



PREVENT RESIST SUPPORT

Episode 10: What To Do When Your Friend Has Caused Harm

with Robyn Ocean



University
of Windsor

Sexual Misconduct Response
and Prevention Office

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Anne Rudzinski: Hello everyone and welcome to the 10th episode of prevent, resist support. Prevent Resist Support is a podcast by the Sexual Misconduct Response and Prevention Office at the University of Windsor.

Transition music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: Hi, everyone. So we've got a really important episode today, but it's also a heavy one. The topic is What to do when your friend has caused harm. And we're joined today by Robyn Ocean from Trent University. Robyn is essentially the Dusty at Trent. So she's the Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator. So that means that Robyn provides support to survivors of sexual violence and creates and delivers educational content. As always, we want to make sure that you have all of the resources for support before we get into our topic today. So if you're a member of the Trent community and you want to reach Robyn, you can reach her at robynocean@trentu.ca. And you can learn more about Trent's prevention and response services at trentu.ca/sexualviolence. If you're a member of the uwindsor community, you can reach out to dusty at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. And you can learn more about our office at uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault. If you're not at either University, but you're

in Ontario, you can reach the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers, they have information about sexual assault crisis centers across Ontario, and their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca. So let's dive into our interview. And welcome in Robyn.

Anne: So welcome, Robyn, I'm so excited to have you here chatting with us today.

Robyn Ocean: Thanks so much for having me.

Anne: I'm super excited to talk about your content about what to do when you find out that a friend has caused harm. And when we're talking about harm, I think it's good to frame it as like it might be sexual violence, it might be an abusive partnership, whether that's physically or mentally or emotionally. But it might be another kind of harm. And so I think we're gonna take, like a broad approach to the idea of causing harm, but talk through, you know, what we can do to process our own emotions, and also what we can do to, like help folks access justice.

Robyn: And it's not even just sexual harm. Because if we don't know how to apologize for not doing the dishes, how are we going to apologize when we have, you know, hurt somebody and their bodily autonomy. So we have to start at all different parts of our lives, social, work lives, you know, family relationships, so that we can build a culture of accountability.

Anne: Oh, I love that. And I think that's so important. Because like, I think as a culture, we're just like, really defensive. Like, I'm really defensive, I'm really bad at hearing any negative feedback. And I like want to be good at it. But it's really hard. And I think other folks really struggle with that, too.

Robyn: Yeah. And it's okay to acknowledge that you are defensive, and let's acknowledge other people are defensive, and then give them some time to reflect and, and change and evolve. And so this issue that we're going to discuss today feels black and white, which is why we feel so defensive, and we get our backs up, because it's either you're good or you're bad. But the truth is, if we've kind of lean in to the nuances and

the complexity of it, then we'll be able to wrap our minds around. Okay, what part is my responsibility? And what part is other people's responsibilities? And if we share that responsibility, does it become a little bit more meaningful and accessible to engage in processes that will transform the situation, and it's about repairing the harm. And if we stop at defensiveness, we won't get a chance to repair the harm. So you might start at defensiveness. Okay, acknowledge that, but let's move through it.

Anne: Excellent. I think that's so important. And the shared responsibility, I think, is so important. So let's start at like the very front end, you've just found out that your friend has caused harm. This is maybe somebody that you know, or maybe care about, or even somebody that you love. And that's going to be really hard. So let's talk about our own emotional responses and how we can start to process our own feelings around this news.

Robyn: Yeah, it hurts us to hear this news because it betrays the expectation we have for this person that we love and care about, and it doesn't match in our minds who they are. And that's one of the reasons our defensive defenses come up. It's also why we have a lot of feelings about it. So the first step in anything is to feel your feelings. So as a therapist myself, I'm always telling my clients and their support people to feel their feelings because if we start to repress those feelings, then other things bubble up, like resentment, or where do those feelings go, they get trapped in our bodies, and then we're unwell and stressed. And so how are we going to engage with this person or in this conversation, if we are holding all of that within ourselves, so the first thing to do is just to be honest, to be reflective and to feel your feelings. So you might feel scared, you might feel confused, you might feel ashamed for them, you might feel ashamed that you know them. If you are feeling like, you know, it really betrayed your experience of this person. And you might feel angry that somebody has accused a person that you love and care about who again, doesn't reflect this experience that you've just been made aware of. And so we have to first begin by acknowledging our feelings. And when I do a workshop about this feeling your feelings is actually step two. And we'll talk a little bit about step one in a minute.

Anne: I think that's so important. And I also just want to talk really quick about the shame and the anger piece, because like people who cause harm are not these like Gremlins that live in like, the alleyway behind your house that are like super obviously gross, they're people that are in our communities that we know and that we like, and, you know, they can be activists or they can be like athletes, or they can be like they can be anybody. And so I think it's, we have this idea that we can always tell when somebody is harmful. And that's not accurate.

