



## THE ROLE OF THE LIAISON

In the beginnings of an accountability process, we have found that two separate but parallel paths emerge: the survivor begins their road to healing and the perpetrator begins to work on being accountable. These paths, though parallel, often take on very different and sometimes conflicting forms. Maybe the survivor is at a place where they are looking for validation, but the perpetrator is in a place of denial. Or, maybe the perpetrator wants to communicate their great strides to the survivor, but the survivor is angry or otherwise not in a good place to hear it. We believe that **separation is the key to interrupting ongoing patterns of harm**, and some distance is needed to help each process grow organically.

That said, our processes are formed around the requests of the survivor, and over the years we have also learned that **an accountability process is most effective when there is direct and frequent communication with the person who was harmed**. Even in the best of circumstances, when there's a lack of communication along the way it can be jarring for a survivor to get a call one day telling them, "Good news, the process has been completed successfully!" When a survivor requests the help of an accountability team, it is usually at the height of a conflict; they may be expecting the worst, and they may need time to readjust and gear up for a positive resolution. In a worst-case scenario, a call suddenly saying "Well, everything went horribly wrong..." can create further harm and make a survivor feel that their trust was violated by the people on the accountability team. Keeping the survivor updated along the way is crucial in preparing for successes and failures, and in keeping the process focused on the survivor's needs.

Communication between an accountability team and a survivor can be tricky, however. Enmeshment and control are key aspects of abusive relationships and it's possible for a perpetrator to manipulate the team to re-play abusive dynamics with the survivor (e.g. bargaining demands, derailing, etc.). Similarly, a survivor may be in a place where they don't care about a process or don't have good feelings about it, regardless of how it's going. While accountability processes are intended to help with healing for all parties involved, those paths rarely follow the same trajectory. As such, separation between healing for survivors and transformation for perpetrators is important to disrupt the abusive patterns that developed in a relationship. Specifically, the liaison may need to help manage the survivor's expectations so that they aren't relying on responses from the perpetrator in the process to move forward in their lives.

For these reasons, we've found it crucial to create a third role, in addition to the survivor's support team and the perpetrator's accountability team. We call this role the 'liaison,' and this person acts as a go-between in an attempt to provide clear communication that does not re-enact old patterns of abuse. Generally, the flow of information goes one-way, from the accountability team to the survivor to update them on progress (the survivor generally does not owe the perpetrator the same level of transparency). But, often the survivor wants to pass information to the accountability team, maybe to provide readings or further areas of focus, or even, in the best of circumstances, the survivor may want to provide positive feedback to encourage the accountability team/perpetuator to let them know they seem to be on the right track.

The liaison is usually the first contact for the survivor. After a first meeting along with the accountability team and the liaison to lay out the process, the liaison is generally their only contact. A couple examples of things the liaison can ask the survivor are:

- How often they want updates about the process (e.g. after every meeting, monthly, or not at all until they're ready to hear it).
- What kind of updates they want (e.g. only when progress has been made – recommended since there are always ups and downs to a process and it may be triggering for a survivor to hear any time something goes wrong). For process confidentiality, we generally discuss our general impressions, but not any details of what was discussed.
- What are their demands, asks, wants, needs, etc. This is often written by the survivor with the help of their support team.
- If the survivor wants to provide a written or recorded personal narrative of their experience (to be shared about halfway through the process when discussing survivor empathy).
- If the survivor wants to receive a letter of apology from the perpetrator at the end of the process, as well as how and when this will be delivered.

It's important to ask the survivor these questions more than once, as the answers may change over time. Often survivors ask for a monthly email, with the general progress if it's going well. These emails can also serve to prepare the survivor for the end of the process, a sort of count-down, so they feel like they have time to add any materials, goals, re-do their demands, etc. The liaison also communicates with the communities involved to help support the perpetrator in their work, to help support and create safer spaces for the survivor, and to "hand back" this work to the perpetrator's community when the process is over.

We cannot emphasize enough that no matter how the process goes, good communication with the survivor along the way is the best way to help them feel supported in this work and empowered to engage with the process.