I never had many friends myself, but there were often boys who attempted to make me feel welcome.

It was, however, nearly always a certain kind of trade-off.
Credits and Resources

There were a lot of people who wanted to remain anonymous—and some who I wasn’t sure of and so put them anonymously too. I wrote a few things anonymously as well.

THANKS TO EVERYONE! THERE WERE MANY OTHER LETTERS & STORIES THAT DESERVE TO BE HEARD! I COULDN’T FIT IT ALL IN & I’M SORRY.

Cover - Cristy Road - Check out her zine "Green Zone" available at Microcosm.

Fly - I did the cover I excerpted on p.11. She does a regular comic in Sludge & Lemon and has a book out called Peeps and Some Zines.

Me - I did Listening p 8+9 and Frozen Inside p 39-42 also reprinted from S+T.

Chris Somerville - wrote "Safe Sex for Survivors" p.18-21.

I excerpted parts of "Healing, Mental Health & Self Care" which I wish everyone could read all of - 509 Garrison St. NE, 01Y WA 98906 also she did the cover p.61-63.

Anandi - wrote p.22-25 for MBR and let me reprint it here.

Janet - wrote p.34-37 and also p.43-46. She writes zine sometimes on called Pocket Green.

Cabo - is a zine I reprinted p.47 and Denial p.57.

Wyatt Hertz - wrote p.47+49 &

Jake Holloway - p.52-54

and the back cover is reprinted from Typhoid Mary.

Write to me for a way bigger resource list.

For 1734 Asheville NC 28802.


Survivors Guide to Sex Trauma and Recovery.

Intro:

This is a zine about supporting people who have been sexually abused. No formulas, no simple answers, just trying to peel back the layers—the heart of it, the hurt and fear and aloneness, the helplessness and failures and how we have pulled through, what we have learned, how we have grown, what we can teach each other.

We are not alone

In my ideal world, people who weren’t abused would talk to each other and learn from each other ways to support and understand us; their friends & lovers who have particularly complicated bodies and thoughts.

And us - we would not have to be so afraid to talk to each other about ways we’ve survived, ways we’ve grown.

We’d see that growth is possible. That good communication (with ourselves & with our important ones) is something we can let ourselves want, something we can work towards & demand & even get (someday).

In my ideal world, none of us would have been abused in the first place.

The original intention of this zine was to help people who weren’t abused figure out ways to be supportive, but I think a lot of the writing in here is useful for all of us.

If you have been abused, this subject could be really triggering. And we don’t all have a friend we can call when we’re freaking out. So seriously, I am asking you, if you think you could be triggered in destructive ways by this, please wait, put the zine down. Think of things you could do to minimize the harm you might do to yourself. Try to make your space safe and gather what inner support you have.

Also, you don’t have to read this right now.

If you do have a friend to call, make sure they’ll be available.

There’s some crisis lines just in case:

1-800-SUICIDE
1-800-659-4673 (Sexual Assault survivor hotline)
23. Are you clear about your own intentions?
24. Have you ever tried to talk someone into doing something they showed hesitancy about?
25. Do you think hesitancy is a form of flattery?
26. Are you aware that in some instances it isn't?
27. Have you ever thought someone's actions were flirtations when that wasn't actually the message they wanted to get across?
28. Do you think that if someone is promiscuous that makes it ok to objectify them, or talk about them in ways you normally wouldn't?
29. If someone is promiscuous, do you think it's less important to get consent?
30. Do you think that if someone dresses in a certain way it makes it ok to objectify them?
31. If someone dresses a certain way do you think it means that they want your sexual attention or approval?
32. Do you understand that there are many other reasons, that have nothing to do with you, that a person might want to dress or act in a way that you might find sexy?
33. Do you think it's your responsibility or role to overcome another person's hesitancy by pressing them or making light of it?
34. Have you ever tried asking someone what they're feeling? If so, did you listen to them and respect them?
35. Do you think sex is a game?
36. Do you ever try to get yourself into situations that give you an excuse for touching someone you think would say no if you asked? i.e., dancing, getting really drunk around them, falling asleep next to...
37. Do you make people feel "unfun" or "unliberated" if they don't want to try certain sexual things?
38. Do you think there are ways you act that might make someone feel that way even if it's not what you're trying to do?
39. Do you ever try and make bargains? i.e. "If you let me __________, I'll do _______ for you?"
40. Have you used jealousy as a means of control?
41. Have you made your partner(s) stop hanging out with certain friends, or limit their social outings in general because of jealousy or insecurity?
42. Do you feel like being in a relationship with someone means that they have an obligation to have sex with you?
43. What if they want to abstain from sex for a week? A month? A year?
44. Do you whine or threaten if you're not having the amount of sex or the kind of sex that you want?
45. Do you think it's ok to initiate something sexual with someone who's sleeping?
46. What if the person is your partner?
47. Do you think it's important to talk with them about it when they're awake first?
48. Do you ever look at how you interact with people or how you treat people, positive or negative, and where that comes from/where you learned it?
49. Do you behave differently when you've been drinking?
50. What are positive aspects of drinking for you? What are negative aspects?
51. Have you been sexual with people when you were drunk or when they were drunk? Have you ever felt uncomfortable or embarrassed about it the next day? Has the person you were with ever acted weird to you afterward?
52. Do you ever consent the same way when you are drunk as when you're sober?
53. Do you think it's important to talk the next day with the person you've been sexual with if there has been drinking involved? If not, is it because it's uncomfortable or because you think something might have happened that shouldn't have? Or is it because you think that's just the way things go?
54. Do you think people need to take things more lightly?
55. Do you think these questions are repressive and people who look critically at their sexual histories and their current behavior are uptight and should be more "liberated"?
56. Do you think liberation might be different for different people?
Dear Cindy,

I got your address from Doris #21, which I very much enjoyed reading despite the disturbing subject matter. Myself have never to my knowledge been abused sexually, but somehow it turned out that most of the women I’ve ever seriously been involved with have. I do not pretend to know how it must feel or what it must do to you mentally, or emotionally. I only really understand how it can make some people act and react to those close to them. How some things, some emotions are just shut down at times if not closed off all together. And how something as innocent as a kiss without warning become a nightmare.

