



#### DEMONS: FEAR

phone number or ask for any identifying information. Available to all genders and identities, they'll direct you to appropriate services and support in your area. I list additional sex worker-friendly crisis resources in the appendix on page 278.

#### WHO CAN I TELL?

When seeking help from the authorities, there are always worries: *No one will care. No one will believe me. My job will be used against me. I'll lose the only way I know how to make money. I'll be charged with a crime, and my abuser will walk free.* These fears keep many of us working in terror, undefended.

If you are in a bad situation, you deserve help. I am not a lawyer, and nothing I say here should be taken as legal advice, but I can offer basic guidelines for reporting abuse:

- ✱ *Crisis hotlines help victims—end of story.* They do not entrap sex workers and punish them. The person on the other end of the line is not going to turn you over to the police, the IRS, the DEA, ICE, or anyone else. Do not put off picking up the phone and calling for help **today** because of that fear.
- ✱ *When you call, ask whether your conversation is anonymous, confidential, private, and/or privileged.* Request an explanation so that you understand what your rights and protections are.
- ✱ *If you're engaged in illegal activities such as prostitution or selling drugs, ask for legal help. Make it clear that you need to be able to speak without incriminating yourself.*
- ✱ *Once you know you can speak freely, be honest. Disclose everything, even illegal activities. You risk undermining yourself by holding parts of your story back only to be found out later, and your credibility is important.*
- ✱ *Most social workers, crisis counselors, and legal advisors are decent people who see just about everything at their jobs.*

#### ✱ PRACTICAL ADVICE: PHYSICAL SAFETY

We can't have a conversation about safety in sex work without discussing the physical and legal risks involved. In these next few sections, I'll be tackling some difficult topics including violence, self-defense, getting arrested, and surviving a scary call. If you're not feeling ready for these topics right now, skip ahead to my discussion of safer sex on page 45.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND WORKPLACE ABUSE

Because we operate at the margins of society, too many sex workers experience workplace violence at the hands of clients, management, pimps, traffickers, coworkers, or lovers. Many of us face getting outed, losing custody of our children, deportation, or arrest. Without exception, no one should be terrorized into doing sex work. Sexual coercion is a violation of human rights, integrity, and dignity. Furthermore, we deserve full control of the money we earn. I don't know who you are, I don't know your situation, but if you live with threats and violence, that is wrong. Nobody deserves to be treated like that. *Especially not you.*

We can talk ourselves into believing abuse is our fault. *I should've known better. I knew this would happen. I brought this on myself.* That is depression talking, anger turned inward. No one is responsible for your mistreatment except your abuser. Whatever you signed up for, whatever warning signs you ignored, and all the rest, none of that matters now—you need to get away from your abuser.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-SAFE or 7233 | thehotline.org) is an excellent starting point for help. It's anonymous and confidential, which means no one will track your

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Of course, there will always be exceptions, but most likely you won't be the first sex worker they've met in their career. You probably won't be the first one they've laid eyes on since lunch! It can be hard to shake that instinctive fear of exposure, but most professionals won't bat an eye when they learn you do sex work.

#### SECURING A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

One of the truly unjust aspects of sex work is that workplace violence is often tolerated. The industry is a magnet for criminal behavior, and we don't always enjoy full protection from law enforcement. However, sex work under threat is not inevitable.

You should be able to come and go from work without being followed or harassed. If management's security protocols are inadequate, make some noise. If that doesn't work, it's time to make a change. If a fan is stalking you, you can go to the police and get a restraining order. If you work out of your home, and you don't have privacy, then you owe it to yourself to move. I know how horrible it feels to lose where you live because of safety concerns—I went through it myself—but you can't huddle in your apartment terrified your neighbors are monitoring your foot traffic. Thousands of sex workers all over the country operate in safe surroundings, and you deserve to as well.

#### VIOLENT CLIENTS

Is there any terror in sex work more vivid than the homicidal maniac? Popular culture works very hard to remind those of us who live on the margins that there is one force civilization cannot defend us from: the murderous, sex-crazed psychopath. Of course, most assault stops short of murder, but violence and rape are common in the populations who make up the bulk of sex workers: gay men, trans\* folk, and women.

