, not to tell his organization back home. We said we couldn’t do that. ‘We’re not here for your apology. We’re here to tell you what happened, what we’re going to do, and that’s it.’ He made a big sign of remorse, taking his drumming stick and breaking it. He put it on the ground like ‘I’ll give up drumming for this.’ Most of us were disgusted.”

What followed was a series of actions, including a set of sexual assault awareness workshops for the center members and members of other local drumming groups. The board made an immediate telephone call to the head of the drumming center in Korea. Their leader expressed his profound shock and unconditional apology. This call was followed by a letter with a list of demands. The Oakland organization demanded that the Korean institution establish sexual assault awareness trainings for their entire membership ranging from college students to elder farmers in the village, a commitment to send at least one woman teacher in their future exchanges to the U.S., and a request that the teacher step down from his leadership position for an initial period of 6 months and attend feminist therapy sessions directly addressing the assault. Even though it was culturally difficult for the Korean American group to make demands of their elders in Korea, everyone decided this was what needed to be done. The group in Korea also did not question these demands. They respected them and did not make any complaints.



The Korean American organization also made contact with a sister drumming group in Korea, one that had dealt with their own experience of sexual assault in the past. That organization had organized their one hundred members to address a sexual assault that had occurred among their membership. In that situation, the person who had committed the assault went through an extensive process with the leaders and members of the group, leaving the organization but following through with a public apology posted on their website and retained relationships with drumming group members.

Inspired by this story of community accountability, the fact that it had been made public and a process in which the person doing harm took responsibility and offered a public apology, the Oakland organization followed with a series of events that reversed the usual silence and victim-blaming accompanying sexual assault. The annual October festival was dedicated to the theme of healing from sexual violence. Facts regarding the incident were printed in the program and shared as a part of the evening's festival, not as a shaming act although it may have indeed shamed the teacher, but as a challenge to the community to take collective responsibility for ending the conditions perpetuating violence including collusion through silence.

This story reveals other painful lessons about community violence and the limitations of our community-led processes. The Korean cultural center came together with a unified response to violence but grew divided as the process continued. What became a long drawn-out period of institutional reflection and engagement sapped the energy and spirit of the organization and the friendships that had held it together. The victim never returned. The continued presence of the teacher at community festivities in South Korea were viewed with resentment and suspicion by Korean American visitors who participated in drumming events in Korea. His eventual removal from the institution did not necessarily lead to the sense of justice that people desired.

Liz, the center's president, reflected on this set of events and the uncertainties accompanying the process of community accountability.

"Some people asked us later why we didn't call the police. It was not even a thought in anybody's mind. I know that a couple folks, her close friends, tried to break in, to kick his ass, but they couldn't find him. Luckily they didn't. Luckily for him and the organization, too, because I think if they did that we would have just been in a whole world of fucking mess. Well, I don't want to say luckily because the victim even felt at some point, 'maybe we should've just kicked his ass. Now, I feel like I've got nothing. I don't have the police report. We didn't throw him into jail. We didn't kick his ass. We didn't do nothing.'

We talked to her and said, 'We didn't move forward on anything without your consent.' We asked, 'What else can we offer you?' We offered her to go to counseling and therapy. We offered her whatever we could do at the time. In

retrospect, I wish we could have spent more time to just embrace her and bring her in closer.”

The story further explores the role of force and violence in our response to violence. Frustration over a long and complex process of accountability spurred discussions among the members of the Oakland organization over the potential benefits of violence. Liz reflected on a member’s remark as they considered retaliation. “That’s what the teacher wanted. He wanted that. When he was making that apology, he wasn’t necessarily saying ‘beat me up,’ But he was saying, ‘do anything you want to me, I deserve it.’ That way, once you do, he can walk away and say, ‘Okay, now I’m done, wipe my hands and walk away. They’ve done everything they can already.’” While some may most fear a violent response, some could also welcome a quick but symbolic pay back. “Kicking ass,” can also substitute for a process of repair and change.

(Adapted from Kim, M. (2012). “Moving beyond critique: Creative Interventions and reconstructions of community accountability.” *Social Justice* 37(4). For audio and transcript of Liz’s Story, visit [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org) )



## **Story F.2. *Women Come Together to Confront Our Community Leaders***

I got a story for you, and it's about community accountability. This Hmong woman in Wausau – she was killed by her husband and then he killed himself. He shot her boyfriend, too, and now he's in the hospital in critical condition.

The reason a lot of Hmong women don't leave violent relationships or go back and forth is because when you're married, you belong to your husband's clan in the spirit world. When you die, they bury you and you have a place to go. If you're in-between places, then nobody's gonna bury you, nobody's gonna pay for a funeral, and you have no place to go in the spirit world. That's why so many women stay or don't do anything.

So this woman, her husband's clan wouldn't bury her because they said she's a "slut." Then her boyfriend's clan said, "she doesn't belong to us so we're not going bury her." And her parent's family said, "if she listened to us, this wouldn't have happened." So they wouldn't bury her either. So nobody's claiming her and nobody's going to bury her or pay for the burial. This is three weeks later.

So this woman's been working with an advocate from Women's Community in Wausau up there. She's been working with this woman who was killed, and she calls me. We'd been talking with the advocates up there for awhile trying to figure out what to do. I'd already been planning to go there to talk about domestic violence and community accountability to a big group of Hmong people at a conference they were planning.

So I say, go back to that clan and say that if they don't bury her and pay for the funeral, we're going to publicly shame them. They have until Wednesday, and if they don't do it, then we're going to go out nationally and write an article and tell everyone that we don't even bury our dead. We'll go to all the women's organizations and shame the community. We'll let them know that there's eighteen clans up there, and nobody buried her.

I said, we always gotta go back to the problem which is that this is why women don't leave or go back and forth – because they're afraid they're going be left with nobody to bury them when they die. You bury him first, and he's the one who killed her. And you leave her and say that she died because she's a slut. She didn't die because she's a slut, she died because this guy was abusing her and you all knew that. She died because the Hmong considered her somebody's property, and now she gets killed and can't even get buried. She's not a slut. Hmong men go out with other women all the time, and nobody dies.

Everybody knew that she was getting treated like s\*\*\* by this guy. If they don't do something about this, then we're gonna go out and tell everybody and shame the whole community.

**So one of the advocates working with the clan leader – she told them this, and you know what? They got the money together and buried her. Her husband’s clan took responsibility for her and buried her. That’s community accountability.**

### **Story F.3. *Stopping Violence as a First Step***

I was in a relationship with Karen for 3 years. Even though I started seeing the warning signs, I agreed to live with her. Our fighting started getting worse and more regular. It got so every day I would wake up worried that my day would begin with a fight. I did everything to avoid her getting mad, but everything I did seemed to get her upset.

After every argument or fight, she and I would process about how she handled frustration. She had thrown a cup against the wall so hard that the plastic split and shattered. She had gotten out of the car that I was sitting in and slammed her hands on the roof of the car as hard as she could. She had hit her head against the bathroom wall and slammed the sink top with her hands. She had thrashed her legs around under the covers in bed and kneed the wall when she was mad that I hadn't brushed my teeth. She would yell, curse, and literally sprint away during a disagreement or argument.

We had processed and processed about it and had moments of shared understanding about why she experienced things and behaved in the ways she did, how she had learned it, what she was reacting to, etc. She came to understand that although she never physically hurt me and wasn't a "batterer" using threatening or controlling behaviors against me, her behavior made me anxious, uncomfortable, and eventually full of contempt.

She learned that it was hurting the relationship. But all of the talking did not result in actual change. Finally, a couple years later, after one incident, I told her that I would assuredly leave her if she did not change this aspect of her behavior. I asked her what she thought would work—what would make her change her behavior, since talking together about it wasn't working. We had long passed the point where talking had any chance of stopping her from escalating her anger.

She didn't want me to leave and knew that I was serious. She came up with something herself, and we agreed upon a rule. If she began to get upset, she would try to use calming, self-soothing practices for herself. And if she expressed her anger and frustration with physical violence even once – including throwing things against the wall or pounding on things without necessarily touching me – she would arrange for herself to stay in a motel that night, and cover the costs and transportation on her own. She would take a cab and not walk to a motel at night (even if she wanted to walk), because putting her as a queer woman on the street alone at night was not going to be part of the plan. She could get hurt. And even if she didn't, I would worry so much that I would get no rest. She agreed that she would take the cab so that she would be safe and I wouldn't have to worry. The whole decision around these consequences seemed like such a small thing, but it made a big difference in her behavior.

We eventually broke up. Her agreement to stop her abuse, and her plans to take steps to avoid further abuse made a difference. I think it also helped her

understand that she really could take steps to control her abuse. It took years of me explaining to her how I felt and years of tolerating what I now find to be an intolerable situation. But she did finally admit that what she was doing was wrong or at least wrong to me. And she finally took steps to change her behavior. She stopped the most immediate violence and took responsibility to make plans to make sure that she would either stop or at least remove herself from our home if she couldn't make herself stop in any other way.

This was a first step and an important one. She could finally recognize with my insistence over and over again that her abusive behavior was wrong. We were for able to take a break from the continued cycle of violence for a while.

But she chose to go no further. She would not change her underlying attitudes and behaviors. She refused to admit how deep these problems were and how simply stopping the most immediate behaviors would not be enough for me to trust her and relax enough to enjoy our relationship together. We had a moment of relief, but without deeper changes, I knew it would be just a matter of time before her abuse would start again.

Stopping violence takes many steps. Changing violence and becoming someone who can truly enjoy human connection, love without control, communicate without having to make every conversation into an argument or a contest, and be open, curious and appreciative about one's partner are things that I now seek.

## ***Story F.4. Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing***

### *Introduction to Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing*

The following is a story from the perspective of a person doing harm, a person who has also survived harm. In his story, these two dynamics are intimately interlinked. Because there are so few stories from the perspective of the person doing harm, we have included many details occurring over many years of struggle, believing that certain pieces may be important for people doing harm, survivors and allies to better understand the dynamics of accountability.

At this point in time, the public stories of people who have done harm and who are taking accountability seriously remain rare. This is only one story told in some detail. This person's feelings and process may or may not be similar to those of other people doing harm. This person's ability to find resources, political groups doing accountability with values that are non-punishing and non-criminalizing, may not be there for everyone although our goal is that these resources will become more and more commonly available.

