



## Chapter 1

# WELCOME & THANK YOU

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Dear Reader:

If you are reading this, you may be beginning a journey of learning how to better support those impacted by sexual violence or you may be an experienced advocate who is continuing and recommitting to your learning. Either way, on behalf of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) and Maine's sexual assault victim service providers, thank you for your work. Advocates change lives.

For four decades, the providers who make up MECASA have produced a statewide advocate training manual which has embodied their deeply held philosophies of service provision as well as captured their knowledge and wisdom about how to best support those impacted by sexual violence. Built on the foundation of learning represented in the previous manuals, this guide is a compilation of the best of Maine advocates' experience and expertise and offers advocates the fundamentals of providing support and advocacy to survivors and their communities.

I first took the advocate training in early 2000 and had the pleasure to retake it this year as this new training was being piloted. While the foundational pillars of our advocacy work remain the same (survivor driven, trauma informed, and confidential) we have learned so much more about how to serve survivors in the intervening years from the impact of trauma on the brain to how to provide more culturally responsive support.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this guide including the Advocate Training Work Group for their many hours of work and guidance, the subject matter experts who consulted on various sections, as well as the thousands of Maine advocates who have developed our field over the fifty years.

And a final thanks to you for your work to support those impacted by sexual violence.

With much gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Saxl'.

Elizabeth Saxl, Executive Director  
Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault



## This Manual & A Word on Statutory Privilege

This manual is a learning tool for anyone interested in supporting those impacted by sexual violence. It is also a part of the training required to obtain the statutory privilege which allows advocates to provide legally confidential services. However, in order to meet the privilege standards this training must be delivered in line with the Quality Assurance Standards as approved by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

## Terms & Language

### Pronouns

Continuing with past tradition, this edition of the manual uses gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language. This recognizes that sexual violence is perpetrated and committed by people of all genders. This manual avoids using gendered pronouns and instead uses “survivor” or the plural “they” or “them.” The goal is to be both inclusive and readable.

### “Person-First Language” & “Identity-First Language”

Whenever possible, this manual uses “person-first language” such as “person who used sexual violence” or “person with a mental illness.” Person-first language advocates support acknowledging a history of erasure and stigma<sup>1</sup> and emphasizing the individuality, dignity, and equality of people.<sup>2</sup> That said, we appreciate that communities want to center their identities as a means to de-stigmatize and prefer “Deaf person” or “Autistic person.”

### Considerations for Advocates

Boxes appear throughout the text to highlight important pieces of information or helpful approaches for advocates. Keep in mind that advocacy work is based on the unique experiences of survivors and those who

love them and that every situation is different. The Considerations are not meant to be directive, and are suggestions to be applied when appropriate for the circumstances.

### Sexual Violence

This manual uses the term “sexual violence” to describe sexual assault, sexual harassment, human trafficking, incest, ritualistic abuse, and the many other experiences discussed throughout the manual. Terms describing specific types of sexual violence are used in the various sections of the manual, and may appear in cited material.

### Survivor


This manual uses the word “survivor” to describe someone who has experienced sexual violence, and to acknowledge the growth and power of every individual. Use of this term reflects the fact that individuals are more than targets of sexual violence, and many individuals do not consider themselves victims or wish to be referred to as such.

Use of the word “victim” is used occasionally to describe an individual who is currently experiencing, or has very recently experienced, sexual violence. In addition, in sections referring to other community systems, the word “survivor” may be replaced with “victim,” “witness,” “patient,” etc.


### Helpline

The manual uses the term “helpline” for the statewide 24/7 sexual assault helpline to standardize the language and service.





**We stand on the shoulders of giants.  
All the good work we produce today  
is made possible by those who  
bravely, and with sacrifice, built  
that which came before us.**



## Acknowledgements

We offer our most sincere thanks to the core group of advocates, and the agencies that supported them, who invested significant time and energy on the revision of Help in Healing, including the 2020-2021 statewide Advocate Training Workgroup: Wendy Page, Nicole Dudley, Lydia Christie of AMHC Sexual Assault Services; Kayce Hunton and Ashley Hayden of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services; Hannah Johnston and Whitney Adell of Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine; Deanna Walker and Jenna McCarthy of the Sexual Assault Crisis Center; Amanda Chambers and Haley Bloodwell of Rape Response Services; Amy Goode and Elise Martin of Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine; Bright Lukusa of the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine; and Katie Kondrat of MECASA. These individuals spent countless hours of visioning, researching, writing, and revising this material. MECASA is grateful for their dedication, expertise, and generosity.

We stand on the shoulders of giants. All the good work we produce today is made possible by those who bravely, and with sacrifice, built that which came before us. Thank you to the advocates and leaders who created the first statewide manual at least 30 years ago.

And thank you to the team who brought us the Foundations of Advocacy curriculum, which has inspired and led us in this 2021 edition process. To the Resource Sharing Project, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, and others on this project, thank you.

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