Robyn: Yeah. And that actually is more dangerous. Because if we think I know the red flags of who is a predator or a monster, and we're using these really big words, then we're not going to see the insidiousness of violence, we're going to think that it happens outside of our friends circles and not in my family. And what that leads to is that defensiveness, that's what we do here, someone we know and care about somebody important in our community, even a person who has been an advocate for survivors, we find out that they have caused harm. And then we're not willing to look past this image that they have to see that that's a complex human being. And of course, they can cause harm. And so again, throughout this conversation, I hope we'll keep pointing back to challenging binaries, because harmful binaries exist in many different places, and including gender and rigid gender stereotypes and roles related to, you know, sex, and things like, who is good and who is bad in terms of who can cause harm doesn't acknowledge that people that cause harm, have also done good things, and people who do good things can cause harm. So again, let's lean into the complexity of it.

Anne: That's just excellent. Do we want to take a minute and take a step back and talk about step one from your approach?

Robyn: Yeah, step one is the best. And I know you're a fan of step one. And step one is believe survivors. And this is how we have to start. Because although we're starting with our feelings, if we don't start with believe survivors, we're probably going to head in the wrong direction, right. Because whichever direction you face, every step you take is in that direction. So if we're not facing the direction of believing survivors, then we're going to really veer off track. And we're not going to be helpful

part of the experience and also in creating the culture of accountability, because there's a bigger community piece here. And so the step one is to believe survivors. And what that means is that if you hear that someone that you know, and love has caused harm, whether you want to understand that or it makes sense to you, or the first thing you think is, is that true?, we're gonna stop asking those questions and just believe survivors, it's not important for you right now, to look for evidence, you're not a detective, your friend or a family member, your community member, it is not your job to try to figure out if someone is telling the truth or not. And the the truth is that, that people lying about sexual violence is so rare that we cannot make the exclusion the rule, right, it is the exception to the rule. And we can't base everything around that. So we have to believe survivors is the foundation because survivors don't lie. Because the flak that they'll get, the trauma of sharing your story, the difficulty and accessing resources, who chooses that? If it's not if it's not true and real. And I just said this to a student yesterday, when somebody comes forward and says something happened, it is their experience, and we cannot deny their experience. And so when we start thinking, Well, that wasn't how I understood the situation. Okay, that's your experience, and we're not going to try to convince you or take away from your experience, but the survivors of this was their experience, which means that something happened, that was harmful. And what I like to think about if we zoom out a little bit is that a person who's coming forward with something like this feels unsafe in some way. And so believe survivors and understand that that lack of safety is really important. And so if we just start from this position where we believe survivors, and I don't need to know whether it happened or not, I'm just going to believe that it happened and hear their experience and trust them that something is unsafe and some harm is has happened, and allows you to move forward in the process in a much more relevant way. Because if you don't start at step one, believing survivors, you're not going to get very far, you're just going to stumble, you're going to be defensive, and you're going to hold on to that, you're going to ignore the situation, you're going to defend the person that caused harm and your image of them. And, and all of those, we have to ask ourselves, how does that help the person who has disclosed? And I'd love to ask ourselves, how does that help the person who has been accused, right? Because they're also a person? And if

they have caused harm, then wouldn't they want to be accountable and make change and have an opportunity to grow and evolve? If we don't start with supporting survivors by believing them, then we're not going to be on the right track.

Anne: Yeah, I love that you said the piece about like, it's not our job. We're not the investigator, we're not the judge. We're not the jury. Like it's not our job to decide whether the evidence was sufficient or whether the thing happened. That's somebody else's job. And our job is just to be like a supportive community.

Robyn: Yeah.

Anne: I think that's so important.

Robyn: And the truth is, it does not cost you anything to believe the survivor, you think it costs you your relationship with the person that's been accused, you think, oh, that's my friend, they must not have done this. It doesn't cost you anything to believe the survivor and think, Okay, this is my friend. And this survivor's experience is true. So how do I hold that I believe this survivor, and I have compassion for my friend. So that's the thing everyone you can hold both, right? So we have, that's why we have to start with believing survivors, it doesn't cost you, it doesn't take away from the relationship you have with the person that caused harm. And it's just a really important first step in working towards a culture of accountability, we have to be able to hear these difficult truths about people, because these aren't the only ones you know, we there's a lot of difficult truths that we'll find out about people that we care about. And they're they can be very unrelated to sexual harm, but we are complex people are a work in progress. And we have to acknowledge that more so that we can give people an opportunity to grow and evolve.

Anne: Yeah, and I think what does cost you is being a person who's willing to overlook those things, not being friends with that person, because I think that there's space to still maintain a relationship with somebody who's caused harm. And we'll talk about that, I think in a little bit. But what does cost you is being a person who is known to like, overlook

those things. And what that costs you is that people will not share with you...

Robyn: Absolutely

Anne: ...the way that they feel about stuff, or the things that have happened to them, they just won't share those things with you. And so I think that that's another piece to think about.