Note that this story is shared by someone whose name remains anonymous. This is not only to protect confidentiality but also to make sure that this story does not become a means for this person to receive public recognition or a sense of heroism for his accountability. It is common for people doing harm who have made some movement towards change to be elevated above people who have survived harm – especially if they are men. The story teller has specifically asked to not receive recognition for any contributions they have made towards this project or Toolkit. Humbleness and humility are core parts of the accountability process. From the story, we can see that the process of accountability, itself, has been long and difficult. But, ultimately, it is accountability to oneself and to others that has made this person's healing and transformation possible.

The story teller also asks that if people are able to recognize him or other identities through the details included in this story, that you please have compassion about who you share these identities with. If you recognize him, he asks that you please talk with him about this story, even if only to acknowledge that you know this part of his history; he does not want this story to be an unspoken secret among those that know him.

### ***Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing***

#### *Why I am Telling My Story*

In all of my years trying to find resources, I've only come across three stories of people who've done harm and only one of them had enough information, enough

of the person's real story, to actually be helpful to me. I want to tell my story to help people who are trying to work on their sh\*\* and also to help people who are supporting that process or who are mentors to have some idea of what might be going on for that person who still doesn't understand themselves – to help folks be better support for accountability processes.

### *Naming the Harm*

You know, for most of the harm that I've done, I've never really been called out for it, so I don't really have other people's names for it, just my own names. I consider myself to have sexually assaulted people, also crossed people's boundaries in sexual ways that aren't sexual assault, and just generally had patriarchal behavior. And then the last thing that's always a little more difficult for me to talk about is that I also molested a relative of mine when I was young.

### *Accountability and Its Early Beginnings*

My accountability process started in my early 20's. The violence and harm I had been doing wasn't just a one-time thing where I just messed up once, it was like an ongoing pattern that was chronic, and happening over and over again in my life. There were a couple of moments when I was able to stop myself in the moment when I was doing harm, like when I hurt someone I cared about very much, seeing her weep when I pushed her sexual boundaries, what I see as sexual assault, I said, "Sh\*\*. I need to stop right now." But even then, that kind of like horror wasn't enough to let me intervene in the big, chronic patterns. It took a lot more before I could start changing, even when I was recognizing chronic patterns of harm I was doing in my life and hated that I was doing those things.

By that point in my life, I was a total wreck. For years and years of my life, my mind had been filled almost with nothing but images of doing gruesome violence to myself. I was having trouble just keeping my life together. I was just under huge amounts of stress, having total breakdowns on a fairly regular basis, and was just being ripped apart inside by everything. And also, being ripped apart by trying to keep myself from the knowledge of what I'd done. It was too much for me to even look at. At the same time, I really wanted to talk with people about it. I was just so scared to do it because of the particular sorts of thing that I had done. You know, like, people who sexually abuse are the most evil of all the monsters in our cultural mythology. And *everybody* is basically on board with doing nothing but straight up violence to them. And so much of my life had been organized around just trying to keep myself safe that it wasn't a risk I could take. It wasn't even a question of choice. It just wasn't a possibility, even though I wanted nothing more.

At some point, I started spending more time around people involved in radical politics and feminist politics. And so one person that I knew, I'll call him Griffin (not his real name), one of their friends had been sexually assaulted. So I just happened to be at a table when Griffin was having a conversation about what

people were going to do about it. And that was the first time that I had ever heard of Philly Stands Up. Where I was living at the time was really far away from Philly, so it was just basically a name and an idea. But, you know, that one tiny seed of an idea was enough to make me realize that it was possible. That there were people that I could talk to that weren't going to destroy me.

It was a few months later. There was just a lot of stuff going on in my life where my history of doing violence to people and my history of surviving violence, they were coming up over and over and over in my life. But I still refused to acknowledge either of them. And it wasn't like a conscious thing. I don't know exactly what it was, but I hadn't gained the moment of insight yet into understanding that that is my history. I ended up talking with that same friend, Griffin, who had mentioned Philly Stands Up, and just in this one conversation, my whole history came out. It was the first time I talked with anybody about either my history of being raped or my history of doing sexual violence to other people. That was *a moment* when I stopped running from my past. Those two things in my life, surviving violence and doing violence, are inseparable. I started coming to terms with both of them in the exact same moment. That was the first time I ever broke my own silence. And that's when I started trying to find some way of doing accountability.

Part of what made this possible was the particular relationship with one of the people I had harmed, June (not her real name), a person that I loved tremendously, and somebody who, even though I haven't seen her for years and probably won't see her again in my life, I still love tremendously. And so the pain of hurting somebody that I love that much was part of it. And then I think part of it was that I had had someone to talk to. I'd never been able to communicate with people about anything in my life before. And part of it was that things got so bad at one point that I didn't have the choice anymore of not seeking support. I had a breakdown where somebody came into my life and listened to me, and I couldn't hold it in any more. And so I had started learning how to communicate from that. And then Griffin, the person I had the conversation with, really started off my own accountability process. I think for me, it was about that friend. I didn't feel threatened by them. I had a trust with them that if I talked to them, they would still care about me and see me as a person. But it's all part of this much larger context. It wasn't just something about that one particular friendship that made the difference; it was like this whole arc of all these huge things that were happening in my life, all of these breakdowns and changes and new commitments and new understandings that were all developing together that brought me to that point.

Actually, now that I think about it, there was a moment a couple of years before that was really the first time I'd ever broken my silence, but in a very different way. For a few years before that moment, I'd started being exposed to feminist politics and things like that. And for the first time I knew that someone that I loved and cared about was a survivor of rape. I was in kind of a tailspin for awhile



trying to figure out how to respond to that. I started seeking out more information about how to support survivors of sexual violence, but it hadn't really been connected to my own life, really. I started to understand the importance of having the violence that was done to you being acknowledged and decided that I needed to step up in my own life. So the real first time that I ever broke my own silence about the harm that I had done was when I talked to the person who I had molested. I approached them and said, "Hey, I did this." But I didn't have the capacity yet to actually engage with it. And so I talked about it with that person and totally broke down and put that person in a position where they were having to worry about caretaking for me, you know, the way that it happens so stereotypically. I gave them some resources, like a rape crisis number to call and things like that. That person asked me if they could tell a particular adult in their life, and I told them, "You can tell whoever you want." But I didn't have the capacity in my life yet to really work through everything that meant, and so I just brought the shutters down and the walls and everything else and cut that part off from my life again. After that, I shut down and I became totally numb, totally blank, for months.

By this point a couple of years later, I had two friends that I ended up talking with, disclosing this to, Griffin and my friend, Stephen (not his real name). And I didn't tell anyone more than that because I was scared, I was scared of everything that would happen. The only thing before Griffin who had mentioned to me about Philly Stands Up, the only thing I'd ever heard in the scene that I was part of there was that all perpetrators should be ridden out of town on a rail. Just like that, along with my own fear of violence that I'd carried for at least a decade by that point, made me really scared to talk about it with anyone else. It was just Griffin and Stephen. Those two were the only ones that I had talked about any of this with for like a year.

### *The Accountability Process: A Difficult Beginning*

Over the course of that year, I ended up finding out that I crossed two more people's boundaries, even though I was committed to doing everything that I needed to do to make sure that I didn't cross people's boundaries. Like the first time it happened, I thought that I was asking for consent, but I wasn't. Or I wasn't able to communicate *enough* in order to actually have real consent. And so that person, when I crossed that person's boundaries, they confronted me on the spot about it. They were like, "Was that sexual for you?" And I was like "oh damn," but I was like, "Yeah. yeah, it was." And they were like, "I didn't consent to that, and that was a really difficult thing for me because of this and this and this." And then later on, it happened again, when I thought I was doing everything that I needed to have consent.

Part of what was going on at that point, was that I still had a huge amount of guilt and shame and traumatic reactions to being vulnerable. But after the second time that I crossed someone's boundaries, I realized what I was doing wasn't working

and I needed to take accountability a step further. I decided to do all of these disclosures to people in my life. When I was doing these disclosures, I wasn't able to be present at all. I was forcing myself to do it, over and over again, and was just like totally emotionally overwhelmed and burnt out. I didn't think about how I was doing them and how that would impact other people. Because I wanted to be 100% sure that I wasn't going to cross anybody's boundaries, I dropped out of everything and just socially isolated myself.

It also seemed like everyone was totally happy to let me become totally isolated and let me drop out of everything. Nobody reached out to me, or as far as I know, people didn't really talk amongst each other or anything. I think it was just like people didn't know what to do with the information, so they didn't do anything. Griffin and Stephen had moved out of town, so they weren't there to support me any more. In that period, the only two people who did reach out to me were people whose boundaries I had crossed. And they were offering support, but I was just like, "No, I can't put you in the situation where you're taking care of me." Because by that point – during the year when I'd just been keeping quiet about things and trying to deal with it by myself, I started reading a lot of zines about survivor support, stories of survivors doing truth-telling and that kind of thing. By that point I'd learned enough to know that there is the pattern of survivors having to emotionally caretake for the people who had done harm to them. So I put up the boundary and I was like, "Thank you, but I can't accept your support."

I was doing all this stuff that was self-punishing, having no compassion for myself – just this combination of a desire to be 100% certain that I wasn't going to be crossing anybody's boundaries and this destructiveness that came out of intense self-hatred. And then it kept going, but I left town. I got way beyond burnt out; I wasn't even running on fumes any more, just willpower. But, I didn't cross anybody's boundaries!

### *Accountability: My Stages of Change*

What were the stages of change for me? The first stage, which isn't one that I would really recommend that people generally include in accountability processes, was the self-destructive one where I would just step back from things. A component of this could be good, but not in a self-punishing, destructive way. But that was really the first step, isolating myself from everything. And then, doing some research and self-education at the same time. I was also going to therapy and was coming to understand my own history better, was able to articulate for myself that really what I needed to do was containment – figure out the boundaries that I needed to assert for myself to make sure that I wasn't going to hurt anybody. It took me a while to understand that because of the ways that people who are socialized male in this society, they're never expected to assert any boundaries on their own sexuality. Both in terms of, "I don't want to do this," but also in terms of actively seeking other people's boundaries, seeking out to understand what other people's boundaries are. So basically that whole first

period was just tracking myself, figuring out in what sorts of emotional states I was most likely to cross somebody's boundaries and what it felt like when I was getting there; what sorts of situations were likely to trigger it and also in day-to-day interactions, what kinds of boundaries I needed to be asserting for myself to make sure I wasn't getting close to any of those things.

