

## **LAB FOR COMMUNITY REACH**

Resilience, Empowerment, Action and CHange



# **BUILDING STRENGTH FOR THE LONG HAUL TOWARD LIBERATION: A TOOLKIT**

Building and Maintaining Resilience in Communities Resisting  
State-Sanctioned Violence

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# THIS TOOLKIT IS FOR

- Organizers
- Community members
- Allies and co-conspirators
- Psychologists, social workers, and mental health professionals



WHO WANT TO BUILD **RESILIENCE**  
*Becoming stronger, healthier, and more able  
to handle challenges*



**WHILE RESISTING  
STATE-SANCTIONED  
VIOLENCE (SSV)**

# STATE-SANCTIONED VIOLENCE (SSV) IS...

the use of violence by government entities to control or punish, including:

- the direct perpetration of violence;
- ignoring violence perpetrated against certain populations;
- criminal prosecution of those who attempt to defend themselves



## BROAD IN NATURE AND IMPACT

SSV includes a range of ways government institutions enact or respond to violence. It poses a dangerous challenge to the wellbeing of marginalized communities, with impact that radiates far beyond the individuals directly involved in any given incident.



## ROOTED IN HISTORY & EMBEDDED IN SYSTEMS

SSV is fundamental to colonialism globally, and has been a fixture of the U.S. since its founding. It includes practice and policy related to the carceral system at all levels of the system.

**ESSENTIAL TO RESIST AS WE BUILD A SOCIETY THAT SUPPORTS THE LIBERATION AND THRIVING OF ALL**



# HOW CAN WE RESIST SSV?

## ERADICATING SSV REQUIRES STRENGTH FOR THE LONG HAUL

People have been resisting SSV for as long as it has existed.

In the U.S., SSV is so deeply embedded in our systems and structures that change won't happen quickly.

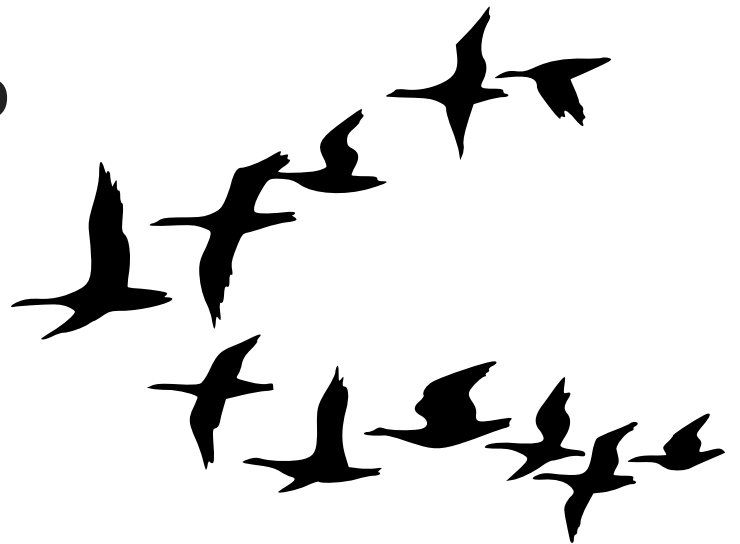
SSV will keep happening as we work to resist it.

**We need radical healing** -- healing while resisting oppression and moving toward liberation [1].

Communities with resilience maintain strength and wellness in the face of ongoing risk.

