



SUPPORT NEW YORK ♦ PILLARS

Support New York is a collective dedicated to healing the effects of sexual assault and abuse. Our aim is to empower survivors, to hold accountable those who have perpetrated harm, and to maintain a community dialogue about consent, mutual aid, transformative justice, and our society's narrow views of abuse. We believe that everyone has a role to play in ending sexual violence, and we look to those who have been most affected to guide us. In our work we value experience over experts, passion over professionals, and devotion over degrees. Below are the basic pillars / points of unity that guide our collective process and work:

* **Survivor Empowerment.** We always honor the experiences of survivors. Our culture uses victim-blaming, shame, and denial to silence the voices of people who have experienced sexual trauma and abuse. The manifestations of trauma depend on many factors, including a person's abuse history, triggers, and support system – things that may be invisible to anyone but the person experiencing them. Only the survivor can fully recognize the complex dynamics at play; only they know when those dynamics have changed. For these reasons, we promote survivor autonomy, trust survivors to name their abuse, and encourage people make their own decisions about how to heal.

* **Humanity For All.** We reject the simplistic characterization of the perpetrator as a sociopathic monster and the survivor as a weak victim, and instead choose to focus on the humanity of everyone involved. We know sexual assault is pervasive, and we know that abuse works in cyclical ways. We focus on shared humanity in an effort to encourage more people to feel comfortable stepping up and naming harms they have experienced, as well as to encourage those who have caused harm to become more willing to address these abuses.

* **This Is Not a Trial.** We refrain from using a traditional punitive justice model that espouses two opposite sides competing for the “objective truth.” We seek instead to find a common goal in healing and accountability. We believe that the criminal justice system is focused on punishment and not reform. This system can be disempowering to survivors, often putting their experience, their past, and their personal choices on trial. Additionally, the treatment of perpetrators is often unfairly biased against people of color and those without resources. Our focus on transformation means that we strive to move beyond a “guilty or not” and “what really happened” dynamic, and instead seek acts of accountability that redress the individualized effects of abuse and heal the perpetrator’s relationship to the community.

* **Community Cause.** We believe that sexual violence is a community issue, and thus it should not be reduced to a personal conflict between two people. We want to take



intimate violence out from behind closed doors to make it a public issue that people can talk about without shame. Calling out behavior that transgresses boundaries should be a part of our everyday vocabulary if we are building communities based on consent. In order to say what we want we also need to be able to say what we don't, and we want a world where people feel they can ask for help and accountability if they need it.

* **We Are the Change We Seek.** We aim to use the strengths of our own communities and the individuals involved to empower people to find their own solutions. We want to provide an alternative to a system that usually depends on external experts to save a situation. We don't export conflict nor do we wait for a revolution to implement change. The solution is in all of us.

* **Cutting Abuse at Its Roots.** We ground our actions within a radical framework that aims to illuminate the relationships between sexual violence, power imbalances, and oppression. These processes are intended to confront the root causes of abuse by identifying and changing the underlying power imbalances and oppressions that perpetuate sexual violence.

* **Sex Positivity.** We want to foster a culture of sexual positivity, where consenting adults feel empowered to freely choose the sex and sexuality they desire, without causing harm to others. We believe that great sexuality comes from a place of “yes” not simply an absence of “no,” and that reclaiming the right to a healthy sexual experience is a vital part of the fight against rape culture.

* **Abuse Knows No Boundaries.** We believe anyone can be assaulted – people of all genders, ages, and sexual orientations – and that anyone can be an assaulter. While we acknowledge statistics and socialized gender dynamics, we reject standard gendernormative and heteronormative models of abuse.

* **It's All Connected.** We recognize the intersection of all oppression in abusive dynamics, whether based on race, class, gender, survivor history or a multitude of other factors. We don't believe in a hierarchy of oppression nor do we prioritize one experience over another. We believe that perpetuating oppressions is a form of abuse. Thus, we don't believe it's okay to abuse others in retaliation of one's own oppressions, as this only continues the cycle of abuse.

* **Two Roads, Same Destination.** We believe that the aftermath of sexual assault begins two separate processes – a healing process for the survivor and a transformation process for the perpetrator. The healing of one person should not hinge on the transformation of another. Ultimately we want to find healing for both parties, but we recognize that this happens at a different pace and in different ways for each person.



* **Improvisation.** Our processes are dynamic and adapted to each specific situation and the individuals involved. It is a continually creative process to develop a consensual world, and there's no generic recipe for change. We use a personal style of working with people in which we emphasize flexibility in our techniques, as inspired by CARA in their “jazzy” approach¹.

* **Building Trust.** We strive to eliminate hierarchy within the group and to operate on the basis of consensus. We practice respecting all members and value open communication. Honest communication is at the heart of everything we do.

* **Sustainability.** We work as best we can to support ourselves and each other in this work; we honor our own and each other's boundaries. We aim to be accountable within our group and in our lives for our own oppressive behaviors. We try to model good boundary setting in our work with perpetrators and survivors, by being clear about what we can offer and what we expect. This work is hard because it hits so close to home. We can't just leave our concerns at the office, so we need to prioritize healthy relationships to sustain this work.

* **We Are All Perpetrators, We Are All Survivors.** We seek to respect boundaries within our personal lives, and to be accountable for our own boundary crossings. We acknowledge that no one can live perfect lives free of harm, but we assume the best intentions of each other and support each other through our personal work. We use our own experiences and struggles to ground the work that we do.

* **The Cycle Stops Here.** Our ultimate goal is to dismantle structural violence. We believe that acts of violence, such as sexual assault and abuse, are not limited to the individuals involved, but that their effects reverberate widely throughout communities to harm others. By de-escalating structural and interpersonal violence and looking for new tools for positive change, we hope to end the reciprocal cycle of violence and move forward as a community. In an effort to do so, we ask for the use of non-violent & non-coercive tactics and communication in all of our survivor support, perpetrator, and collective processes.

* **We're Out of Ink!** Lastly, we don't believe in handing out a stamp of approval. There is no end point to learning and transforming oppressive tendencies. After a perpetrator's processes end with us, it continues throughout their personal lives and within their communities. Similarly, healing and growth may continue throughout the life of someone who has survived sexual violence. We hope to help with the beginnings of these lifelong processes.

¹ Communities Against Rape and Abuse, ‘Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies’, in Incite (ed.), *The Colour of Violence*.