



Thinking About Harm

TOWARDS A SHARED FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

SOURCES/CAUSES/BEHAVIORS

MISTAKE

Error: "a wrong action or statement proceeding from faulty judgment, inadequate knowledge, or inattention" ([Merriam-Webster](#))

MISUNDERSTANDING

"incorrectly interpreting or not understanding what is being communicated" (Adrienne Marie Brown, *We Will Not Cancel Us* p. 30)

CONFLICT

"disagreement, difference, or argument between two or more people. Can be personal, political, structural. Conflicts can be direct and named, or indirect and felt." (*We Will Not Cancel Us* p. 28)

WRONGDOING

"violation of an established right or protection" (Sigal Ben-Porath, *Cancel Wars* p. 67). The willful breaking of an agreed-upon norm.

ABUSE

"behaviors intended to gain, exert, and maintain power over another person or in a group" (*We Will Not Cancel Us* p. 27)

IMPACTS/EFFECTS/EXPERIENCES

DISCOMFORT

"mental or physical uneasiness" ([Merriam-Webster](#)) "You aren't quite in pain, but you don't feel very good. Discomfort can also describe embarrassment" ([vocabulary.com](#))

OFFENSE

"upset and hurt or annoyed feelings" as a result of (perceived) rudeness, disrespect, or lack of regard for one's feelings or identity ([Cambridge English Dictionary](#))

PAIN

"a distressing feeling often caused by intense or damaging stimuli" ([Wikipedia](#)). "Pain is often localized, felt intensely, and sometimes suddenly. Discomfort can feel like a general challenge." ([nfpt.com](#))

HARM

Injury, damage, wound. "Harm is what needs healing" (*We Will Not Cancel Us* p. 28).

TRAUMA

A wound that changes one's perception + behavior. "A lasting rupture or split within the self" (Gabor Maté, *The Myth of Normal* p. 20). Not the event, but its impact over time.

QUESTIONS TO THINK + TALK ABOUT

Think about and try to articulate the differences between (for example): mistake vs wrongdoing; conflict vs abuse; discomfort or pain vs harm; harm vs trauma. Why do these differences matter? Can you think of examples for each of the behaviors and experiences above (preferably non-theoretical: times you have performed these behaviors, experienced these impacts, or witnessed others doing/experiencing them)?

Looking at each of the behaviors: which of these can and/or should be avoided if possible? What are ways you can think of to try to decrease the likelihood of those behaviors you believe should be avoided—both as an individual person and as a community in dialogue with one another?

Looking at each of the experiences: which of these do you believe can or should be avoided if possible? Are there any that may have any value? What are ways you can think of to respond—both individually and as a community in dialogue with one another—to each of these impacts when they occur?

