



PROJECT SALVAGE TOOLKIT

PLANNING TO IDENTIFY, PREVENT AND CHALLENGE GENDERED VIOLENCE IN ACTIVISM.

Why a toolkit?



We wanted our research to practically address what we have learned about gendered violence in radical communities, whilst knowing this project was the tip of a complex iceberg. Toolkits: 1. Are broad enough to provoke conversations and 2. Can be worked through together. Our research showed that identifying, preventing and challenging violence, as well as supporting survivors, is difficult and collective work – and so a toolkit felt just right.

What is this toolkit supposed to do?

There are no 'one size fits all' answers to gendered violence. This is designed to support the difficult and messy task of working through how such harm can be identified, prevented and challenged, and how survivors can be supported, in your activist context. The toolkit cannot answer 'what should we do', but rather 'what questions should we be asking ourselves?'

How and when do we use this toolkit?

You will work through some general exercises designed to provoke useful thought, conversation and action about how to respond to gendered violence within your community. You might use it proactively: when thinking about how your group can respond to harm, how you might prevent harm from happening or how to make your group accessible to survivors. You can also use it reactively: to think through how to tackle a particular situation, how you can support a survivor, or how you could challenge a person, group, or culture that is harming people in your community.

 @project_salvage
 thesalvagecollective@gmail.com

Research conducted by the Salvage collective and supported by the Open University.



<https://projectsalvage.wordpress.com>

FACILITATORS' GUIDE

Why have facilitators?

The questions this toolkit asks can provoke discussions about personal and collective politics and people's experiences that can be upsetting and difficult for any group.

A lot of these differences can be valuable in making decisions about how to identify, prevent and challenge gendered violence. It is a good idea to appoint **someone trusted to write down** and capture the value of these disagreements, as well as a **facilitator to keep the group on track** and **someone sensitive to the needs, emotions and voice** of everyone in the discussion to make sure everyone is looked after and heard.

to think: TIMING

As you make decisions about how to approach gendered violence in your community – you can try thinking about whether your commitments are:



Short Term

Can be done this week / month.

e.g: Devise an immediate safety plan



Mid-Term

Over the next few months.

e.g. Hold a monthly harm discussion



Long Term

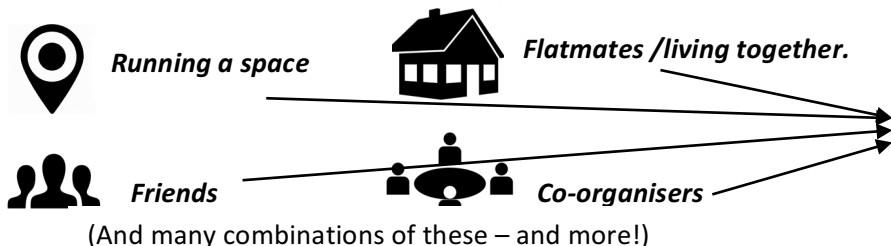
Over years.

e.g. Rewrite group constitution

Towards the end of the toolkit, check to see how many short, mid and long term commitments you have made – do you cover one time period more heavily than others?

to think: SPACES

As you make decisions about how to approach gendered violence in your community – try to be aware of the different relationships and spaces that your community includes. You might be:



How do these relationships affect:

- what you can and can't offer
- your responsibility and
- your capacity to act in a situation?

EXTRA TIPS:

- Aim to complete the toolkit within a day or two to keep everything you learn fresh in your memory. You can always redo parts of it again later on.
- Colour-coding notes with post-its or pens can help separate themes/issues.
- Don't forget that your scribe and facilitator should also be able to contribute their thoughts to the discussion!