Then once I had that containment figured out and had the space where I was trusting myself not to be crossing people's boundaries, then there was room in my life to be able to go inwards and start working on self-transformation and healing. Part of that, too, was that I was still crossing people's boundaries on a regular basis. Every time it would happen it would be a crisis for me. Sometimes I would get suicidal. Sometimes I would just be freaking out and paranoid and have huge flare-ups of guilt and shame. So when I was crossing people's boundaries, there wasn't emotional room for that type of transformation and healing to take place. I needed to create this sort of containment not just for the worthy goal of not doing harm but also to make sure that I had the capacity, the emotional space, to be able to work on that healing and transformation. So that was the second phase, when I was working with an accountability group that I sought out for myself. There was a lot of healing and self-transformation.

Now at this point, I feel like I've gotten enough of that worked out that I feel like I'm getting to a place where it becomes an ethical possibility for me to start reaching back outwards again, and starting to work on getting involved in organizing or perhaps have relationships. Because for this whole time I've had a strict rule for myself around abstinence and celibacy, just not getting involved in people because – because I know that any time that would happen, that all these things that I haven't dealt with would come up. And once all that unresolved trauma flares up, then the game is basically lost for me. So now, the potential for having intimate or sexual relationships starts to become more of a reality for me and at this point I feel like I've learned enough about where all that's coming from, and I've healed enough that I can communicate about it enough to understand my limits and boundaries and to reach out at the same time.

Another shift that's been happening, too, is that towards the beginning it was basically like I couldn't have people in my life that I wasn't able to disclose to. There were some people that were either an acquaintance or some sort of person that had power over me that were in my life that I didn't really disclose to. But basically, every person that I was becoming friends with, at some point I'm gonna need to tell them, just as part of the process of being friends. When I decided that I wanted to be friends with them, I would have to tell them. At this point, as I'm getting to the point where I'm putting people less at risk, I feel like I'm gaining back more of the privilege of retaining my anonymity. It's still really important for me to disclose with people, and there are some situations in which I'm probably always going to be disclosing to people really early on. For example, any time I want to get involved in anti-violence work, that's going to be a

conversation I have at the outset, before I get involved. But I feel like I'm regaining some of that privilege of anonymity now, too.

### *Accountability and Healing: Moving through Guilt, Shame and a Traumatic Response to Vulnerability*

Now it's been years of seeking support through political groups working on accountability and therapy and staying committed to the process. The things I now understand about healing, in the wholeness of my experience, as both a survivor and a perpetrator, look very different than the ones that I've read about or that people have talked to me about, where it's healing only from *surviving* abuse or violence.

I think that the three biggest emotions that I've had to contend with in that healing and transformation – and this is something that I've only articulated in the last, like, month of my life – I think the three biggest things that I've had to contend with are guilt, shame and a traumatic response to being vulnerable.

I think those three things – in myself at least – are the sources for the self-hate. It took me a long time trying to figure out even what guilt and shame *are*. What the emotions are, what they feel like. I would just read those words a lot, but without being able to identify the feeling. One of the things someone told me was that it seems like a lot of my actions are motivated by guilt. And that was strange to me because I never thought that I had felt guilt before. I thought, “Oh, well, I feel *remorse* but I don't feel guilt.” It was years of pondering that before I even understood what guilt was or what it felt like in myself. Once I did, I was like, “Well damn! That's actually just about everything I feel.” I just hadn't understood what it felt like before, so I didn't know how to identify it.

Now my understanding of guilt is that it's the feeling of being worthy of punishment. That guiltiness crops up when I become aware of the harm that I've done. I might engage in minimization, trying to make that harm go away, so that I don't feel that guiltiness for it any more, so that I don't feel worthy of being punished. I might try denying it – same sort of thing. Maybe I'm going to try to numb myself so that I don't feel that – so that I don't have that feeling any more. Or maybe I'm going to make that punishment come to me – just being in that place where there's this feeling that the other boot is gonna drop all the time, and that it should drop, trying to bring about a sense of resolution to that sense of impending harm by harming myself.

And another thing that I can see in myself is trying to get out of that sense that harm is gonna come to me by dedicating my life to amending the harm. But the thing is that it's different from compassion, trying to right wrongs because of guilt instead of because of compassion. Doing it through guilt, I notice that I can't assert any boundaries with myself. It's like a compulsion, and it leads me to burnout. Because any time that I stop, that feeling comes back, and it's like, *the*

*harm is gonna come.* I'm learning how to stay present with that difficult feeling and breathe through it. It helps me a lot.

And then, as far as the shame goes, my understanding of shame is it's like the feeling that *I am someone who I cannot stand to be.* I was at this workshop where somebody was talking about their experiences with addiction and said, "My whole life, when I was in the middle of this addiction, I had this combination of grandiosity and an inferiority complex." You know, like this sense that I was better than everyone else and that I was the worst scum of the earth. I think when that's the manifestation of shame – that *this* is who I should be and *this* is who I really am. When I've seen myself in that kind of place, then usually I'm reacting to the shame either by trying to drown out that awareness of the side of me that's scum, and one of the primary ways that I did that was through finding ways of getting sexual rushes or something like that. And the other thing that I've seen myself do is trying to eradicate that part of me that's the scum. And mostly that happened through fantasies of doing violence to myself, targeted at that part of myself that I hated, that part of myself that I couldn't stand to be, and trying to rip myself into two. I think that's a lot of what was fueling my desire for suicide, too.

One of the things that happened with the accountability process is that once I started talking to people about the things I was most ashamed about, and making it public, then that grandiosity went away. And instead I had to come to terms with this other understanding of myself that wasn't as caught up in illusions of grandeur and instead was this forced humbleness. Like, *I'm a person* and I'm no better than anybody else. *I'm a person and I can also change.* So through talking about the things that I'm most ashamed of, that shame became transformative for me. That was a really big aspect of healing for me. And it required a lot of grieving, a lot of loss. And that's something that I was going through during that first year when I was talking with people about it.

As I was talking with other people about it, all these possibilities were closing off in my life. I'll never be able to do this thing now. I'll never be able to have this type of relationship now. The world was less open to me. Like, I can't think of myself in the same way any more. A lot of times I didn't really have the capacity to really face it. But in the moments of insight I had, where I was coming to terms with it, I was really grieving, weeping, over the things that I was losing because of the accountability. That was a big part of healing for me, finding and connecting with and expressing the grief. And also the grief over everything that I had done.

There are still some things that I probably will have to let go of but that I haven't allowed myself to grieve yet, some possibilities that I'm still clinging to. I've found that a lot of time when I get on a power trip and find myself in this controlling sort of attitude, one of the things that resolves that is if I can find a way to grieve. The power trips, the controlling attitudes, tend to happen when I'm trying to control things that are changing. If I can just accept the change and grieve ways



that possibilities are changing, then that brings me back. I mean, I've come to terms with a lot of the things that I was grieving when I first started talking with people about it. I'm starting to be able to find ways in my life now of different paths to some of the same things that I wanted for my life, but just paths that have a lot more humility in them. And I think that's one of the really valuable things that accountability has given me. Any time I start that thinking big about myself, then I bring it back to this accountability that I'm doing and it's helped me a lot in just like helping me find ways to stay connected to humility. That's something that I really appreciate about it.

The third one's a traumatic response to vulnerability. And this is one that I still don't understand that well because I'm just now starting to have some understanding of it. But like I was saying before, because of the violence that I've experienced in my own life, a huge portion of my life has been dedicated to keeping me safe. And for me, those behaviors have been enforced in myself through that same type of self-hate and violence. So if I leave an opening where I'm vulnerable, then that self-hate comes to close it down. If I ever mess up in a way that left me vulnerable, then I find that I start having all these fantasies of doing violence to myself. It's a way of enforcing in myself to never let that happen again. I don't really understand it that well. One of the things that I've been working on more recently is learning how to be open to vulnerability. And that's the last part of self-hate that I've healed the least.

One thing that my history of surviving violence has created is a huge dedication in my life to making sure that I never allow myself to be vulnerable. In the past, it's been utterly impossible for me to allow people to see that I'm any sort of sexual being and has also made it impossible to talk about any sort of like emotions of importance. Or just asking for consent, there's a sort of vulnerability that's involved with that. So this created this wall that set me up to make it really, really hard for me to have consensual sexual interactions with anybody. In my family, we had no communication about anything whatsoever. I didn't have any models around communication. Now that I'm in a world where communication is possible, it's hard for me to convey to people what it's like to be in a world where that's not possible. For a huge portion of my life, there wasn't even a glimmer of possibility. These things that I was feeling, they weren't in the realm of talkability. It meant that I couldn't ever be present enough with the emotions to learn how to intervene. Any time they would come up, I would just try to eradicate them with all this violent self-imagery, without even realizing what I was doing.

### *Accountability as a Gift*

I have a friend that's been involved in a lot of accountability work, and he's insisted to me that what I'm doing isn't accountability because there's not survivors somewhere who are issuing a list of demands or that kind of thing. But for me, that's only one aspect of accountability. There's another aspect that's being accountable to myself, making sure that I'm living the values that are

important to me in the world. Ultimately, accountability for me is a commitment to do what I need to do to make sure that I don't repeat those patterns, that they stop with me. Part of that has been the work around creating boundaries for myself. Part of that has been the healing and transformation. And part of it is also engaging with the world, to not see it as an individual thing, but to see myself as part of a social struggle. I need to be engaged with the world to be part of ending all of this sexual violence that's everywhere.

The accountability has this gift of humility. One of the things that is really valuable for me about that humility is the amount of compassion that it's allowed me to have for other people. I still have superiority complexes, but nowhere near like I did. At this point in my life, I'm able to understand myself as being the same kind of human as so many other people. I don't put myself on a different level from them. And so I feel like I have a much greater ability to understand people's struggle and pain, and to learn from it, and to *love* people, coming out of that compassion and shared struggle.

