

EVERYBODY IS A

SL

A COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

((F12))

THE F12 NETWORK provides educational resources & workshops to the Chicago arts/music scene to prevent sexual violence.

SUPPORT LIAISONS (SLs) are present at events to prevent harm, provide emotional care, respond to crisis, mediate conflict, and empower others to do the same. We enhance and encourage safer space by our presence and availability.

This zine exists to inform and prepare you for conflict de-escalation work, as an SL, or to be an active source of support within your community.

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WHAT A SUPPORT LIAISON DOES:

- You want to go out, but you're worried that your abusive ex will be at the show. The SL can back you up while you ask them to leave.
- Someone is touching people in the crowd without consent. The support liaison can tell them to stop, and/or leave.
- Someone is having a panic attack, is sad and overwhelmed, or is having a bad drug/alcohol experience. They want to talk or sit quietly with someone who is calm and empathetic.
- The person who assaulted you has refused to participate in an accountability process. The support liaison can work with the event space to make sure that person is not allowed into

the show.

- You drank more than you meant to and would like someone to help make sure you get home safely.
- The SL helps de-escalate violent confrontations when they happen.

WHAT AN SL DOESN'T DO:

- The SL isn't a bouncer. They don't physically remove people from events, enforce rules, or get involved in physical fights.
- The support liaison isn't a cop. SLs are there to support people, not protect property. F12 uses a transformative justice model, and is critical of the criminal (in)justice system. The SL doesn't call the cops.
- The SL isn't there to rescue you from an uncomfortable situation. They can talk to you about what is making you uncomfortable, and can help you

work towards feeling assertive and empowered.

- The SL doesn't choose sides in conflicts. They minimize harm by mediating and de-escalating conflict, and work against violence that's in the space.
- The SL doesn't drink or use drugs while they are at a show. They're committed to being mindful, empathetic, nonviolent, and alert.

TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Transformative justice is a process of healing from harm. A carceral system punishes and removes an offender from the community. Transformative justice seeks to heal the person who was harmed, the person who committed the harm, and the community at-large.

Acts of abuse and violence don't exist on their own, and someone isn't "suddenly an abuser". Individuals are often part of a

cycle of violence, and our goal is to help them get to the root cause of that cycle, and to help them break it.

F12 and other groups like it work to create a viable alternative to state policing. Read more on transformative justice online, and at your nearest infoshop or radical bookstore.

POLICE AND THE STATE

If our goal is to minimize harm, we believe that calling the cops isn't a solution. At best, cops remove the person who caused harm, and cause *them* harm at the hands of the state. At worst, cops escalate the situation, and cause more harm than existed in the first place. The work we do as support liaisons is antithetical to calling the cops.

The carceral system is inherently unjust and oppressive; it perpetuates state-sponsored harm. Rather than replicate that within our own community, we are working from an anti-authoritarian, consensual, non-punitive model to enact transformation and wellness in our communities.

We are working to minimize interpersonal violence that exists in our communities, and choose to find a different solution than state-sponsored violence.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Nonviolent communication works to minimize harm that we experience, and works against interpersonal violence that is caused by ineffective communication.

Nonviolent communication is based on the idea that all humans have the capacity for compassion,

and only resort to violence when they don't recognize more effective strategies for meeting needs. Needs are never in conflict - but strategies for meeting those needs sometimes clash.

The work we do relies on nonviolent communication, and we try and practice it in every relationship we have. It is especially important when there is conflict, and it can be used to minimize further conflict and harm.

DE-ESCALATION TACTICS

While doing work as a support liaison, you might encounter conflicts that are escalating - whether they are happening to you or folks around you.

In order to mediate conflict, it is important that everyone is

ready and able to be a part of that process. De-escalating a conflict is necessary, both to maintain emotional and physical safety, and to mediate whatever conflict that caused the situation.

Steps to de-escalate conflict:

1. **ASSESS** the situation. What's going on? Is it safe for you to get involved? Should the people involved be separated? Would it be better to talk outside?