Robyn: Yeah, thanks for bringing that up. Because if you if you don't believe survivors, then you become an unsafe person. And so it...

Anne: Yeah

Robyn: ...does cost your your respect your relationships with people and community. So we just all have to believe survivors.

Anne: Yes. So when should we get involved? I think there's this like dichotomy that happens where either people find out about something, and it's like, we have to fix this, we have to have justice, or they're like, that's not my business. That's their business. That's their relationship drama. That's, you know, that's something that happened between two people, but I don't need to get involved in so when should we get involved? As somebody who is hearing about this or as somebody who is like a bystander in this situation?

Robyn: Yeah. So we might, we might feel that it's a situation between two individuals, but sexual violence is a systemic concern. And it happens within our society and our culture and our systems. And we perpetrate it, as our systems do, as well, in terms of how the police don't believe survivors, or the legal system isn't set up in a trauma informed way. So there's lots of things out there that are bigger than us, that that call into question what it means to support accountability. And those things are really big. So it's happening to two individuals, but it is all of our business, and is all of our quote, unquote, problem. This is an important question. When do we get involved? I suppose it would be when someone's involving you, right? How are you hearing about this? Is it because the person who has been accused of causing harm has said,

"Hey, this person just said that I sexually assaulted them, I told I didn't. They're ruining my life", you know, and then the story goes on. If somebody is sharing that with you directly. It's an opportunity to be involved. Right. And I think that's the opportunity to hold these complex ideas. Which is I believe the survivor and I have compassion for you, how can we have this conversation in a meaningful way? And it's hard when somebody is denying an experience, but, you know, as, as an expert in this myself, as someone who has supported survivors, and also people in conflict with the law, you know, people, you know, who have been responsible for atrocities in some cases, you know, it's important to have these conversations and be a person that they can talk to. So I would say, "thank you for sharing that with me. Let's talk it through" and and see where it goes from there. Otherwise, when when to be involved is an important question. Because if you haven't been invited to be involved, are you then becoming just a person with a pitchfork in a group of people? And does that detract from what the survivor wants and needs? So this idea, we don't have to think in binaries of like, I'm either in the mob with the pitchfork, or I'm going to ignore it. And it's none of my business, right? Like that's a harmful binary as well, let's find all the places in the middle. And and most important thing is how we are being involved and looking at looking at that as the starting point. So if a survivor says to me, that somebody that I cared care about has caused harm, I would say "thank you for sharing, I'm sorry, that happened to you, I believe you, how can I support you? You know, is this something you want me to talk about with them? Is that helpful for you, I want to know what you need and how I can be involved", right? Because if we just think, "Wow, this thing happened in my friend group, and I am a survivor advocate, and I'm responsible, and I care. And there must be justice, then". And I'm not checking in with the survivor, I'm starting to do things on their behalf. And that can get out of hand very quickly, because that means that the survivor doesn't have choice and autonomy and boundaries. And that's the same thing that happens when sexual violence happens. So if we're not doing what the survivor wants or needs, because we have taken this issue on our own, then we're very likely to reproduce some really harmful imbalances. And, and then that can cause further harm. We all all of us doing this work, no stories of when that's happened when friends have done things on behalf of the survivor. And even sometimes the survivor at the

beginning was like, "yeah, you know, I couldn't make decisions. So my friends made the decisions for me, I get it". And then months down the road, they, they're able to look back and said, "that got out of hand. That's not what I wanted. Nobody checked in with me." And so remember that the path to hell is paved with good intentions, or whatever that comment is good intentions aren't enough, right? We need to be communicative, we need to have respect, and we need to uphold boundaries, above all.

Anne: I love just the the whole theme of just offering options and letting them decide, I think that that is such a lovely way to, to handle that or just to ask them open ended question of like, What do you want? What do you want me to do here? How can I support you? What is the thing that you would like me to do here? Do you want me to just listen? Do you want me to offer strategy? Do you want me to go talk to somebody else about it? So I think I think that's really helpful and is a great place to start. And I think this is such a great bridge into our next piece, which is about, you know, we've decided that we're involved in in some capacity and that spectrum of involvement. And so our approach should be survivor centered. And what does that look like in a situation where a friend has caused harm?