That ability for real, authentic love is something I never had. I thought that love was this obsessive thing. And when I realized that I needed to stop that, I had this moment of grieving and loss and doubt, because I thought, "Well, if I stop this, will I ever feel love again?" It required this huge shift. Once it quieted down, once I stopped it, then the whole landscape was just silent. It took me awhile to re-tune my hearing so that it wasn't just the roar of this obsession, but that I could hear the birds, and the insects, and the breezes. From there, learn a sort of love that's based in resilience, and shared commitment, and sacrifice. So that's been a real gift that it's given me.

Another thing too, is that I can bear to live with myself. I never could before. Most of the time I'm okay being in my own skin. It's been huge – even though I went through some extremely dark and difficult periods where the basin of depression that I'd lived in for so long in my life dropped into an abyss. Coming out of that abyss, through a continuing commitment to accountability, it's like the first time in my life when I'm starting to feel I'm free of this sort of depression and this crippling anxiety and paranoia. I have emotional capacity now; like I can feel things. I'm still not in a place where joy is a big part of my life, but it seems possible now. Through all this grieving and everything that I've done, I've also had a couple moments of clarity and lightness that I'd never experienced before in my life.

I think something else that has been a real gift for me, in terms of accountability, is the possibility for having lasting intimate relationships with people, whether sexually or not sexually. And having some capacity for pleasure – sexual pleasure, even, because before it was so caught up in shame and guilt and feeling triggered that I only ever felt horrible. Now I don't feel like I'm consigned to that for the rest of my life. I feel that there's a possibility of being liberated from it.



**(This story is available at the StoryTelling & Organizing Project (STOP) website at [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org).)**

## F.7. Taking Accountability Cover Sheet

## *Taking Accountability Tool F1: Staircase of Change*

Our vision of accountability is one that:

- Believes that transformational change is possible even for those who commit the most serious acts of violence.
- Focuses on responsibility rather than punishment.
- Understands that it is not only individuals that are responsible for change – it is our communities.
- Sees accountability as a process of change.

### *Process of Change as a Staircase*

This Toolkit refers to one way of understanding the process of change as a *staircase*.

The image of a staircase tells us that:

- Change may come one step a time
- Each step is significant
- We can aim for the top of the staircase, but we may not be able to reach it
- For every situation, each step will mean different actions and different changes
- Any one of us may not be able to see the next step until the step just below is reached

Step 6	Create a healthier community
Step 5	Change harmful attitudes and behaviors so that violence is not repeated
Step 4	Make repairs for the harm
Step 3	Recognize the consequences of violence without excuses, even if unintended
Step 2	Recognize the violence
Step 1	Stop immediate violence or stop it enough to go to next step

### *Step 1: Stop Immediate Violence*

For some interventions, Step 1: *Stop immediate violence* may be the ultimate goal of the intervention. The approach in this Toolkit aims for intervention results that may transform the person doing harm and/or a community that may have done harm or allowed harm to happen. However, Step 1 may be the first step necessary to reach these larger aims.

Step 1 can mean many things and can be reached a number of ways.

Sometimes the first step of accountability is stopping a specific act of violence from happening or stopping violence enough so that we can even discuss what the next step might be. (See Story F3. *Stopping Violence as the First Step*)

Although we have grander visions of accountability and change – leading to equality, mutual respect, and shared power – the pragmatic steps may begin with something very simple. Stop violence.

Sometimes we cannot reach any type of agreement from the person doing harm that violence should stop. Sometimes we need to use some manner of pressure, threats, force or coercion to make sure it does (See Section 4.F.3. *Taking Accountability Tips* for more about the use of force). By this we do not mean the use of physical violence, but acts such as asking someone to stay away or leave, letting someone know that there will be consequences if violence continues, or physically restraining someone from acting out violently at that moment.

We may need to act immediately. We may be facing a situation of serious harm, injury or even death. We may be protecting children. We may not be able to get any form of agreement from the person doing harm to stop – or may not have time to see if this is possible.

Sometimes stopping violence means that we need to get out of harm's way. For some, escape from the person doing harm may be the only way to stop violence – at least in the short term.

*Step 2. Recognize the violence.*

Step 2 is to *recognize* the violence.

For some people who have caused harm, this step can be significant. They may not want to admit the things that they did. They may not even be aware that they were violent. They may be aware but deny or minimize the fact that these actions had ever happened.

Recognizing the violence means to say, “Yes, I did do these things.” (See Section 4.A. *Getting Clear* for a section on naming the harms).

“Yes, I did hit you.”

“Yes, it’s true. I didn’t let you go to work.”

“Yes, I called you names in front of the kids.”

“Yes, I stopped you from seeing your friends.”

This step may simply be that the person doing harm is admitting that they did commit that act of harm. They may still excuse it, minimize its impact, blame someone else for the fact that they did it. They may not be willing to see the impact of what they did – how it made people feel, how it hurt others. They may not care that it harmed other people – or at least not admit that they care.

This step involves accepting a fact – naming the violence in some way that matches the way that the survivor or victim or the people carrying out the intervention see the facts.

*Step 3. Recognize the consequences – without excuses – even if unintended.*

Step 3 moves from recognizing violence to recognizing the results or consequences of violence – without excuses. This includes consequences that were not intended by the person doing harm.

The person (or community) doing harm that reaches Step 3 has stepped back and thought about what they've done. They've listened to other people share their experience of the violence and are starting to understand the full impact of their attitudes and actions on others, and perhaps on themselves.

They've stopped making excuses or stopped asking for us to make excuses for them. They can now accept the violence and abuse as their fault and their responsibility.

They've stopped getting angry when confronted with what they've done. They've stopped going to other people to get their sympathy and to tell their side of the story.

They've started feeling sorry for what they've done – feeling remorse. They are starting to deal with whatever difficulties they may have regarding feelings of regret, embarrassment, and shame. They have begun to accept these feelings without fighting against it, making excuses, being self-destructive or destroying other people because they can't handle being wrong or having to show their faults.

They are starting to understand that there are consequences to what they've done. They may have lost trust, relationships and more. They don't blame others for losing these things – they see that it is the result of their own attitudes and actions.

**The following are some examples of how someone may begin to take accountability.**

“Yes, I did hit you. I hit you with my fist and tried to hit you in a place where nobody would see the mark. I kept saying and thinking it was your fault, but I now see that I had a choice. It is my fault – not yours.

I see that by hitting you, I caused fear. I caused you to hate me, to not trust me – maybe never to trust me again. I caused you physical pain, but most of all I can now see how much I hurt you at your very core.

Now that I can admit what I did, I can remember the look in your eyes – how afraid you were, confused and then how angry. You had to hide your bruises so nobody would see them. We pretended like nothing happened. I wouldn’t let you bring it up, threatening to hit you again if you did. Sometimes I didn’t use the words, but gave you a look so that you would know that you’d better watch it or else.”

“Yes, I called you names in front of the kids. I knew it would hurt you and humiliate you. Thinking back now, that’s why I did it. I felt angry and took it out on you. I didn’t care if the kids were around. In fact, maybe I wanted them to think you were a bad mother and turn against you.

I didn’t see how much this hurt my kids. I didn’t care. I can now see how our son acts like me – terrorizing his sister and calling you a b\*\*\*\*, just like I did. Now I can see how our daughter hates me. She won’t even look at me. I blamed it all on her or you or anybody but me. I never wanted to admit that it was my fault – even to myself. I was proud that my son didn’t take s\*\*\* from you and stood by my side. But now I see that he’s scared of me, too.”

#### *Step 4. Make repairs for the harm.*

With Step 4, the person doing harm makes sincere attempts to repair the harm – these repairs are not just the ones they can do cheaply and quickly. They are repairs that are requested by the people that have been hurt or by the community. These may also be repairs that they have considered themselves after deep reflection about the harm they have caused.

These repairs may never be able to make up for the harm done. Often they cannot – nothing can. But they are real and symbolic attempts to do something significant to make the lives of those who have been harmed better.

These repairs may be:

- Sincere apologies:
  - With specific and full details of the harm (Step 1 and 2)

- Without excuses (Step 2)
  - With full acknowledgement of the negative consequences they created for individuals and the community (Step 2)
  - With the intended repairs (Step 3)
  - With a commitment never to repeat these harms to the survivor or victim or any other people again (See Step 5)
  - With knowledge that repeating these harms will lead to negative consequences (See Step 5)
  - Without making this for the purposes of making oneself look like a hero or a martyr or any other form of self-gain except the gains of making repairs for harms done
- **Public apologies in any of the following forms as long as they are agreed to by the survivor or victim and the people involved in the intervention:**
    - In person to the survivor or victim or their representatives (the survivor or victim can choose whether to be in attendance)
    - In person to other people affected by the violence or their representatives
    - In person to a larger group to which one is accountable – family and/or friends of the survivor or victim; one's own family and/or friends; the organization that one is part of; a broader community
    - In other forms such as: video conference or skype (if transportation is an issue); written letter, letter published on a website, and so on
    - Without making this for the purposes of making oneself look like a hero or a martyr or any other form of self gain except the gains of making repairs for harms done
- **Services such as: help fixing things that are broken; cooking; cleaning; making something useful; providing other valued services for the survivor or victim, the community or other people or organizations that are agreed upon**
  - **Financial repairs such as: money for the needs of the people harmed; money for damages; money to pay for something valued by the people harmed; return of funds stolen, taken, gambled or spent carelessly; taking over credit card payments, mortgages, IRS payments or other forms of debt; money so that the people harmed can receive medical care or go to counseling; money so that the people harmed can enjoy themselves.**



- A commitment to stop violence now and in the future -- and action to back it up.

### **Example of an Accountability Letter**

“I am letting L, her family and our friends know about my previous actions against her. Although she asked me to write this, I also agree that sharing this with all of you is my responsibility. This is just one step in being accountable for how much I had hurt her and in doing so, hurt all of you as well.

As you know, L and I met 8 years ago. I loved her and respected her and respect her to this day. But I acted in ways that were the opposite of loving and respectful.

My abuse began with my jealousy. I was jealous whenever she looked at anybody else. I was even jealous when she was with her friends. I began to control her behavior – making her feel uncomfortable whenever she went out without me. I questioned what she did, who she talked to, how she felt. I knew it was wrong, but I justified it in my mind – that this was my being a loving person or that I couldn’t lose her so I had to watch her all the time.