## RESILIENCE ISN'T JUST THE MEANS TO COPE

IT IS THE PROCESS THAT ALLOWS INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES TO SURVIVE, EVEN THRIVE, AND PERSIST IN WORKING FOR CHANGE





# HOW DO WE BUILD RESILIENCE?

This toolkit highlights psychological *resources* -- practices, beliefs, and ways of structuring activities or thinking about what we're doing -- that can help build

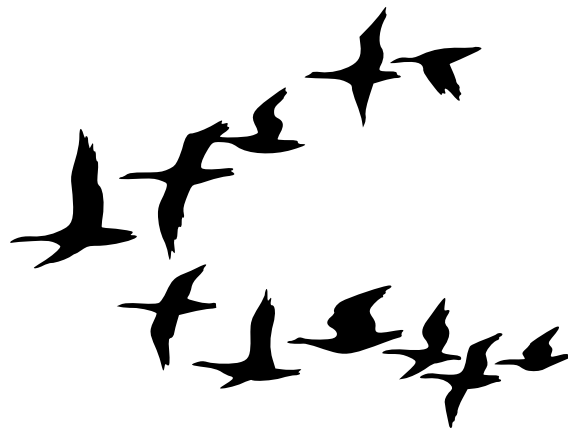
## RESILIENCE AS INDIVIDUALS --



each person is supported in building their own resilience

AND

## RESILIENCE AS A GROUP --



the group is able to bounce forward from challenges, accomplish goals, and thrive.

# WHO MADE THIS TOOLKIT?

This tool kit is a companion to a research article by the [Lab for Community REACH](#), psychologists and students passionate about and personally affected by SSV: *[Building Strength for the Long Haul toward Liberation: What Psychology Can Contribute to the Resilience of Communities Targeted by State-Sanctioned Violence](#)*. We believe the research in this article could be useful for those striving within communities to support themselves and their networks.



# WHY A TOOLKIT?

The toolkit lists **specific strategies** that might build each resilience resource.

There is a lot already happening in communities, and this toolkit is meant to sharpen or add to existing wisdom, pulling many ideas together in one place.

# RESOURCES THAT STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE

There are **four categories** of psychological resources that contribute to resilience. Each can be built or degraded over time.

## MAINTENANCE

The supports that keep up engagement in the resilience process.

## EFFICACY

The belief that one or one's group is capable of accomplishing specific goals.



## KNOWLEDGE

The information and savvy needed to take action.

## SKILLS

The specific abilities that make action effective.



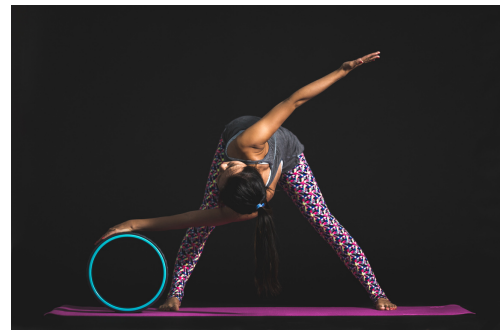
# MAINTENANCE

*How do we build maintenance resources to keep the group engaged in the process of resilience?*

**CONNECTEDNESS**



**FLEXIBILITY AND STABILITY**



**INTENTIONAL TIME AND SPACE FOR THE FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS**



# MAINTENANCE

## **CONNECTEDNESS**



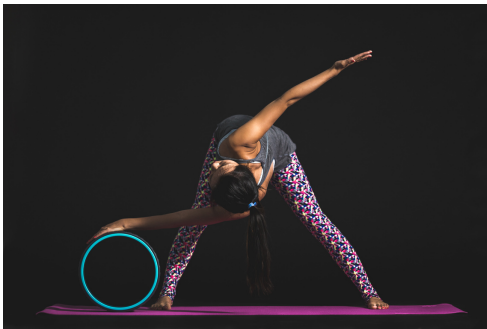
**CONNECTEDNESS** is a sense of togetherness and community. It can help the community to address divisions, take action, and problem-solve.

In order to **build connectedness**, you might...

- **Share stories in community**
  - Process experiences related to SSV with others in person or via online platforms, either informally or in a structured format [2, 3].
  - Link the present to the past -- make space for elders to share their experiences. E.g. spaces: conversation, art, literature, and forums [4, 5]
- **Connect at community events.**
  - Hold community events, which can allow for communal grieving or celebration of creativity, resilience, and thriving.
    - Event ideas: protests, art events, sharing stories by elders, community expressive writing [6].