Robyn: So step one believes survivors, that's the foundation. And so that's how we make sure that we are working towards a culture of accountability, because we can recognize that anyone can cause harm, and anyone can experience harm. And then step two, feel your feelings, hopefully separate from the survivor, in most cases, you know, because you don't want to turn the attention on to you. And then step three is what do we do? And what does that look like? So I think we're getting into step three. And this is about figuring out what you're capable of, right? What's your, what's your capacity? So if you're able to be a mediator, because you have those skills, and that's what the survivor wants, great. If the survivor just wants you to be on their team, as a support person, great. If the survivor says, "You know what, you're really close to this person that caused harm. I want you to talk with them and let them know how this is impacting me. And, you know, I want them just to think about what this means and and I hope that they can get help so that they don't do this again." And sometimes what we can do for the

person that's caused harm is be a bridge to access resources, right? So if you have caused harm, we don't really advertise a lot about the resources that are available to you. And even if you are, quote, unquote accused of harm, and you think, "wow, I have no idea how this person perceives me in this way", that's still quite a lot to work out. And can you work that out with your friends? You know, I don't know, I would say go talk to a professional about it. And so you could in many universities, go to your resource person and your sexual violence prevention office and say, "What are the resources for somebody that's been accused of harm?", and they might have specific therapists, you know, in the community that they know, or I think about community agencies like the John Howard Society, and they have different programs about from a restorative approach about how to how to deal with your own causing harm. So there are resources available. And I think that honestly, that's the one of the best ways to deal deal with your involvement in the situation, is to first believe survivors and then also hold that this person that has been accused of causing harm, deserves compassion, is a human, is complex, is not an image or narrative I have in my head about them and all expectations along it, just a human being who can make mistakes. And so they need to access resources in order to grow and learn and evolve from this situation. So if you can hold both of those things at the same time, you're going to be a better helper and support person in this process. So just to drill that down, again, because I know it's really complex, but you're gonna hold that what the survivor said is true, and you believe them. And you're going to hold the the person who has caused harm is a human being and deserves compassion. And when you're holding those two things, it'll again lead you in a better direction.

Anne: Yeah, I love all of the things that you just said. And I think it's so important. Okay, so the next piece that I just want to touch on really quickly is the idea of the like, perfect victim. And so sometimes when somebody is experienced trauma, they don't act, the way that we think that they're going to act, they might be like, super angry, they might be really sad, they might be kind of shut down, it might look a huge variety of different ways. And sometimes when people are in situations of abuse, they don't act perfectly. And so you know, it's pretty rare that we'll have like the perfect victim. But I think a lot of times we evaluate

the survivor in terms of how we believe them. So can you talk about that piece a little bit, or even the idea that sometimes the stories seem really inconsistent.

Robyn: And that is all valid with trauma. So we have to think about from a trauma perspective, as our foundation that these stories and experiences aren't linear, there's not an ABC or D, when you talk to a survivor that is experienced something traumatic, that story and experience is fragmented in their brain, because that's how the brain deals with something so challenging and scary, that just happened to them. And so in that way, when you hear the story, the story might change, it might not make sense or follow through there might be, you know, gaps in time and space in their story and experience. And that doesn't mean that any part of that story or experience is untrue. And this is another reason why we have to believe survivors first because chances are whoever's listening to this is not an expert in gender based violence, is not an expert in trauma. And if you are not an expert in this experience, then to not believe somebody's experience is really, really unfounded, everyone, you know, because when we understand trauma, we understand the pieces of the story and how it comes together. And so, again, in a really helpful way, I'm suggesting people kind of stay in their own lane, right? You're a friend, you're a family member, what is your role as a community member in this in this situation, and how you've been invited to be involved, because there is there is narratives in our, in our mind and in our society, from films from TV shows from Law and Order, right about what a victim is, or what a victim looks like. And you think that because they didn't go to the police, that must not have been so bad. You think that because they didn't go get a sexual assault kit from the hospital that it wasn't so bad. You think that because they didn't talk about it for six months, and all of a sudden it's coming up, that it's not so bad, but we in this field and who have a lot of experience with this topic. We understand why that person didn't go to the police. We understand why they didn't go to the hospital. And we absolutely understand that for six months, they did not bring it up and did not disclose it. Because that is that just illustrates the person, the survivor, dealing with it on their own because they feel shame and stigma within our society, which is obviously something you can prove to be true when you don't believe them. So when if you don't believe them, you're

just proving why they didn't come forward for six months. You're just proving why they didn't go to the Police. That's why Step one is to believe survivors. So again, all of these ideas you have in your head about what a perfect victim is, or what sexual assault looks like. And if you've created a hierarchy of, you know, what, what sexual violence looks like, and what's bad, and what's oh, not so bad and not such a big deal, we have to really disintegrate all of those pieces, because they're not true. And they're not, they're kind of based on harmful binaries about black and white, good and bad. And this and that. And and that's not what these experiences look like. And I know that sometimes you'll hear that a person has experienced sexual violence many times throughout their lifetime. And you think, "how is it possible, this again?" And the truth is, if you don't know about why it happens again, then when you're asking yourself, they must be lying at this point, I really want you to question that and where that comes from, and who that benefits and what the purpose is of that, and how it harms the survivor. Because the truth is, when you experience sexual violence, you're more likely to experience that sexual violence, again, because of how our brain responds to trauma. And so that's why everyone listening here has really a lot of work to do to dismantle these really harmful ideas about what a perfect victim is, what a perfect perpetrator is, what sexual violence is in a linear process, because all of it is much more complex. And we will build a culture of accountability, when we're able to see things as they are, as people express them to us. And we believe survivors and hold compassion for the people that cause harm as well.

