

Guidelines on sexual violence and domestic abuse

The following updated guideline was agreed at the February 2020 rs21 members' national meeting

The purpose of this document is to encourage and empower members of the organisation to take proactive steps in creating an environment that aims to reduce the occurrence of sexual violence, domestic abuse and sexist behaviour as much as possible. It is important that members feel confident to use these principles and guidance in tackling not only the 'most serious' of cases, but all manifestations of misogyny and gendered oppression that may happen in our spaces.

General principles:

- **Survivor-centred approach.** We should aim to act in a way that empowers the person who has been impacted by the instance of sexual violence or domestic abuse. We should support them as best we can, and try to ensure their comfort and safety. If possible, we should act so as to bring them a sense of justice. We should be aware of the ramifications of trauma due to experiences of sexual violence, harassment or domestic abuse.
- **Containment and safety.** We should try to ensure the comfort and safety of other members. We should create an environment which minimises the chance of sexual violence (SV) or domestic abuse (DA) from taking place.
- **Liberation and oppression politics.** What approach best fits with our understanding of sexual violence as part of both the capitalist system and the systematic oppression of women, trans and non-binary people? How can we best react in accordance with our socialist and feminist principles?
- **We should not aim to emulate the legal system both in its conduct and ideology.** When dealing with cases of sexual violence or domestic abuse, comrades should not seek to conduct an 'investigation' of details or perform processes in which accounts of cases are measured up against each other with supposed impartiality, but rather to understand the situation at hand informed by our knowledge of the politics of sexual and domestic violence, power and misogyny.

If the survivor and perpetrator are inside the organisation and the survivor discloses sexual violence or domestic abuse:

- The survivor should always be supported by a person or people of their choosing, either from inside or outside the organisation;
- A supportive comrade should ask the survivor how they would prefer to proceed, and who they would like to speak to regarding the issue – e.g. the SG, a group of trusted comrades, or another person or group outside of the organisation?
- If possible, the survivor should be offered the support they would like, and/or be signposted to external specialist support agencies;
- Depending how the survivor wishes to proceed, the perpetrator could be spoken to by an assigned member of rs21 with the survivor's approval, with the aim of enabling them to recognise what they have done and the impacts of their actions;
- If appropriate, the perpetrator should have their membership of the organisation revoked temporarily or permanently, depending on the nature of the intervention and the wishes of the survivor.

If the survivor is outside the organisation and the perpetrator is a member of rs21:

- If contact is made by the survivor with a member of rs21, then they should be offered the opportunity to outline what has happened in whatever way is most comfortable for them. This might mean to write something down or to have a meeting with a trusted member of rs21;
- If no contact is made, the relevant group of members such as local branches, comrades around the perpetrator, or if necessary, the SG should discuss what is known of the allegations and make a decision on the perpetrator's involvement in rs21 political activity, including suspension from attending local meetings, events or revocation of membership from the organisation, as appropriate

In the case of a historic allegation being brought to light, or a new member joining who has been accused of something in the past:

- An attempt should be made by a suitable member or group to establish whether the survivor(s) wish the allegations to be discussed or to be consulted on any action to be taken towards the alleged perpetrator by the organisation
- If so, suitable members of the organisation should have a frank discussion with the alleged perpetrator and/or survivor to ascertain the specifics of the case in question, while being vigilant to act with understanding of our politics and principles around sexual and domestic violence. It is crucial that comrades do not attempt an 'investigation' on the case following a legal model;
- When appropriate, comrades should approach the SG to suggest the revocation of membership or to deny entry to the organisation.

Some notes:

- The survivor's confidentiality should be protected as an absolute priority if they wish it to be maintained.
- Survivors should not be discouraged from reporting to the police – it is their choice and there is support available from organisations including Rape Crisis.
- rs21 and individual activists should consider carefully the role they play as friends of perpetrators in creating the conditions in which it is possible for perpetrators to reoffend and/or move on blamelessly from cases of SV and DA. Express efforts should be made to minimise the tendency for perpetrators to return to political and social spaces without changing their oppressive behaviour.
- The survivor's voice is extremely important throughout this process, but cannot be used as an excuse for the organisation to hide behind. It is not the survivor's responsibility to make organisational decisions. They should feel supported by rs21 to have their experiences heard and acknowledged and the space and support to recover.
- Members or bodies inside rs21, regardless of knowledge or experience of violence against women and girls, should not seek to replace external specialist services. However, supporting comrades who have been subject to domestic violence or sexual violence is an act of solidarity and so comrades should take a survivor centred approach to offering support, this means asking the survivor what they would find useful, as well as challenging sexist behaviour appropriately.