The first time I became aware that my girlfriend was abused, I had no idea how to react. I knew her father. Outwardly he seemed like a great guy. I liked him. He let me swim in his pool, and once at a barbeque he gave me a beer (I was only 15). He was nice. Anyway, after we had been seeing each other for awhile, and things began to become more intimate, she told me about the things he had done to her in the past.

I was stunned. I didn’t know how to react, or what to feel. The only real emotion that I could hold on to was anger. I envisioned sneaking up on him late at night with a baseball bat, and beating him stupid. I remember having a whole speech that I would recite while delivering the blows.

Of course I didn’t have the nerve to follow through. Instead I set his car on fire. He had a sporty little MGB that he was very proud of. The ideal midlife crisis mobile. One night he had it parked on the street. I snuck out of my house with a can of gasoline, doused it, and watched it burn from 3 houses away. It looked cool, but ultimately it did nothing to help the situation. It didn’t help her, it didn’t help me, and he was heavily insured, so it hardly even bothered him. I realized that no matter how strongly I felt, it just really wasn’t my business. Not is that way anyway. Nothing I could do would make it go away.
2) If you are not home right now, if you are at a show or a restaurant or are traveling and are in common space at a stranger’s house, quietly leave the room. When there are lots of people around me and I feel the way you’re feeling, it tends to make it worse. If you’re with a friend, ask them to come with you. If you’re alone, it’s still okay; you can still be safe. Go out to the yard or an empty room or the bathroom, somewhere you won’t attract a lot of attention and where you are not in physical danger.

Don’t move very far. Don’t cross any streets. Walk slowly and don’t talk to any cops.

3) Now, come back to your body. You might not be able to feel your limbs right now, maybe not your skin either and this is okay. It’s a reasonable response to fear, but returning awareness to your body will do a lot to make you feel safe. If you have someone you trust close by, ask them to hold you, very gently. Focus on their arms supporting you, keeping you safe. If you’re alone, wrap your own arms around you.

Sit down somewhere, a soft place if you can find one, and slowly, gently, rock back and forth. Your body remembers this from when you were a baby and it will comfort you now just like it did then.

Keep breathing, each exhale twice as long as the inhale.
If you are still dissociating (retreating from your body) close your eyes and imagine you are filling yourself back up again. Imagine a warm, white light pouring into your feet and filling you up...moving through your legs... up your torso... into your shoulders (keep breathing)... down your arms and into your hands... up your neck... into your face... all the way up to the top of your head. Now you are full.

Rock gently back and forth until the rhythm naturally slows itself, until you are still and safe.

Keep breathing, each exhale twice as long as the inhale.

4) If you’re alone and are still nowhere near okay, find your list of people to call when you feel like this. If they are not answering, call the next person and then the next one. Go all the way down the list, and back up to the top if necessary, until you reach someone. Tell them exactly what’s going on with you.

5) Don’t fight it. I cannot stress enough that the only way to get through difficult feelings is to let yourself feel them. Trying desperately to hold at bay everything raging inside you, will only intensify the storm. You must move through these feelings. Don’t deny the experience, see it for what it is. Name it: “I feel really scared right now,” “I feel like the walls are closing in on me,” “I feel like I’m sinking.” And just hang out with it. Don’t let it consume you, don’t let it be everything that you are. Recognize it for what it is, a feeling, and then let it move through you. Soften into it and be with it and it will pass through ten times more quickly and cleanly than if you clench onto it.
But I realize that on one hand, she really doesn't want to talk about it all, and on the other hand, she really does. She needs to feel like I really want to know, for my own sake, as well as to help her take some of the burden.

Often, when talking about it, she'd be really angry with me. I've learned that even though she needs to talk about it in this distant and removed way, she also needs to let out the feelings, and if I just sit there and listen to her, the feelings of it all still remain bottled up inside.

I'm learning to trust myself more. To try and show her that I care, instead of just acting scared. I ask her if I can hold her, ask what she's feeling. This is what she actually needs. She wasn't listened to or believed many times in her life, and sometimes just a few words will bring her back into this time. I'll stumble and recognize that it's me and she will go with the story.

But sometimes it's not what she needs. She doesn't want to be held and she gets defensive if I ask what she's feeling. She says things like, "What do you think I'm feeling?" She yells.

This made me want to run away, it made me feel so worthless, and even now it is hard to understand, but I am starting to see that this anger is part of her healing, part of her protection, and when it happens, I try and not get defensive. I might have to leave, but I try and do it gently. I tell her in a soft voice, a loving voice, that the yelling isn't scary, and that I have to leave for a little bit. I tell her where I'll be and when I'll be back. I don't do it in a threatening way, I don't tell her to calm down. I just try and accept it all but also, take care of myself.

I always make sure to bring up what happened and to try and learn what's going on. I try and show her that I love her and that she's safe, and that I'm willing to do the work, to love her and to know her and to care.
Listen

Denial

1. First of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

2. Second of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

3. Third of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

4. Fourth of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

5. Fifth of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

6. Sixth of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

7. Seventh of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.

8. Eighth of all, everyone get depressed. Everyone is sad inside. It's so hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed. Everyone is sad. So hard to deal with. Everyone feels depressed.
One girlfriend I had, her previous boyfriend used to beat her up. I was clueless, cruel, cold-hearted and eighteen. I think she loved me because I didn't hit her. I wasn't very kind otherwise.

The next girlfriend I had told me she wasn't into blowjobs because she used to have to give them to her uncle. We often had sex with our clothes on. The last six months of our relationship we had sex twice. I didn't know how to process the information about her and her uncle. Somehow I knew it wasn't unusual, and I guess having clear parameters (no blowjobs) made it an easy thing for me to avoid, and still feel like I was doing alright by her.

A few years later I got very drunk at a house show. I ran into a friend there and she gave me a ride back to her house. We made out and then she undressed me and we had sex. I didn't want to, but I was drunk and something said as a guy I shouldn't feel uncomfortable. My body was reacting, but I felt terrible and something in my head told me it was weak to say no.

