

Collective Agreement

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I. Preamble

1. Why this Agreement?

In the last few years, it has become apparent again and again that there is abusive and violent behavior in our structures as well. The violence has not necessarily increased, it is just becoming more visible. That's because there are more feminist networks and support structures. This motivates people who have experienced violence to entrust themselves to others and talk about their violent experiences.

At the same time, we clearly see the weaknesses of the state penal system in cases of sexualized violence.

It is not easy for those affected to make their voices heard, as they are often not believed or even blamed. Because the penal system is focused exclusively on punishing the "perpetrator," those affected automatically fade into the background. There are no other approaches beyond punishment that enable individuals to change their behavior so that violence is reduced in the long term. So we need a transformative approach to be able to restore justice.

What are our goals?

This agreement is an attempt to develop a community towards values and practices against violence and oppression. We want to create resistant structures in order to become more capable in dealing with sexualized violence. This should happen in each individual group as well as in the community as a whole. At the same time, this is the basis for approaches that can function outside of state structures. In concrete terms, we are pursuing the following long-term goals with the Agreement:

Prevention

We want to abolish sexualized violence in our communities, or at least reduce the extent of it. We want to exchange ideas and educate ourselves on the topic. We want to use the Agreement to apply social pressure to change the structural and political conditions that make violence possible.

Support for those affected

We do not leave affected people alone, but support them in the long term. We want to give them a space in which they can entrust themselves and where they can experience recognition and appreciation. Together, we work out possible ways of dealing with the situation, taking into account their wishes and needs. The first priority is to establish security.

Community Building

We want to change the culture of our interactions. We want it to become a common practice in our groups and spaces that we meet each other as humans. Not only the results of our political work should be important, but also the personal relationships within it.

Continuous engagement

A continuous engagement and dealing with sexualized violence is a basis of our political cooperation. Only in this way can we build long-term and secure relationships. This can also mean interrupting our daily routine and temporarily putting other political issues on hold.

Enabling a culture of error

We want to create learning spaces. In doing so, we recognize that we grew up in a patriarchal world that shapes all of our behavior. We want to examine violent behavior, find ways of dealing with it and learn other ways of behaving. Such learning processes can be painful and are associated with insecurity - this requires trust and empathy in dealing with each other. Mistakes can also occur in the process of dealing with each other. We want to learn from these mistakes and further develop our approaches.

Transformative approaches

People who have committed violence take responsibility for their actions. Within our possibilities and our own limits, we want to support them in their efforts to change their patterns and behaviors so that they can once again become part of the community.

What is our ambition?

Addressing this topic is not easy. People who participate in this project make themselves emotionally vulnerable. We want to be aware of each other's limits and learn together to recognize and change violent behavior.

We want to use our resources and own experiences with sexualized violence to put the goals of the Collective Agreement into practice. We want to support each other in asking questions and criticizing each other in solidarity. We are aware that supporting affected persons and dealing with perpetrators of violence does not only mean community work, but also requires psychosocial knowledge. For us, taking responsibility for the process can therefore also mean recognizing when external support is needed and when a simultaneous working of self-organized processes and professionalized structures can make sense.

By external support we do not mean cooperation with the police, since the police maintains the racist and patriarchal order and protects only those who fit into this state order. Therefore, we reject cooperation with the police.

We also position ourselves against all other forms of violence and oppression that occur in our society and thus inevitably in our structures. In writing this agreement, we have been guided by the specifics of the causes and effects of sexualized violence. People can be affected by different forms of discrimination. Therefore, we try to make a discrimination-sensitive and intersectional analysis the basis of our joint action.

We are several groups from Dresden who have come together in a partially public process to write this Agreement. Since it is a shared learning process, we would like to make sure to keep reviewing and updating this agreement.

2. Which concepts do we use?

The concepts, information, and experiences we are using are from communities of US American queers, trans* people and women of colour, and Australian Indigenous people. These communities have developed alternatives to the state penal system based on community accountability.

From these concepts follow certain principles, which we want to base our interactions on. A detailed description can be found in the brochure "Dare to take the risk" of the group "CARA", on which we orientate ourselves.

The following two aspects are particularly important to us:

Focus on the affected person:

In contrast to the perpetrator-centered punishment system, we want to orient ourselves first and foremost to the well-being and will of those affected. We all have learned to think first about what to do with the person who has acted violently or wrongly. First and foremost, we support the person who has been harmed. This principle should be expressed in the decisions we make.

All people can commit violence:

Neither does it reflect reality, nor is it in any way constructive to understand violence as a phenomenon of individual "special" people. Violence is omnipresent in our everyday life and appears in many forms. It can therefore also be (unconsciously) exercised by all people. Therefore, persons can be affected and exercise violence at the same time. What is perceived as violent is individual and has nothing to do with the intention of the person exercising violence.

II. What is sexualized violence

The term sexualized violence can be defined in different ways. We make an attempt to provide a definition in order to establish a basis for the Collective Agreement. We refer to common literature on self-organized approaches to sexualized violence.

