



LEARNING

TO
LISTEN

Learning To Listen, a guide to help understand, identity and support survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, specifically focused on Circus and Dance. Meera Shakti Osborne made this guide as a response to the workshop *Learning to Listen Supporting Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse* run by Sreena Pluck and Jumanah Younis, hosted by True You Today with generous support from Hackney Council and the National Lottery Awards for All

CONTENT WARNING: contains descriptions of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Please look after yourself when reading through the work, remember you can take breaks.

On the final page you will find contact details for support networks.



Definition of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is:

“Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting”

World Health Organisation



Legal Definitions

Rape

Penile penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth without a reasonable belief in consent is rape.

Sexual Assault by Penetration with an Object

Penile penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth a part of the body or anything else without a reasonable belief in their consent.

Sexual Assault

Intentional touching of another person, which is sexual and without a reasonable belief in consent.



Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is:

Sexual harassment is when someone behaves in a way which makes you feel distressed, intimidated or offended and the behaviour is of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.



Legal Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is...

“Domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is defined across Government as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality.”

Crown Prosecution Service, UK



POPULAR MYTHS ABOUT DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE + ABUSE

Certain types of people get abused.

Sex workers
cannot be raped.

Rape is a result of uncontrollable desire.

Women lie
about rape.

Only happens in male to female relationships.

Women say no when
they mean yes.

It is survivors fault- they
should have avoided rape.

The abuser
'just snapped'

It happened because
of substance abuse.

If you didn't say no, it wasn't rape.

Domestic violence is a crime
of the poor and uneducated.

It's cultural ie muslim
or non-white people
who are perpetrators.

Trans people are dangerous, not in danger.

Jealousy is a sign of care.

LGBT people do
not experience
domestic abuse.

If it was that bad, she would go to the police.

IMPACTS OF MYTHS



The myths directly reproduce violence.

The myths act as a barrier to disclosing

Juries also read the myths and defense lawyers play on this.

Believing the myths protects perpetrators.

The law is not enough, we
need to change societal
understanding, in order to
give survivors the best
chance of disclosing and
being believed.

BEHAVIOURS

Grooming - the process of preparing someone for abuse

ASSOCIATED

Favouritism - false sense of security

WITH

Gaslighting - abuse pushed to the fault of the survivor

Women of colour and black women being hyper sexualised

Holding on too long while doing a trick or dance move

Stealthing/Condom removal

DOMESTIC

Nagging

+ SEXUAL

Rape

ABUSE +

Verbal abuse

VIOLENCE

Beating someone up

Non consensual touch

Unsolicited massage

Financial control

Humiliation

SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATED TO CIRCUS AND DANCE

Feeling forced to wear sexualised costumes.

The idea that circus is meant to hurt.

Life partner as training partner, no boundaries allowed.

Circus is on the sidelines so it is easier to get away with abuse.

Lines can feel blurry when everyone are friends.

Small circles, everyone knows everyone. If abuse happens this can be very isolating.

Abuse at home and you work together - no time away.

