



Victim/Survivor Empathy Exerciseⁱ

Materials: Pens and Paper – one sheet per participant

Instructions:

Ask each participant to tear a piece of paper into 4 strips. Then number the strips one through four. Tell participants that they will not have to share the information that they will be writing on the paper with the group. On each strip ask them to write the following:

- 1. the person you trust the most**
- 2. a place where you feel the safest**
- 3. your favourite group activity, sport, club or similar**
- 4. a secret – something you have told nobody or only one or two others.**

[If they genuinely feel they have no secret, ask them to imagine one and write it down].

1. a) Ask the participants to look at the first piece of paper. Ask them to share with you what they like about this person, what they enjoy, why they feel close to them. Write what they indicate on the board (you may wish to use the left hand side of the board for these positive expressions).

b) Now ask them to tear up the piece of paper with the person's name written on it and throw the pieces away. Say: You can no longer talk or be with that person – she/he either blames you for your assault or you were assaulted by him/her. How do they feel now? Write their reactions on the board (you may wish to use the right hand side of the board for the negative feelings).
2. a) Ask the participants to look at the second piece of paper. Ask them to share with you what they like about this place and why they feel safe there. Write what they indicate on the board.

b) Now ask them to tear up the piece of paper with the place written on it and throw the pieces away. You no longer feel comfortable going to that place, you were assaulted there. (Cite statistics: 55% of rapes happen in victim/survivors' homes – rising to 75% of those raped by a current or previous partnerⁱⁱ). How do they feel now? Write their reactions on the board.
3. a) Ask the participants to look at the third piece of paper. Ask them to share with you what they like about this activity (or club, sport or similar); what they enjoy about it, etc. Write what they indicate on the board.

b) Now ask them to tear up the piece of paper with the activity or club written on it and throw the pieces away. You can no longer take part in this activity; you might see your perpetrator there. How do they feel now? Write their reactions on the board.
5. a) Now ask the participants to look at the piece of paper with their secret. Why is it a secret? Why don't you want many people to know? Write their reactions on the board.

b) Now take the piece of paper with the secret written on it. You can't tear it up. You can't throw it away. You must keep it forever. Think about what people might say to you if they knew. Think about what they might do if they knew. Now think about telling a stranger, maybe a tutor, your family, your friends, a union representative. How do you feel now? What might you worry about if you were going to tell someone? Are there possible reactions you would be dreading? (*looking for blame; disbelief; dismissal*). Write their reactions on the board. Why might you worry that people



could respond like this? (*looking for – people use denial or blame as a way of coping or not facing up to painful factsⁱⁱⁱ*)

6. Think about how a survivor might react after being assaulted. What if the person who assaulted her/him was their friend, partner, relative? What if it happened where they felt safe? What if they can no longer take part in social activities they used to enjoy?

7. Point to the list of negative emotions; ask participants - if they felt that way what might some of the consequences be for them socially, physically, academically, psychologically? What about taking the decision to share a secret – can we see how important it is to respond sensitively if someone tells us a secret? If a victim is a person of colour or a non-native speaker or gay/lesbian for example, how might these facts change the way they approach a police officer, rape crisis worker, or other service providers? What if the victim/survivor was assaulted by a member of the same sex – what issues might come up for them in reporting or disclosing to anyone?

8. Debrief: this has been an exercise in putting ourselves in other people's shoes, reflecting on the significant changes that might happen in a person's life as they cope with the aftermath of being assaulted or abused. It has also been an exercise in thinking about how important it is to respond in a serious and supportive way if someone in our life discloses a traumatic experience to us.

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This exercise was adapted by the Intervention Initiative Team from Plante 2002 (reproduced in Banyard, V. L., Plante, E.G., & Moynihan, M. M. (2005) *Rape Prevention Through Bystander Education: Bringing a Broader Community Perspective to Sexual Violence Prevention*. University of New Hampshire). Downloaded 12/6/2014 from <http://cola.unh.edu/sites/cola.unh.edu/files/departments/Prevention%20Innovations/bystander/Rapepreventionthroughbystandereducation.pdf>

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Myhill, A. & Allen, J. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem. Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study 237. London: Home Office. (p.37)

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Nina Burrowes' excellent guide for rape prosecutors describes some of the ways in which jury members, for example, may react to victims in court (pp.13-15). Burrowes, N. (2013). *Responding to the challenge of rape myths in court*. London: NB Research. [Online – last downloaded 8/10/2014] <http://www.nb-research.co.uk/index.php/projects-2/>