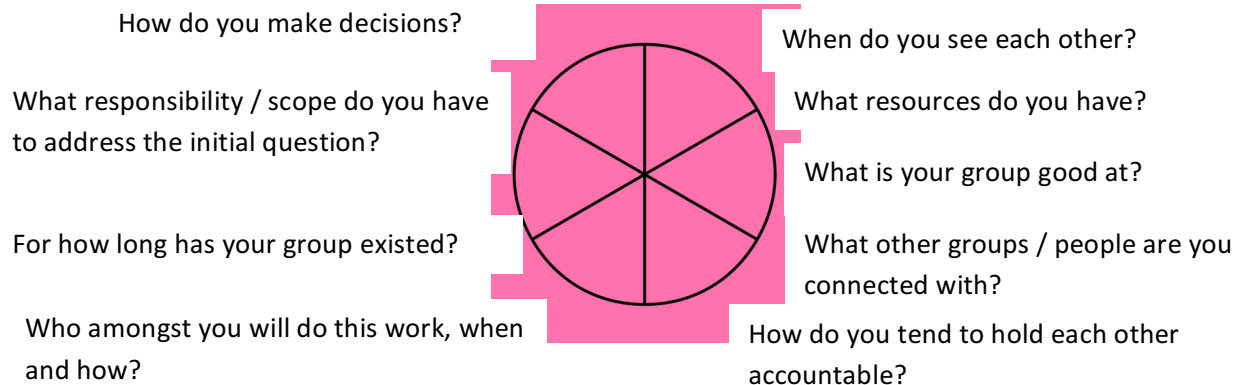
BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Initial Questions:

- What questions are you trying to answer with this toolkit?
- E.g.: *How are we going to deal with experiences of harassment at our social centre?*

Jotting these down to focus discussion can be helpful. You may also want to note down:

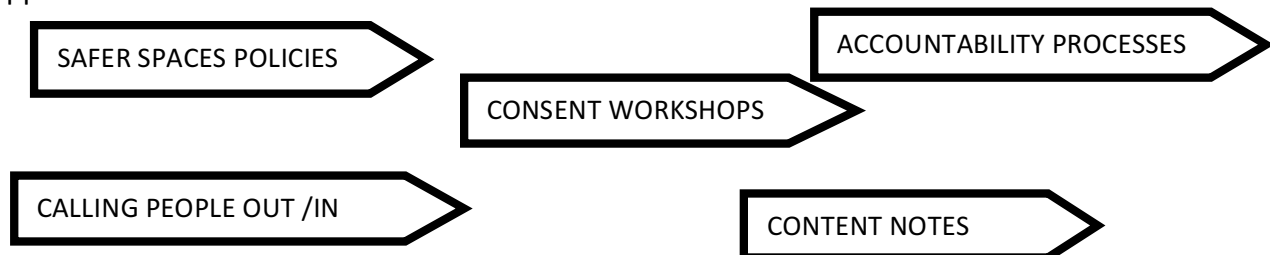
YOU AND YOUR WORK



These **basic questions** about your space, organisation, group or community can help you keep discussions **focused**, and your commitments and goals **realistic**.

EXISTING TOOLS

Activists have devised various tools designed to identify, challenge and prevent gendered harm and support survivors. Some of these are listed below.



This toolkit doesn't directly advise on these tools but it can help you to think through how these tools are working/could be useful for you, why they might be useful and how you can use them.



WORKSHEET 1: ACCESSIBILITY AND DISCLOSING HARM

THE ISSUE

Many survivors do not feel able to disclose that something harmful has happened to them within an activist space, or even things they experienced before joining activism. Fears of not being believed, of not getting access to safety and justice, and of being ostracised are compounded within activism by fears of being used to score political points, or being seen as a 'messy' person / situation that has tarnished the supposed community of an activist space.

THE QUESTION

Is your space/group accessible to survivors?

They thought they were doing this great thing you know, and if I give feedback being like 'err yeah this abusive thing happened', then like what am I doing? Like they are doing it in the name of liberation - Beth



to do: EXERCISE

Going through the questions below, apply them to different elements of your group's work. From your discussion, think about relevant actions you could take to improve across your work. An example is provided in blue.

Remember to think about long, mid or short term actions – and any other relevant questions you can think of, too!

ACTIONS?

EVENTS?

MEETINGS?

LIVING SPACES?

- Q: Do you think about how survivors might feel welcomed and/or excluded or blocked by your group – either those who have experienced violence in the past, or are experiencing it now?
- Q: Are their structures in place for people to express uncomfortable experiences within the group?
- Q: Do you make room in conversations for the negative side of things to be discussed?
- Q: How is negative feedback dealt with? What discussion or action follows?

E.G. for MEETINGS: We will make time in all meetings to talk about negative aspects of what happens at our social centre. B and A are great listeners who have free time for the next few weeks, and will identify themselves at meetings so people can speak alone if they would rather. J will support B and A, checking in if the work is too stressful. We will meet to talk about how this strategy is working in 6 weeks, and will provide an email address to everyone that joins meetings to give feedback in the future.



