

THIS ZINE explores what an accountability process can look like, provides some goals and ideas for those of us that are working towards community accountability, and questions what tools we have at our disposal. It includes some background readings on accountability, in order for the reader to gain further insight into different aspects of community accountability.

THIS ZINE is for people who want to respond to and minimize harm in their communities, and who are looking for something beyond the prison industrial system as a solution.

AN ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS PRIMER

How to prepare for and facilitate a process



READINGS:

Below are some excellent readings for folks who are interested in participating in an accountability process, or who have found themselves in the midst of one. It's good to read as much as you can ahead of time, in order to be prepared and ready to address harm when it does (inevitably) happen. It's like having an emergency plan -- it doesn't help to talk through what you gotta do in the moment, when a fire's already started in the house.

Think. Re-Think (*by the Northwest Network*)
Overviews the organization's experience with accountability, and talks through their focus on transformative justice and long-term work building *communities of accountability*.

Beautiful. Difficult. Powerful. (*by the Chrysalis Collective*)

BY FAR the most helpful thing that I've read in terms of how to strategically hold an accountability process. It really is strategic, telling a story of how a group of folks worked to form an accountability network that is strong enough to do the work of supporting the survivor and pushing the perp to be accountable for the long term. I recommend this, if folks only read one thing.

A Stand Up Start Up (*by Philly Stands Up!*) -
This covers a lot of ground, with the focus on helping folks start up a similar project to Philly Stands Up in their city. It talks about transformative justice, accountability, and being strategic.

Portrait of Praxis (*by Philly Stands Up!*)
Breaks down holding someone who perpetrated accountable, how to set goals for a process, and how to actually get folks to follow through on them. It's a really good reading if folks are down to hold a process for the long term.

Northwest Network Assessment Tool (*by the Northwest Network*)

This serves as a really good list of questions who are trying to dig into harm that happened, and to guide their strategy for moving forward.

Accounting for Ourselves (*by Crimethinc.*)

This piece is alright, but not my favorite. It provides more of a critical lens of accountability processes, and serves more as a review for more long-term strategies for addressing violence and assault in d.i.y./anarchist communities.

UNPACKING ACCOUNTABILITY

So, what do we mean when we talk about “accountability”?

Answerable; able to explain and account for one's actions, and to hold one's self responsible for the impact of those actions; accountability as a skill that can be worked on

Accountability isn't something that you can earn, or a badge you get to wear after you go through an accountability process. We don't think that you can just “hold someone accountable”, because it's a skill that individuals have to get better at. But, you can push them to work through their shit, stop causing harm, change the conditions that allowed that harm to happen, and to build a culture where accountability is expected from everyone.

ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS ACCOUNTABLE COMMUNITIES

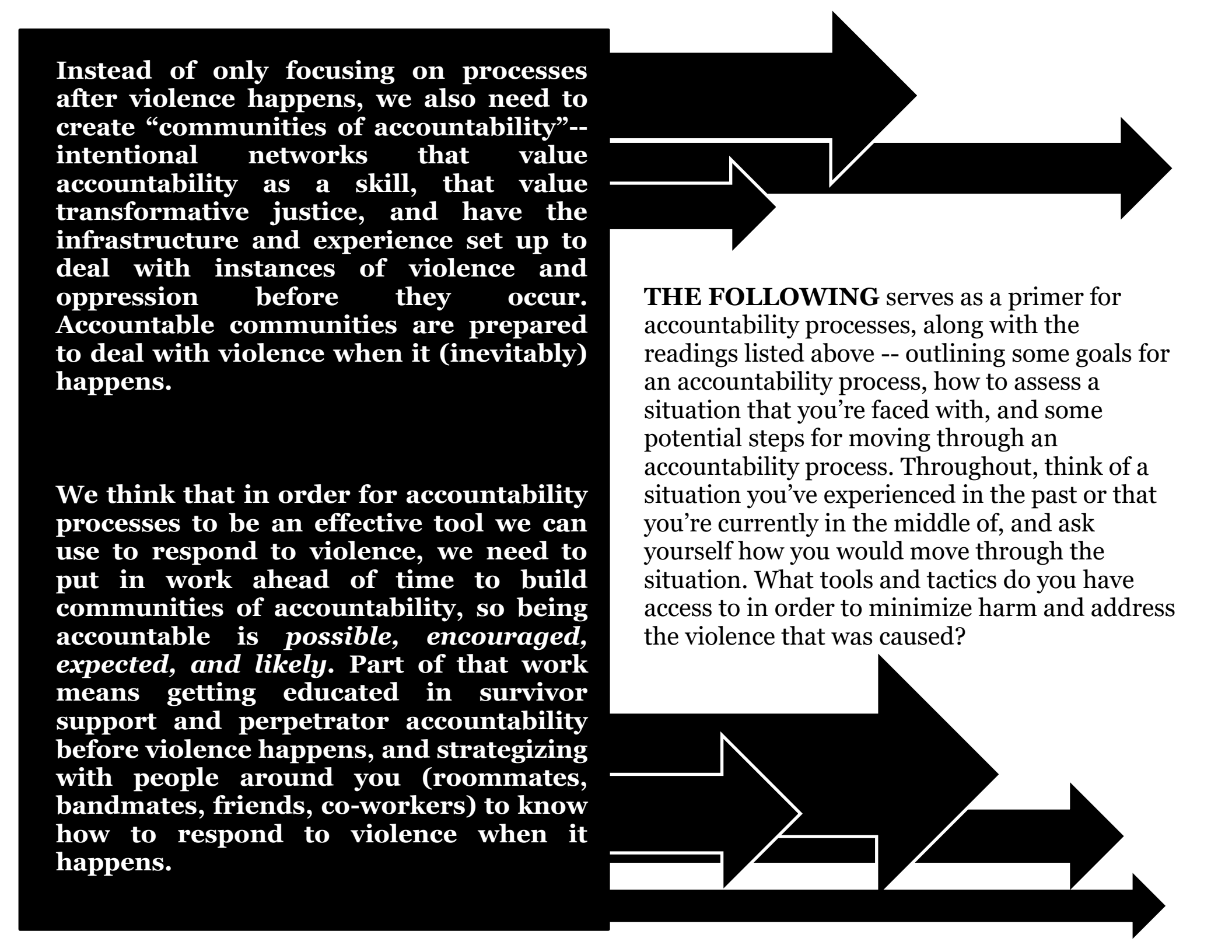
If our goal is to minimize harm that happens in our communities, and to make an intentional, anti-oppressive space, *how can we actually get there?*

How can we make responsibility to those around you an *expected part of our scenes?* How can we make sure that we are *all* accountable to one another?

When we talk about Accountability, folks in the scene think of an *accountability process*--where a crew of folks come together to support the survivor and hold the perp accountable for harm or violence that they've caused. In practice, an accountability process is normally way messier than we plan for. Processes come about as responses to violence after they occur, and a lot of the time we don't know how to actually go about “holding someone accountable” who doesn't want to be a part of the conversation.

Instead of only focusing on processes after violence happens, we also need to create “communities of accountability”-- intentional networks that value accountability as a skill, that value transformative justice, and have the infrastructure and experience set up to deal with instances of violence and oppression before they occur. Accountable communities are prepared to deal with violence when it (inevitably) happens.

We think that in order for accountability processes to be an effective tool we can use to respond to violence, we need to put in work ahead of time to build communities of accountability, so being accountable is *possible, encouraged, expected, and likely*. Part of that work means getting educated in survivor support and perpetrator accountability before violence happens, and strategizing with people around you (roommates, bandmates, friends, co-workers) to know how to respond to violence when it happens.



