

sexualized  
violence  
prevention  
and response

*Resistance is ever-present.*



A RESOURCE FOR  
VICTIMS/SURVIVORS  
AND THE PEOPLE WHO CARE  
ABOUT THEM



**The intent of this booklet is to:**

- **disrupt harmful narratives about victims' identities/actions/character/capacities**
- **provide more accurate ways of understanding the experiences and actions taken by victims**
- **bust some rape myths**
- **affirm the experiences of so many victim/survivors who know they did absolutely everything they could to**  
**stop the violence.**

**This resource was developed on the unceded territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwépemc'ulucw. Their historical and ongoing resistance to colonial violence must be recognized; every act of resistance makes room for future resistance. Kukwstsétsemc.**

## *What does "resistance" mean?*

Whenever people experience violence, they take action to stand up against that violence, and to protect their dignity and self-respect. This is called resistance. Alongside every story of violence, there is a parallel story about resistance that must be recognized (Coates & Wade, 2007).

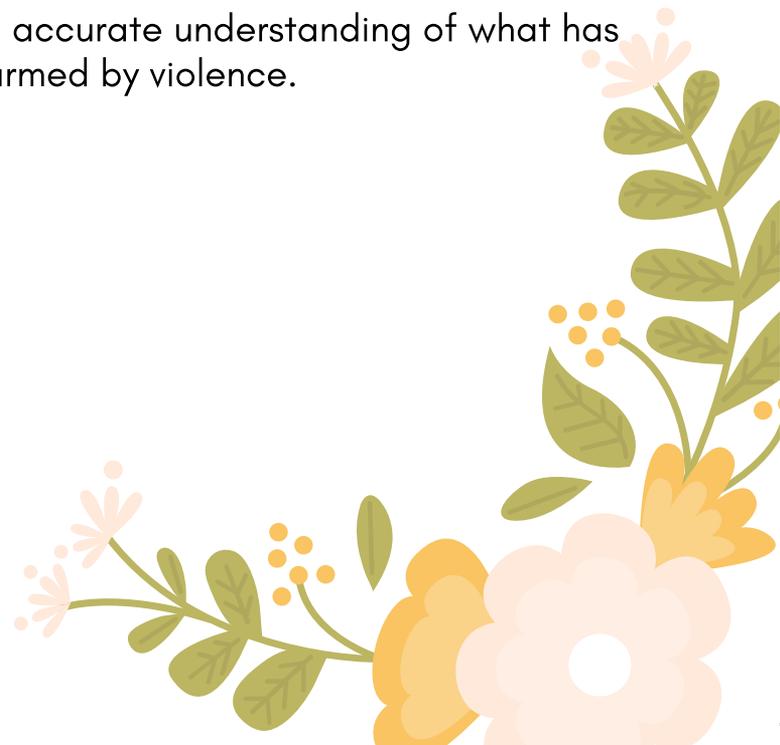
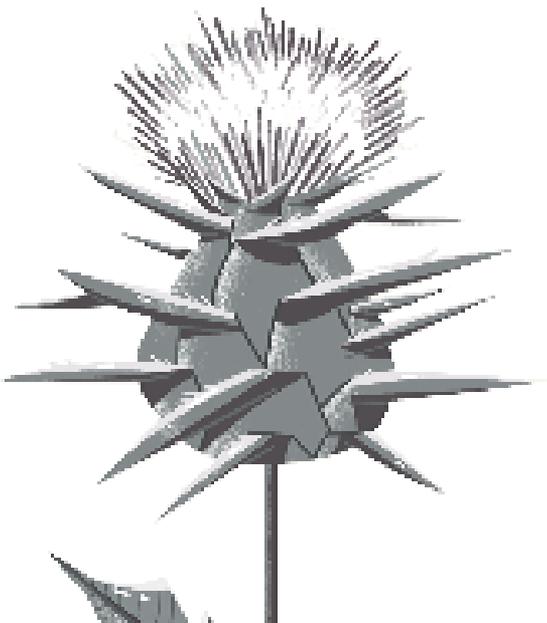
Resistance might look very different from person to person, and from situation to situation. It may range from subtle to overt actions.

Anything that a victim/survivor does to lessen the harm done by violence, disrespect or oppression could be considered an act of resistance.

## *Why does it matter?*

All victims/survivors resist violence. Unfortunately people tend to focus on what the victim/survivor didn't do. Because some forms of resistance are not clearly visible, some people may assume that victims are "passive" and "they did not do enough to stand up for themselves." It is important to understand that engaging in overt resistance can sometimes put victims at greater risk of more serious violence (adapted from Honoring Resistance, 2007).