WORKSHEET 2: DIFFERENT FORMS OF HARM

THE ISSUE

When we think of gendered violence, there is a tendency to focus on forms of attack. Even though many people know that abuse can be economic, social, emotional, mental, subtle, collective (such as bullying) and cumulative, putting this recognition into action can be a challenge.

THE QUESTION

How can you take the recognition that violence is not just physical forward to identify and challenge gendered violence in your group and wider community?

to do: EXERCISE

Work through the wheel of different forms of harm below, and jot down how these forms of harm are currently identified (or not identified!) and responded to within your group. For each form of harm, produce at least one decision. An example is given in blue to help you – and remember, try to think long, mid and short term.

Example reflection:
- Some members have used feminist language to justify crossing others' boundaries.

It's the little things that... allow for the awful abuses, the gradual erosions of self-worth. - Anna

Example reflection:
- We do create pressure to be 'perfect activists' but we don't talk about this openly. This has led to members being shamed for mistakes before, and could facilitate abuse.

Example decisions:
- We dedicate time to talk about this issue twice a month
- We will hold sessions on group relationships.
- We will commit to no gossip about these sessions.

Example reflection:
- Some cases have happened where someone controls and crosses boundaries in our living space / occupation

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Do we dedicate time to talking about how power and relationships work in our group?
- Are there taboos within the culture of our group that are avoided or not addressed?
- Are there any spaces / people / time/ skills dedicated to conflict resolution, working through 'subtle' behaviours that cause harm?
- Is there a tendency to be silent about things that seem uncomfortable but aren't blatant abuse?



WORKSHEET 3: CULTURE AGAINST VIOLENCE

THE ISSUE

The informal, everyday and interpersonal ways that people look after each other can make the world of difference when it comes to identifying, preventing and challenging gendered violence within your community, as well as helping to provide concrete support for survivors. Not having everyday support can compound isolation – and can prolong experiences of harm.

THE QUESTION

How can you actively nurture a culture that identifies and challenges violence, and supports survivors?



I just don't think we're ready for [accountability processes] because people are doing it and it's going badly wrong. I think that's because all the other bits that need to be around it aren't there and we need to do those things first. - Erin

to do: EXERCISE

Try brainstorming the skills, time and resources you have available and think about how they could be threaded together to support a survivor or to identify, challenge or prevent harm within your group on a day to day basis. An example is given in blue. Remember to think short, mid and long term.

*Listening – I am a good **listener**, if someone had concerns about a person or relationship, I could call them **one night a week**, at least **until the summer**.*

*Cooking – I can **cook dinner for X** when she's feeling low, either **at her house** or drop food round on **Wednesdays**.*

*Organisation – I can keep on top of **emails, dates and communications** for **everyone in this group** about this situation **until I go on holiday**.*

There are loads of other skills that could be useful – are you good at childcare? At challenging people who have hurt others? At researching support services? At writing letters? Are you creative, funny, musical, can you cheer people up?

SKILL	TIME	AREA	FOR GROUP	CHANGES
Cooking	Tues eves til July	At X's house, call first	Let H & J know	House too stressful – deliver in cafe
Listening	Ring every 4 days	N/A	Let J know I rang	Feeling better- call weekly instead
Challenging	Meet weekly	Neutral – café	Write e-mail to all	Too difficult – need a break from it



@project_salvage



thesalvagecollective@gmail.com

Research conducted by the Salvage collective and supported by the Open University.