# MAINTENANCE

## *FLEXIBILITY AND STABILITY*



After a traumatic experience, the combination of **FLEXIBILITY AND STABILITY** allows for both steadiness and creativity in moving forward.

In order to **build flexibility and stability**, you might...

- ***Maintain routine***

- Attend to your normal routine during times of crisis to help ground yourself and feel steady [7].
- As a group, identify one or more regular practices for each gathering, like a guided meditation, reading, or check-in.

- ***Reflect on what's most important to you.***

- Identify and articulate values and grounding belief systems / purpose -- why are you doing what you're doing? [8]
  - Identify and use indigenous healing systems (corresponding to the cultural heritage of your group).
- Make grounding values concrete and accessible by posting them online or creating slogans that reflect them. Refer to them when making choices.



# MAINTENANCE

## ***INTENTIONAL TIME AND SPACE FOR THE FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS***



To thoughtfully manage complex reactions to SSV, create space to feel and share difficult emotions like anger, fear, and sadness so that the emotions can energize action, rather than paralyze and demoralize. Similarly, positive emotions like happiness and hope can shore up strength for the grueling long-term work of social change.

In order to **build intentional time and space for the full range of emotions**, you might...

- ***Openly acknowledge and discuss***
  - Discuss the reality that it is normal and healthy to experience the full range of emotions, and they are necessary as fuel for connection and resilience.
  - Share common responses to trauma and the principles of trauma-informed care [9].

# MAINTENANCE

## *INTENTIONAL TIME AND SPACE FOR THE FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS*



In order to **build intentional time and space for the full range of emotions**, you might...

- ***Cope ahead***
  - Anticipate how one may emotionally react to certain events and identify coping strategies in advance [10].
    - E.g., discuss possible outcomes of a court hearing and brainstorm group activities in response -- "we'll be angry if the judge rules xyz but storming out won't help the case, so we'll take deep breaths, squeeze stress balls, and afterwards have a meeting where we can let our anger out and plan next steps."
  - Discuss the likelihood of particular emotional responses, and plan for how to channel them.
    - For e.g., Write out a script for a media interview, brainstorming what questions might be asked. Let yourself FEEL during this practice session, saying what you'd really like to say, and then practice saying what you'll actually say.

# MAINTENANCE

## *INTENTIONAL TIME AND SPACE FOR THE FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS*



In order to **build intentional time and space for the full range of emotions**, you might...

- ***Make and share art***
  - Produce, share, and discuss art in order to process and communicate emotions.
  - Hold community events like poetry open mics, art festivals, and block parties with dancing and live music. The events encourage people to feel emotions related to the issues and experiences you're organizing around.



# EFFICACY

IN THE CONTEXT OF SSV, BOTH SELF-EFFICACY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY ARE KEY RESOURCES.



**Efficacy is the belief that one or one's group is capable of accomplishing specific goals.**

**Efficacy both motivates action and makes action more effective.**

In order to **build efficacy**, you might...

- ***Celebrate successes***

- Define success for yourself
- Celebrate small successes [11].
- Remember that you can be an example for others, sharing your own struggles, techniques for healing, and achievements.
- Acknowledge and embrace: Your existence is resistance.

- ***Identify models***

- Highlight the success of other similar individuals and groups.
- Seek out examples of success by others in your identity group [12], and other marginalized groups that have successfully achieved social change.

# SKILLS

**KNOWING HOW TO DO IMPORTANT THINGS  
WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO DO?**

**CONSTRUCTING AND  
COMMUNICATING MEANING**



**RISK MANAGEMENT**



**COLLECTIVE  
DECISION-MAKING**



# SKILLS

## **CONSTRUCTING AND COMMUNICATING MEANING**



When a community experiences adversity, meaning-making is the creation of communal narratives that give the shared experience meaning and purpose. In the case of SSV, these narratives often refute mainstream stories that rationalize and perpetuate violence and instead, articulate the systemic forces at play and call for action.

In order to **build skills in constructing and communicating meaning**, you might...