Anne: Yeah, so that also just makes me think about the piece that like the evidence we expect might not exist. I think people want the like receipts, they want the screenshots, they want the like hard evidence in these cases. But like, a lot of times the kinds of harm that happens in the like, broad realm of sexual violence is not things that are easily documentable. And so I think that that's another thing to, to kind of keep in mind that if you're looking for evidence, in order to believe a survivor, the evidence that you're looking for might not exist. And that doesn't mean that it didn't happen. And just the idea that like, I love that you said, you know, like if that's what you're feeling, if you're feeling like you don't want to believe this person, because they're acting in a certain way, or, you know, any of these things, it's a good idea to

kind of like, go back and like, reflect and check the kinds of biases that you're having about what survivors look like, and what stories look like and what evidence looks like and all of that.

Robyn: Yeah, again, just to put it to an extreme example, but if somebody has their house robbed, you don't not believe them. You don't say "No, you didn't have your house robbed, you know", or "Oh, you must have left the door wide open" or, you know, "how is this your fault and responsibility?" And, and "I don't believe you", we just don't say that. So then why do we say it to about sexual violence? Right, because although anyone can cause harm, anyone can experience harm, the vast majority worldwide, the pandemic before this covid 19 pandemic is men's violence against women. And so it benefits the the structures that be for us to not believe survivors, and specifically to diminish the experiences of women. And so again, a lot of unlearning for us to do.

Anne: Okay, we've talked about, you know, processing our own feelings. We've talked about believing survivors. So what can we do to make the situation better? I know that we've talked about the idea that you should always ask the survivor how we can help. But could you maybe walk us through some of the options that we have for that helping so folks maybe have a bit of an idea, about what they could offer?

Robyn: Okay, so it's important for you to know what resources are available in your community. And if you don't, that's okay. Because there's a lot of resources. So find one resource person who might have access to more. So for instance, if you're a university or college student, or high school student, whoever listening, you know, you have people at your university and educational center who can help you to know more about resources, that would be number one. And number two would be how can we live in a culture of accountability? And you have to ask yourself that how can I be more accountable? And again, it could be I need to be accountable, that I didn't wash the dishes, or I need to be accountable when somebody says that my tone was very sarcastic, and they feel hurt by what I said, right? If we're not able to be accountable for what I'll describe as small things, but I guess I mean, everyday things and how, how are we going to be accountable when someone says, "you really hurt me"? And so I want to invite everyone to work on their

defensiveness be open to feedback, work on their communication skills, and and be able to have some honest self reflection when when something is is when you are aware of something, right. And so we need to have compassion for ourselves. So again, believing survivors means having compassion for them and their experience. And understanding that anyone can cause harm means that the person who has caused harm deserves compassion, and is a complex human being, and is more than the worst thing that they've ever done. And there's a complexity there. And we need to have self compassion for ourselves so that we are open when we've done something wrong. Or maybe we can even look back honestly, before somebody brings it to the forefront. And just think, "Okay, what what has my behavior been like? How have I been growing? What is important to me in how I want to be perceived in the world? And what are my values?" And so if we're able to ask ourselves those questions, that's one thing that we can do. Because at the end of the day, we might not be the mediator in an issue between friends, but we we are a human being in the world. And so what can we do to build a culture of accountability?

Anne: Yeah, that is excellent. And so on that note, what can we do to help our friend to be accountable and stop causing harm? Are there things that we can do to support that person? Are there like ideas that you have of things that people could propose to that person as like, these are the things that I could maybe try to help you with?

Robyn: Yeah, so this is an example of something that you can say. So if somebody says, "Listen, I've been accused of sexual assault, I have no idea what they're talking about. I can't believe this is happening." So you could say, "thanks for talking to me about this. I'm sure it's difficult to talk about, I want you to know that I believe the person who said what they said, and it's hard to hear that you behaved in this way, I appreciate that you're sharing this with me, can we talk about some resources for you to look at your behavior to make sure this doesn't happen again?" Just being open to the conversation. And remember, like, one of the first things I said was, "I believe them", right? And so I had this conversation with a student yesterday, where they were telling me that somebody accused them and it wasn't true. And in no time in the conversation, did I say, "Okay, well, I believe you, and I know it's not true",

