

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What do I do if I know the person who is reporting harassment?

A: You respond in the *same exact way* you normally would. Believe the person reporting harassment, de-escalate them if they are in crisis, validate their experience, offer them The Three Options and follow through. Your role is NOT to judge who is a good or bad person. Your role is simply to make your space free from harassment for however long you are present.

Q: What do I do if I know the person reported as the harasser?

A: You still respond in the *same exact way!* Believe the person reporting harassment, de-escalate them, validate their experience, offer them The Three Options and follow through. You can always chat more as a friend at another time, but while you are in your space, your role is to ensure the safety of all by upholding your Safer Spaces policy.

Q: How big of an issue is harassment anyway?

A: Please see our “Identity-Based Violence Statistics” document or visit one of the many sites dedicated to this topic, like ihollaback.org or stopstreetharassment.org.

Q: What about creating a safe space for men?

A: First, there is no such thing as a completely safe space. A safer space is an environment where people can be themselves without fear of any harm. This is achieved by supporting people in the space, encouraging them to speak up, listening and, ultimately, taking action when they feel threatened or intimidated. Spaces where men (especially cisgender white men) can feel comfortable expressing themselves and are sure to be taken seriously are abundant. Spaces where women, LGBTQIA folks, People of Color, people with disabilities, those who practice non-Christian religions, undocumented people, and other marginalized communities are afforded that same respect and consideration are not.

Society has historically given the benefit of the doubt to men who perpetrate violence while questioning the women and LGBTQIA folks who file complaints of harassment or reports of sexual assault, regardless of the harrowing statistics showing they're telling the truth. Two-thirds of women in the U.S. have experienced street harassment at some point in their lives

and 68% of those women were concerned that it would escalate into something more violent.¹ A 2012 survey conducted of gay and bisexual men in the U.S. also found that 90% reported being harassed or made to feel unwelcome in public spaces because of their sexual orientation.² Approximately 1 in 5 women in the U.S. have been victims of rape and 1 in 2 women have been victims of other forms of sexual violence at some point in their lives.³ Moreover, men are far more likely to be victims of rape themselves (1.4% of men in the US reported being raped in their lifetime⁴) than they are to be falsely accused of rape (of the 32% of all rapes that are actually reported, about 2-10% are false accusations⁵). For more data, please see our “Statistics” document included in this guide.

Thus, intentionally and publicly supporting people subject to identity-based violence, in addition to following through upon receiving complaints of harassment, will make spaces safer for them and, in turn, for everyone else.

Q: Who originally created the Safer Space Program and what experience do they have working with these issues?

A: Melanie Keller and Shawna Potter created the original program and training while running their local Hollaback! chapter, with help from friend and fellow activist Corey Reidy.

Shawna is the Founder and former Director of *Hollaback! Baltimore* (2011-2021). She has experience in business management, is a touring musician, and the author of “Making Spaces Safer: A Guide to Giving Harassment the Boot Wherever You Work, Play, and Gather” (AK Press), based on her years of experience running safer space workshops.

Melanie is a linguistics PhD candidate & lecturer, cat mom and former Director (2013-2015) of *Hollaback! Baltimore*. She became an expert on gender-based violence through her

¹ Kearl, Holly. “Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Report.” Stop Street Harassment. Spring 2014. Web. <<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/nationalstudy/>>

² McNeil, Patrick. "Harassing Men on the Street." Feministe. 15 Oct. 2012. Web. <<http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2012/10/15/harassing-men-on-the-street/>>.

³ Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁴ Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁵ Lisak D., Gardinier L., Nicksa S. C., Cote A. M. (2010). False allegations of sexual assault: An analysis of ten years of reported cases. *Violence Against Women*, 16,1318-1334.

previous work as an advocate and crisis counselor for victims of sexual assault, stalking, domestic violence and human trafficking in both Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD.

Corey has been an activist organizer for well over a decade; whether they be DIY collective, actions, worker-cooperatives, or political campaigns. She was a *Hollaback! Baltimore* volunteer from the start of the chapter's inception. From her various organizing work, Corey had knowledge and experience creating conflict resolution plans and implementing their trainings. She was able to bring this expertise towards the creation of The Safer Space Program. Today, Corey lives in Philadelphia, PA. She is a full-time yoga teacher. With others she organizes a yoga worker-cooperative, participates in a larger yoga teacher unionizing effort, and is still involved in various other activist activities. Beyond this, she slowly makes her way through university and hangs out with her beloved cats.

When the program was created, *Hollaback! Baltimore* sat on the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Community Partners group and the Transgender Response Team (TRT), and drew on our experience with them for elements of this campaign.