The next day we went to an amusement park and sat on a bench. I threw up in the garbage can repeatedly. She took me home. I was very hungover, disgusted with myself and her. I knew it wasn't the biggest thing—so minor compared to what every woman I'd had a relationship with had experienced. I was mad at her for doing that, for not asking. I was mad at myself for getting into that situation with an old friend. I kept telling myself it wasn't that big a deal, but I left town without telling anyone for two weeks.

It was a while before I had any kind of sexual contact with anyone again.

With the next girlfriend, things went very slow. When I think about what it might mean to be a good partner to someone, I think of her. The way she talked about her own experiences and talked to me about mine. "Is this OK?" "Why does this feel weird?" I didn't tell her at first but she kept asking in a way that was gentle and patient. It seemed seamless.

I still don't get it, but I'm more careful than I used to be. I'm more aware. I'm used to being seen as a good guy, or (lord forbid) a sensitive guy, but I know that in reality it hasn't added up to shit because other people's abuse was something I had to negotiate. I never went out of my way to understand it or deal with it until my own boundaries were crossed in such a minor way.

The purpose of active listening is to help you understand what is going on inside the other person. What her feelings are, what she is experiencing, etc. Because that person is not able to always share what's going on inside, the statements she makes are sometimes coded or clouded. This means you have to decode or clear the message, and hear what she is really saying. The only way to know whether you are hearing correctly is to reflect back to the person what you are hearing from her. She will in turn let you know whether you are correct or not.

The purpose is to show that you're interested, that you've not only heard her, but that you understood (or are trying to understand) what she said. It helps check your accuracy of decoding what she's saying. It gives her a chance to breathe. It lets her know that you're actually there. It communicates acceptance. It fosters the person doing their own problem-definition and problem-solving and keeps the responsibility on her, not you.

When an abuse survivor says "I just can't tell anyone what happened," she may be saying any number of things:
- I want to forget it ever happened
- I am afraid of what people will think of me
- No one believed me before, why would it be different now
- I am afraid of my feelings about it
- I am afraid I will fail apart if I talk about it
- I am afraid my abuser will come back and hurt me more
- I am afraid you'll think I could have prevented it
- I promised never to tell
- I don't know if I can really trust you or a million other things

You need to find out the hidden feelings, otherwise you might assume the wrong ones. You can ask "Do you mean..." "Are you saying...", "What does it feel like?"
Keep laughing! Keep dancing! You don't always have to keep feeling sad.

I learned to stop pretending that every part of me was happy.

I could take away the past. Life is written in pen.

I was lucky that she gave me a start, but what about me?

I wanted the parts of the world that were mine.

It was like a piece of my soul.

Like to sell the use of my body.

Many people do but one should have to know what it feels like to be used.

to be used.

She loved me, but the scars from her past cut deep.

There are common errors to avoid while dating.

Get out when you have had a good story.

My parents were married for 16 years in love. I fall for a

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My parents were married for 16 years in love. I fall for a

There are common errors to avoid while dating.

get out when you have had a good story.
There was the stark, swollen grip of the drunk who married his mother. He would chase them outside in the dead of night with a rifle in his hand, firing shots that sank into the flaccid soil of the cotton fields. He would read my father’s fortune in coffee grounds. He would toss empty bottles at the wall.

And one day he draped his hands over my father’s shoulders and his hands were like buckets of moonshine, heavy and damp and spilling over the edge. And this man, this man who wandered through the house like a pixilated beast, who tossed china out of doorways and shattered windows, this man looked deep into my fathers already frantic eyes and said, “You are my son.”

I have always known that I am my father’s daughter. I can tell by the way I twist little pieces of paper into spirals between my fingers. I can tell by the way darkness wraps around my brain like a raincoat. I can hear his nervous laugh rattling in my rib cage. We both have trouble breathing while we sleep.

My veins are swollen and heavy with thick blood. I am carrying memories that are not mine. My cells are saturated with secrets. I am listening to stories whispered across the table, through the closed door, over the back seat.

I don’t want to know.
I don’t want to know.
I only want to hear the music on the radio.
Sex

Bovardance chapter

Metrosexual guide to sex (consensual and 
sensual sex)

For more survivors, consensual sex becomes a matter of self-discovery within their 
unique, existentially confronting transition from gender

Survivors are now open to needing to feel sexy. Our culture

In your body, and make your bed path away in your
groove... What do you want to do?... It’s for you. If you’re not the one.

Readers are now open to needing to feel sexy. Our culture

Take pride in yourself. Be a man. Be a person. Be yourself. In your body, and make your bed.

And they are not what they are only what they are.

Take pride in yourself. Be a man. Be a person. Be yourself. In your body, and make your bed.

The survivors guide to sex (consensual and sensual sex)

For more survivors, consensual sex becomes a matter of self-discovery, yet, within their unique, existentially confronting transition from gender.
For my father...

By Jake Holloway

Last time I saw my father, he sat across from me at dinner and told me about the face of the monster that would appear to him out of nowhere when he tried to sleep at night. It was the horrible, half-eaten face of a dog, all fangs and teeth and ripped flesh. It would loom over him in the dark.

My father’s stories. They would cling to me like tiny shards of glass. He would toss them at me over breakfast. Sweep them under my feet on the back porch. Offer them up in our crowded family car, and I would choke on tobacco smoke and the burden of too many splintered memories swallowed whole.

He stopped drinking when I was eleven. When you stop drinking, there are one or two years of bliss. Effortless life. The exhilaration of clear vision and shaky nervous fingers. They call this the honeymoon period. And then all at once, the darkness melts away and all those terrible stories you tried to obscure blossom into sharp and distinct forms, gleaming teeth and broken edges.

This is when the memories of my grandmother began to surface.
I don’t know details really.
I don’t want to.

When her second husband died, she took my father into her bedroom, and told him that he was the man of the house.

I am sitting in the back seat of the car. I only want to hear the music on the radio.

My grandmother’s eyes are small and glowing like glass beads. She is young for her age. Her ankles are thin and fragile like mine. She is still very much alive despite her catheter and sunken cheeks. I wait patiently by the bed. I feed her jello while my father paces the halls. She is dripping like a wilted flower. She reveals herself—all folded flesh and blue veins, her colostomy bag spilling along the white linoleum. I watch her struggle, humiliated and stunned by her own fading life.