<https://projectsalvage.wordpress.com>

WORKSHEET 4: FORMAL SUPPORT

THE ISSUE

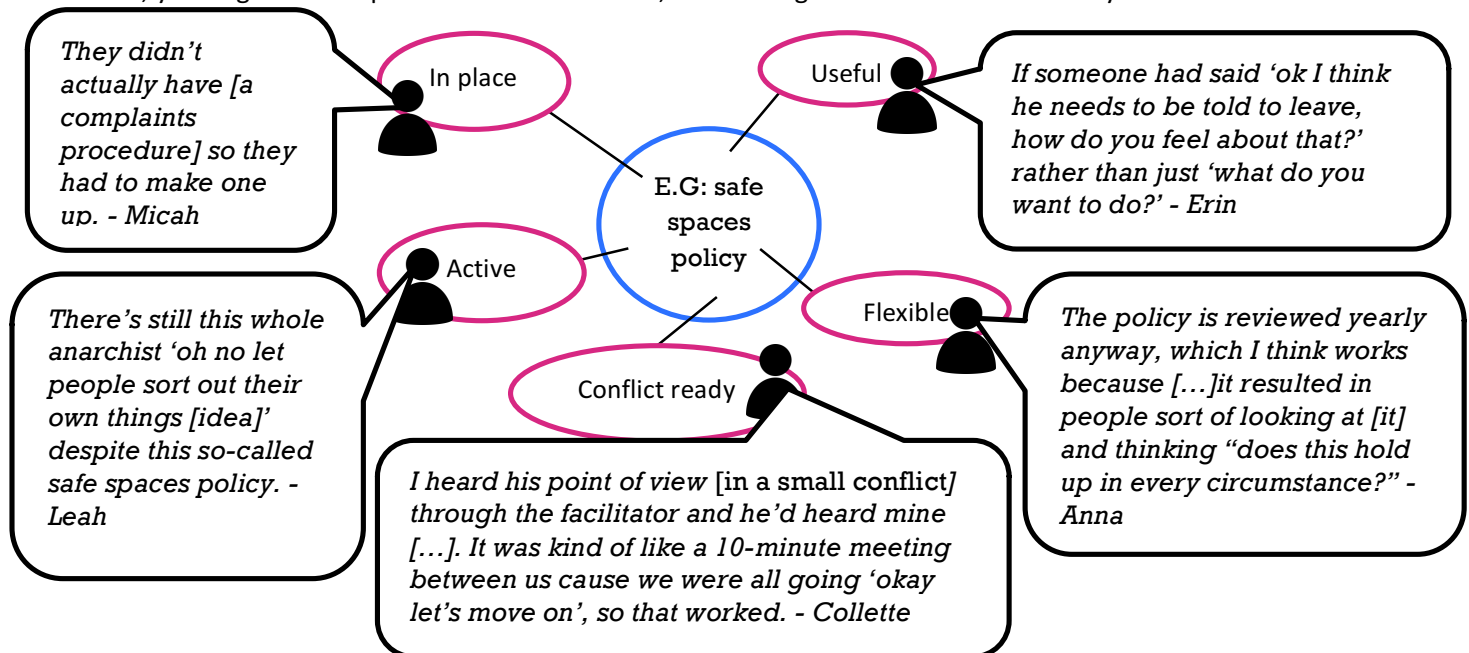
Alongside a culture of support that feels human and personal, structures like safer spaces policies, complaints procedures and accountability processes can be used to identify and challenge gendered violence within your group. These tools **cannot** do the work of sorting through gendered violence for you and it's important to check whether any formal tools you create or use are really useful.

THE QUESTION

How can you put formal structures in place that provide real, concrete support to those experiencing harm and that support a culture of care, accountability and support into your group?

to do: EXERCISE

Take a formal piece of support that your group uses, or is thinking of using, to challenge harm: a constitution, safer spaces policy, complaints procedure or accountability process, for example, and work through the challenges below. From your discussions, you might come up with some initial short, mid or long term commitments to try.



KEY QUESTIONS

In place: What can formal structures do? What are their limitations?

Useful: Is the structure practiced in a way that works? Is it doing what it was designed to do? Has it taken on a life of its own?

Active: Does everyone agree on what it means? How does it really work in practice? How does it relate to your wider culture?

Flexible: Is there room for change in the structure? How is it designed to deal with different circumstances? How is it improved?

Conflict ready: What contingencies exist for conflicts that arise? Do you have the capacity, skills and time to deal with these?



