

Guidance document on sexual violence and domestic abuse

General principles:

- Survivor-centred approach. What would best empower the person reporting the instance of sexual violence or domestic abuse? How can they best be supported? What would ensure their future comfort and safety? If possible, what can be done that would bring them a sense of justice?
- Containment and safety. What will ensure the comfort and safety of other members of rs21? What will reduce the possibility of the perpetrator engaging in abusive or violent behaviour again, inside and outside rs21? How can we create an environment which minimises the chance of sexual violence (SV) and domestic abuse (DA) taking place in future?
- 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?

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

- The Steering Group (SG) should suspend the perpetrator from all political activity associated with rs21;
- The survivor should always be supported by a person 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;
- The perpetrator, once suspended, should 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, as well as opening up the possibility of an apology or accountability for their actions;
- The perpetrator should be signposted to suitable perpetrator rehabilitation services if appropriate;
- The perpetrator should have their membership of the organisation revoked until further notice (which may mean permanently).

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

- The SG should suspend the perpetrator from all rs21's political activity;
- 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 SG should discuss what is known of the allegations and make a decision on the revocation of the perpetrator's membership and/or any processes which must follow from them (e.g. signposting the perpetrator to rehabilitation services).

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:

A member of the SG or other suitable member of the organisation should have a frank discussion with the alleged perpetrator and/or survivor to ascertain the specifics of the case in question;

- The SG should seek advice and further information where necessary, and then make a decision on whether membership should be revoked or denied in this case.

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 it this cannot be 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 support.