



WELCOMING TRAUMATIC NARRATIVES

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Through our workshops, we hope that participants will have a good time, gain self-confidence and learn about emotional and sexual life. It is not a question of putting them in a state of great vulnerability because the facilitator is not a health professional and it is not in his or her mission to ensure a therapeutic role. Sometimes participants find adequate support during the workshop, however, some events require long-term support. In order to prevent people from feeling alone or helpless after the workshop, here are some recommendations:

- At the beginning of the workshop, introduce yourself and make it clear that you are not a therapist or sex therapist. Encourage people to take care of themselves and to be careful about what they share. Explain that the group and the facilitator will not be able to provide support after the workshop.
- Prepare a list of important numbers (shrink, therapist, etc.) and make it available to the group.
- Make a safety charter in which you define common rules to keep the exchanges friendly. Complete it by creating protection symbols.
- In the activities you offer, do not encourage people to relive traumatic memories. Focus your activities on the positive aspects of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. For example, if an activity is about consent, do not push people to share moments of aggression, but rather encourage them to talk about times when they felt

2 _ You will find a list in the following pages.

3 _ You will find out how to perform these two activities in the following pages.

respected.

- Offer activities that encourage people to identify their internal resources (such as their own qualities in these intimate contexts) and external resources (friends, structures that can help them). For example, you can suggest that they talk about people who inspire them, who support them, etc.

Despite all these precautions, it may happen that a person confides in us about a painful or even traumatic event related to gender-based violence or sexual orientation. Here are some tips on how to best receive these stories:

- Do not avoid what has just been said, for example by leaving a silence or changing the subject.
- Sometimes it is best to see the person in a safe environment, perhaps away from the group, where you can have a more intimate conversation. This protects the person as well as the other participants, as hearing a traumatic story may bring back memories that they may not want to relive. If you feel that the person needs the group dynamic to confide in you, invite those who wish to do so to leave the room.
- Be an active listener and do not interrupt the person. They may be afraid or ashamed, and if you interrupt, they may not be able to resume their story. On the other hand, they may have difficulty expressing themselves and may seem "stuck" in their stories. You can reassure her that you are there to listen and that she can take her time. Ultimately, the best thing is to let her do it at her own pace and in her own words.
- It is possible that some points may seem inconsistent and raise questions. This is normal, especially since memories of trauma can be hazy and difficult to gather. It is important not to give the impression that you are questioning the sincerity of the person confiding in you. Rephrase by asking if you have understood correctly and ask a few questions without being intrusive.
- This sharing may bring out very strong emotions in you. But this is not "your time". This is not the time to cry, to get angry, etc. Because if you do, it is suddenly the other person's turn to "take care of you", to manage your emotions, to help you calm down,

to reassure you, etc. When it should be the other way around! Obviously, it is not a question of acting like a robot and denying what you feel. You can, for example, ask for a short break to digest all this, go outside for some fresh air, clear your head and integrate what you have just heard. The person probably needs more support than you do right now.

- Acknowledge the pain of the person in front of you without dramatising the situation. For example, you can say "What happened to you is serious", "It's normal to be in pain" or "You have the right to be angry".
- Do not give your analysis of the situation or your opinion of the other people involved. Avoid being binary and moralising the story in terms of "good" and "bad".
- Similarly, you may feel powerless and try to help the victim afterwards. For example, by advising them what to do if it happens again... But even if your intentions are good, for example with : "Let's learn krav-maga together, next time you can beat them up!", it may sound like "Oh, if you had done krav-maga, this wouldn't have happened to you". Accept the fact that you are not there to go back in time and undo this event.
- Let the victim experience it in their own way. Each person experiences trauma differently, some may feel destroyed and others may not. There is no "right way" to live one's life after having suffered violence, because humans are multiple and complex beings. It is important not to judge, not to "wait" for this or that way to react.
- It would be inappropriate to ask the person about their family history or their relationship with their parents, or to implicitly or explicitly suggest that what has happened is related to an unresolved past. These questions are guilt-inducing and do not fall within the role of the counsellor.
- In the case where the victim expresses symptoms related to the trauma he/she has experienced, it is inappropriate to give him/her advice such as: mediation, homoeopathy, seeing a magnetizer, eating healthy, etc. Each person is free to choose his or her own beliefs, but only a health professional recognized by the state is able to diagnose a person and to advise him or her on a course of treatment adapted to his or her situation.
- In the case of sexual assault, if the person expresses doubts, seems afraid of not being believed and/or reassured, or lets you

know that his or her word has already been questioned: tell the person that you believe him or her.

- You can remind the person that there is no shame in having been a victim, that they were a victim of abuse at one point in time, but that this victim status does not define their identity. The victim is never responsible for the abuse. The aggressor is the only one responsible. The most important thing is to listen, to respect the person who is confiding in you and not to hesitate to ask them what they think they need. She may not know why she opened up to you, but that doesn't matter: she will know that you listened, that you didn't judge and that you welcomed her word.
- Thank the person for sharing. They have shown vulnerability by sharing their story with the group or with you, which is a sign of trust and courage.
- At the end, remind the group that everything that is shared is confidential. This is especially important in groups where participants already know each other.