IMPACTS OF ABUSE

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LOW SELF-ESTEEM

ISSUES WITH TRUST

DENIAL

PERCEIVING THREATS
ALL THE TIME

REACTING STRONGLY TO ANY PHYSICAL TOUCH

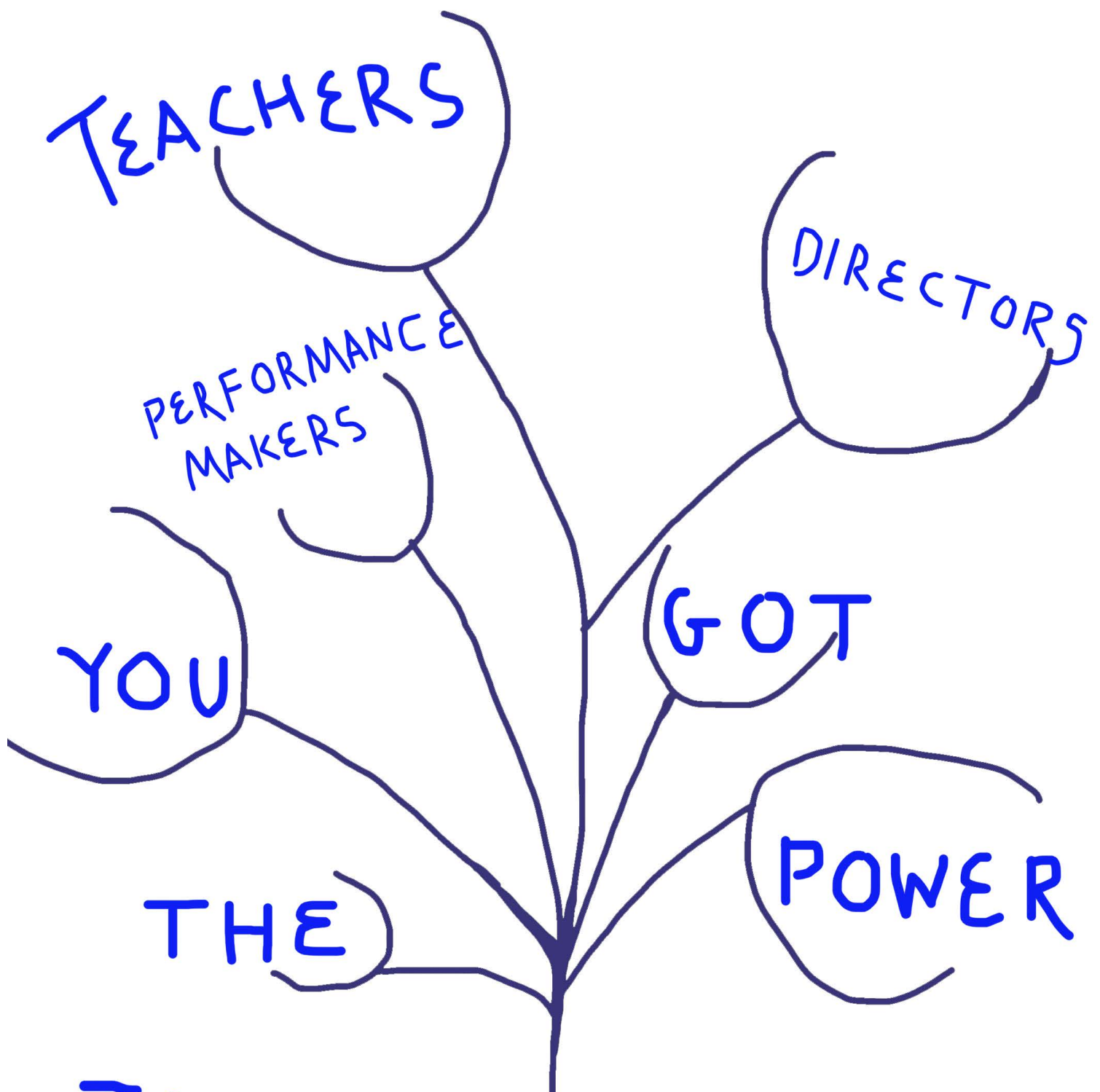
ANGER

FEAR

WITHDRAWAL FROM
SEXUAL INTERACTION

PTSD

CONTINUAL STRESS AND RELIVING TRAUMA



THINK

About the music you play in rehearsal space and in performances - what are the lyrics saying and who is singing? Don't platform perpetrators!

LISTEN

To women and gender non-conforming people if they say they feel uncomfortable.

CHANGE

Attitudes around consent - make sure everyone is aware of asking and giving consent, before beginning any session or performance.

As adults we prime ourselves
that we know what we are doing.

UNDERSTANDING
Coercive Control
IN RELATIONSHIPS

Reasons you might leave:

Jealousy

Name calling

Possessive

Isolation

Manipulation

Fear

Reasons you might stay
or return:

Apologies

Gifts

"I Can't cope"

"You're special"

"I love you"

Crying

Abuse is gradual,
we can normalise it.

Fear of not being
believed.

STAY

Fear for own and
childrens safety,

Fear of losing
your whole life.

RETURN

Wanting to see the
best in people.

Lack of support
and no resources.

Financial dependence.

LEAVE

Being able to name the
behaviours as harmful.

Being believed.