Recognizing acts of resistance provides a more accurate understanding of what has happened, and supports the dignity of those harmed by violence.



# What does resistance look like?

## During the assault

*Going limp.* This may lessen some of the physical pain of the assault, and indicate to the perpetrator that they will not fight back (which increases safety for the victim/survivor).

*Closing their eyes.* This might allow the victim/survivor to imagine themselves in a safer place, or send a message to the attacker that they do not consent. Closing their eyes may help the person experiencing violence to maintain a sense of dignity.

*Staying silent.* Silence may indicate to the perpetrator that the victim/survivor is not a threat to them. Silence may also keep other people safe. For example, if children or other witnesses are nearby, they may try to intervene. The victim/survivor's silence may keep them out of harm's way.

*Tensing up their bodies.* This sends a message to the perpetrator that the victim/survivor does not consent, and may be the only safe way to demonstrate resistance.

*Imagining that they are somewhere else.* Going elsewhere in their mind may be the only viable form of escape. Under the circumstances, this is understandable: it allows victims/survivors to reclaim a sense of dignity and power while they are being violated in such a profound way.

*Placating the perpetrator.* Actions that signify "cooperation" with the attacker may result in less force being used during the assault. Victims/survivors may feel a sense of power, knowing that they are resisting the violence without the perpetrator knowing. In this context, cooperation IS a form of resistance.

*Fighting back physically.* Fighting back during an assault may escalate the force being used. Victims/survivors recognize this, and deliberately respond in a way that may reduce that risk. However, fighting back does not mean that victims are responsible if the violence continues to escalate.

## What these actions often get mistaken for:

Consent.

"They didn't fight back" or "they didn't fight back hard enough"

"She went along with it, so it couldn't have been that bad."

"They didn't have any bruises, so it couldn't have been rape."



# What does resistance look like?

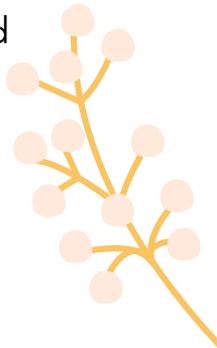
## Immediately after the assault

*Acting "normal" immediately after the assault is over.* Some victims/survivors describe engaging in activities that might be considered 'normal' (smiling, sharing a meal, going back to the party, taking their time leaving) because they wanted to show the perpetrator that they were not a threat, and that there was no reason to use more violence. This may be a strategic choice to increase their safety while they are trying to escape the situation, or a way of reestablishing a sense of control over what happened and affirming dignity.

### *What these actions often get mistaken for:*

Evidence that the assault didn't happen, because who could act so 'normal' after something so terrible happened?

Evidence that the assault didn't happen, because victims of sexualized violence 'should' be visibly distressed (e.g., crying loudly, very upset, shaking).



## Anytime after the assault

*Responding to the perpetrator's texts, messages or calls.* Victims/survivors of violence have shared that staying in contact with perpetrators made them feel safer because it allowed them to gauge whether the perpetrator was going to be an ongoing threat.

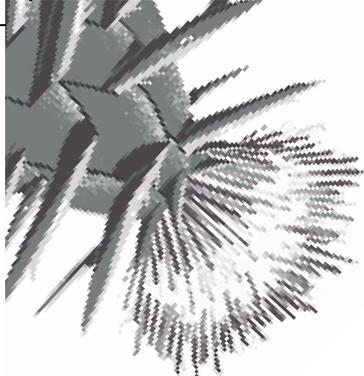
*Interacting with the perpetrator in public settings or social situations.* See previous.

### *What these actions often get mistaken for:*

Evidence of romantic feelings or inconsistent stories

Observers may assume that victims/survivors have lied about the assault.





# What does resistance look like?

## Anytime after the assault

*Choosing not to think or talk about the assault.* Victims/survivors may simply need more space and time before feeling safe enough to process the assault. Sometimes victims/survivors deliberately choose not to think or talk about the assault as a way to demonstrate that they will not allow the violence to hurt them any longer or dictate how they live their lives. Sometimes basic needs (like food, safety or shelter), academic work, caregiving, or keeping a job take priority over addressing what has happened. **Victims/survivors are making deliberate and strategic choices about their safety and well-being at all times.**

### *What these actions often get mistaken for:*

Friends or loved ones may think “You're in denial about what happened to you!” or “You have to talk about it or else it will haunt you forever!”