THE FOLLOWING serves as a primer for accountability processes, along with the readings listed above -- outlining some goals for an accountability process, how to assess a situation that you're faced with, and some potential steps for moving through an accountability process. Throughout, think of a situation you've experienced in the past or that you're currently in the middle of, and ask yourself how you would move through the situation. What tools and tactics do you have access to in order to minimize harm and address the violence that was caused?

GOALS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

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1. SURVIVOR SUPPORT:

Whoever has survived harm or violence feels supported by their community, and is empowered to exist as their whole self within the community. Work is done both as a response to the harm they survived (giving them space from the person that harmed them, therapy, etc), but also to help them change the conditions that marginalize or oppress them in general (unpacking internalized racism/misogyny/transphobia, self-defense classes, stronger relationships).

2. TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE:

Whoever has perpetrated harm or violence recognizes what they have done, unpacks their violent learned behavior, and works to re-learn more empowering behavior that isn't violent. In practice, this can take a little to a lot to a WHOLE LOT of time to actually accomplish. This work is based on what the survivor needs/demands, but also what the person who perpetrated harm needs as separate from what the survivor needs--in other words, they have work to do, even if the survivor doesn't convey what they need to the person that harmed them.

3. COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY:

The community as a whole responds to harm when it occurs, based on the harm done and the capacity of individuals in the community. The community needs to heal and feel like things are being worked on, as it relates to the community as a whole. The community has to transform sites of harm that exist within the community, and get to the root of the harm that was caused as it relates to the community as a whole. The community must work towards the empowerment of everyone within it, and it must unpack the systemic forms of violence it enacts or allows to go unchecked (i.e. racism, classism, ableism, collective shunning, etc)

IN PRACTICE, we might not really know when these goals are reached. We recognize that these are goals to be *constantly strived for*, instead of something that we might ever fully reach. As long as systems of oppression and violence still exist in the world, we'll still have to fight and struggle to reach these goals.

NOT EVERYONE can or should participate in accomplishing all of these goals -- the survivor of harm might not trust the person that caused harm to them; the person who caused violence might not listen to certain individuals in the community; queer/trans people or people of color might not want to talk to straight/cis or white folks about violence or oppression related to their identities. But, the *community as a whole* needs to make sure each of these goals is being addressed.

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ASSESSING THE SITUATION SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

BEFORE STARTING AN ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS, it's important to assess the situation, and figure out how you relate to it. It's not enough to get involved or to just jump into the situation--if we want to make sustainable and radical change, we have to be strategic. If we want to resolve conflict or dismantle systems of power, we have to be real about our capacity to escalate or our potential to make things worse. Some questions to ask yourself, and those around you:

What experience do you have with addressing violence, abuse, and assault?

What systemic forms of violence do you feel capable or confident in talking about? (i.e. racism, the prison system, settler colonialism, ableism, etc)

What is your capacity for involvement? Do you feel capable or confident in doing long-term support work?

Do you feel capable or confident when talking about hard and potentially harmful things with people around you?

Do you feel capable or confident when talking to people that perpetrated harm or violence?

What do you need to learn or to work on in order to feel more confident when addressing violence? What do you need to do to get better at addressing harm?

What systemic forms of violence and oppression are brought into the community? How is it replicated by people within the community? How does power flow through the community, and who does it pool around?

Who in your community has influence? Who in your community is down with the politics of anti-oppression and transformative justice? Who is good at listening? Who is good at problem-solving? Who has access to resources that are needed to do this work?

After assessing the situation, it's a good idea to strategize with people around you about how you can address violence most effectively. Take what you thought through above, and use it to inform how you and others move through an accountability process.

WHAT A PROCESS CAN LOOK LIKE

THE FOLLOWING are some guidelines for what shape an accountability process can look like. The community should take care to make sure that all goals of an accountability process are met. You as an individual might not be directly involved in every part of the process. It's up to you to determine what work you are able to do, what you would be effective at, and what work you are confident doing. It's up to you to encourage others in the community to do the necessary work, especially the work that you aren't able to do alone.