When she wouldn’t answer the way I wanted or she went out anyways or did what she wanted, I began to lose my temper. At first I yelled. Then I began to throw things and hit things near her. One time, I hit her, leaving the mark of my hand on her face. I begged her not to tell anyone and I promised never to do it again. She stayed home from work for a couple of days – and I did stop for awhile.

But it didn’t stop there. The next time I knew not to hit her where anyone would see the mark. I started to hit her on her head or body where people wouldn’t see. This happened about every 6 months at first. But it started to get worse, and I would hit her or threaten to every couple of months. I apologized every time and begged her to forgive me. I promised to change and go to counseling. But I never followed through. I never found any help and hoped that she would forget. I hoped I would just stop or things would change. I told myself that I didn’t hit her so hard – that it was understandable because she kept doing things I asked her not to do. I always made excuses for my behavior or blamed her.

She tried to talk to me about it, but I would never let this be the subject. I didn’t want to talk about it and would either threaten her or walk out of the house or tell her that she was crazy every time.

I didn’t think about how this affected her. I only thought about how I felt – about how everything and anything affected me.

She finally threatened to leave me and this time I believed it. I hit her and broke the things that were most important to her. I got so I didn’t even apologize any

more. I would just leave the house and come back later hoping that everything would be forgotten.

Some of you came to me then. I know that I lied at that time. I said it only happened a couple of times. I said that she was crazy and exaggerating things. I didn't want to face up to what I had done. I felt incredibly ashamed and still blamed her for telling other people about our business.

This past few months have been my biggest challenge. But I also have to thank you for stopping me. I'm not sure what I would have done next.

You didn't back down, and L, you didn't back down even though I wanted you to. I now know that if you hadn't stepped in – especially L's sister and her husband, I would not have stopped. Somehow, I just didn't know what to do and just kept doing the same thing over and over again.

I am hoping that L and I can continue our relationship. But I also know that it might be too late. I have come to accept that I cannot control our relationship but only control myself. I am going to counseling every week now and am starting to discover what it means to be an adult and take responsibility for my behaviors.

I am deeply sorry. I apologize to all of you. L, I apologize to you and know that I hurt you so many times in so many ways. I do hope that you will be able to trust people again and will heal from everything I have done to you. I know that trust is something I must earn and that it may take a very long time. I accept that responsibility and hope that I can honor that no matter what happens – even if you decide that you can no longer stay in this relationship. If that is the case, please know that I will not do anything to stop you or to hurt you. This is your choice.

I apologize to your family. I hurt your daughter. I made your sister suffer. I know that I have caused so much pain and suffering as you worried about L's safety and dignity. I know that you saw her change from a loving person with confidence to someone living in constant fear. I also know that nothing can make up for that loss.

I have talked with all of you and as you know, I promise to do the following:

I will treat L with respect and kindness.

I will never ever threaten L with harm. I will not throw anything, hit anything. I will not touch her in any harmful or unwanted way. I will never insult her or call her names. I will not tell her what she can do or not do, who she can see or not see. I will communicate with her and discuss what she wants and needs. I will listen and not interrupt.

I will continue to seek help in order to change my attitudes and behaviors. I have a better understanding now than ever in my life and for that, I am grateful. And I know that change takes time. I will not stop getting help. I have found a group that has a program for people who are violent. I started going and will continue to attend through to the very end.

I will support L. to get what she needs in order to recover and have agreed to make sure that I pay for her counseling.

I will also talk about other things with L – how we share work around the house, decisions about what we do together, decisions about our finances. These are things that I know now that we must share together.

I believe I am a changed person and thank L and all of you for helping me stop my violence. And I know I have a long way to go.”

*Step 5. Change harmful attitudes and behaviors so that violence is not repeated*

Step 5 brings the person doing harm to a deeper level of change. It moves beyond the specific harms to go to the deeper causes for violence. It makes one truly responsible not only for past harms but for future behavior, free from violence.

Changing harmful attitudes and behaviors involves a deep look at oneself and the types of attitudes and behaviors that are related to violence. This will be different for different people, but this could include fundamental changes such as:

- Shifting a sense of superiority over others to one of equality and humility.
- Shifting an expectation that one is to get whatever one wants to an expectation of shared giving and receiving.
- Dealing with issues of insecurity and low self worth to healthy self-confidence.
- Seeking support to change unhealthy relationships to alcohol and drugs that lead to abuse of self and others.
- Seeking support for problems of gambling or careless spending.
- Seeking support to deal with personal experiences with abuse such as child sexual abuse or physical abuse to look at their connection to violence.
- Letting go of controlling behaviors and opening to relationships of give and take, spontaneity and curiosity.
- Seeing other people as partners and companions, not as objects.

- Seeking community as a space for sharing and reciprocity.

### *Step 6. Create a healthier community*

Steps 1 – 5 are stages towards being a healthy member of one's community. At some point, efforts to stay accountable may shift towards ease and confidence in one's ability to be a healthy and respectful partner, family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor and fellow community member.

Someone who has been able to take accountability and go up the staircase of change may be in a position to help someone else who is causing harm and who could benefit from the support of another who has been through the same thing.

Finally, as a healthy member of one's community, one may be a part of changing the process of taking accountability from one associated with shame to one of honor and courage. This is the task of all of us no matter what position we have in relationship to violence.

### Your Staircase of Change: What Does It Look Like?

This tool can be used for anyone to think about what a staircase of change would look like for this specific situation. What specific steps would show that someone is moving up and making progress with the process of taking accountability?

For the survivor or victim and allies, you can use this tool to figure out what specific things you can ask the person doing harm (or the community) to do. Remember that Step 1 is significant and may be as far as you get in an intervention. You may think that your goal with regard to accountability would be just getting to Step 1.

You may want to go further. You may set goals that include Step 2, that the person doing harm (or the community) need to specifically name the harms and recognize the specific attitudes and actions that were harmful.

You may want to go further to Step 3 and set an expectation that the person doing harm (or the community) fully account for all of the consequences of that harm without making any excuses, whether or not these harms were intended.

Step 4 may be an expectation, as well. You may want the person doing harm (or the community) to take action or provide resources or services that actually contribute to repairing the harm.

Processes of accountability as an expectation may stop with Step 4. It is easier to come up with concrete things that people can do to meet these steps.

Step 5 and 6 are important but harder to make specific measures. You may be able to tell, but explaining what that looks like is harder to do.

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Step 2	Recognize the violence
Step 1	Stop immediate violence or stop it enough to go to next step

*Step 1: Stop immediate violence*

What specific harmful, abusive or violent actions should stop? (See Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know* and Section 4.A. *Getting Clear*)

Are there some that are absolutes or bottom-lines?

Are there priorities?

Are there some forms of harm, abuse or violence that are less priorities to stop – or that you could even let go of? Or come back to at a later time when things progress?

To what level do you expect these particular types of harms or violence to stop?

*Step 2: Recognize the violence*

What specific harmful, abusive or violent actions do you want the person doing harm (or community) to name and recognize?

Are there some that are absolutes or bottom-lines?

Are there priorities?

Are there some forms of harm, abuse or violence that are less important to name – or that you could even let go of? Or come back to at a later time when things progress?

*Step 3: Recognize the consequences of violence without excuses – even if unintended*

What are the consequences of violence? (See Section 2.2. *Interpersonal Violence: Some Basics Everyone Should Know*)

To whom – what individuals, families, groups or organizations have been hurt or negatively affected by the violence?

What were immediate consequences, for example, injuries, fear, lost days from work?

What are more long-term consequences, for example, inability to trust, nervousness, nightmares, flashbacks, loss of self-confidence, lost relationships with children, incarceration?

*Step 4: Make Repairs for the Harm*

What can be done to repair the harm? (understanding that there may be nothing that can repair it?) Financial repair? Services? Apologies? Public apologies or other responses?

To whom?

For how long?

*Step 5: Change Harmful Attitudes and Behaviors so Violence Is Not Repeated*

What underlying or deep attitudes and behaviors have contributed to the violence?

What underlying or deep changes in attitude or behavior need to be made?

*Step 6: Create a Healthier Community*

How can you contribute to a healthier, less violent community overall?

What are situations of violence in my community that I have witnessed or have been aware of but where I was unable to intervene?

What are some of the social or community dynamics that helped me to intervene? Or that were a barrier to intervening?

Who are other people in my community that could benefit from having a staircase of their own, and how can I support them?

*Your own Staircase to Change.*

Use your own words to describe what your steps to change or accountability look like.

***Staircase To Change***

Step 6	
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<b>Step 5</b>	
<b>Step 4</b>	
<b>Step 3</b>	
<b>Step 2</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	



## [Taking Accountability Tool F.2. Level of Participation for Survivors or Victims. Chart.](#)

If you are the survivor or the victim, you can choose how you want to be involved in the process of taking accountability.

You may already have a clear view of what you want from the process of goal setting. See Section 4.D. *Goal Setting*. As you move through an intervention, however, you may have different ideas of how you think about accountability or what specific things you want.

### *Taking Accountability and the Person Doing Harm*

In this Toolkit, the process of taking accountability usually involves some level of connection with the person doing harm. This Toolkit offers the *Staircase of Change* as a framework for thinking about accountability as a series of steps, a process. It also relies upon the idea that accountability can best come about not through punishment or revenge, but from compassion, connection and support for the person doing harm. It aims to support an understanding that change can be a benefit not only to you and the community – but to the person doing harm, as well. This is not just so they can make some kind of calculated gains – getting status, getting out of punishment or prison, looking like a hero or a martyr. What we mean by benefit is that they can have better and more meaningful relationships, they can live better lives, they can create respect and healthiness rather than abuse and harm.

If you do not believe in this form of accountability, then you might consider a different approach to intervention – perhaps one that is not in this Toolkit but that may be found in other types of domestic violence or sexual assault programs. See Section 3. *Getting Started: Is This Model Right For You?*

### **How involved will you be – or how will you be involved?**

This approach to violence intervention works best with the participation of the survivor or victim. However, the levels of participation can be very different depending on the situation and what the survivor or victim wants. For possible levels of participation in the intervention over all, see Section 4.E. *Supporting Survivors or Victims*, Tool E3: Survivor or Victim Participation in an Intervention. Chart.