Others may think that the assault didn't happen, because we have been taught very rigid “scripts” about how a victim/survivor is supposed to look, sound or behave like.

*Feeling angry all the time.* Victims/survivors may experience profound moments or periods of anger following their experience. It's okay to be angry about what happened. Anger is an understandable response to being deliberately harmed by another person. It is an assault to their dignity, along with a threat to their safety. Under these circumstances, they will very likely feel a wide range of emotions. Feeling angry about what happened may be considered an act of resistance because it reminds victims/survivors that they know what happened was wrong, and that they are not at fault.



*Feeling sad.* This often gets called ‘depression’, but there is a difference between clinical depression and feeling sad or despair following a specific attack or incident of violence. If victim/survivors are concerned about this distinction, they may want to consult with a professional counsellor.





# What does resistance look like?

## Anytime after the assault

*Using alcohol or substances.* For some people, using alcohol or substances may be an understandable tool that they have learned to respond to feelings that follow an experience of violence. There may be a variety of reasons why someone chooses to use alcohol or substances. These reasons may include: long waitlists for support services, difficulty navigating the systems that provide support and/or justice, isolation, few family/friends to lean into for support, victim-blaming, rape myths, or feeling responsible for what happened to them.

### *What these actions often get mistaken for:*

Someone partying extra hard

Lack of coping skills

*We don't suggest that alcohol or substances are the remedy for pain caused by someone else's violent behavior. If victims/survivors are curious about their use of substances or alcohol, they may want to connect with a professional counsellor.*

## Other ways to resist

*Taking care of basic needs.* "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Audre Lorde, 1988). Sometimes the most powerful thing that victims/survivors can do is get enough food and sleep to get them through the day.

*Reaching out for support.* Choosing when and how to access support on one's own terms supports the reclaiming of dignity and power. Those who are providing care to victims/survivors also deserve support and may want to consider getting connected on or off campus.

*Continuing to educate yourself.* Knowledge is a powerful healing tool.

*Supporting sexualized violence initiatives on campus.* Please visit [tru.ca/sexual-violence](http://tru.ca/sexual-violence) for more information about campus initiatives.

*Supporting sexualized violence initiatives in the community.* The Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre and the Y Women's Emergency Shelter provide important services to those who have experienced violence. Please contact KSACC at 250-372-0179 and the Y Women's Emergency Shelter at 250-374-6162 to find out more about how you can support their work.

*Dance. Hike. Take a bath. Do things that reaffirm that your body belongs to you.*

Talk about this resource. Share it with other people.

## Supports on campus

Counseling Services: 250-828-5023 OM 1631

Wellness Center: 250-828-5010 OM 1479

Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Manager 250-828-5023 OM 1631

Community Based Victim Services Worker (Tuesdays, 1:00–4:00 in Student Services): 250-3722-0179 or drop in OM 1631

## Supports off campus

Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre: 250-372-0179 [www.ksacc.ca](http://www.ksacc.ca)

Kamloops Sexual Assault Response Team: Available at Royal Inland Hospital, for victims/survivors accessing medical services following an assault. [www.ksacc.ca](http://www.ksacc.ca)

Kamloops Y Women's Emergency Shelter: 250-374-6162 [www.kamloopsy.org](http://www.kamloopsy.org)

VictimLink (free, 24/7 support by phone, multilingual): 1-800-5630808. For TTY, call 604-875-0885. Text to 604-836-6381

Interior Crisis Line: 1-800-353-2273

Mental Health AfterHours support: 250-377-0088

For more detailed information about supports available, please visit  
[www.tru.ca/sexualviolence](http://www.tru.ca/sexualviolence)

*The Milk Thistle is considered an invasive species in the province of British Columbia.*

*We think the Milk Thistle is an apt symbol for the ever present resistance of victims/survivors of sexualized violence.*

*The Milk Thistle's flower is well defended by its thorns. If dignity were the flower, then each thorn represents every act of resistance a victim/survivor takes.*

*The Milk Thistle is often considered a weed, and yet it is also a great healer—it has been used for its medicinal properties for centuries.*

*Milk Thistle is hardy; it thrives despite adverse conditions, and spreads easily.*

*Every time you see a cluster or field of Milk Thistle, we hope you'll see what we do: resistance, ever-present, connected and growing.*

*Milk Thistle by Chen Libman, used with permission*

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Many thanks for support and contributions from  
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