I said, "I, I'm able to have this conversation with you. And I'm not going to say that the person you're talking about is lying, it's just not helpful for the conversation, they've brought it up for some reason, they feel unsafe, or they feel that you have harmed them in some way, they feel very activated enough to bring this forward. So let's talk about how you're doing in receiving this information. What do you need? And how can we support you to make sense of this and move forward?" And I think that that may have been kind of shocking for them. But we had a really beautiful, compassionate conversation. And I'm so honored to have made space for that kind of conversation. And I know that this is, you know, this is my field, this is my expertise. But I, I really admire the communication skills that people have out there in the world. And I really do believe that people can have these kinds of conversations, too. If I'm a person, I can have this conversation, so can you. So it's not about solving, it's not about canceling the person. It's not about defending the person and your experience of them. It's not about anything that separates and divides us. It's the opposite. It's about bringing people together leaning into the discomfort, you know, finding the nuances of it, like understanding the complexity of it and just say, you can even say, "I don't know what's going on. But I, I know that sexual violence happens and that it's not okay. And so whether you understand your behavior or not, it might be something that you can learn from, because this is what's happening right now. And so how can you learn from this? Who can help you learn from this experience? You know, do you want to access some resources so that you can talk it through?" And I said yesterday to the student, "How could this be a learning opportunity for you?" And we were really open to it, even though the entire conversation, they were denying that they sexually assaulted the other person. And, and again, to me, that's, that's not what mattered. I didn't need to focus on that, or stay on that I needed to stay on, "So how are you and what's next?", you know, and just to make space, and they ended up being very upset. And I said, "Let's, let's make space for this feeling. You're entitled to all of your feelings, and, and at the same time, somebody feels that, that their boundaries were crossed, and they have feelings, too. And so let's just make space for everybody's feelings so that you can learn, grow and evolve from this situation." And I think that any one of us can have an experience where we cross a line, again, that we didn't intend to, of course, but it's not what it's not the intention that

matters. It's the impact. And things quote unquote, get out of hand. But if we just kind of lean into that and just say, "Okay, you know what, it doesn't really matter that I didn't mean it that way, it matters that in our relationship, there isn't enough trust or respect or equity, that, that we can make space for this mistake, and it is becoming an issue." And so what do we do with this issue? Where do we take it from here? And, and just kind of going slow and having compassion for all parties? And, you know, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, and I've had to apologize, and I've had to reflect, and I've had to work through my own self defensiveness, absolutely. I get defensive when I made a mistake. And it's because to my core, I don't want to hurt people, and I don't want to make a mistake. That's why I get so defensive. I it's not, I don't believe that happened. It's like, I don't believe I did that, you know, because that's not that that goes against the experience that I have of myself. And so I'm not asking anyone here to do a process that I haven't done. It's like this process of self reflection, and and working through it in a way that, like, Okay, well, this is a part of my story, but it doesn't define me, and what do I need to learn in order to evolve? And if anybody wants me to make this right, how can I work with them to make this right?

Anne: I think that was so beautifully said. And I think there's just so much to think about in there. One of the things I would really like to talk about is what about, you know, the times when we say to our friend, or it comes to up to our friend that these accusations have been made, and they really double down, they don't want to hear about it. Maybe they lash out at the survivor. Or sometimes I think there are cases where people threaten self harm. And so what do we do when that person just responds like really negatively, and isn't open to having those really thoughtful discussions?

Robyn: I think that that is a moment in time, and they could move past it. So let's not freeze frame that moment in time. Okay, so someone wants to lash out, and double down, whatever, I would say, "Okay, this is how you're feeling now. And I'm wondering how you can contain this feeling or go spend a weekend, you know, making space for yourself and taking care and practicing some breathing and just have some time to think on it. But please don't lash out at the survivor, because I believe

the survivor, and it's not helpful for you to, to lash out or to, to, to decide, you get to make sense of the situation. Like that's not your role. And so if this is so upsetting for you just kind of take a beat, you know, take a step back, and be upset", because remember, step two is feel your feelings about it. But we don't want to make space for further harm to happen to the survivor, because that's not okay. And so that that's an opportunity to advocate as a friend and just say, you know, "you need to not talk to this person for the, for the weekend, or until you're able to just sort this out for yourself. Because whether you want to believe this or not, this is what is happening in our friend group, this is a situation of conflict", whatever you want to say it is "that we're going to have to work through, and this energy you're bringing, and this kind of aggressive tone", if that's what it is, name it for what it is, right as objectively as you can, "it's going to be a barrier to making change and to, for us to sort this out." You know, I like to say something honest, and authentic and compassionate, like, "I believe that you think this now, but I don't think you're gonna think this way forever. So why don't we just give, give everyone a chance to cool off, you know, and just say, I know that you care about all these people involved. And, and this isn't how you'd want to behave, to show that you care about all the people involved. So, you know, I know this is really hard for you to hear that somebody has experienced harm and someone has caused harm. And I know you're trying to make sense of it. But I don't, I'm not going to make space for you to make sense of it in a way that's going to cause further harm." And just be really clear and post a boundary there.

Anne: Excellent. I think that is so helpful. So the kind of last chunk of questions that I have, think about the other people in the community, so thinking about how other people are talking about it, how other people are reacting to it. So how can we best talk to other people about the situation, when it comes up when they ask us about it?