I watch my father and his boyish terror.

You can talk about what, if any, kind of help she might need to stay present. Maybe she needs to say out loud that she wants to be in the present. maybe she needs you to say her name or to tell her who you are or maybe to tell her a story of something simple and nice, not sex related, that you’ve done together lately. The spiral down can make us forget that there were even nice simple times or any feelings other than fear and helplessness.

When things come up, it can be really important to talk about them again when you’re not in bed. You can say “I know you couldn’t talk about what was making you so scared and sad last night, but I do really care and really want to know. do you think you can talk about it now?” maybe she’ll say yes, maybe she’ll say no.

You can say, “It was confusing when I asked if you were ok and you said “I’m fine” but you didn’t really sound fine and I didn’t know what to do. What should I do when that happens?” maybe she’ll say - yeah, she actually was fine, just trying to bring herself back into the present and she was glad you didn’t stop and that you trusted her; - maybe she’ll say, - yeah, actually, she was saying fine to be cynical, and she’s glad you noticed, glad you stopped.

You can say “Do you like it when I ________________? I can’t tell.” maybe she’ll say - I want to like it but it makes me feel weird.
- maybe she’ll say - it’s triggering, but I’m trying to work through that trigger. - maybe she’ll say - I don’t really like that, I just didn’t know how to say anything.

If you are courting someone, sleeping with someone, thinking of getting in a relationship with someone, always assume that they could have been sexually abused. Know that for many sexual abuse survivors, even ones who love sex and are aggressively sexual; there will very likely be a period of time when they don’t want to have sex. Think about whether you are willing or able to be in a relationship that isn’t sexual. It is totally tricky to be an abuse survivor, be emotionally dependent on someone, be having a time of serious abuse triggers, try to set boundaries, try to say you don’t want to have sex for awhile, and then have that person freak out or threaten to leave.

If you are willing to be in a relationship that isn’t always sexual, (even if you love sex) then it could be a good thing to remind the one you love that if they ever don’t want to have sex, it’s totally ok.
I'm having trouble jumping over the fence of my life. I'm stuck and I can't get out of my own way. I'm trying to figure out how to move forward, but every step I take, I stumble and fall back. It's like I'm running in circles, never getting anywhere.

I know I should be happy, but I can't help feeling lost. I'm not sure what I want or where I'm going. I feel like I'm just going through the motions, doing what's expected of me, but my heart isn't in it.

I want to find my purpose, to discover what I'm meant to do. I want to be fulfilled and content, but I don't know how to get there. I feel like I'm stuck in a rut, unable to break free.

I need help. I need someone to guide me, to help me see the path ahead. I need someone who understands what I'm going through and can help me find my way. I need someone who can help me see the beauty in the struggle and find the strength to keep going.

I'm tired of feeling this way. I want to change, but I don't know how. I need help, but I don't know where to turn. I'm alone and I feel like I'm drowning. I need someone to reach out and help me.
SAFE SEX FOR SURVIVORS
by Chris Somerville

Over the past couple of years I have read as many zines written by sexual abuse survivors as I knew existed. Not a single one had mentioned any comprehensive information or given any tactical advice about the specific problems that we encounter when we are trying to be sexual. For me, it was my experience of my own sexuality, both in the context of sex with another person and outside of that, which first made me look in the fact that I had experienced sexual trauma early in my life. After three years of sexual dormancy and thirteen years of repression of memory, I became active again. That’s when the flimsy walls of my reality began to really crumble. It was sex that finally released me from the illusion my mind had made in order to keep me safe. It was sex, in a perverted and fucked-up form, that inflicted the damage to begin with. And as I moved steadily through a haze of terror, re-entering my sexuality during the onset of my trauma resurfacing, it began to occur to me that sex might end up being at the very core of my healing process.

I’ve known survivors who are too afraid to even think about sex. I’ve known survivors who have sex constantly and indiscriminately. We hurt ourselves either way. Sexuality is central to the experience of being human. We NEED to be touched, it’s just part of being mammals. The kind of intimacy we are capable of having when we allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable in sex is nourishing down to our very soul. It can reconnect us to our body, to our own true self and our true emotions. We never ever knew we could touch, grounds us in present time (what can you think of that brings you into the moment more profoundly than an orgasm?)

I believe that making ourselves vulnerable, truly sharing ourselves, showing our realst selves to another human being is vital for any sucessful healing process.

This is why I believe sex is one of the most effective ways to heal from abuse. You lay naked with someone, with yourself, sometimes you even enter another person’s body, take someone inside your own. Isn’t that beautiful? It is one of the most powerful experiences a person can have, which is why it can also be so devastating.
My experience with the issue of consent and its relationship to sex.

Remember what happened the other day?

I love your approach in the beginning. I felt safe and respected.

Let's set some terms, first of all. I have no training to be a sex therapist.

There is a difference between being a sex therapist and being a sexologist. A sex therapist is trained to help people with sexual issues, while a sexologist is trained in all areas of sexuality.

It's important to understand that this distinction is crucial for the safety and well-being of those who seek professional help for sexual issues.

Keep in mind, it's also important to remember that consent is a ongoing conversation, not just a one-time agreement.
I cannot get involved with someone who's into SM because I know it's retraumatizing for me.

I'm only want to sleep with my close friends, I can't be in a serious relationship right now.

My relationship with my partner must be monogamous because it takes so much time and careful attention and trust for me to build a space in a relationship safe enough in which to be sexual that to allow another person into this space feels like a desecration.

I must have my relationship with my partner be non-monogamous because any kind of limits imposed on my life or my sexuality by another person reminds me of the entrapment and control I felt during my abuse.

I cannot be in a relationship with another survivor. I can barely hold my own shit together, I can't take on so many else's.

My partner must be a survivor, too, I don't have the energy or the time to explain myself and explain what I go through to someone who doesn't share my experience.

I can't have sex with someone of the same gender as my abuser.