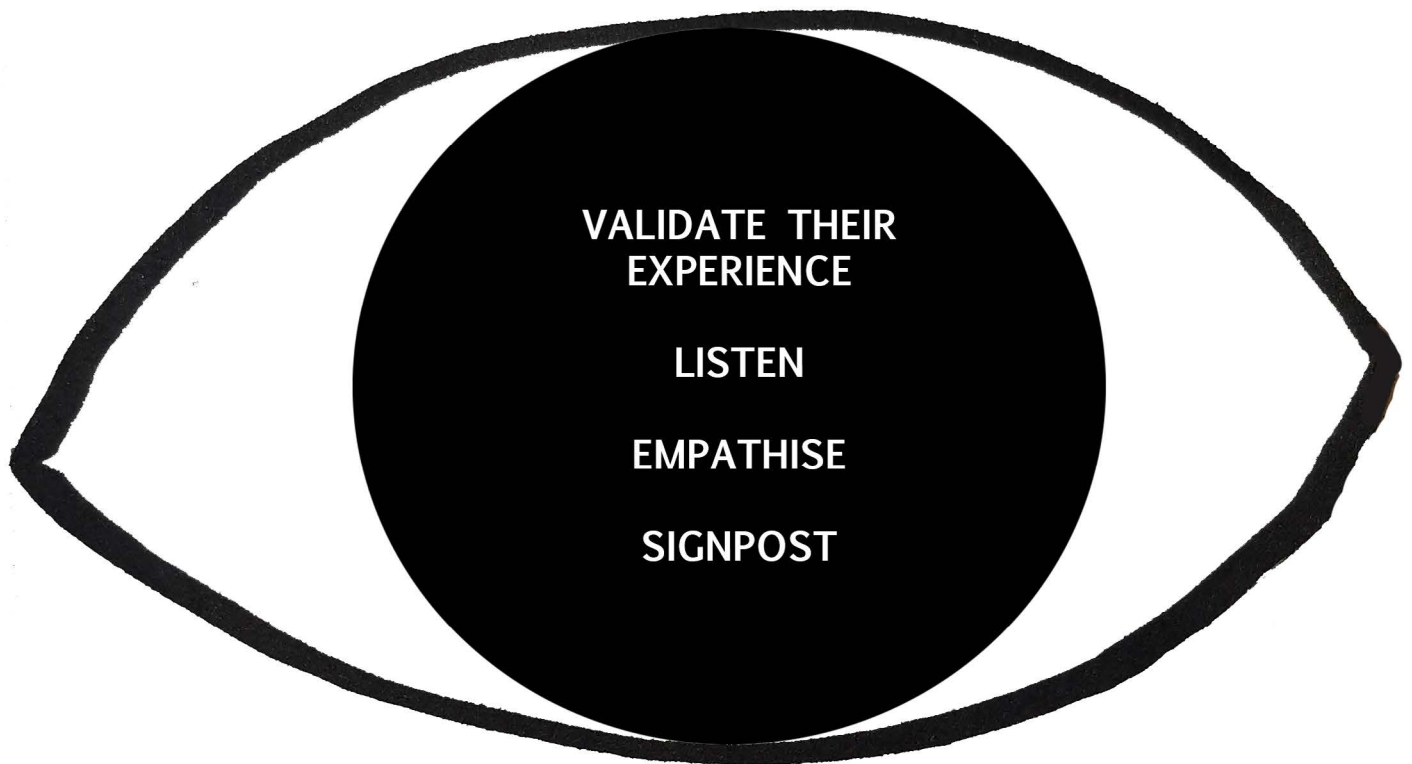
Access to support
and resources.

Fear for own and
childrens safety.

No option is easy.