Unfortunately, there is no way to keep ourselves absolutely safe, but we can protect ourselves. My advice:



- ✱ Trust your instincts. Your gut is your first line of defense. If someone feels wrong to you, terminate the situation. As social animals, we know deep down from even the subtlest clues when something is off, but we're socialized not to be judgmental, to smooth things over, to act nice. In sex work, you do not wait for things to get weird. When those little hairs go up on the back of your neck, you get yourself the hell out of there. I recommend a powerful book on this subject, *The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence*, by Gavin De Becker. As he writes, "The words 'I know it' are more valuable than 'I knew it.'"
- ✱ Learn how to physically defend yourself. (I discuss this more in the next section.)
- ✱ Always have an escape plan. When you do outcall, shoot porn in an unfamiliar place, or start at a new club, look for the exits and alarms.
- ✱ Demonstrate good boundaries. Act proud and assertive, like someone who doesn't tolerate nonsense.
- ✱ Have a support team. Let folks know where you're going, and check in with them after a shift, shoot, or scene.
- ✱ Tell your clients about your support system. Don't be afraid to inform them that you have people who know where you are and what you do.
- ✱ Always, always, always have enough money to walk away if something doesn't feel right. This means having twenty bucks stashed in your shoe or your bra so you can get home. This means having money set aside so you don't have to say "yes" to something you don't want to do.
- ✱ Have a plan in case you get robbed. How do you get home? How do you get in your front door? Is your cellphone, with all those hot selfies and client information, locked? Hopefully this never happens, but know what your next steps are if it ever does.

## ✱ PRACTICAL ADVICE: MANAGING ACUTE ANXIETY

Anxiety episodes are no fun whatsoever: racing thoughts, elevated heartbeat, dizziness or lightheadedness, an inability to think clearly. We face a lot of uncertain situations in sex work, resulting in worry, stage fright, or just a general sense of dread. If you're in immediate danger, you must get yourself to safety right away. However, if you are safe in the moment but fear of the future is overwhelming you, here's my advice on how to feel calmer:

- ✱ Realize what you are feeling. The first step to confronting panic is to acknowledge it. Many of us would much rather ignore our anxieties, so we chatter, obsess, drink, overeat, or hypnotize ourselves online for hours. However, denial only exacerbates feelings of paralysis and powerlessness.
- ✱ Voice what you are feeling. Try saying aloud: "I feel super scared and wound up right now." Speaking the truth won't make whatever you fear more real. Instead, it will bring you into the present moment.
- ✱ Breathe deeply. Slowly inhale to a count of three, filling your belly first, then your chest. Gently hold your breath while counting to three, then slowly exhale to a count of three. Repeat as often as needed, until you feel your body soften. It's common to take shallow breaths when we're afraid, elevating the body's stress hormones. Breathing deep from the diaphragm activates the relaxation response of the parasympathetic nervous system, countering the adrenaline-fueled fight/flight/freeze response of the sympathetic nervous system.

## THE POLICE

Seeking out the police or other authorities when you need help is one thing; it's quite another when they come after you. The best offense is a good defense. When you're talking about cops who literally hold your life in their hands, you need excellent defense. Do not wait; do your homework today. Connect with a lawyer or a sex-work friendly legal defense organization. (More on that in a minute.) Always have their card on hand, right next to the condoms and lube, and memorize their name and contact information.

The police are less likely to mess with someone who calmly and clearly articulates their rights. I can't say this enough times: Know your actual rights. Don't spout nonsense you picked up from action movies. This isn't always easy—I've got major authority issues myself, I confess. I get so mad I can't see straight when taking orders from bullies, so I know what a struggle it can be to stay cool.

However, always pick your battles wisely. The time to take a stand isn't when you're in custody. Keep your mouth shut, follow their orders, don't make a bad situation worse for yourself. I don't want to take anything away from folks who've been beaten, raped, and robbed by dirty cops—that is a brutal reality. However, I lived with an ex-cop for ten years and had several as clients. What they tell me is most of them don't want to arrest us. They can't admit it on the job—law enforcement can't pick and choose the laws they like—but many of them view shaking us down as a total waste of time. In the heat of the moment, try to remember they are just doing their job. Comply with their orders while firmly asserting your right to a lawyer. For more information, I provide a list of resources on how to interact with law enforcement in the appendix on page 278.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE: MANAGING ACUTE ANXIETY