The process of *Taking Accountability* require some special consideration since this process is primarily involved in engaging the person doing harm. Exposure to danger, potential manipulation and a repetition of the dynamics of abuse and violence that bring us to this intervention in the first place can easily be played out in the process of *Taking Accountability*. For this reason, it may be important

for the survivor or victim to consider how they can best be involved or not involved in this process. Their level of participation could be different in this aspect of the intervention than in others.

The following is a chart that marks out the possible levels of involvement and participation of the survivor or victim in the process of *Taking Accountability*. Please note also that these may be different depending upon where we are in the *Staircase of Change*. For example, a survivor or victim may want to be very involved in naming the violence and the consequences of that violence. But they may want the person doing harm to take the steps to figure out what repairs are most appropriate and give feedback once these are proposed.

They may want to be involved in guiding goals and thinking about repairs, but want the allies to be the ones who put the most energy into this process.

Again, the *Staircase of Change* in this Toolkit is:

Step 6	Create a healthier community
Step 5	Change harmful attitudes and behaviors so that violence is not repeated
Step 4	Make repairs for the harm
Step 3	Recognize the consequences of violence without excuses, even if unintended
Step 2	Recognize the violence
Step 1	Stop immediate violence or stop it enough to go to next step

Think about each step (if this is useful to you) and think about how you want to participate.

There are a number of components to an intervention; remember, your participation can be high in one component of the intervention and low in another. The factors to consider are:

1. *Physical Presence*. Do you want to be there in person in any stage of engaging the person doing harm? Is there a particular time or way in which you (or the intervention) would benefit from you being there in person? If so, how? What is important in terms of your own safety – physical, emotional and other? If not, what other options are available?
2. *Leading or Directing*. How much do you want to be leading or directing? How much are you setting the terms? How much do you want to work with your allies to set the terms – or how much should you work with them even if it is uncomfortable? How much can you expect the person doing harm to actively participate in setting the terms?
3. *Engagement with the Person Doing Harm*. This approach has as part of its vision the idea that the person doing harm would have some level of initiation and participation in the steps towards accountability at least at some point in the

process. At the same time, this may be an uneven path. We anticipate that there will be resistance. Our motto is that we are creating systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time. Even if an intervention necessarily begins with an act that involves pressure, force, or coercion, make space for compassion and connection with the person doing harm. This may lead to further steps that can bring in the person doing harm as a participant of an intervention, and not just a target.

*4. Information and Communication.* The final component we present with this tool is that of information and communication. This is especially important as the participation of the survivor or victim may become less direct and physically present. What kind of information and communication does the survivor or victim expect, want and need? This column offers a variety of options to consider.

*Chart F.1. Level of Participation by the Survivor or Victim in the Process of Taking Accountability*

Level  Can be high in one and low in another	Physical Presence	Leading or Directing	Engagement with Person doing Harm	Information and Communication
Highest	I want to be there in person and actively involved as the main actor.	I want to be leading, directing and setting the terms.	I want my input and participation to be the most visible and prioritized. I want the person doing harm to listen and follow – but not make any decisions.	I want to decide and to know everything.
High	I want to be there in person and prioritized with special consideration but not necessarily the main actor.	I want to be in a primary role and I want my perspective to be the priority. I do not always need to be leading.	I want my input and participation to be the most visible and prioritized. And the person doing harm can make suggestions and comments that may be taken into account.	I want to know everything but I will not always be deciding.
Middle	I want to be there in person but at a level similar to other people.	I want to be participating in a similar way to others.	I want my input and participation to be high, and I expect to have significant participation and input by the person doing harm. We can have some back and forth.	I want to know the most important pieces of information
Low	I want to be there but I would like to be in a protected position.	I want to give input and feedback but I don't want to actively	I want the person doing harm and their allies to make a	I want information at key moments or at some regular timing

		participate.	proposal for an accountability process and I will make comments and changes.	– but don't need to know everything that's going on.
Minimal	I want to be there but via something like another room or communicating through phone, skype or other method of communication..	I want to give my input and feedback but then step away from any involvement.	I am leaving this to my allies to work together with the person doing harm to figure out how accountability will happen. I want to know what is going on and will give feedback.	Let me know what happens at the end or if there are significant changes. Otherwise, I don't want to know.
None but you have my approval	I don't want to be there.	I trust the group. I don't want to be involved.	I am leaving this to my allies to work together with the person doing harm to figure out how accountability will happen. I am stepping away.	I don't need any further information.
None – the survivor or victim disagrees	Not there or there but disagreeing.	May be uninvolved or actively disagreeing or countering the intervention.	May be uninvolved; carrying out another intervention in a different way; working together with the person doing harm to counter the intervention.	May not be in communication; in communication in order to have more control over a process that I disagree with

### *Taking Accountability Tool F.3. Self-Reflection and Guiding Questions for Survivors or Victims and Allies*

The process of *Taking Accountability* can be particularly challenging for the survivor or victim of violence. Since this involves some level of engagement (communication, working with, supporting) the person doing harm, there is lots of opportunity for re-living the dynamics of abuse and violence that led the survivor or victim to this intervention.

If we consider the process of taking accountability as one that can lead to deep and transformational change, then it can be a long and difficult process with anticipated resistance from the person doing harm.

Again, we are creating systems **flexible enough** to allow for the expected process of dodging and delaying accountability and **strong enough** to withstand and diminish these tactics over time. Along the way, we can expect resistance in many forms that can be dangerous to or threatening to the survivor or victim, as well as others vulnerable to violence including anybody participating in the intervention.

This Toolkit attempts to reverse the kind of dynamics that feed interpersonal violence. It also attempts to provide more effective measures for communities to make meaningful change – and not simply rely upon escape and punishment as a means towards resolving violence. The alternative we offer, however, is still in its early stages of formulation. As we say in Section 3.2. *What This Model Is NOT*, this is not a guarantee of success.

For the survivor or victim, this approach offers promises. It allows you to name your goals, find your way towards them, and offers tools for you to bring together your allies to make this a possibility. At the same time, this approach has its risks and does not offer guarantees. It asks you, in particular, to take the risk of possibly participating in engaging the person doing harm if taking accountability is one thing you work towards.

This section offers some tools to help the survivor or victim, allies and the person doing harm to take the courageous and challenging set of steps leading to transformation and change. We offer some guiding questions for you to ask yourself and your allies in order to prepare you for some level of participation in the process of taking accountability.

If you do not feel prepared enough or have enough support to participate in this or to even propose it as an area of your intervention, then we ask that you reconsider this arena of the intervention. We have found that even asking yourself that question can be a powerful step towards gaining a sense of power and control in your own life.

### *Your Special Role as a Survivor or Victim*

If you are the survivor or victim of violence, you may be in very different relationships to the violence and to the person who has done harm. What you consider goals in relation to the violence and the person may differ depending on your relationship to each of them. For example, is this someone you are together with as a partner, and do you want to stay together? Is this someone you do not want to stay with? Is this someone you are separated from, and that you want to remain separated from? Is this someone with whom you may still need to share community? (See Section 4.D. *Goal Setting* for more support around these questions.

If you are reading this Toolkit, then it is possible that you are considering a high level of participation in the intervention or are already participating at a high level. If you are the survivor or victim, you can play a very powerful role in driving this process. You may know best what happened, the nature of violence, the harms that have resulted from that violence and what needs to be done. Others may have some understanding of the situation but may not be able to formulate all of the strategies necessary to change the situation nor know all of the details that could come under question if and when they meet with the person doing harm.

At the same time, this puts a great burden on you to be the survivor or victim of violence *and* the person in a position of great responsibility to address it. This is a difficult position and one that you may choose not to take.

Working together with allies can lighten this burden and help you come up with better ideas and strategies than you would alone. This tool can help you get more specific about what you expect from the accountability process and how to best prepare.

This does not take away from your responsibility to weigh the costs and the benefits of your involvement, made even more difficult when you don't know what the outcome will be. Keep this in mind as you make your way through this tool and through the intervention.

### *Overall Questions*

- What are your goals? What do you want?
- How is any step in the accountability or any step in the *Staircase of Change* linked to your goals?
- What could bring about change in the person doing harm?
- What do they care about? This could be positive things such as care for other people or questionable things like their reputation. Anything could



count but the strategies would need to change depending upon what these are.

- Have you seen their potential for change?
  - If so, could these moments of change be part of a cycle in which change including apologies or remorse seem to be simply parts of a cycle that includes a return to violence?
  - Are these moments of change including apologies or remorse a tool to get what this person wants such as your return to the relationship, control over the situation, sympathy from others, a belief in change from you?
- Even if things they care about are self-centered, are they things that could at least help you reach your goals?
- If so, what kind of strategies could use these points as anchors or leverage for you to reach your goals?
- Is there anything that the person doing harm could say or do that can jeopardize your credibility, your side of the story?
  - Is there important information that you have not shared with others in the intervention – things that the person doing harm could share?
  - Can you anticipate all of the accusations the person doing harm could make against you? Are you ready to handle these?
- Is there anything that someone else, including allies or potential allies, could say or do that can jeopardize your credibility, your side of the story?
- What can be the worst result of this request for accountability?
- How can you protect yourself from the worst results? Can you live with the worst results?
- Do you want to go ahead?

There are many further ways to approach this question. In this following section, we will go through the *Staircase of Change* and ask questions that accompany each step.

*Step 1: Stop immediate violence or stop it enough to go to next step*

As we have said, Step 1 may be the ultimate goal of the intervention. Stopping immediate violence can be a challenging step in and of itself. It may be the best

some of us could hope to achieve. For others, this step may be one that is no longer meaningful. The violence may be long over. What we want now is a response.

By force or coercion, we do not necessarily mean an act of violence. But this may look like a demand that someone stop, yelling at somebody to stop, bringing a group of people to tell someone forcefully to stop, a threat that continuing violence could result in leaving a relationship, telling others about the violence, threats of retaliatory violence, threats of some unknown consequence that would be serious, and threats to call the police.

Stopping violence with force may look like: the confiscation of a gun, throwing someone out of the house, banning someone from being near or visiting children they had harmed, putting them on suspension at work, or grabbing someone who is beating their partner. It may be leaving a partner or a person doing harm, changing locks so they cannot re-enter the house, or preventing them from coming near you.