Introduction. Someone asks for help, or you offer support to someone that you think might need it. Sometimes this involves the survivor reaching out to you for support or to hold someone else accountable, or for the person who committed violence to ask for support while working through the violence that they caused. It's good to ask questions about what harm was done, how the person wants to move forward, and what you can do to support them.

Observe. After hearing them out, it might be helpful to figure out what else is going on in the community, and what else has happened after the violence was enacted. The first step is to observe. Observe what has happened and what folks need, both as individuals directly involved as well as the community around them. It helps to map out the social support networks of the people directly involved -- mapping out who has influence in others' lives, what relationships they have, who does work with who, what relationships of support already exist, etc.

Support. Figure out what support is needed, and what you and the community can do. It is good to talk to others around you about this, and to figure out who would be good at doing this work with you. Make sure to *be strategic about the work you do*. Make a plan ahead of time using what observations you made above, set realistic short-term goals and ideal long-term goals for yourself and others, and figure out how to assess how things are going while working towards those goals. Below are different aspects of support that should be addressed, based on your capacity and ability:

SUPPORTING THE SURVIVOR

This work is best done by those immediately around the survivor -- people who are close friends, partners, co-workers, roommates, bandmates, etc.. These are people that the survivor trust, and who are committed to work towards the safety and empowerment of the survivor.

Minimize any immediate harm the survivor may be in. Help them find a place to crash, store their stuff, or to look after children or non-human animals.

Minimize any long-term harm that the survivor might experience. Make sure the perpetrator and survivor don't come in contact, if it's necessary. Help the survivor process everything. Help them navigate their job, therapy or the medical system if they think it's helpful, or finding a new place to live.

What are the survivor's needs? What needs do they have that are dependent on the perpetrator (e.g. not coming in contact with the person that enacted violence on them, talking through and processing with the person that perpetrated violence, a desire for vengeance, material or social reparations for harm done)?

What needs do they have that are separate from the perpetrator (e.g. feeling supported or having a place in the community, knowing there are spaces that they can go if they need anything, help with childcare or buying groceries, etc) ? What needs to happen for them to feel empowered and positive in the communities that they're a part of (e.g. group self-defense classes, starting a band, discussions with other survivors of violence, etc)?

Who is holding the perpetrator accountable for the violence they caused? Who is doing work to support them in a critical way? What is the relationship between the perpetrator accountability team and the survivor support team? How can those groups communicate the needs of the survivor? How can those groups communicate the work being done by the perpetrator to the survivor, and to the rest of the community?



SUPPORTING THE PERPETRATOR

This work is best done by people in the perpetrator's social network -- friends, partners, co-workers, bandmates, etc. These are people that the perpetrator trusts, listens to, and respects. These are people that are critical of the perpetrator's violent behavior, are able to work with transformative justice models of accountability, are willing to work towards intentional communities rooted in anti-oppression, and who can commit to the long and challenging work of holding their friend accountable.

Help the perpetrator minimize any immediate harm they may cause. Help them find a place to crash, someone to look after non-human animals or kids, and keep an eye on them.

Support them in getting to a place where they can process the harm that they've done. It can be difficult or impossible to process the harm done when the situation continues to escalate -- encourage them to take a step back from playing music or going to events so they have space to process, to stop communicating with the person they harmed, or from dating anyone new while they're still

working on the harm they caused. It can also be difficult or impossible to process and work on things when you don't have basic needs met -- help drive them to job interviews, help them find a good therapist if they think it's helpful, be a sober buddy, and keep being their friend if you already are. Do the "human work" that needs to be done as a member of an accountable community.

Make sure that they don't isolate or ignore the violence that they caused, and make sure you are a positive and critical person in their life. Make sure that they have positive and intentional people surrounding them, instead of excluding them or pushing them out of the community. It's easier for them to ignore the issue or violence they caused when they skip town or have friends that back up their oppressive behavior. Work towards them seeing you as an ally, rather than an adversary.