Your bottom lines might not be set up on a scale of polarities the way these ones are, they might not be as "hardline" but it's a really good idea to use words like MUST and CANNOT. Your personal power within your own sexuality and your agency within your relationship will both strengthen immeasurably when you decide what you must have, what you can willingly do and what you WILL NOT compromise. Keep in mind that many of these things will change. Some of my bottom lines are the exact opposite of what they were six months ago. Allow what you need to be malleable but at the same time, understand and respect the fact that what you need right now is what you need RIGHT NOW.

TOUCH YOURSELF

Do not underestimate the far-reaching power of a positive relationship with masturbating. It is a way to explore your ability to have a positive relationship with your body, and it can be a really amazing, strong way to give yourself support with survivor issues.
Go outside for sunshine or fresh air.

Wash your face.

Stop ping to focus on each one.

Move your eyes from object to object.

Just your eyelids.

Now “blink” with your whole body, not just your eyelids.

Alternate tense and relax some muscles.

Favorite blanket.

Hold a stuffed animal, pillow, or your arm.

Attention to your every breath.

Breathe deeply. Keep breathing. Pay attention to your every breath.

Clap your hands.

Now hold your self.

Make eye contact with your pet. Now hold.

Your self.

How do I feel? Describe it out loud. To lie down on the floor. Feel your body.

Jump up and down. Waving your arms.

Eat a snack.

Call a friend.

Make tea. Drink it.

Hard as you can.

Blink hard. Blink again. Do it once more as things go when you are having trouble saying present.
So you’ve decided to have sex with someone. Congratulations! You’re very brave. Now the trick is to figure out a way to have sex in a way that isn’t-destructive to you or your partner.

The first decision to make is whether to tell your partner you’re a survivor. You might not feel safe enough right away, or you might not want him to know at all. Whatever you choose to say, however much you decide to reveal, you should be able to test the waters a little bit by dropping a few hints.

For example, explain that you don’t want to do certain things in sex because they are TRIGGERING to you. Also, you need to establish certain BOUNDARIES in the sex that you have. If he’s been on such survivor lingo as this, he will probably ask more questions and from there you can decide how safe you are to talk about this stuff. If you don’t feel safe enough to talk about it then you probably shouldn’t have sex with this person.

You need to hold onto your power and establishing your boundaries with a new partner either before or very early in the sexual phase of your relationship. This is essential to this. Otherwise you can fall into some pretty nasty sexual power dynamics and feel unable to talk about them.

One particularly hard power dynamic is that of simply not feeling able to have sex. There will likely be times when you don’t want to have sex and your partner does, or maybe you want sex in your mind but your body won’t allow it. This can be really frustrating for everyone but it’s vital that you listen to these messages and accept them. If you attempt to override them, either due to pressure from your partner or from yourself, you can inflict some serious damage, SEX CAN’T BE JUST SEX FOR US. If you are an abuse survivor your relationship to sex CANNOT be the same as that of someone who isn’t a survivor.

And to the partners of survivors, as I have been one, I have this to say: If you want to have sex and your partner isn’t feeling it, no matter how sudden this may seem, let it end there. Try not to feel rejected because this isn’t about you; don’t go into your self-hatred.
A good thing to do after you’ve called down the initial flurry of being triggered, but with the experience still fresh in your mind and body, is to write out a list of still fresh in your mind and body. For example, am I disassociating right now? Am I not being triggered at all? Am I not under the belief that I am being triggered? Is there someone else around me? Do I need to get up and move around? Do I need to eat something? Do I need to meditate? Do I need to talk to my partner? Do I need to call someone? Do I need to talk to someone?

If you’re a survivor and you’re sexually active, being triggered is inevitable. It’s going to happen no matter what. This is one of the hardest things to accept. But triggers are still scary and really intense, so it’s important that each of us devise a response system to being triggered. It happens, so we can have a clearer idea of what to do when it happens. I would recommend doing both.

But triggers are still scary and really intense, so it’s important that each of us devise a response system to being triggered. It happens, so we can have a clearer idea of what to do when it happens. I would recommend doing both.

First, I slowly put my arms around her and spoke in a low voice, telling her she was in a safe place. Here is the important part: since the person is not in the present moment, you need to get them someplace safe in their mind. This might sound silly but it works. As they told us to do in training, I told her to picture a safe place and put herself there, a place where no one can get her and she feels free from any possible harm. I then asked her to describe the place to me. This gives the person something to do, a task to occupy the mind until the crisis is over. She told me about a boat. I asked a lot of questions about the boat, the area around the boat. No question is too detailed. The person needs to focus on this safe place. After a few minutes of describing her boat, she quit shaking, her heartbeat slowed down, and her eyes saw her immediate surroundings again. She was still upset, but the crisis was over. We talked until she felt okay to leave and I checked on her frequently for the next few days.

The fact is, you may never be around when someone you know relives a trauma. But if you are, remember these few things:

1) Speak in soothing tones.
2) If you touch the person, be gentle as you comfort them, there’s a fine line between feeling held and feeling held down.
3) Ask them to picture a safe place and to tell you all about it.
4) Ask a lot of questions so they really have to inhabit the safe place.
Laminate your list of questions with packing tape and keep it close to the place you have sex, under your pillow, in the drawer: where you keep your sex toys and condoms, wherever you can get to it when you need it. Make sure your partner knows where it is or has a copy himself.

So you've been triggered. The first thing to do is to notice the feeling you're having and if you can, name it. "I feel afraid," "I feel dirty and gross," "My stomach hurts really bad," "I'm going to cry." You may feel an urge to ignore what's going on inside you and just keep going. FIGHT THIS! Say that you need to stop. Now your partner asks, "What do you need?" If he doesn't ask you this, tell him anyway. You might not know exactly what you need. Look for that great list you made and try to find out this way, ask yourself all the questions on the list. If you're still not sure what you need or if you don't have a list, just try to be still and stay present with your feelings. This may be all that you need right now.

To the person supporting the triggered survivor: The focus needs to be on your partner in this situation. He needs to be the one calling the shots because he's the one having the discomfort. As survivors are people who have had their power taken away over and over again, a supportive partner needs to do just that: support him. Don't try to fix or rescue him, he needs to take that power back for himself, to make the situation better for himself. Stay present with him, hold the space in tact.