Robyn: I think that's really about being a good role model. And so if you're able to hold that you believe the survivor and you have compassion for them and their experience, and you're letting them drive the boat because it's their boat, and you're holding space that the person who has caused harm is a complex human being that deserves compassion and humanity and we have a common humanity here, and that their

harm is only one part of their story. If you're able to hold both of those things, then you're able to role model that for others, and that's what's going to be so meaningful for the community. So you could say, Listen, I know everyone's really upset, this is upsetting. I just want to share my perspective, which is that I believe this person that has experienced harm, and I want to know that the person who has caused harm can do better. And I believe that they can, and I care about them, too. And so how can we as a community respond in a way where we're not making decisions on behalf of the survivor, and we're not defending or canceling the person that's caused harm. And there are times where we have to cancel a person and it's they're very rare, and it's about safety. It's about when you really feel that this person is unsafe, and they have no capacity to change right now, you might have to cancel them. And I would still say for now, right? It's just kind of like, a trespass, I guess...

Anne: Yes!

Robyn: ...More than a cancel

Anne: Yes it does not have to be permanent. You can say, "I need you to take a step back from this community while you work on your shit" and then come back, friend, and then come back and let's talk about it. It does not have to be permanent.

Robyn: Absolutely. If we understand the complexities of human beings and that we are all more than the worst thing we have ever done, which is a quote from Brian Stevenson who is a lawyer for death row in the States, look at what he must have seen when he says people are more than the worst thing they have ever done. So again we have role models out there trying to build a culture of accountability so we have to be those role models. And as you said Anne, we can accept that this person is not OK right now, not safe for right now, and have enough compassion for them to know that they are not going to feel this way forever, hopefully. So how can we build a bridge for them and ask them to go work on some stuff and come back and check in and hear what they have worked on . Let's hear what accountability means for them and then we can reassess. And so in this binary of black and white that is so harmful,

it is either I accept this person and this behaviour or I cancel them, and truth is there are so many other ways. And I think one of the most important things for us to do and our boundaries is to say, "I am not OK with you right now but I want to be in the future, I want you to be someone I can be OK with. So can you go be OK and come back and let's check in from there."

Anne: I love that so much. I'm not OK with you right now but I want to be in the future. I think that's that's beautiful. I really enjoy that. So what can we do when we are talking with someone who really does not believe the survivor. Do you have any tips for that situation?

Robyn: I just want to ask how that is helpful? I really think, does it even matter if you think it is true or not? Why does that matter? Because these things come up for a reason. So if you want to stay, if you want to like pour yourself a bed of concrete to your feet to say I am not moving from this position where I feel like I Don't believe the survivor, then everyone else is going to move on and you are going to be standing in some concrete. So it just doesn't help you, it doesn't help the survivor, it does not help the person that caused harm .I really think anything can be an oppountyo to learn from and grow so why does my behaviour, whatever it was, even if I don't understand it. Make it so that this person has accused me in this public way or is telling people about this? Something is going on. So what can I do about that for me? What does that mean for me? Let me look at my behaviour. It should not be this painful to look at our behaviour. It should not be this painful to look at the person we care about and their behaviour. If we had a culture of accountability, it would be with loving joy that we would lean into that and say, "I care about you and I want you to do better." And so that's why if we can role model this we can change the culture of accountability and it will be less painful for everyone. I understand that it is painful, we don't want to think that anybody that we love and care about could cause harm. We also don't want to hear that people have experienced harm because we care about them, we worry about them, you know, we want them to be well. And so I see the pain and I know exactly what that feels like and I want to make space for us to have these conversations. These are communication skills and it will help us to connect on such a deeper level. Imagine you are in a friend group,

someone sexually assaults somebody, and as a friend group you are able to work past that? How transformative would that be? How much stronger would your relationships be? How much more real would it be? Because of it, we are not all perfect and no one is. So we cannot strive for perfection. Again, another harmful binary, it is an extreme, right, you are either perfect or a monster? That's not the world I live in.

Anne: Wow. I think as you have talked about it I am just so struck with the amount of care and thoughtfulness that you have put into this whole topic and this whole discussion and how much is based in empathy and like community and I just think it is really excellent. So my last question that I have before we wrap up is what can we do when the community sides with the perpetrator?

Robyn: So, I just want to have full disclosure because I don't mind being vulnerable. I have not always been so zen about this. And I have had to come to a place to be more deeply empathetic and be more compassionate and that's why I want to have this conversation because if I can do it, so can you. And it is really hard work to get there. But it is so much more meaningful. Now because I am here, it is amazing how many more people are coming forward and saying, "hey I have been accused of sexual violence" or some people have said "I have hurt somebody." I had somebody say "I think I might be a serial predator" and I have just made loving space for those conversations and I feel so honoured and draw into having those conversations. I want to use that as an example to say once you are able to have those conversations and be authentic in your compassion for people that have caused harm, those people will come to you and you'll be seen as a helpful and safe space to have that conversation and I am really hopeful that every person that has come to me and said "I may have caused harm" will not cause harm again because they are going to be able to deeply look at it. So I just wanted to be transparent about that. Because as a survivor advocate, 12 years, it is hard to recognise that people cause harm because I have seen the deep suffering that harm and trauma, sexual violence, causes for the person that has experienced it. And when you spend all that time almost drowning in the suffering, it is really hard to see the humanity in a person that caused harm. So if I can see the

humanity in people that have caused harm I really have faith that others can as well.