2. **LISTEN**. Hear where the person or people are at, and hear what feelings and emotions they have. Try to figure out what needs they have, and which aren't being met. No judgment (value statements, or what is "good" or "bad") -- it's not helpful.

3. **CLARIFY** their feelings and where they're coming from. Make sure you hear and understand them, and help them feel heard. Act as an ally, and work on having them not think of you as an adversary. Don't *tell* them how they are feeling. Acknowledge their feelings, even if you don't agree with their reasons or behavior.

4. Attempt at a **SOLUTION**. Work with everyone involved to find something that everyone consents to, and that works for everyone. Figure out how to meet as many needs as possible, and set that as everyone's

goal. Center victims' or survivors' needs first.

5. **ACT** on that solution. Help in any way you can. Find some help. Help everyone follow through on the plan you made together.

- Throughout the process, your goal is to have folks feel positive about you -- enough to listen to you and to have them act based on everyone's need. Your goal is for them to think of you as an ally, not an adversary.
- It helps to listen actively, and to have a non-confrontational body language. Being silent is okay! Using silence and being supportive can be more important than what you say.
- Show confidence, not fear. Respect others' personal space. Do not criticize, act impatient, belittle, or make people feel foolish.

HARM REDUCTION

We recognize that harm will happen, especially in a culture that promotes and enforces interpersonal and systemic harm.

But, we choose to work against that harm, and build communities of resistance and support as a response.

When someone chooses to do something that could open them up to harm, try to minimize sources of harm. Instead of telling them not to do it, work through it with them to prevent harm from happening. Instead of telling someone that they should drink, work with them to avoid harm that might happen if they drink - help them get home safe, help them get water to stay hydrated, etc.

We work against systems of harm, and believe that interpersonal violence and systemic violence are linked. We have to fight against both to solve either problem.

ANTI-OPPRESSION

Because we live within systems that harm us and target us based on our identities, we need to be aware of forms of oppression while doing the work that we do. Dominant culture is racist, homophobic, misogynist, ableist, and classist. All of this makes it harder for some of us to survive, and a lot of the times we don't.

While being an SL, we need to work against these systemic forms of violence while interacting with others. This is a long process, and we can't cover it fully in this tiny handbook. Read up as much as you can on things like anti-racism, black liberation, transfeminism, class struggle, and all the other forms of resistance to dominant violence that we exist under. Check for resources online, and at an infoshop or radical bookstore near you.

GROUNDING YOURSELF

It's good to check in with yourself regularly, and to focus on what you are feeling. Take care of yourself!

- Stop what you're doing.
- Take a breath.
- Observe your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. What are you feeling? Hearing? Seeing? Smelling?
- Proceed more mindfully focused.

HOW YOU CAN PREPARE YOURSELF

- Make sure ahead of time that you have the whole evening to spare.
- Figure out your boundaries. What are you not willing to do? What are you good at, or able to do?
- Practice talking to folks nonviolently, on your own, with

a friend, or someone you don't like.

- Reflect on your motivations beforehand. Why are you committed to this role?
- Come up with a few "go to" phrases to have when you are stunned or not sure how to respond to someone.
- Remember that being an SL is a learning process. It takes time and practice.
- Talk to other folks doing the work! Look for support.
- Get contact information for the event hosts, if you can.

GUIDELINES FOR SLs

When entering a space:

- Introduce yourself to the host of the event. Inform them how and why you may need backup.
- If unsupported by other SLs, find a friend or person you trust at the event. Let them know how and why you may need backup.
- Find a quiet space removed from

people that you can use for private conversations (a chill zone)

ANNOUNCING YOURSELF AS AN SL

Feel free to introduce yourself as an SL at an event. That way, folks know that you are prepared to have their back and de-escalate instances of violence if they occur, so they know who you are, and to spread the message of anti-assault and anti-oppression.

For example:

"Hi, my name is _____, and I'm here as a support liaison with the organizers. If you feel unsafe in any way, or needs backup or support, come find me. I'll be sober, I don't call the cops, and I'm ready to talk to you. Thanks!"