NAMING WHAT HAPPENED

Responding to a disclosure

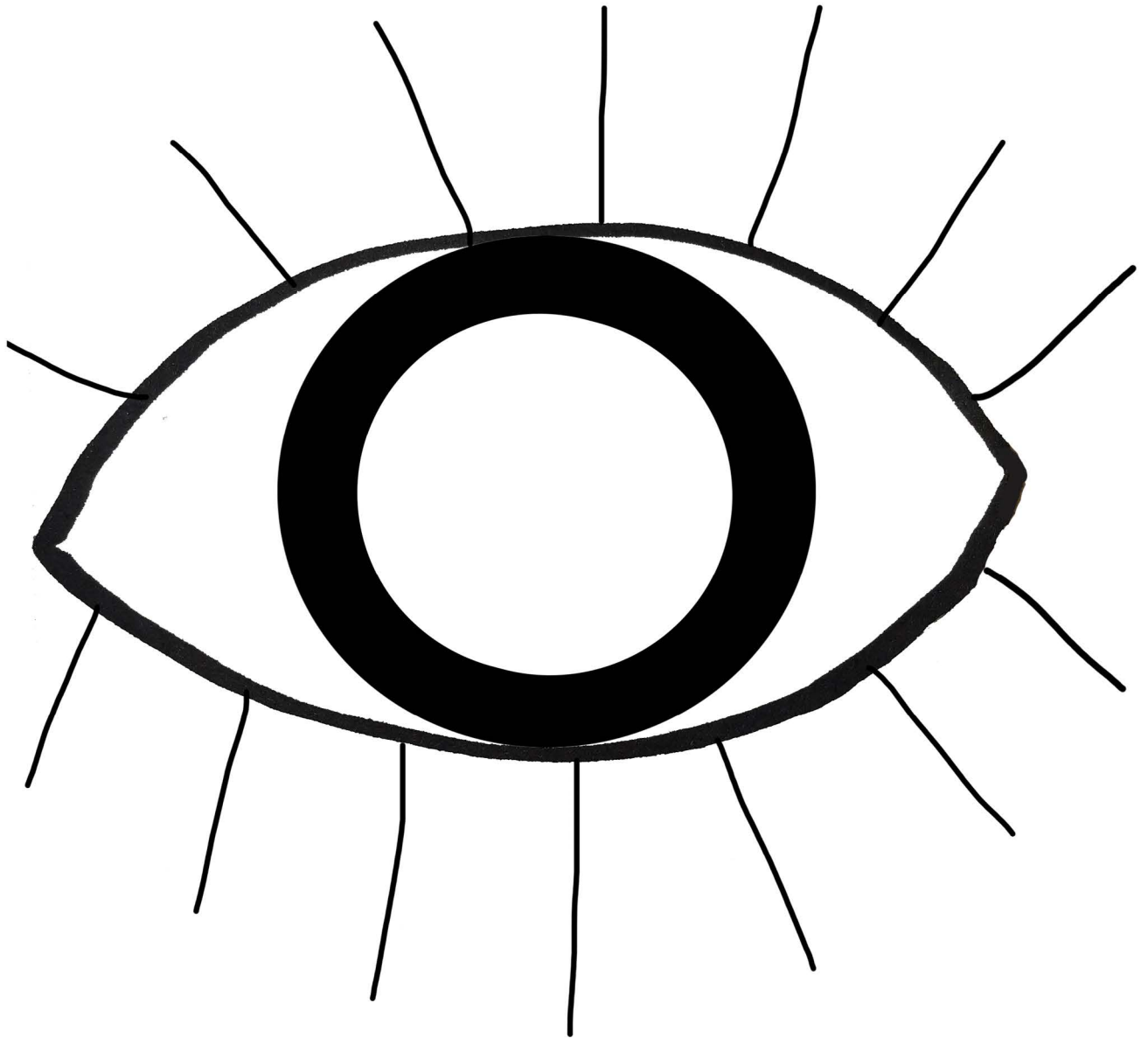


Listen - believe them, treat them as the expert to their experiences (because they are!)

Empathise - Respond with empathy, reflect on what they are saying, rather than responding with your own judgements

Signpost - to support, this will vary depending on the situation. If the perpetrator is in a position of power, this is also a safeguarding issue.

LISTEN CAREFULLY



Try and name the feelings that you recognise through what the person is telling you, this can be validating. If you don't feel like you can, try repeating what the person is saying to you. Sometimes we speak without hearing the words we are saying.

SPECIALIST SERVICES



National DV Helpline

Run by Refuge, this helpline operates 24/7, providing safety planning, advice and options



Rape Crisis

A network of specialist sexual violence services across England



Gallop

A specialist support service for LGBT+ people



Survivors UK

A specialist service for male survivors of sexual abuse