WORKSHEET 5: IDENTITY

THE ISSUE

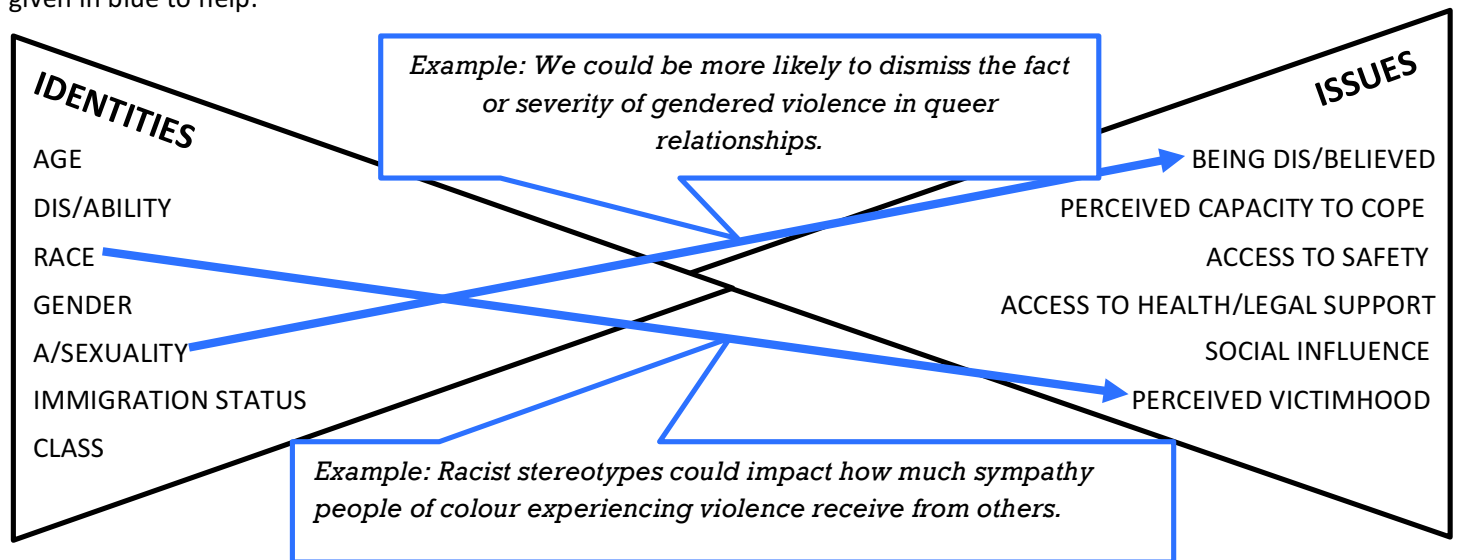
Gender, class, race, a/sexuality, ability, religion and background affect how gendered violence happens, the forms it takes, the threat it poses and how it is dealt with by a community. Responses to gendered violence, like all activism, need to take into account how someone's identity informs both their experience of harm, and of attempts to challenge it.

THE QUESTION

How can you act on gendered violence in a way that is relevant and responsive to different identities?

to do: EXERCISE

Try filling out the wheel below to get thinking about how different identities (in the left triangle) – and combinations of these – might affect the issues relevant to gendered violence (in the right triangle). These are just some of the issues that came up during our research, so do fill in other issues and identities that might be relevant to you. Some examples are given in blue to help.



If I was being abused by a man would you take it seriously? Or if I was cis would you take it seriously? Or if I was straight would you take it seriously? - Anna



WORKSHEET 6: COMMUNITY

THE ISSUE

Chances are, your community will go way beyond the people in this room. Each of us have people we know in different contexts. Gendered violence can also take place across different spaces – at a party, at work, in a housing co-op, within a friendship group, or at an action. Thinking about this wider network, and the different skills, relationships and resources that exist in that network can help you plan to identify, prevent and challenge gendered violence.

THE QUESTION

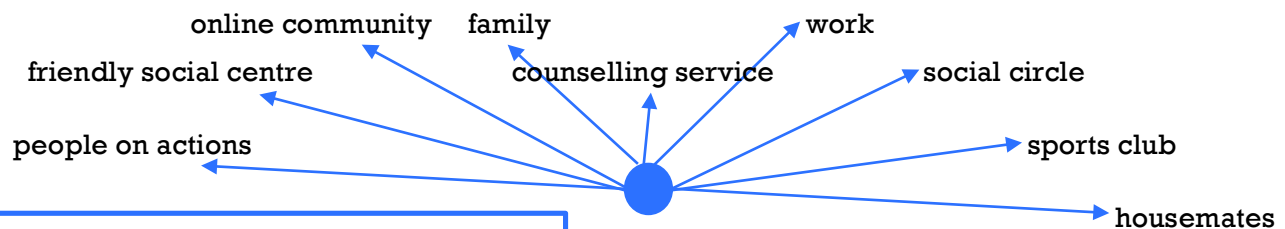
How can your wider community help to challenge gendered violence?

to do: EXERCISE

What does your community look like? Try mapping out some of the key spaces and groups you are connected to. For each space or set of people, jot down what you know about their:

- **Relevant skills**
- **Capacity / time**
- **Trust in you / your trust in them**
- **Contact details**

You can then make some initial (short, long and mid-term) commitments or plans for how these different relationships can help your effort to challenge gendered violence (or even where to avoid!). An example is given in blue to help you.