- ✱ Reconnect with your body, focus on the here and now. Clenching an ice cube, snapping a rubber band on your wrist, or curling and uncurling your toes are ways to get you out of your head and back into your body. Even if you're in serious trouble, focusing on what's actually happening in the present moment will improve your ability to manage the situation.
- ✱ Realize that your brain is playing tricks on you. If you're in a panic mode but facing no immediate danger, your mind is outrunning reality. Say to yourself: "I am safe in this moment. I am healthy and whole. These feelings will pass." A friend of mine, when she's drowning in anxiety, puts on loud music, dances wildly, and sings, "This is silly, this is silly, this is silly," until she can get on top of how she's feeling. Acknowledging that our brains are in hyperdrive can help free us from any shame, guilt, judgment, or pressure we put on ourselves to "just get over it already."
- ✱ Use positive self-talk. Oftentimes during panic attacks, self-hatred tags along, fueling all those hideous whispers inside our heads telling us we're no good. I call those voices "hate radio." Talk to yourself with the same compassion you'd show to your lover or very best friend. Say, "This feels terrible right now, but I'm going to get through to the other side very soon. I don't let fear rule my life."
- ✱ Visualize a calming situation. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a peaceful place out in nature, sitting in a park or by the beach or in the forest. As you inhale and exhale, imagine any thoughts or emotions that come into your mind are like leaves blowing on the wind—notice them, but let them go right on by. Just observe—don't judge or fixate on them in any way. This practice of acknowledging feelings without engaging them can be very powerful.
- ✱ Question your thoughts. When we get worked up, all kinds of horrible future scenarios can ricochet through our brains. Once your body and mind have calmed down for



a few minutes, and you are in a safe place, try challenging your worries with these scripts:

- *My anxious reaction is out of proportion to the reality of the situation.*
- *I have friends and loved ones who can listen, soothe, and provide perspective.*
- *If the worst possible thing did happen, I am safe and strong and could handle it.*
- *I can alleviate anxiety today by preparing for a better future. Is there anything I need to be doing right now?*
- ✱ *Focus on meaningful activities.* When you're past the critical stage, a meaningful goal-directed activity like going to the movies or the gym or making dinner can help focus your attention elsewhere. It's fine to distract yourself—don't sit around obsessing about how you feel. Get back to the business of life.
- ✱ *Listen to your body.* After an anxiety attack, it's common to feel wrung out and exhausted; give your body the rest it needs to recover. If you have excess adrenaline to burn off, working out, taking a long walk, or sex can be relaxing and grounding, bringing body and mind back into balance.

*Worry pretends to be necessary, but serves no useful purpose.*  
—ECKHART TOLLE

## ✱ HEARTFELT ADVICE: SURVIVING THE BAD CALL

The worst has happened—a call turned ugly. A client or coworker or cop became violent, threatening, or otherwise out of hand. You're safe now, but shaken and scared. What do you do next? It's important to say first that in our line of work, an encounter does not have to rise to the legal threshold of rape, assault, battery, or robbery to feel disturbing, painful, dehumanizing, or traumatizing. If it felt bad to you, that is all that matters.

If you are the victim of a crime, reporting to the police is your decision. Unfortunately, in many parts of the U.S., sex workers face bias in the legal system. There is a chance your claims will not be taken seriously. If you decide to go to the police, I strongly suggest you enlist an ally to support you through the process.

In the days that follow, it is crucial to take extra care of yourself for as long as you feel affected by the event. Here's my best advice:

- ✱ *Take a moment to acknowledge this is tough stuff.* Give yourself credit for doing the very best you know how to get through this. Treat yourself just as your guardian protector or very best friend would treat you: gently, kindly, with ferocious protectiveness and bottomless compassion.
- ✱ *If you experience suicidal thoughts, insomnia, anxiety, or other distress symptoms, seek professional crisis counseling right away.* The National Sexual Assault Hotline (800-656-4673 | [rainn.org](http://rainn.org)) is available 24 hours a day. It's free, anonymous, confidential, and available to all genders.
- ✱ *Don't be silent; don't act like nothing happened.* Stuffing this down inside is additional self-harm.