Anne: I think to me that just says we have so much work to do. I hear so many people complaining about cancel culture. So many people are talking about accountability and growth. And I think what this says to me is that if that's what you want out of your community, then we all have to invest in getting into that place where we can have that authentic compassion.

Robyn: Yeah I think, maybe it was Albert Einstein, I'm not sure I am not sciency, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So with the MeToo Movement and Cancel Culture, you know, which was the idea that anyone who has caused harm is a monster, which was a direct response to the fact that no body has ever been held accountable for sexual violence and harm for centuries, then all of a sudden people were held accountable, the reaction was to, opposite reaction was then to OK we are not going to believe all of these survivors, it can't be possible, sexual violence is so big and wide. And so then people stopped believing survivors. So we have had all these things about, let's cancel and throw people out for causing harm and now we don't believe survivors anymore because it is not possible for it to be that big. So I think from that point the opposite reaction is to have compassion, understand compassion, and believe people can change. So that is where I am leaning. I didn't answer your question at all. So what can we do when the community side with the perpetrator is that we can try to bridge to this world where we are like I believe that this person has, you know, done what they have done because I believe the survivor and I believe that harm has been caused and that people do not feel safe. And so if you are going to side with the perpetrator, you are ignoring the person who has experienced harm and you are isolating them and you are canceling them. And so in order to defend the person who has been accused of harm, you are canceling the survivor and they did not come forward for no reason because it is hard to come forward. And I would just want to posit to them that if your intention is to throw away the person that has disclosed sexual violence? And I would be really hard pressed if people were like, yep that's it no problem. And maybe a little too hopeful. So if that is what your community is doing, they are

siding with the perpetrator and they are trying to throw away the survivor, I would just try to be a role model about that and say, "I don't want to throw anyone away. I think that everybody there deserves compassion and support. This is our community and harm has happened and I believe that we can make change and transform through the situation. I don't think we need to be defensive about it. I think we need to be hopeful and I am happy to take a leadership role and make space for this conversation, but I am not going to side with the perpetrator and throw away the survivor. That's not fair.

Anne: I love that. And I just think this applies to like, you can take this very general advice and thoughtfulness and apply it to so many different situations. Bring in that compassion, empathy, sense of care. I think this could really change a lot of what our community looks like. So I am just so grateful that you are willing to lay all that out for us, walk through your thought processes, I think it has been so helpful. And I would just like to know as our last question are there any takeaways that you want to leave us with?

Robyn: That it is not this binary, harmful, black or white, people are good or bad. Bad people do good things, good people do bad things, because there really is no such thing as good or bad. And it goes to everything we talked about today. If you want to side with the perpetrator and throw away the survivor, you are dealing in extremes again. And all of these extremes divide us. You see that more now than ever. If you have been tuned into equity issues in the past century, you'd be tuned into them now you can see how divisive those extreme binaries are. And the biggest takeaway is connection and compassion and communication. Look at that, three c's. And that's what we need to do in order to deal with this situation from all facets. You might not ever talk to the person that has caused harm, but can you still hold compassion for them? And just the hope that they can change and evolve? Hold that. It's probably more helpful. It will help you to be accountable for things that you have done as well. Yeah, compassion, communication, I forgot the other C. Connection.

Anne: I am just going to add my own reflection. I just think that a lot of what you said is practice. You have to get into the practice of being

accountable, apologizing, not being defensive, and that's something that takes a lot of work. To me, it sounds like you are advocating for this really thoughtful process of folks just like working on that and I think that that's really realistic and also really beautiful.

Robyn: Awh. Thanks. I think it is hard. And again, I am happy to be honest and say I have not always thought this way and I have definitely ebbed and flowed from where my compassions lie. And now I have more compassion for others because it makes change and they are just incredible conversations to have. So if anybody is listening and is afraid to have these conversations I just want to share that these conversations about accountability are incredibly inspiring so I highly recommend it.

Anne: That's incredible. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you for chatting with me today. I will share all of Robyn's contact information and the information about what she is doing at her institution in our episode description.

Robyn: Thanks, Anne!

(Transition music)

Anne: So that was what to do if your friend has caused harm with Robyn Ocean from Trent University. If you are interested in learning more about the work that Robyn is doing, you can find that info in our episode description. If you need support and you're a member of our UWindsor campus community, you can reach out to us at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. If you're not in Windsor, check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca.

Remember to like and subscribe, folks, that always helps us out. And we'll see you next time!