Example: K is friends with L, who has caused harm to someone in our community. We know and trust K, so we'll ask them to help us talk with L while we're dealing with the harm L has caused.

Example: P lives with H who is experiencing gendered violence in her current relationship. P is a great listener, so we'll ask it they can help check in on how H is doing day to day.

Example: There is a group of people we sometimes see on actions who we think can help people access counselling. We'll try and contact them to build stronger links for survivors in our community – we'll also invite them to our fundraiser so we can hang out socially and let off steam.



WORKSHEET 7: CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRANSPARENCY

THE ISSUE

Keeping details about gendered violence confidential can be essential to protect those involved, prevent further harm from happening and to ward against gossip, bullying or rumours that can hurt and isolate people. Yet being transparent about your principles, actions and work is also important. People may want to be warned about gendered violence, and they may be suspicious about secret meetings, bannings or conversations.

THE QUESTION

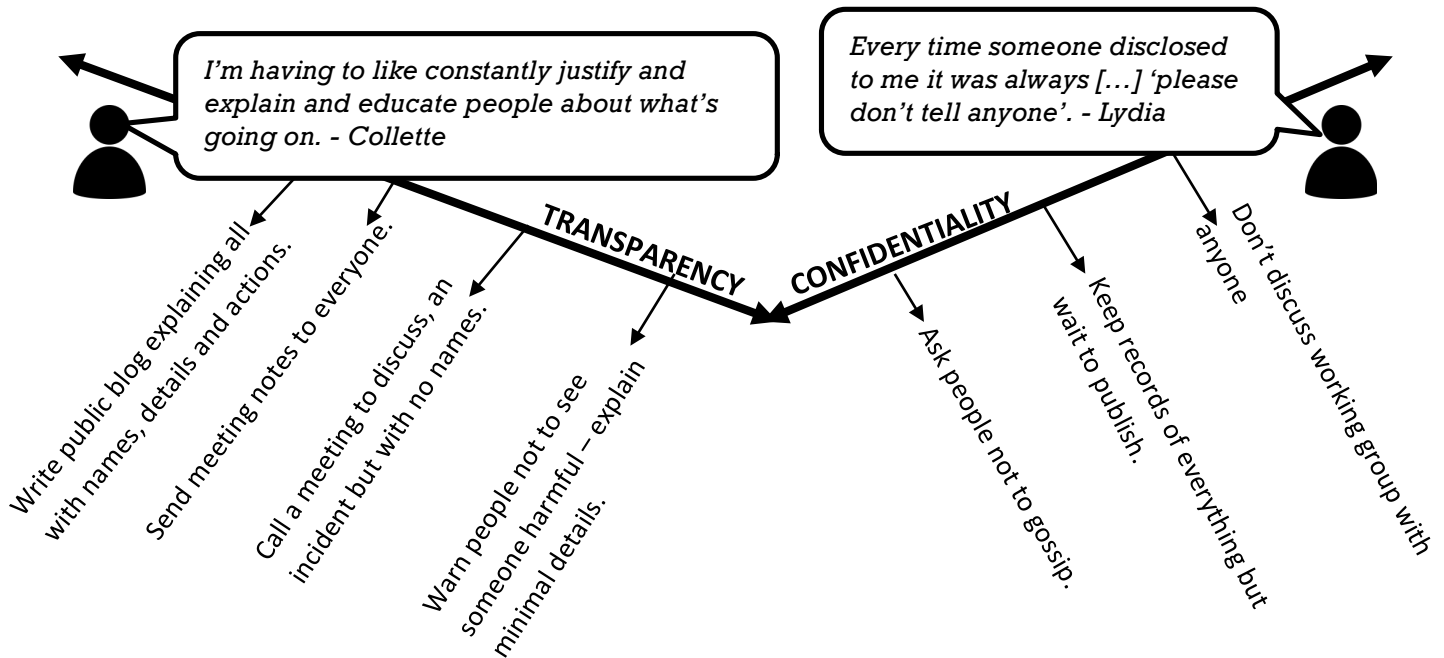
How do you make the right choices about confidentiality and transparency?