- **Construct narratives**
  - Encourage expressive writing as a strategy for community members to make sense of traumatic experiences for themselves. For example, write uninterrupted for 15 minutes a day without stopping to edit or analyze, either about any topic that comes to mind, or about thoughts and emotions related to a single issue [13, 14].
  - Come together with others affected by an incident of SSV to find common ground in how you make sense of the issue, and how it might differ from mainstream stories [15, 16].
  - Decide how you want to tell the story of the community's experience and tell it in this way. Consider how the story fits (or not) with other stories impacting your group/population.



# SKILLS

## CONSTRUCTING AND COMMUNICATING MEANING



*In order to **build skills in constructing and communicating meaning**, you might...*

- **Create a safe space to share and preserve collective narratives**
  - Invite sharing memories and developing collective narratives as part of meetings, or hold gatherings for storytelling [17, 18].
  - Make a virtual space (e.g. website) to preserve collective memory and tell stories the way you want to tell them.
- **Translate narratives for social and mainstream media**
  - Ask community members with media experience to distill and translate communities' collective narratives into external-facing messages for social media and/or mainstream media.
  - Agree in advance on basic principles and messaging to uphold when interfacing with social media and mainstream media; this may require consulting with lawyers to align messaging with legal strategy.
  - Use social media to gather and sustain collective memory, and to frame the story. #Messageintentionally.
  - Encourage posting and messaging as part of an effort to generate mainstream media framed by community perspectives rather than dominant status-quo discourse.

# SKILLS



## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

**RISK MANAGEMENT** is about identifying risk factors that can be changed, and developing plans to decrease the likelihood of harm.

In order to **build skills in risk management**, you might...

- **Define safety**

- Articulate what safety means in a particular time and context. The concept of safety can vary. For example:
  - Safety could mean having space in which one can get away from reminders of SSV, such as violent imagery or video
  - Safety could mean anonymity, not having one's name publicly associated with a group
  - Safety could mean having an appointed peer support person (or trained mental health professional) available for group members to debrief with
  - Safety could mean not discussing certain topics or checking in before discussing them so that group members can take care of themselves
  - Safety could mean going places in pairs/groups, or with a group member trained in self-defense present
- Regularly check in on community members' concept of safety as it may change over time, as the local or national context around SSV shifts.
  - "What do we each need to feel safer this week?"
  - "What risks or threats are we facing this week?"
  - "What about this plan feels risky?"
  - "How can we make this plan safer for everyone?"

# SKILLS

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**



In order to **build skills in risk management**, you might...

- **Identify risks and determine what can be changed.**
  - Engage in scenario planning: Brainstorm scenarios in which your safety is compromised, and then identify the factors that can be changed. As part of this process, individuals and groups can decide how much risk they are willing to tolerate and can revisit this decision on an ongoing basis.
  - Seek help from experts to identify risks, such as understanding potential legal or medical hazards.
  - With respect to psychological risk, when SSV is garnering significant media attention, people can make conscious choices about their exposure, e.g. what videos they watch or articles they read.
- **Agree on a plan to minimize risk.**
  - For psychological safety, agree on what topics will receive content warnings / check-ins before being discussed in group. E.g., contagious behavior: suicide, self-harm, or substance abuse
  - Plan strategies ahead of time, and make a plan B, plan C, etc. in case the situation changes. Agree on how you'll make changes to the plan if needed [19].
  - Identify what information sources you trust and agree how you'll let community members know about the latest risk updates.

# SKILLS

## **COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING**



When people are gathered in response to a traumatic event, you'll need to make decisions on strategies both to support those most affected by the event and your work to affect change. **COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING** means the collaborative process used to reach such decisions.

In order to **build skills in collective decision-making**, you might...

- ***Intentionally choose a decision-making model***
  - Select a model to use for making decisions that fits the culture and aims of the group.
  - A lot of groups like a consensus-based model because it lets everyone listen and share their opinion, work through disagreements, and design a plan that values everyone's voices [20, 21].
  - Ensure that all group members are educated about the decision-making process being used and that new members are quickly informed of how to engage.