- ✱ *Ask for support from friends and family.* Now is not the time to isolate.
- ✱ *Tell your buddies, coworkers, and management what happened.* Let them be part of your protection system. Additionally, they have the right to be informed in order to protect themselves.
- ✱ *Do not blame yourself.* You are only responsible for you, not for anyone else. You don't deserve what happened. You didn't have it coming. This is not your fault. You are not stupid. This is not your karma. *Period.*
- ✱ *It's natural to feel vulnerable.* I encourage you, however, not to treat this event as evidence that you can't trust other people or yourself.
- ✱ *It's normal to feel depressed or lose interest in ordinary activities for a while.* Please don't beat yourself up. When traumatized, we need to grieve what we've lost: the hope that we will always be safe, the wish that nothing bad will ever happen to us. That sadness must be fully felt, but it is survivable.
- ✱ *Anger is common as well.* It can be an excellent motivator to make yourself safer in the future.
- ✱ *Take extra good care of yourself.* Go for long walks. Write in a journal. Make art. Be sweet to your body, including washing, grooming, and eating right. Connect with the things that make you feel good. Nature, sunshine, little kids, exercise, and animals are all excellent medicine.
- ✱ *If flashbacks flood your mind, stop what you're doing and be present.* Breathe into you, not the memories.
- ✱ *Avoid addictive or self-destructive behaviors as best as you can.* What starts out as a shortcut to make the pain go away can contribute to a spiral of shame and self-loathing.
- ✱ *Be proactive.* Self-defense courses and getting politically involved are powerful ways to take back control, as well as to find safe community. Support groups, both online and in real life, connect you to those who have had similar

experiences, providing opportunities to learn from others how to cope.

- ✱ *It's natural to think about quitting sex work.* However, give yourself time; don't make snap decisions.

And finally, allow for the possibility that once you've processed what happened, this event will pass through you to settle where it belongs, in the past.

*Few of us are actively taught self-care in response to trauma. As negative emotions come up, we must honor them, because they're telling us something important—our response cannot be to wish them away or to engage in yet more harm to ourselves. We must enlist all of our resources: friends, safety nets, self-love. Healing can only happen when we give ourselves time and space to acknowledge what happened and to grieve it. Only then can we absorb both the trauma and the truth of our resiliency into the story of ourselves.*



## ✱ PRACTICAL ADVICE: THE LAW AND LEGAL TROUBLE

*The problem with living outside the law is you no longer have its protection.*

—TRUMAN CAPOTE

The law ought to protect sex workers, and legal matters ought to be in the Tools section of this book. When sex work is illegal, it drives it underground, making it more dangerous while criminalizing the “victims” the laws are supposed to defend. The result is many of us, regardless of our job title, live with the fear of arrest and criminal prosecution.

Of course, plenty of sex work is legal, and you may think since you’re not engaging in prostitution you’re in the clear. But working for a legitimate strip club or massage parlor or porn company doesn’t mean you won’t find yourself in a bust someday because of someone else’s actions, such as a nuisance complaint, drug dealing, human trafficking, or tax evasion. Unfortunately, our industry routinely attracts law enforcement. You cannot ignore your responsibilities, and ignorance of the law is no defense. It’s especially true if you work for yourself. Only you know your precise circumstances—whether you have children, are on probation, are camming across state lines, are sending adult material through the mail, and so on.

Knowledge is power. What’s considered free speech in one town can be prohibited in another. Laws written today may be overturned tomorrow. You can’t fully assess risk if you don’t know what risks you’re actually taking. Wouldn’t it be better to find out that what you’re doing is legal than operating in ignorant fear?

I just have to shake my head remembering how clueless I was back in the day. I’d ask someone, usually a fellow working girl, what she thought the law was. She’d tell me something she heard from somewhere, but she wasn’t quite sure it was true, because she’d heard the friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend got busted for something like it just the other day. We’d all just stumble along in a haze of anxiety and half-truths.

Rather than that, my advice is to invest a few hundred dollars to sit down with a defense attorney to learn exactly what the laws are where you live. If that’s financially out of reach, there are ways to get your questions answered through low-cost or free legal resources listed in the appendix on page 275.

As for me, I’m not a lawyer and don’t play one on television. Absolutely nothing that follows here should be construed as legal advice. And I’m certainly not advising you to do anything illegal—heavens no! I’m instructing you to do the opposite: find out what the laws are so you can make good choices. However, be aware it’s not only about what is on the books: laws aren’t always equally enforced. Perhaps your newly elected district attorney plans to crack down on petty crime. Knowing the DA will press charges incentivizes the police department to make more nuisance arrests. Or perhaps your city leaders have decided adult industries boost tourism, so law enforcement priorities are directed elsewhere. Local legal aid nonprofits and criminal defense lawyers should know which way the wind is blowing in your area.