Help them observe what happened, and dig into the violent or harmful behavior that they've done. This can involve talking, reading about abuse and transformative justice, or meeting with other folks that have gone through this work before. *Do this work with them,* and encourage everyone in your

community to do it, too. Harm and violence are pervasive in our communities, and normalizing it makes it easier to address it as a community.

Help them to unlearn violent behavior, and help them make sure they don't harm people in the same way again.

Recognize that it's hard to unlearn, but it's necessary. This can take a lot of time, energy, and work, depending on the person and the harm done. Unpack why they turned to violence to meet a need they had, or why they escalated a situation to the point where they felt the need to enact violence.

Help them to learn nonviolent behavior as an alternative. Support them and help them process what this looks like, and hold them to it.

Help them act on it, and help them teach others to do the same. Support them in rebuilding trust within the community, and transform themselves to be a positive influence for others. Encourage them and support them in enacting nonviolent behavior.

Who is supporting the survivor? What is the relationship between the survivor support team and the accountability team? How can those groups communicate the needs of the survivor? How can the accountability team follow through on meeting the needs of the survivor? How can those groups communicate the work being done by the perpetrator to the survivor, and the community as a whole?



SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

A lot of the work that goes into supporting the community is asking those affected what they need to see happen, and asking a lot of questions to those around you. It's good to have a committed group of folks working to ask these questions, and work towards solutions. This group could be the survivor support group, the accountability team, a mix of both, or another group of people entirely. This work is best done by people that exist within the community who want to address the systems of harm that exist in the community, and who have the capacity to commit to that work for the long-term. Everyone within the community is able to do different aspects of this work.

What harm was done apart from the harm done to the survivor? How does it impact people in the communities that the survivor and perpetrator are a part of?

What trust was broken? Can it be rebuilt? What steps need to be taken to rebuild it? It's not always possible or realistic for everyone to trust someone who has perpetrated harm. Some trust can be rebuilt, though, so it's a good goal to work towards.

What needs does the survivor have that the community can hold or work towards? What needs does the survivor have that might be at odds with what the community needs, or what the community is able to work towards?

What needs to be done to hold the perpetrator accountable? What needs does the person who perpetrated harm have, to those ends? What needs do they have that might be at odds with what the community needs, or what the community is able to work towards?

What violence exists in the community, apart from the violence enacted by the perpetrator in this situation? What other violence has been perpetrated in the past? What systems of violence is the community subjected to (e.g. policing, shitty landlords, capitalism, systems of racism and discrimination, etc)? What needs to be done to minimize those harms? Are there other survivor support teams and accountability teams doing work in the community already? What relationship do those groups have to you?

What resources does the community have to address that violence? What resources does the community need in order to address that violence? What resources can the community create itself, and what resources does it need to find elsewhere?

Who is supporting the survivor? Who is supporting the perpetrator, or who are a part of the accountability team? What is the relationship between those groups and the community as a whole? How can the community communicate its needs to both the survivor and the perpetrator? How can the community meet the needs of the survivor, and work towards them feeling positive and empowered within the community? How can the community meet the needs of the perpetrator, and work on holding them accountable to transforming their violent behavior?



SO WHAT?

IN ORDER TO ADDRESS HARM, we need to be prepared. We can't expect to be good at supporting someone who's experiencing serious violence when we can't support each other on an everyday basis. We can't expect to hold someone accountable for enacting serious violence when we can't even hold someone accountable for not doing the dishes.

In order for individuals in our communities to be held accountable, we need to be responsible to one another. We need to be experienced in holding folks responsible to one another. We need to have the language that we can all use to talk about this. We need to acknowledge that violence happens, and we need to collectively struggle to dismantle it.

WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING, even if it's not perfect or we aren't good at it at first. We're probably going to cause harm, we're going to make mistakes, and we're going to learn from those mistakes.

*We need to figure this out in order to survive.
We need to figure this out in order to thrive.*