Because we treat things as confidential we don't say anything, but that just means that they [person who has caused harm] get to paint the picture of what's happened. - Hayley

to do: EXERCISE

Along each axis below is a tension. Have a look at the quotes from our research, as well as the example decisions that could take place along each axis. Think about how these tensions relate to your context and jot down how the decisions and commitments you've made so far in this toolkit impact, or are impacted by, issues of confidentiality and transparency.



WORKSHEET 8: MEANING 'SURVIVOR LED'

THE ISSUE

Activists working to challenge gendered harm will often aim to have a 'survivor-led' approach. Though intended to centre survivors' needs and experiences, in practice it sometimes means survivors are expected to know all their needs, to have similar needs to each other, or to not change their needs over time - it can leave the responsibility of inventing perfect plans of action down to survivors who may already feel vulnerable and under pressure.

THE QUESTION

How can action on gendered violence be survivor-led in a way that is supportive, rather than a burden?



I was expecting it to be like "right this [violence] has happened and this is why you feel like this" and I was presented with quite a lot of bureaucracy. Which is quite a strange response, when you're feeling so emotional about a thing. - Anna

to do: EXERCISE

Below are some examples in blue of how actions to challenge gendered violence can be tweaked to give survivors power and control over a situation without burdening them. Pick a few decisions and commitments you have made so far with this toolkit and put them through this process. How could a course of action be made more survivor-centred? How could it be managed in a way that doesn't place all responsibility on survivors? Remember to think short, mid and long term.

Example: We don't want to be prescriptive or controlling, so we'll ask survivors what they need and want.

Issue: Open ended questions can be daunting.

Tweak: Use semi-structured questions like 'we're thinking of having a meeting about X, what do you think? Would you be up for it?'

Example: We have a safer spaces policy designed by survivors, with guidance on actions to take in almost any circumstance.

Issue: Diff. survivors and circumstances need diff. things, bureaucracy is alienating.

Tweak: Give info about our existing strategies while asking for others' thoughts.

Example: We have to check that everything we're doing to challenge someone who has caused harm is OK with the survivor/s.

Issue: Continual calls and messages about gendered violence can be draining, upsetting and burdensome.

Tweak: Keep briefings to once weekly through a call, check if it's OK each time.



@project_salvage



thesalvagecollective@gmail.com

Research conducted by the Salvage collective and supported by the Open University.



<https://projectsalvage.wordpress.com>

WORKSHEET 9: SHIFTING CIRCUMSTANCES

THE ISSUE

The complexities and shifting circumstances of our lives mean that decisions, policies and courses of action designed to challenge gendered violence have to adapt to change. It's important to recognise this and prepare for it from the start. Thinking about how you might deal with this can help build a more nuanced, flexible and resilient set of resources for coping with gendered violence.

THE QUESTION

How are you doing to deal with changes, criticisms and pressures on the steps you want to take?

to do: EXERCISE

It can be hard to think about how to prepare for change without knowing specifics– what was said, what has happened, who was involved, how did it happen – that make all the difference. To help you, we've drawn on some common 'wild cards' that happen during activists' attempts to challenge gendered violence. Have a look through our wild cards and then either add your own, or pick one from below that is relevant to your situation. Jot down how you would respond – how will this wild card affect the decisions and commitments you have made so far?

WILD CARD: CRITICISM

A group of people loosely associated with your network - friends, acquaintances and others in the wider community send a collective email criticising what you're doing. They think your efforts are not transparent, and that there are some racist elements of your work on gendered violence.

WILD CARD: DEMANDING INFORMATION

A survivor you are working to support (who has previously asked for total confidentiality) contacts you and explains that they keep being pressured to disclose what happened and to justify why the person who caused them harm has been asked to leave events. They are fed up of this and want you to act.

WILD CARD: NEW EVENTS

Someone e-mails you to say that a survivor you have been supporting has sexually assaulted them at a recent party and they think you have a responsibility to act on this.

WILD CARD: SUPPORTING SUPPORTERS

The partner of a man who has caused harm in your community has been working to support him, have difficult conversations with and challenge him. She contacts you to explain that doing all this work, whilst losing friends and being blamed for associating with an 'abuser' is really taking its toll on her. She wants your support to stop this.