The goal of stopping violence may be straightforward or very complicated. It could deal with the person doing harm at the highest level of risk. They may never have been challenged before. They may be favored by people in your social circle, including those whom you might bring into an intervention.

An intervention that is able to accomplish Step 1 may be considered a success. For many, this will be the end goal. Moving beyond this step may simply not be possible at this time with the amount of resources you have. Moving beyond this step may come years later. Or it may not come at all.

Step 1 is a significant step on the staircase. The power of this first step should not be underestimated.

#### Questions:

- What specific forms of their violence do you want to address, reduce, stop or prevent?
- Do you want to address it, reduce it, stop it or prevent it? What makes most sense?
- What could bring this about?
- How can this be brought about with the participation and agreement of the person doing harm? Is this possible?
- What kinds of pressure or force might be necessary? What would this look like?

- Is this pressure or force a punishment, revenge or pay-back? If pressure or force is necessary, can you imagine it without the elements of punishment, revenge or pay-back? What would it look like then?
- What does your role need to be in order to make this happen or at least to attempt it?
- Should you take this role? What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
- What are the particular dangers to you if you are physically present? How will you stay safe? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*)
- What are your goals and bottom-lines in terms of stopping the violence? (See Section 4.D. *Goal Setting*)
- Could you consider reaching Step 1 and only Step 1 a success?
- How will you feel if you are not able to reach Step 1?
- Will there be consequences carried out by you and others affecting the person doing harm if they do not reach Step 1?
- What would these consequences be? Would you communicate these consequences to them? By whom and how would this communication be delivered? How could this communication be done most safely and effectively? Would you in reality carry out these consequences? What are possible effects of these consequences if you carry them out? What are possible effects if you do not carry out these consequences?
- What would be other concerns if Step 1 were not reached? Think of safety, possible increases in their violence or ability to carry out violence, other possible results? How can you safeguard yourself and others? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*).

### *Step 2: Recognize the Violence*

In this step of accountability, the person doing harm (or the community) needs to recognize and admit that they are responsible for a particular act or pattern of violence.

#### Questions:

- What specific forms of their violence do you want to you want the person doing harm to specifically take responsibility for?
- What words do you use to describe this?

- What words do you expect the person doing harm to use to describe this? Do they need to be the same as the words you use?
- How important is it to you that the person doing harm be able to think about what these are on their own (or with an ally or supporter)? Is it okay if they accept your version of the harm and your words?
- What is the bottom-line in terms of what you would want the person doing harm to name?
- Could you consider reaching Step 1 and Step 2 a success if you got no further?
- How will you feel if you are unable to accomplish Step 2?
- What could possibly result from the failure to reach Step 2?
- Would you and others carry out consequences affecting the person doing harm if they do not reach Step 2?
- What would these consequences be? Would you communicate these consequences to them? By whom and how would this communication be delivered? How could this communication be done most safely and effectively? Would you in reality carry out these consequences? What are possible effects of these consequences if you carry them out? What are possible effects if you do not carry out these consequences?
- What would be other concerns if Step 2 were not reached? Think of safety, possible increases in their violence or ability to carry out violence, other possible results? How can you safeguard yourself and others? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*).

*Step 3: Recognize the consequences of violence without excuses – even if unintended*

This is a much higher level of responsibility in which the person is able to identify all of the different people and groups that the act of or pattern of violence has affected and how it has affected them – in the short term and long term.

Questions:

- Who has experienced those harms that have resulted from the acts of or patterns of violence caused by the person doing harm?
- What are the harms? Short-term and long-term?
- What words do you and others who experienced harm use to describe this?

- What words do you expect the person doing harm to use to describe this? Do they need to be the same as the words you and others use?
- What kinds of excuses has the person doing harm used – and which they need to stop using?
- What is the bottom-line in terms of what you would want the person doing harm to name as the consequences of their violence?
- Could you consider reaching Step 1, Step 2 and Step 3 a success if you got no further?
- How will you feel if you are unable to accomplish Step 3?
- What could possibly result from the failure to reach Step 3?
- Would you and others carry out consequences affecting the person doing harm if they do not reach Step 3?
- What would these consequences be? Would you communicate these consequences to them? Who and how would this communication be delivered? How could this communication be done most safely and effectively? Would you in reality carry out these consequences? What are possible effects of these consequences if you carry them out? What are possible effects if you do not carry out these consequences?
- What would be other concerns if Step 3 were not reached? Think of safety, possible increases in their violence or ability to carry out violence, other possible results? How can you safeguard yourself and others? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*).

#### *Step 4: Make repairs for the harm*

Making repairs is offering money, services and other things that contribute to repairing the harm. Repairs are sincere and take effort. They are not only ones that can be done cheaply and quickly. See the previous Section 4. *Taking Accountability*, Tool 4.1. *The Staircase of Harm* for examples of repairs.

These repairs may never be able to make up for the harm done. Often they cannot – nothing can. But they are real and symbolic attempts to do something significant to make the lives of those who have been harmed better.

For many interventions and attempts to get accountability from the person doing harm (or the community), you may only reasonably be able to reach Step 4. Step 5 and 6 are more abstract and life-long processes that are more difficult to name as specific requests.

Questions:

- Think about the harms that you, others and the community have experienced. What could the person doing harm do to have some sense of repair? (Money, services, apologies)
- Look at the list of repairs in Section 4. *Taking Accountability*, Tool 4.1. *The Staircase of Harm*. Which seem to fit your situation and what could possibly be offered?
- How important is it to you that the person doing harm (and their allies or support) be the ones to come up with the repairs?
- Would you prefer that they respond to your request for specific repairs? Would you prefer to respond to their offer of specific repairs? Would you prefer a process in which you make a request and they make an offer that you then try to agree to together?
- Are any parts of the repairs to be made public? For example, would one of the repairs be a public accountability statement or apology? If so, what aspects would be important for you to make public? Who is that public?
- It may be impossible to force someone to be sincere. Would a response that tries to meet your request but is not completely sincere be okay with you?
- What is the minimal form of repair that would seem like a successful outcome to you? Be specific about what this would look like – for example, how much, for how long.
- What is the bottom-line in terms of what you would want the person doing harm to offer in terms of repairs?
- How will you feel if you are unable to accomplish Step 4?
- What could possibly result from the failure to reach Step 4?
- Would you and others carry out consequences affecting the person doing harm if they do not reach Step 4?
- What would these consequences be? Would you communicate these consequences to them? By whom and how would this communication be delivered? How could this communication be done most safely and effectively? Would you in reality carry out these consequences? What are possible effects of these consequences if you carry them out? What are possible effects if you do not carry out these consequences?
- What would be other concerns if Step 4 were not reached? Think of safety, possible increases in their violence or ability to carry out violence, other

possible results? How can you safeguard yourself and others? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*).

*Step 5: Change harmful attitudes and behaviors so that violence is not repeated*

It may be more difficult to make specific requests beyond Step 4. The changes in Step 5 and Step 6 require the person to have the motivation, long term commitment and necessary support that are fundamental for higher levels of change.

If you do not know the person doing harm well and are not planning to remain connected with them except perhaps as someone who will co-exist in the same community, then you may consider stopping at Step 4.

If you are in an intimate or close relationship with the person doing harm, thinking about Step 5 may be more important to you. This may be because you care more about and are more connected to the person doing harm. This may also be because these steps will be important in making sure that violence is not repeated and that this person is capable of a healthy, respectful relationship with themselves and with you and others close to you.

**Questions:**

- What attitudes and behaviors do you want changed? These may be the same that you listed in Step 1.
- What would new, positive attitudes and behaviors be?
- How can you say this in specifics? Note that it is hard to know what it means if the request is, “You will be a kind person.” Rather, kindness may look like specific things such as, “You will never insult me – call me names like (you can come up with your own).”
- How would you know if someone reached Step 5?
- How will you feel if the person doing harm is unable to reach Step 5?
- Would you and/or others carry out consequences affecting the person doing harm if they do not reach Step 5?
- What would these consequences be? Would you communicate these consequences to them? By whom and how would this communication be delivered? How could this communication be done most safely and effectively? Would you in reality carry out these consequences? What are possible effects of these consequences if you carry them out? What are possible effects if you do not carry out these consequences?



- What would be other concerns if Step 2 were not reached? Think of safety, possible increases in their violence or ability to carry out violence, other possible results? How can you safeguard yourself and others? (See Section 4.B. *Staying Safe*).

### *Step 6: Become a healthy member of the community*

Creative Interventions believes not only in healthy individuals but healthy communities. Therefore, we include Step 6 as a possible high aim towards accountability. Each step along the way (1 – 5) already move in this direction.

At some point, efforts to stay accountable may shift towards ease and confidence in one's ability to be a healthy and respectful partner, family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor and fellow community member.

Someone who has been able to take accountability and go up the staircase of change may be in a position to help someone else who is causing harm and who could benefit from the support of another who has been through the same thing.

It may be unrealistic for other people to ask for this level of accountability from the person doing harm. This may become a personal goal for this person, one that they set along with their allies. It could be one that they choose to reach in dialogue with the survivor or victim. It may be one that every member of one's community set as a goal for themselves.

#### Questions:

- How can Step 6 be a healthy goal for everyone involved in the intervention – not only the person doing harm, but the survivor or victim, allies, and other community members?
- What does this mean? What does it look like?
- What are things you can do now that move towards this goal?
- How can the things you have learned and accomplished in moving from Step 1 to Step 5 and beyond be used to help others in the community to also move through this process of accountability?
- Can you share your story of success with others so you can be an example? For example, you can share your story through [www.creative-interventions.org](http://www.creative-interventions.org) or [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org).

## [Taking Accountability Tool F.4. Self-Reflection and Practice for Allies. Practice Questions](#)

Being an ally that supports the process of taking accountability can be challenging. This section includes self-reflection tools that may be helpful for allies.