### FINDING LEGAL COUNSEL

Where do you look to get the right help? I can’t stress this enough: do not reach out to your lawyer clients. Don’t ask to meet for coffee to get advice; don’t offer a trade. First off, that is highly unethical on their part—not that you need to be protecting them from themselves, since they’re the ones who are officers of the court, after all. But getting represented by someone who may have broken the law with you? You don’t want any part of that if someone decides to investigate your client, trust me. And second, bad boundaries equal

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bad business. Keep clients as clients. Get yourself a lawyer who is sworn to protect you without any messy conflicts of interest.

Most legal aid nonprofits help people from every walk of life; I recommend asking right up front if they are comfortable advising sex workers. A former district attorney or public defender now in private practice will most likely have handled many sex work-related cases. Also, check out the Kink Aware Professionals directory, sponsored by the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom ([ncsfreedom.org](http://ncsfreedom.org)). NCSF stands up for the rights of all queers, kinks, and other sexually adventurous people. They provide a bulletin board listing lawyers comfortable with alternative sexual lifestyles. Additionally, check out the legal advice resources I list in the appendix on page 275.

Like all other professionals—doctors, tax consultants, and the rest—demand utter professionalism. Attorneys are obligated to be respectful regardless of their clients’ circumstances. If your lawyer disses what you do, time for a new lawyer! Their job is to advise, not judge.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LEGAL COUNSEL

Once you find counsel, schedule an appointment to ask:

- ⊗ Is what you’re doing a misdemeanor or a felony in your municipality? What are the best ways to avoid breaking the law?
- ⊗ Can using a fictitious name harm you? Should you ever use false identification?
- ⊗ If stopped by the police, do you have to give your real name? What are the legal implications for using a false name?
- ⊗ If arrested, should you talk to anyone other than your attorney? (Spoiler alert—the answer is always **no**.)
- ⊗ What’s the protocol if you are busted? What if you need to post bail? Discuss where the best place is to set aside funds if you ever need get-out-of-jail money.

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- ⊗ Should you deposit a retainer for bond and/or legal fees with your attorney? What are your rights to these funds if you do?
- ⊗ How might getting arrested affect your living situation?
- ⊗ If convicted, can you be evicted from where you live?
- ⊗ Would you have to register as a sex offender?
- ⊗ If you have children, what is the effect of an arrest/conviction/plea bargain on custody?
- ⊗ If you’re in the middle of a divorce, what is the effect of an arrest/conviction/plea bargain on marital dissolution proceedings?
- ⊗ How can an arrest affect spousal and/or child support?
- ⊗ Would you be obligated to tell anyone about your arrest: employers, judge in custody proceedings, future landlords?
- ⊗ What are your state’s laws concerning asset seizures? Can they take the cash in your home or place of work? Can they seize anything else—computer, cell phone, car, video equipment, or house? Can they confiscate your bank account, safe, or safety deposit box?
- ⊗ What options are there to have an arrest or conviction expunged, meaning that it’s removed from your legal record?
- ⊗ What rights and/or legal exposure do you have regarding the internet? What cybercrime laws do you need to follow when advertising online?
- ⊗ Can you protect your website’s content from illegal use?
- ⊗ What are the laws that govern working with other sex workers, including referrals or doubles?
- ⊗ What should you do if a landlord or neighbor registers a noise complaint?
- ⊗ If you are assaulted, robbed, or raped by a client, what are your rights? Can you report it to the police?
- ⊗ If you are assaulted, robbed, or raped by a police officer, what are your rights? Who can you report it to?



## UNDERSTANDING FELONIES

I advise you, in no uncertain terms, to stay the hell away from felonies. Felony convictions carry serious prison time, ruin your record, and can result in asset seizures, meaning the government can take your property and never give it back. If you're unfamiliar with any of these terms, talk to your legal counsel. Do not skimp on learning what you need to know to keep yourself out of prison for years.