# KNOWLEDGE



**KNOWING USEFUL STUFF**

**KNOWLEDGE OF  
USEFUL SYSTEMS**



**KNOWLEDGE OF  
COMMUNITY ASSETS**



**PSYCHOEDUCATION**



**CRITICAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS**





# KNOWLEDGE

## ***KNOWLEDGE OF USEFUL SYSTEMS***



**KNOWLEDGE OF USEFUL SYSTEMS** means understanding how to navigate systems when group members get caught up in them, or when the system relates to change work you're doing. Example systems: the carceral system, the media, and government offices regulating the use of public spaces.

In order to **build knowledge of useful systems**, you might...

- ***Connect with expertise***

- Tap into individual networks and local community organizations that have expertise in systems likely to be relevant to the group.
- Ask individuals with specialized expertise (e.g. activists, lawyers, psychologists, and strategic communications professionals) to lend their knowledge to community organizations or help develop accessible brochures or factsheets to disseminate online.
- For smaller organizations, connect with larger or more established organizations to increase access to relevant expertise [22].

# KNOWLEDGE

## ***KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNITY ASSETS***

**Knowing about community assets can help you reach goals.**

**Community assets can include:**

- **Finances to fund events and support community members**
- **Space to host meetings and other events**
- **Community members who have particular skills**
- **Community members who either have influence in particular circles or have relationships with people in positions of power**



**In order to [build knowledge of community assets](#), you might...**

- ***Create a resource hub***
  - Create resource lists of community assets and community members with specialized expertise to be made accessible to the broader community.
  - Designate a position of maintaining knowledge of community assets and serve as a point person to link community members to assets when needed.

# KNOWLEDGE

## ***PSYCHOEDUCATION***



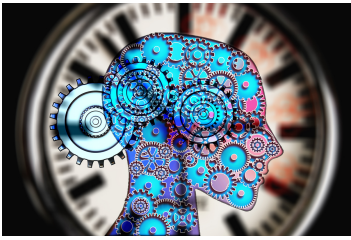
Trauma-focused psychoeducation helps an individual or group understand how their exposure to traumatic threat(s) can impact their functioning, how to lessen those impacts, and ways to bounce-back from these experiences.

In order to **build knowledge related to psychoeducation**, you might...

- ***Increase access to trauma-informed knowledge***
  - Build knowledge of the impact of trauma through reading and consultation. This includes trauma experienced by individuals and groups, as well as cultural trauma -- SSV that happened to someone with a shared identity, which heightens one's own awareness of oppression and vulnerability to SSV [23, 24, 25, 26].
  - Share information through personal networks and online presence [27].

# KNOWLEDGE

## ***PSYCHOEDUCATION***



In order to **build knowledge related to psychoeducation**, you might...

- ***Create psychoeducation groups***

- Implement structured, non-clinical, psychoeducation groups as outlined by Miller and Wang [28]. The model consists of three sessions of group psychoeducation.
  - The first session includes a discussion of social identity, power and privilege, and the ways that social disasters can cause trauma; this session also allows group members to share their own reactions.
  - The second session entails adapting trauma management strategies to a context in which the threat is ongoing, including self-calming, mindfulness, and self-care strategies.
  - The final session reviews and reiterates what group members have learned, giving them a space to practice strategies and plan for the future, including identifying barriers to their healing.

# KNOWLEDGE

## CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS



Critical consciousness is recognizing how a single event fits into larger patterns of oppression, and taking action based on that understanding [29]



In order to **build critical consciousness**, you might...

- ***Develop consciousness in connection***
  - Engage with critically-engaging reading materials, educational podcasts, and documentaries that link current events with political and historical context [29].
  - Facilitate groups to enhance critical consciousness through discussion of learning, and dialogue about strategies for engagement [31, 32].



# Endnotes

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