### **Self-Reflection 1: How can I deal with my discomfort with conflict?**

We all know of times when we have not wanted to speak up, to intervene, or to directly address painful realities—whether they involve people harming us or people harming someone else. We don't want to get involved, or we just want to move on and tell ourselves things will get better on their own. We know that harm is being done, but out of discomfort, lack of confidence, and/or conflict avoidance, we say to ourselves things like the following:

- Who am I to judge?
- We haven't heard the other side.
- It's not that big of a deal.
- I don't know all of the details, so I can't really say anything about the situation.
- I think they'll just work it out in their own time.
- The person doing harm won't be able to handle the confrontation. I don't think he's ready. I think he needs a lot of support before he'll be ready.
- You already talked with the person doing harm— I don't see how bringing it up again will make a difference.
- Maybe this isn't a good time.
- It was just a moment of crisis — it's not a pattern. It's not my place to say anything
- I'm too busy and tired to deal with this. People need to sort their own lives out.

If you notice these thoughts in yourself, you can ask yourself if:

- I am uncomfortable with conflict and could be thinking these thoughts because I am avoiding conflict. If so, be aware of your way of dealing with conflict and see if you can make a change.

- I am stressed out and need to step back a moment and take a rest. If so, take a moment to reflect, step out and catch a breath, or find support to help you take care of yourself. If your stress level requires more than a brief step out, then let the group know.
- I still have questions about what happened and would feel better if I have answers. If so, let the group know or see if you can talk to someone else in the group or the facilitator to see if you can get the answers. Other people may have similar questions, or you may find that you just have to feel comfortable with a situation in which there are still unanswered questions.
- I have so many conflicts with this situation and my role that I cannot play it in a good way. If so, let the group know or see if you can talk to someone else in the group and get support to figure out a better role.

### **Self-Reflection 2: How can I separate compassion from collusion – or making excuses?**

This approach to violence intervention asks us to seek change through compassion. Anger, disgust, sadness and fear are commonplace reactions to violence and can motivate us to get involved in an intervention.

However, support for accountability requires compassion, understanding and a willingness to make a connection to the person doing harm.

There can be a difficult balance between compassion and understanding and *colluding* or making excuses for violence. We can think that supporting the person doing harm means that we can listen to their pain, their fear and perhaps even their blame of others, and try to see their side of the story.

Being able to see challenges to violence as a part of compassion can be difficult. The following questions can help by identifying positive parts of the person doing harm with possibilities of change.

- What positive connection do we have?
- How is my support in this process of taking accountability a *gift* to the person doing harm – even if it is challenging and difficult?
- How is this opportunity a *gift* to me – even if it is challenging and difficult?
- What kind of signs of health can I see in the person doing harm?
- What values have they shown that connect to their ability to change?

## **Practice: What do I say to the person doing harm?**

Whether we are working together with just one person or a group of people, we can practice saying simple phrases to each other to help get comfortable in our role and help move beyond some of the frozen, tongue-tied experiences that we fear.

Face another ally or team member or involved person in your situation. Have one person read from this list, and have each person in the pair repeat the sentence aloud, while looking at the other person. Ask people to just use a normal speaking voice. We're not angry, bored, threatened, or anything else when doing this exercise. You can come up with your own sentences that are helpful in your situation. There are shared as examples.

1. I care about you.
2. I'm not rejecting you.
3. I want you to have good relationships in your life.
4. I want to understand how you are feeling.
5. I want to support you to change your violence.
6. I want to support you to try new responses that might work better in your situation.
7. I want to understand what this is like for you.
8. How are you doing?
9. I think you're blaming the process right now so that you don't have to talk about what's really hard. Is it possible that that's true?
10. I don't think this kind of violence is ever acceptable. How could you express what is important to you in a non-violent way?
11. I know it can be hard to say what is really going on for you.
12. Please lower your voice.
13. Do you need to take a break?
14. I'm sorry this is so hard.
15. I'm sure things can get better even though they're hard now.
16. Let's slow down.

17. What might that be like for \_\_\_\_\_ (the other person)?
18. Why do you want to make a different choice next time?
19. What are you scared of losing?
20. I hear you focusing on the other person and their faults again.
21. What are you responsible for in this situation?
22. How do you want me to share my thoughts and observations with you?
23. I need a break.
24. What is one thing you can do this week that feels like a move in a good direction?
25. Let's hang out again. / Let's talk again.

### [Taking Accountability Tool F.5. Breaking through Defensiveness.](#) [Guiding Questions for the Person Doing Harm](#)

If you are the person being asked to take accountability, we know this process can be difficult. You are likely facing people who feel angry. You may feel all alone – in a sea of accusation.

It is easy to feel defensive – to try to protect ourselves by thinking things like:

- It's none of their business.
- They weren't there and have no idea what they're talking about.
- Who are they to judge?
- What about my side of the story? I think I'm the victim.
- I can't handle being blamed. I'm going to do whatever I can to get out of this.
- This is all \_\_\_\_\_'s (not my) fault!

We might get really defensive and attack them with words or actions. We might feel furious when we find out that people are talking behind our back, or that our friends or loved ones did not keep private what we think they should have kept private. We might want to withdraw from them entirely, build our own camp of supporters, or use violence to get back at them before they hurt us more.

Plus, this may all be an unknown. Taking accountability – using ways that don't mean punishing us or locking us up – is just not usually done. We may not have any idea about what's going to happen next. Fear, confusion, anger and defensiveness are understandable.

It takes courage and effort to slow down, realize that we are not going to die or be destroyed.

These questions are for self-reflection. They are meant to break through defensiveness so that you might actually be able to face this challenge, learn from it, and gain some new skills. See how answering these questions might help you.

This might be a good time to get together with someone who is supportive of you – but isn't just supportive by agreeing that you were right and excusing your violence. Find someone who can support you and challenge you at the same time. See Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers* for more help on how to find a good support person or ally for yourself.

Try asking yourself these questions:

1. When I'm feeling angry or defensive, I tell myself this story about why these people are talking to me or confronting me about violence...
2. Is there a more positive story I can tell myself (about why they are talking with me about this)? What is it?
3. Can I imagine myself as someone who can listen to what is being said without being defensive? What is that person like? When are times that I have been like this?
4. When I imagine or remember what it's like for \_\_\_\_\_ (the person who was harmed) to be receiving my violent behaviors and actions, I see...
5. What can I share with the people confronting me so that they know me better, and can help me feel connected to them – instead of rejected? What can I share that isn't making an excuse for myself or putting blame on other people?



## [Taking Accountability Tool F.6. Preparing for Direct Communication. Affirmations and Guided Questions for the Person Doing Harm](#)

This tool can help prepare the person who caused harm and who is being asked to take accountability for a direct meeting with the survivor or victim, or their representatives, or the community allies that may be communicating the kinds of changes that they are requesting.

It offers affirmations that can help to ground the person who caused harm to be in a more position. And it offers guiding questions that can also help the person doing harm to prepare.

The tool involves moving through 4 steps that can be repeated over time and can be done separately depending upon what discussions are coming up next. You can add or substitute your own words to make this more meaningful for yourself.

### **Step 1: I believe.**

*I will remind myself of the following messages. Thinking about these messages can bring me some sense of calm and peace – as I enter into a challenging situation.*

1. I am a good person.
2. Like everyone, I am imperfect. I make mistakes.
3. I am stronger when I acknowledge both my strengths and my imperfections to myself.
4. I have the strength to listen to how I impact people (even when that impact is not what I intended) – without interrupting.
5. I have the strength to open my mind to another person's way of thinking.
6. My mistakes do not define me. They only have power if I refuse to acknowledge them.
7. I know that (even when they are upset with me) others see some of my strengths and good intentions.
8. I am strong enough to understand others even if they are different from myself and to receive understanding from others.
9. I trust that I will be strong enough to let you tell your story and understand that that story is real to you.

10. I trust that I will be strong enough to stay calm even if my own story is not accepted or is questioned.

Question. Which three of these statements resonate most with me? How do they help me be more calm and more open minded? Are there other words that work better for me and still are in line with these statements?

### **Step 2: I can listen.**

1. I can listen with the intention to understand. If I find myself finding fault, wanting to defend myself or wanting to attack, I will remind myself to stop and listen.

2. Even if I have heard all of the things said before, I will listen with a new openness and see if I hear anything different.

3. I will relax and see what happens if I let what is being said enter into my own picture of what happened. This will not erase what I think or believe. It will add to it.

4. After I listen, I can take time to reflect and think about what was said. I can ask for support to help me to do this. I can use these questions to help me:

- How has my understanding of the \_\_\_\_\_'s experience of me changed my own story or feeling about what happened?
- From what I have heard, what is it that has affected \_\_\_\_\_ the most?
- What 1-2 things are most important to \_\_\_\_\_?
- What struck me as most "real" in what \_\_\_\_\_ said?

### **Step 3. Make true attempts at repair.**

1. I am strong enough to admit the harm I have caused to others.

2. I am wise enough to see the impact of my harm, and understand who it hurt and how even if I did not intend it.

3. I am honorable enough to apologize for everything I have done without making any excuses.
4. I can offer my apology as a gift, expecting nothing in return.
5. I understand that repairs will take my energy and efforts. Apologies are important and are the first step in making repairs.
6. I will take time and get help from my allies if I need it to think of things I can do to offer repairs.
7. I understand that my idea of repairs and the requests from \_\_\_\_\_ may be different. We will be able to find a solution.
8. I understand that nothing I do can fully make up for the harm. Things were taken away that can not be given back.
9. Taking the step to make repairs is an important step to healthy change.

Question: When being honest with myself, what are three things I can acknowledge about my role in this situation?

#### **Step 4: Change my attitudes and behaviors over time.**

1. I commit to deep changes in my attitudes and behaviors so that I will not repeat my harmful behaviors.
2. I will stay connected to people, things, places and activities that support these changes. These include the following:
  - People:
  - Things:
  - Places:
  - Activities:
  - Other:
3. I commit to reflecting on my attitudes based on what I heard from \_\_\_\_\_ and seeing what attitudes I need to question and change.
4. I commit to reflecting on my behaviors and actions based on what I heard from \_\_\_\_\_ and seeing what I need to question and change.

5. If I am finding it difficult to change or have set-backs, I will do the following things:

6. If I commit harm again, I will do the following things:

7. If I commit harm again, I expect the following consequences:

Question. What are 2-3 things I do (currently or in the past) during stress or conflict that the \_\_\_\_\_ has found challenging (or that are challenging to the situation overall)?

What is one strategy for handling this in the future that I think I can do?

If you are staying connected to each other, you can ask yourself this question.

What are two things I'd like us to commit to as bottom lines for how we behave toward each other during future situations of stress and conflict?