- ⊗ Pimping and Pandering: Laws intended to punish anyone who profits from or facilitates prostitution. Although well intended, these laws criminalize sex workers who coordinate with each other to share clients, schedule doubles, or even to protect themselves from dangerous clients.
- ⊗ Crossing State Lines: Facilitating travel from one state to another to engage in prostitution. Another set of laws designed to save us from ourselves. (See #EliotSpitzer #EpicDownfall.)
- ⊗ Trafficking: Moving or imprisoning people for the purpose of forcing them into prostitution or other work against their will. From what I read, massage parlors and strip clubs are prime targets for trafficking busts. Don't be naïve—just because you work someplace voluntarily, it doesn't mean you won't get swept up in a raid if management is involved in something shady.
- ⊗ Drugs: While I've got nothing against drugs—I believe adults should do whatever they please with their bodies—I don't recommend exposing yourself to additional criminal charges. And obviously, selling felonious amounts of drugs or being around anyone who does is not a good idea.
- ⊗ Child Abuse/Child Trafficking: Under no circumstances, without exception, ever involve yourself with sexual activity with a minor, and stay far away from anyone who does. If you know of such activity and do not report it, you can be charged with conspiracy and/or accessory.

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However, be aware that in some states, failure to give your legal name can be grounds for arrest, and giving a false name such as your working handle may also be a crime. Check with your legal advisor what your obligations are in your jurisdiction. I list additional resources in the appendix on page 278 for how to interact with law enforcement before, during, and after arrest.

If you do get arrested, do nothing until you have legal counsel present. Say nothing other than asking for your lawyer. Even if you have a law degree, nothing you say at this stage will improve on silence. Have a friend who knows your arrest protocol, including where to find your emergency bond funds, and what to do if your lawyer is not available right away. You can tell them you've been arrested and where you're being held, but that is all. Loose lips sink ships!

In general, if busted for sex work, you'll face a misdemeanor charge. It can get more complicated, however, if your arrest involves drugs, theft, minors, or assault, even if you are legitimately defending yourself from violence or robbery. In general, although not always, misdemeanors result in arrest and booking, followed by a plea agreement with a fine and/or probation and/or community service. In general, although I can't stress enough *not always*, if there are no other mitigating circumstances like a parole violation, there is usually no jail time. With a good lawyer, charges can be dropped and the arrest expunged from your record.

Finally, that one thing you hear again and again on cop shows turns out to be true: You must tell your lawyer everything so that they can best represent you. Everything you tell them is confidential and cannot be disclosed, unless you involve your counsel in a crime or fraud. Have them explain what that means so you understand the legal limits of your communications.

## TRANS\* RIGHTS WHILE UNDER ARREST

Our trans\* colleagues are among the most vulnerable when in police custody. We all need be working towards a day when trans\* people's bodies and identities are treated with dignity in our legal system.

- ⊗ Child Endangerment: Just as it sounds: engaging in activities constituting physical or psychological abuse of a minor. Be aware that there are cases of people serving decades in prison for phone sex involving fantasies with children.

## IN CASE OF ARREST

A lawyer friend once told me when it comes to the law, the single greatest advantage the rich have over the poor isn't having star lawyers defend you in court. It's pre-arrest counsel, or at the very least, counsel before being charged with a crime. (You ever notice how powerful people surrender to the police at a time and place of their choosing, rather than doing the perp walk in front of the neighbors? That's pre-arrest counsel privilege working big time.) Having a lawyer represent you at this phase of legal proceedings is the best defense to keep the police from throwing you in a cell to rot over the weekend while waiting for arraignment, threatening you with charges that force you to act against your own best interests, or otherwise taking advantage of you.

Unfortunately, most of us don't know we're going to get busted until the cuffs are on, so get your pre-arrest counsel now. Find out from your legal advisor the precise steps you need to take if you get arrested. Memorize that information, as well as your lawyer's name and phone number.

Additionally, the National Lawyers Guild (nlg.org) has a free online guide called You Have the Right to Remain Silent: A Know Your Rights Guide for Law Enforcement Encounters. Written for activists, it explains your rights in clear, easy-to-understand language: when you are detained or arrested; when you are out in public, in your home, car, or place of work; and whether or not the police need a warrant. Their message is clear: you have the right to remain silent, and you should. If you find yourself talking, stop. Think of it this way: the cops want you to incriminate yourself, to make their case for them. Don't give them the satisfaction—silence is your power move.