Sexualized violence is understood as "all forms of both physical and psychological sexualized contact that are not based on consensual agreement" (RESPONS Collective, 2018, p. 33). Thus, sexualized violence is understood to include not only physical assaults such as rape and sexual assault, but also sexualized language, gestures, and images. It is also assumed that sexualized violence is often accompanied by other forms of violence, such as verbal, psychological, financial, and other forms of physical violence. This can result in a pattern of repeated violence, especially in intimate partner relationships, in families or towards children (Respons, p.33).

This definition intentionally distances itself from legal and the overall mainstream perspective in society and works against a hierarchy and a comparison of different forms of sexualized violence.

Sexualized violence is enabled by structural power relations such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, etc. In a patriarchal society violence simultaneously serves as a way of enforcing different types of oppression and marginalization and emerges from them. The different forms of violence are linked to each other and are affecting different groups of people in different degrees. This is a result of hierarchy and power relations. For example, FLINTA* people are more likely to be affected by sexual violence than cis men, and children are more likely to be affected than older people. People who face multiple discriminations have a higher risk of experiencing sexualized violence.

At the same time, any person can commit sexualized violence because we all grew up in a violent society.

The following existing hierarchy and power structures are commonly used by abusive or assaultive individuals:

- physical dominance
- psychological dominance
- cognitive dominance
- linguistic dominance
- the trust or dependence (e.g. financial, social, family) of the other person
- higher social/socio-economic status

As a result, sexualized violence exists in the presence of the following factors:

- lack of ability to give informed consent to the actions (informed consent means all relevant factors are known and the person can understand the consequences of the actions)
- Significant difference between the acting parties and/or significant difference in maturity (e.g., if the person is a minor)
- Presence of coercion or manipulation (manipulation means, among other things, creating a situation that does not seem to the person as if something harmful or difficult can happen. An existing relationship of trust often plays a role in this, which helps the person exercising violence to create such situations)

III. Who can join this agreement

Joining the collective agreement should be made as easy as possible. At the same time, it is important to have some control over who joins to ensure practical implementation of the agreement.

Political groups, contexts and public places (cafes, clubs, workshops, etc.) that consider themselves critical of power and are profeminist can join. They recognize that people occupy different positions of power in society on the basis of, for example, gender, origin or abilities. They also try to reflect and reduce these injustices in their own contexts. They deal with the question of how different social positions are connected with the power to exercise violence or to be hurt by it.

Joining the collective agreement is intended to start a process of reflection on their own behavior for all members of the group. No specific knowledge is expected, but a continuous learning process is intended, in which we would like to learn and practice a solidary and respectful interaction with each other.

If a group wants to join, the process is as follows:

1. All members of the group read the Collective Agreement. The contents are discussed together with the help of further information material. A selection of literature can be found in the appendix. In case of questions or ideas for further development, groups that are already part of the agreement can be contacted.
2. All group members have agreed to join.
3. The request to join can be addressed to any group/initiative that is already part of the agreement (link to the list of groups/initiatives). This group will inform all other members via the common mail distribution list. If no objections are raised within one month, the requesting group can join.
4. New members who join the group after the group has signed the agreement should be made aware of it and agree with the principles.

Newly admitted groups must be present at the next main plenary session to become a permanent part of the agreement.

By signing this agreement, your group or initiative agrees to the common principles of action. Your group commits to develop a concept for dealing with sexualized violence within three months and to create space for thematic exchange. The group names at least two contact persons who people who have experienced sexualized violence can contact and who can support those affected in setting up a support structure. In addition, a joint workshop on the topic of sexualized violence/community accountability is to be attended.

IV. Main Plenary Session

Main plenary sessions give the opportunity to meet people from other groups. They are intended to provide space for ongoing discussion and debate in the context of the struggle against sexual violence.

People should be encouraged to give positive and negative feedback on collaboration between different groups. Main plenary sessions are part of our community building. They help us to

review our work and to find out what we need in specific cases as well as for the further development of our concept. The main plenary session can also be an opportunity to seek help on specific cases.

- In order to stay up to date, a main plenary session is held every 6 months. Each group may additionally schedule an extraordinary plenary session on a specific topic.
- At each main plenary session, a responsible group is found to invite and prepare the next plenary session. Invitations should be sent 1.5 months before the plenum.
- The main plenary session should be attended by 2 delegates from each group, if possible.
- At the main plenary session, proposals to change the agreement can be introduced and decided.
- The main plenary session has the task of ensuring that those affected are supported and that the surrounding community meets to discuss their shared responsibilities.
- At the main plenary session, the exclusion of a person from community locations or from groups can be communicated and explained. Community support can be requested.
- We decide consensus minus one - the person/group affected by the exclusion can say something, but cannot vote against their own exclusion.
- We generally strive for a consensus decision. If we are not able to do so, we decide according to the super-majority principle. This means that at least 90% of the groups must agree with the proposal.
- If not all groups are present at the meeting, they will have to vote afterwards shortly after the meeting.
- Voting rights: one vote per group, one person can only represent one group.

