



WOMEN ^{OF} REFORM JUDAISM

WRJ says STOP Language and Self-Care

Discussing harassment and sexual assault can be sensitive. It can bring about a lot of trauma and withheld pain. But the more we talk about it and call it what it is, we destigmatize it and lower the barriers to meaningful conversations and actions. Harassment and sexual assault language is

evolving, and there are different opinions about particular words and usages. There is no “perfect” way to have these conversations. It helps if we are thoughtful and consistently intentional with our language and patient with each other. It is important to give ourselves and others grace and take care to truly listen to each other. Don’t be afraid to correct gently or apologize when there are language disconnects. Please reach out to call in a presenter/WRJ with care if we use language that could have been better (at advocacy@wrj.org). We are all learning and growing so patience is key as we move through this together.

Some people may choose to disclose their own experiences. Reliving experiences can be painful and sharing can be frightening. It is still common for folks to question a survivor’s experiences. It is important that we offer them a safe space to share. Body language, even over video is important.

Be mindful of your expressions. Be present when someone is sharing and offer words of encouragement and appreciation. In addition, if anyone self discloses personal experiences with you, they should not be shared with others.

As a society we are making strides in moving away from the fear of using the words, “sexual assault,” “rape,” “harassment.” However, labeling an experience for someone else, perhaps even before they themselves fully understand what has happened to them can be harmful. Coming to the realization that their experiences were either not consensual or unwanted, can be overwhelming. Instead of labeling it for them, we can take their lead, be a listening ear, validate them, and gently guide them toward help.

Supporting people and engaging in this work is a mitzvah. However, as you engage in these conversations in your congregation and community, it is possible that you might experience secondary harms including physical and emotional reactions, and over time, compassion fatigue. If you have experienced trauma in your past, it could reinvok that as well. Self-care is important in this process. We encourage you to listen to your physical and emotional selves.

It’s important to recognize your own needs to make it through these sometimes-difficult conversations. Self-care can help relieve some of the heaviness. We encourage you to make space for self-care and support each other as we work together to create a safe, respectful, and equitable environment where all voices can be heard. Please see the [‘Materials and Resources’](#) section for tools to help you. Don’t hesitate to connect yourself with those if you find you are in need.