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Unfortunately, that day is a long way off. Most jurisdictions are under no obligation to place trans\* people into jail populations that match their identities or make accommodations to keep them safe.

That doesn't mean you can't advocate for yourself while under arrest. Furthermore, your lawyer, whether or not they are court-appointed, has a fiduciary responsibility to advocate for your fair treatment in the legal system. Do not hesitate to self-identify your gender, request specialty protection while in custody, and demand your right to medication, if you are on hormones. To learn more, connect with the sex-work-positive trans\* rights organizations I list in the appendix on page 278.

## WHAT IF I CAN'T AFFORD A LAWYER?

If you can't afford a lawyer, you can ask for a public defender. However, you'll have to swear under penalty of perjury to your inability to pay and list your assets. If you lie and get caught, you will be charged with a felony of lying under oath. Which is another way of saying if you have the money, pay for your defense.

## WHAT IF I WORK OUT OF MY HOME?

Different statutes apply whether you own or rent your home. If you own a condominium, covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) can be invoked if you're convicted of criminal activity, including operating an illegal business. When renting, there are nuisance statutes that can jeopardize your landlord's ownership. Know your rights ahead of time.

## WHAT ABOUT MY KIDS?

If you're fighting to keep custody or have legal custody of children, please don't work without legal counsel. It used to be even unfounded accusations of engaging in sex work could seriously endanger parental rights. I'm old enough to remember when mothers could have their kids stripped from them if spotted with more than one "boyfriend."



However, as a general trend over the past twenty years or so as sex work has become more mainstream, in many jurisdictions, it's no longer automatic cause to void parental rights. It's not enough for a disgruntled ex to assert that working in a strip club or as a pro dom makes you an unfit parent, but naturally, it helps not to have any arrests or convictions. The court may well take into consideration whether your job affects your child's living environment. Common sense dictates it's best not to work where your kids sleep. And, of course, the court will want to know about mitigating circumstances: Are there drugs in the home, have the police ever been called, are other people working there with you? Answering "yes" to any of those risks felony exposure—yet another reason to stay away from those activities altogether.

## THE IRS

When it comes to law enforcement, it turns out the IRS is a whole different beast. Again, while I'm in no position to dispense legal or tax advice, lawyers and CPAs tell me there is no structural linkage between local law enforcement and the IRS. Nobody in your hometown police department is going to pick up the phone to inform the taxman you just got nailed on solicitation charges with a fistful of ill-gotten cash—they just don't have the time. That said, all bets are off if you're convicted of a felony. The feds do talk to one another, and they will gleefully go after your assets—one of the many, many reasons not to ever mess with major crimes. (I'll talk more about the IRS in the Money section.)

*Fearful ignorance is willful poverty. You may not have a lot of money in the bank, but knowledge is wealth you can give yourself. Connect with good legal counsel. Ask every question you can think of. Have a clear sense of the laws that govern the work you do, have a plan in place, and your lawyer's contact information memorized in case you get arrested.*

## ✿ SADNESS, DEPRESSION, AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Sadness, feelings of stuckness, and wrestling with existential angst are a part of life, but they can make putting on the sexy a whole lot harder. Whether or not sex workers are more prone to emotional downswings than the general public, I can't say, but because of the stigma and danger we face, I believe many of us tend to associate any depression we do experience with our work.

Sex workers I've known tend to manage sadness one of two ways: they paper it over with addictive behaviors, or they resign themselves to it. Either way, the result is they live with depression like they deserve it. What I want for you, Sexy Reader, is something different. I want you to view depressive episodes as a part of the human condition, endurable and temporary, just like tax season, head colds, and Super Bowl Sunday.

Let me be clear: if you're feeling hopeless because you hate your job, then you need to take steps to get out of the Biz. But if you occasionally get down, same as everyone else alive, self-care is the key to loving your life again.

## THE BLUES

Not wanting to bathe or go to the gym or feeling gross in our work clothes are signs our bodies are depressed—listen when that happens. Somatic depressive episodes are opportunities to treat ourselves with extra kindness. Consciously experiencing sadness as a sex worker can be scary—too often we ignore the warning signs out of fear that if we take a break from sex work, it'll stretch into a permanent vacation: *What happens if I'm depressed forever? I'll never work again.* But

## ✿ PRACTICAL ADVICE: SAFER SEX

For those of us engaged in **FULL SERVICE** or **CONTACT SEX**, we face special challenges. It goes without saying, lovely Sexy, you need to take care of that sweet hot bod of yours when doing this work. You're not allowed to take unnecessary chances, because you're going to live to be old and fabulous!