V. Entrusting oneself in the case of sexualized violence

The collective agreement aims to (re)establish the ability to take action. This requires, among other things, communication and a willingness to make the relevant information about an act of violence available for dealing with it. Taking responsibility can only take place with sufficient information. The needs of the affected person influence the procedure. People who experience sexualized violence in our community should have the opportunity to go to the groups that are part of the agreement. There they can report the case of violence and ask for support.

What steps are necessary?

Getting in contact

Each group should ensure at least one way of contact, which is published on our website. This should be checked regularly by the contact persons. All information they receive about it must be treated confidentially.

Initial meeting with 2 contact persons of the group

The initial meeting and the resulting specific actions are based on the needs of the affected person. There are different possibilities:

- it remains with the initial meeting
- further talks with the contact persons follow
- there is a consultation with contact persons from other groups
- further arrangements are made (e.g. contact to a specialized counseling or support service).

If two people are involved who accuse each other of violent acts, further contact persons will be consulted in any case.

Should the affected person consciously decide to involve the police, there will be no further dealings within the framework of the agreement. In any case, the involvement of the police represents a risk for our structures. Exceptions must be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

VI. Dealing with sexualized violence

We hereby declare that it is our joint responsibility to deal with cases of sexualized violence. Such behavior is not a private matter and concerns us all. By acknowledging the shared responsibility for allowing the violence to occur, we also accept shared responsibility in dealing with the problem.

Already engaging with the issue of sexualized violence, its effects and the establishment of structures, as is intended to happen within the framework of this agreement, makes a contribution to dealing with it. The groups also try to recognize which dynamics or which behavior of their members can lead to sexualized violence.

If, after contact has been made, a decision is made on how to deal with it together, we follow different paths according to the needs of the affected person:

- Support for the affected person without transformative work with the person perpetrating the violence
- A community accountability process with the involved persons and their social environments
- Transformative work with the person perpetrating violence and their social environment

If no group can provide sufficient expertise, groups can be brought in from outside to address the issue. In any case support will be organized by us.

After the processes have been completed, an evaluation should take place within the groups of the collective agreement.

VII. Joint responsibility within the framework of the agreement

We use this agreement and the structure that emerges at the same time as a resource for knowledge and criticism. In doing so, all groups recognize that there is no one right way of dealing with and accepting responsibility.

The basis for shared responsibility is a constructive error culture. All groups recognize that the different possible ways of dealing with errors also give different perceptions of what is wrong. We also approach each other with the basic assumption that mistakes happen in almost every process of taking responsibility.

The groups try to acknowledge these mistakes and correct them if possible, without being paralyzed by them in their further dealings.

- It is up to the group and the supporters to decide which collective process should be used to deal with the case of violence. However, the group should make transparent to the other groups within the agreement, which strategy has been chosen for the specific case.
 - If other groups have concerns about how the group is handling the situation, those concerns should be addressed and discussed.
 - For those cases where money is needed for certain types of support, we create a list of groups that are willing to donate necessary money.
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VIII. Consequence in case of lack of taking responsibility of the perpetrator and their environment

Lack of taking responsibility can result in consequences for the person perpetrating the violence. The perspective of the affected person should be included, e.g. what a lack of taking responsibility means.

By lack of taking responsibility we understand, among other things:

- Continuation of problematic behavior towards affected persons or further persons.
- Stopping a community accountability/reflection process without prior announcement or discussion of the backgrounds.
- Non-compliance with concretely made agreements
- The process of taking responsibility and reflection is completely refused and insights are not made transparent.

By consequences we mean, among other things:

- Person can be excluded from certain places for a certain period of time
- person may be prohibited from attending certain events
- Person may be prohibited from contact with certain persons who do not wish to have further contact
- The person may be assigned a responsible person/group to accompany the specified person at public events
- In case of persistent violent behavior, the person may be excluded from the political movement if no other measures are possible anymore

If one or more groups decide to exclude the person, this can take place with immediate effect. The exclusion must be communicated to the other groups involved in the Collective Agreement, the affected person, and the person perpetrating the violence.

The people around the perpetrator of violence should also address their own relationship dynamics and hierarchies. These enable the perpetration of sexualized violence. If the environment of the perpetrator does not respond to the accusations or protects the perpetrator, this can also have consequences.

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IX. Transparency

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When joining the Collective Agreement, each group should make this information public. A link to the agreement should be posted on their website or social media as part of the collective effort to combat sexual violence. Upon leaving the agreement, the group should make this known and remove all information about their participation from their website/social networks.

The main plenary session should report on the number of cases of exclusion from spaces or from the movement in the past year and identify the reasons for the exclusion of individuals.

X. Exclusion from the Collective Agreement

- A group/organization may leave the agreement at any time by informing the other groups about its decision and giving reasons for it.
- When leaving, the group should be excluded from all communication channels as well as the Collective Agreement members' side should be excluded.
- A group can be excluded from the Collective Agreement if it does not comply with the agreements made. Any group of the Collective Agreement can request the exclusion of another group in the main plenary session.