**DISASSOCIATION**

When a survivor disassociates she may not be having any intense feelings like would be found in a triggered response, she is simply gone, not in her body, not present in her experience. This response is less alarming than a trigger response but it is just as serious. There is still a way to return to present time.

It's hard to disassociate when you're looking into someone's eyes. This can be awkward and scary and hard; it can also be incredibly intimate and can do a lot to keep you present in your body. The partner of a survivor is more likely to notice his partner disassociating than the survivor will notice herself. Ask "Are you here?" or "Where are you?" And be very gentle with this. Make it safe for her to come back.
Supporting Someone Who’s Reliving Sexual Assault

I want to talk about something that is often seen as overwhelming and scary: PTSD. PTSD stands for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, an anxiety disorder that can develop in people who have been sexually assaulted.

Many people who have been sexually assaulted try to cope with their emotional trauma by avoiding or repressing their memories. However, this can lead to a buildup of emotions and anxiety, which can manifest in nightmares, flashbacks, and other symptoms.

It’s important to remember that PTSD is a normal human response to a traumatic event. If you or someone you know is struggling, it’s important to seek professional help. They can provide guidance on how to manage symptoms and cope with the aftermath.

In conclusion, PTSD is a real and often misunderstood condition. By raising awareness and providing support, we can help those affected begin the healing process.

By Anandi
I am not crazy. I am aware that capitalism and patriarchy and all systems of control depend on the denial of both the oppressor and the oppressed. I know that patriarchy values logic over emotion, and that "too much" emotion, too strong of a response, will label you crazy, and that women especially are considered crazy lot of the time. We are not crazy. What happens to us is real. All the attempts to silence us won't change this reality.

I carry with me a whole history of sexual abuse, and so do most of us. Each sexual act does not exist in a vacuum and I'm sick of people treating it as if it does. I never want to hear the fucking words, "Well, why didn't you stop me?" again. I want to hear, "oh my god, I'm so sorry" and then I want them to ask for my story. I want them to be able to take it instead of asking for pity. If I tell them to fuck off and leave me alone, then I want them to respect that. If it's someone I love, I might want them to hold me so I can cry. If it's someone I hate, I want to be able to punch them without the community saying "dude, that's so fucking up! She hit him!"

I want all of them to say, I believe you. I'm taking this seriously. I hate what I've done and I'm going to change. I'm going to commit myself (or recommit myself) to looking deep inside of myself and changing my behavior and looking at this world and what it's made me into, and it's my responsibility. I'm going to take this seriously. Thank you for having the courage to tell me. I'm going to work as hard as possible to make sure I never do that to anyone ever again."

I want them to say that and feel it and mean it and follow through.

...if you think you have never been with someone with a history of abuse or rape, it is much more likely that you simply aren't coming across as someone who people feel they can tell these things to. You might read this and think, well, that's not my friend, I know they can take care of themselves! Like as if some girl who throws bottles at cops (or whatever) would definitely be able to say no! But that is not so! ... Actually a person can be very outspoken and still be unable to stick up for themselves sexually. And in fact, survivors of violence are very often these very same tough-as-hell seeming people.

...Aside from the practical advice part of this, the how to make out with someone without unknowingly causing them to relive their histories of abuse or just be a jerk, I want to say a few things. One is that, no matter what you think about all this, whether you think you need this advice or not - consider this! If you take my advice and you treat everyone in this way, you will be so popular! People will tell each other, oh, s/he was so sweet and great and... do you see where I'm going with this? I'm trying to say you'll be better in bed, OK? And everyone will want to get it on with you!

Another is that just because you're a girl doesn't mean you can't do things to people that might be triggering or putting pressure on them... Same goes for survivors of abuse. Being a victim does not make it impossible for you to victimize, and in fact we are statistically much more likely to pass on our fucked up shit... And just because you do it only with boys doesn't mean you don't need to worry about these thing either. Yes, more girls that guys are sexually victimized in this society, but given that pretty much every girl I know has some kind of fucked up story, that's not saying much. And the fact is, it can be even harder for male victims to talk about these things, that there may be even less space where they can feel safe dealing with these issues, and even less consideration for their pain. So please, be careful with everyone, OK?

The absolute, number one most important thing is to pay attention to the person you're with! Even if you're really drunk, or really turned on, or both. If you can't tell if they're into it or not, if they're being real quiet, Stop! It is your job to stop if you suspect your partner is not having fun! The most sure sign you will ever get that something is definitely wrong is if the person who you're with seems to change suddenly, to become quiet or more withdrawn, tenses up, stops looking at you, or anything that makes you feel more alone suddenly. Do Not assume they are all right! And then, don't just hear what you wanna hear. If you stop and then you say "hey, you OK?" well sure, put yourself on the back for being so sad if you need to, but then! If the person you're with kinda looks down or up or off to the side and says real quiet like, "no it's nothing don't worry, I'll be fine," you know something? It is not OK to be like, "well, I tried, no one can say I didn't, so fuck it." I mean, do you like this person or not? Sex is supposed to be fun! For both of you! You can tell the difference between someone who's having fun and someone who isn't, I know you can. The problem is that most people second guess themselves, they think, well, I must be wrong. It must just be
Frozen Inside

I was so tired. I didn't feel like doing anything. I just wanted to stay in bed all day. But I knew I couldn't. I had a lot of work to do.

I tried to force myself to get up, but everything seemed so hard. I felt like I was nowhere.

I took a deep breath and forced myself to stand up. I limped to the kitchen and poured myself a cup of coffee.

At first, it was bitter and strong, but I sipped it slowly, allowing the warmth to spread through me. Slowly, I started to feel better.

I sat down at my desk and opened my laptop. The screen was blank, but I knew the words were there. I just had to find them.

I started typing, my fingers dancing over the keys. The words started to flow, and soon I was able to write the entire story in one sitting.

When I finished, I read it over and over again, making sure every word was perfect. I was proud of myself for finally finishing it.

I printed the story and handed it to my editor. She read it through and gave me some feedback.

I made a few changes and resubmitted it. This time, I knew it was going to be published. I could feel the excitement building inside me.