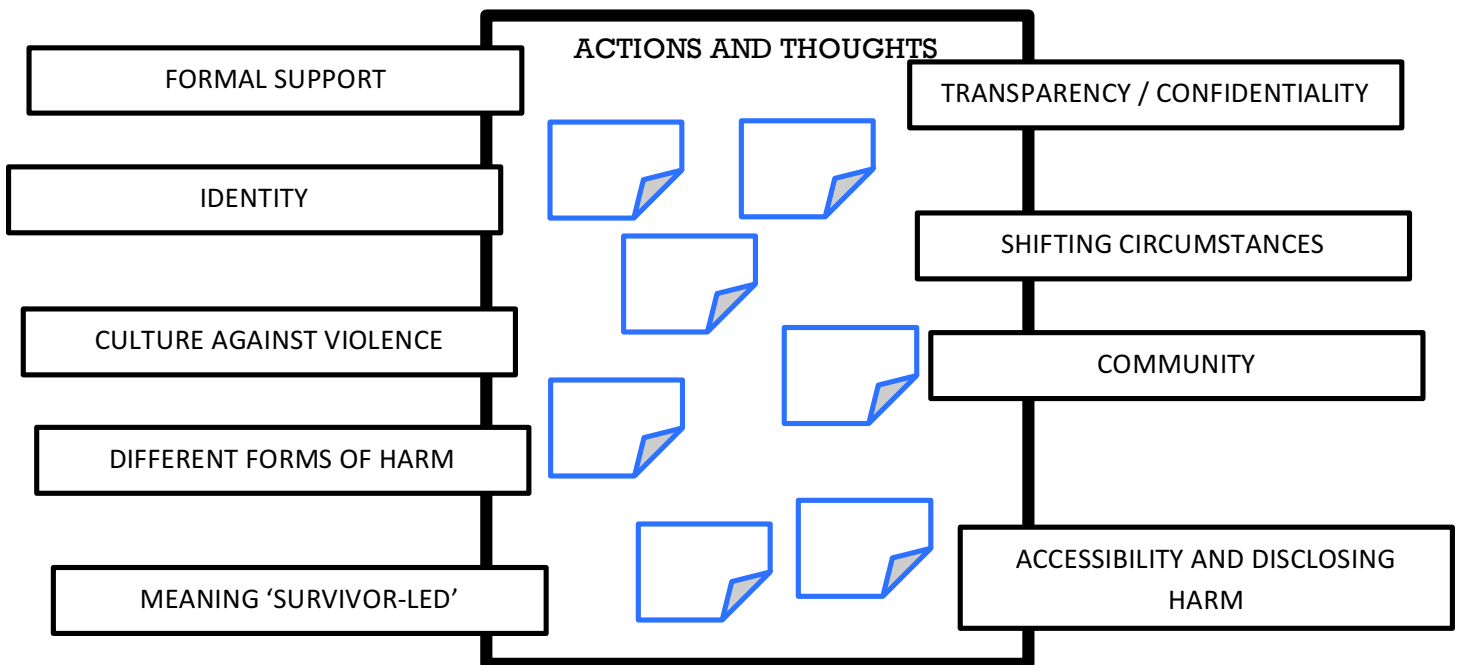
ACTION PLANNING AND REFLECTION

If you had a particular issue you were using this toolkit to discuss, bring that alongside your notes to reflect on what you've discussed, and to plan some concrete actions you can take.

Using the suggested layout below, think through how the decisions, thoughts and commitments you've come up with so far could work together and be put into action. Think about:

How is a decision impacted by issues on the other worksheets?

What kind of practical parameters could turn this into a realistic, doable course of action?



For each decision, thought or commitment:

- **When will you do this?**
- **How are you going to do it?**
- **Where will it happen?**
- **Who will do it?**
- **What resources do you need?**
- **How long will this go on for?**
- **What will you do if there are changes to make?**
- **If this can't happen – what will you do instead?**

I would like to see conversations emerge [...] and for the conversations to be messy, not to be about a set of rules or a set of guidelines but about creating the possibility to talk. - Beth



HAVE SOME OTHER IDEAS?

We know that our research, and this toolkit, are not perfect. From the work we have done, we already see the potential for a few more research projects emerging, and we are always interested in your thoughts about how we could do better. If you have read through or tried out the toolkit and have some thoughts about things we have done well, things we are missing, or how we could do better, feel free to get in touch.

Our website and contact details are on the bottom of each page in the toolkit.



SALVAGE