Finally, the day arrived when the book was released. I signed copies and went on a book tour. People loved it, and I was able to reach more readers than ever before.

I realized that sometimes, the things we work hardest for are the ones that feel the most rewarding. I was grateful for the journey and all the hard work that went into making my dream a reality.
and everyone is laughing at the story because it is a boy-boy story, which I don't think is funny at all.

The day before that I was reading a zine where she's calling someone out. She says "That was assault, asshole!" but at the end of the page it says "I should have fought." I'm sick of people saying, "well, if you didn't want sex (or whatever) with you if I'd known."

I am sick of the blame and self-blame. We have had practically everything taken away from us and can not always speak. And what kind of world are we building? If it's still seen as our responsibility to say something? Why isn't it their responsibility to ask for signs and signals, and ask again?

You know how there are supposedly two instinctual responses - fight or flight? Well, there's also freeze, you can see it everywhere in nature, especially in animals that are under constant attack.

LIKE DEER

IF A COUGAR IS TRYING TO GET A DEER. RIGHT BEFORE IT CATCHES IT, THE DEER WILL LAY DOWN AND FREEZE

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE

IT'S BREATH QUICKS

IT'S NERVES RID-0

LIKE DEER

it won't move an inch.

A friend of mine tells me about this. She says "frozen, the soul can go somewhere where it won't be touched. Frozen, maybe the cougar will just pass it by. Frozen, if it does get killed, maybe it doesn't hurt as much."

I laugh, nervous laugh, because do I believe in soul? Plus, it always hurt pretty bad the times I've been assaulted and/or raped while frozen (why didn't I do something? why didn't they notice? why did it happen at all?)

My friend says "one of the differences between us and the deer is that once the danger is past, the deer find their family and then they shake and shake, get the trauma out of their bodies, somewhere safe, where the protective family around. Where do we get that release and support?"

desirable to try to change the way we are with relation to sex... This is something our society just doesn't teach us how to do or encourage us to learn, and in a way we are all survivors of the fucked up things we're taught about sex. We learn that we're suppose to want it all the time, but also that it is shameful. We are bombarded with sexual imagery every day, yet we are told that we shouldn't talk about sex, especially not honestly; that sex is only okay to talk about if it's in alienating gross ways that aren't good for anyone's sexuality. And so lots of times we're so busy trying to prove something that we can't just relax and have fun, and... I think everyone can benefit from thinking about this stuff.

And while it doesn't come naturally, neither does relating to each other in these fucked up ways. We were able to learn that; we can unlearn it. It isn't something that happens all at once; it is a constant process, even for someone who thinks about this stuff all the time. But it can happen.

A couple other random things

--It's great to ask people what's up and be ready to talk to them about it, but if they're not ready or up to talking about it, please respect that too. It doesn't help to be all macho about your new role as a supportive partner and go around demanding that people open up and share with you, right now!

--Try not to take in personally if your partner says, "yes, actually I am feeling freaked out and I don't want to do this right now." Don't give the person a guilt trip. They're having a hard time already and probably a lot of guilt issues too.

--One thing doesn't mean or imply another. If someone says the are OK with kissing, it doesn't mean they are OK with being felt up, etc. It means they are OK with kissing.

--Just use protection. Your partner shouldn't have to ask, and they damn sure shouldn't have to argue about it. And if you can't get it together enough to carry any... then accept that you may not get to do certain things as a result. No arguing!

--OK, this is a tricky one, and you all can write me and tell me how fucked up I am... but listen -- if you're under 30 and you're dating someone who is more than 5 years younger than you, then consider the possibility that there may be a serious power imbalance in your relationship, which probably rules out any possibility of honest communication. You may think you're different, and you may really be, but everyone thinks their relationship is the 1% that is fucked up, and 99% of them are wrong, you know? I spent my whole teenage years dating people much older than me, and... saying that it wasn't like that, but it wasn't until I had a boyfriend of my own age for the first time when I was 19 that I realized how different it was to be in an actual relationship of equals where I felt like I could actually speak. Does my experience men everyone is like this? No, of course not, but I've talked to plenty of other punk girls who know exactly what I'm talking about and have the same history. And an unequal dynamic means that the chances of someone enduring sex that they are not comfortable with or that may be damaging to them are increased many many time over.

anandiwonder@yahoo.com
We also have been together is years

EVERY ONE OF YOU THINKS LIKE THIS. THIS IS ALREADY WHAT HAPPENS. WE HOLD ON TO EACH OTHER SO MUCH, BUT IT'S HARD TO LOOK LOCAL AND NOT LET MYSELF GET TOO WRAPPED UP IN THESE EMOTIONS AND TRY TO TELL, IT'S HARD TO TELL HER TO TURN OFF MYSELF TO JUST EXPAND WHY ONE RELATIONSHIP IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS AND HOW WE CAN MAKE IT THROUGH ALL THIS.

things will be just fine when she was only trying to survive and thrive but feel like I've lived my life for her. I thought I wish I'd been more supportive of myself, because I think I made a huge step with a lot of people. It made me feel important as a
Dear Cindy

... I read your column for Slug and Lettuce. Oh, I love the way it is angry and questioning, very direct and clear in the anger. Yeah, I was at Nove Miaso and asked some of the guys there to read it, and they complained about how small the print was so I went and photocopied it big and then they didn't have any excuses. But let's not talk about excuses. I am glad that you wrote such a moving piece, it makes me feel okay when I've been questioning lately how I let certain situations happen. But fuck that. I have been so conditioned, trained, and taught my entire life that whatever he says, goes, and that it is more important to be sexy and liked by the guys than building lasting honest relationships with people...

I've been thinking and writing about all these situations/stories from my life that have reinforced a patriarchal deep deep within my head, and it's really making me split wide open as I start to understand where it's been coming from and how I perpetuate it. It's exciting, kind of. I can see how I am moving away from it and challenging behaviors that wreck me. And maybe, also, I'm just over it. Maybe I'm finally realizing that being boy-crazy ain't where it's at. After random fucking hurts and leaves me cruised, and that no kinda boyfriend/soulmate/partner will complete me and provide my happiness, in some ways it seems like so much work to break out of these patterns, but I'm also feeling a big sense of relief and excitement at letting go...

love, sarah
First of all, if the behavior that bothers me is actually connected to my friend’s abuse history, she may want to think about that connection. Healing happens when you can look at all parts of your life, how you treat people, how you see yourself. Not talking to someone about their behavior denies them an outside perspective and a chance to work on some of their issues. I’m not doing them a favor by ignoring the possible effects of abuse.

More importantly, maybe I’m wrong. Women from all types of backgrounds exhibit the behaviors I mentioned earlier, we’re brought up that way. What if my friend’s actions don’t stem from abuse? Maybe if I talk to them I’ll see that there is no connection. I’ll see I’ve committed grave error psychologists often commit, tracing everything back to a starting place, a seed in childhood. Not talking to her keeps me from straightening out my own skewed perceptions. Maybe I’m attributing too much to a part of my friend’s life. Maybe their actions come from a million other motivations and forces that have nothing to do with abuse. A person is much more that the bad things that have happened to them. To assume that all their actions stem from past traumatic events is reductive and unfair. By not talking about abuse and its possible effects, I deny my friend the chance to tell me how she perceives her self and her world. This lack of communication reinforces the silencing effects of abuse. Support means talking more, even when it’s difficult. I suppose it seems facile to say “we all need to talk more,” but we do. Let’s bring stuff up, abuse related and otherwise. Let’s challenge each other, listen, and learn.
Dear Cindy,

I wanted to write and thank you for Doris #21 - it is kick-ass and brave and one of the only things that has really woken me up in a long time. I also wanted to give you my thoughts, reactions and story before I lost my nerve and in case any of it is useful for your zine.

I haven’t thought about any of this stuff consciously in a long while, have spent the last 5 years trying to stuff it under the surface. After 10 years of therapy, I can only say that “something bad” happened with an older male family member. In my 20s I tried to pull at those threads and unravel them, and I had terrible panic attacks and depression on and off for years. My family disinherited me and I caved. Now I am living a split life, in contact with my family and pretending nothing happened while knowing inside that it did. After that early experience, I got into many other bad situations with men because I was so numb, out and unaware that I could want anything.

What’s always hurt me is that I wanted to be political organizing around women’s issues and never could. It’s mysterious, but being with a group of women always triggers because something about rape or assault will come up, and I’ll feel for a few days like I’m drowning and I can’t breathe. I have responded to the whole sexual assault thing by being very tough and no-nonsense in my activist and job lives and being with women makes me feel things, makes me feel vulnerable and then I feel crazy because I lose control. It’s weird, I have wanted more than anything to be politically active with a group of women, but because I want it so much, I get intimidated when I get near real women I admire. If I don’t have a sense that they’re gone through something similar, I get afraid they will reject me for being damaged, and if they have been through something similar, I get afraid they’ll talk about it too much and I’ll get triggered. I don’t know, my relationships with women are fulfilling but complicated, I think partially because my mom “sold me out” on numerous occasions and chose the abuser over me.

Being assaulted has taken a lot from me, I get triggered all the time and have 1000 tricks that no one knows for keeping it together. Even at activist conferences, there are creepy men and I find myself panicking and being defensive and silent instead of speaking up and telling them to get the fuck away. I had EMDR treatment a few years ago, which really helped and has taken some of the edge off of my startle reflex.
Often when I hear my friend’s stories or I read about a woman stalked, raped or killed in the paper, I think, “Why them? Why not me?” There’s a name for that feeling; psychologists call it survivor guilt. It’s the horrible feeling the people who survive a terrible event are left with. It was first identified after the Holocaust when many people who escaped the camps expressed severe guilt for having survived the camps when their friends and family members had not. This guilt and the horrors they’d seen led many survivors of the camps to kill themselves years after their escape. People who survive accidents, disasters, and combat when friends or family have died are also prone to survivor guilt.

Given these scenarios, it makes sense to me that in our society, many women would feel this extreme guilt. We live in a state of constant surveillance from the male gaze. We have to think about our safety whenever we make choices about where we go or how we get there. We are inundated with tales of assault, abuse, and the murder of women. Of course those of us who survive to see another day would feel guilt. Constantly confronted with tales of sexual violence, one would feel not only fear but also a sense of “that could’ve been me” and maybe even “why wasn’t that me?” What I want to look at here is how these feelings manifest themselves when I deal with abuse. What does acute awareness of abuse do to me and how does it affect how I treat people who are working through abuse issues?

I. Support is a tricky business
When I first find out a friend has been abused, I sometimes grow apprehensive, I get a sort of “walking on eggshells” feeling. I want so badly to be supportive, to say or do the right things. This reaction has positive and negative aspects. It’s good to be careful with your friends, especially when they are having a hard time. But treating your friend like she is a very fragile creature can be...
I grew up in a college town.
There was a football stadium
down the street that looked like a coffin.
We were kids and we would go to parties.
There was always something about those parties
that made me uneasy.

I never thought I'd feel safe
enough to just lay there at a sleepover at a guy's
old party like this.

I didn't always feel so sad...

Remembering that guilt is important for me when I deal with friends who
have been sexually abused. Their stories weigh on me. So many abused
brothers, step brothers, and cousins, one raped by her mother, one
raped by her mother, one molested by her mother, one the resident sex toy
for family and friends--the list goes on and on. But that didn't happen to me.
I may have had my share of abusive encounters since childhood but I wasn't
abused as a child. I was never raped by a stranger or by someone I was
in a relationship with.

I grew up constantly reminded of abuse. My mother was a public health
nurse who frequently examined children for signs of abuse or neglect.

I remember being about 5 years old when my mother told me a particularly
grim story at dinner one night. My sister, 9 years older, had stayed
out later than we were supposed to and had come home
bruised, beaten, black and blue.

Do I think she should have told me those stories? Not necessarily.

But I do remember feeling quite upset for the children she spoke of.

I felt guilty. Maybe it was my Southern Baptist upbringing, but I
also felt guilty that my own childhood was so relatively peaceful and free
from violence. Why did these other kids have to deal with it?

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