I'm not going to run down all the details of the potential health risks here. You're an adult and know how to read, so I'm assuming that you know how to prevent pregnancy, if applicable. Also, that you know how to protect yourself from the really damaging viruses: herpes, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HPV, and HIV. If you have any gaps in this important knowledge, check out the resources in the appendix on page 283. **Do it now, do it today.**

If you still have questions, talk to your health care provider. As of this writing, insurance companies in the U.S. can't deny coverage due to preexisting conditions or health histories, so for now, you can be as honest about what you do for a living as you choose to be. We all need to be aware of changing laws around health care privacy, however. If you have any concerns, ask what your rights are first before you reveal work-related information.

All that is well and good, but knowing about safer sex isn't the same thing as doing it. It's not always easy in the moment to make the best choices—we're turned on, we're scared, we want our clients to come back, but it's our job to do the right thing for ourselves, just the same.

When I worked, my rule was simple: no activities that exposed me to HIV, not for any amount of money. As it happens, that significantly lowered the possibility of contracting most of the other major

punishing ourselves and pushing through the resistance is a recipe for burnout.

How do you treat yourself when those sad, bad days roll around? Do you stop dead in your tracks, call in sick, and retreat? Do you force yourself through the day pretending nothing is wrong? Do you use it as an excellent opportunity to be sweet to yourself? Do you beat yourself up and call yourself horrible names? Do you reach out to those who love you most? Do you cruise Instagram for hours, stalking other people's seemingly perfect, happy lives?

I've learned over the years that the very best medicine for sadness is curiosity. Sorrow always comes with something it wants to say. Is your life changing in some way that you haven't acknowledged, or is some part of you going unfed? Do you miss someone or some part of yourself? Change is inevitable, and so is the sadness that comes with it. We need to take time to get to know and understand it. Once we do, wanting to look good, connect, dance, fuck, and all those other lively drives return.

Here's the thing. If you're afraid that deep down some part of you hates your job, you owe it to yourself to find out. Probably that's not the case at all. If most days you feel fine at work, I'm guessing you truly *are* fine—seriously, the vast majority of us are lousy at lying to ourselves. Now, maybe you need to take some time off or make a few changes. But don't ignore your melancholy because you're too afraid to learn what's at the root of it. You owe it to yourself to listen to what your sad spells are trying to say.

As for the issue of sex drive, there is no "right" amount of sexual desire. Certainly there's a perception that in order to do sex work, especially porn or prostitution, you either have to be hypersexed or altogether dead inside. Neither is true. It is absolutely fine not to want sex in your private life; it is absolutely fine to want sex outside of work. It's absolutely fine for your sex drive to wax and wane. What matters is you feel healthy, connected, and alive in your body.

Sometimes we don't feel actively sad, but it's like we've hit a wall. Who hasn't had those days feeling stuck, lazy, wanting to check out?



Then self-hatred comes rushing in because we should be doing laundry, going to the gym, and saving the world, when all we want to do is play Candy Crush.

The best attitude towards heavy, unmotivated stuckness is patience. Recognize that depression slows our bodies and minds down, and sometimes that's precisely what we need to be doing. Take a deep breath and say: *"I have no energy for saving the world today. All I'm good for is sitting here feeling like crap. Tomorrow, I'm going to wake up in the morning with plenty of energy, ready and rested."*

## DEPRESSION

When sadness settles into stay, depression has come to visit, erasing any memory of anything good. Our bodies are the experiential seat of grief, hopelessness, and depletion; our minds make up stories to give those somatic symptoms meaning. It can be so hard to do the right things for ourselves when every muscle in our body aches, but we have to take action to get through it.

Body-based techniques have helped me through depression, including good diet and exercise, dancing and other forms of expressive movement, and the release of traumatic memories. I'm also a fan of lifting weights—studies show weight training can be as effective as anti-depressants. If you're looking for a book on the mind-body connection, I recommend *Unstuck: Your Seven Stage Journey Out of Depression* by Dr. James S. Gordon. *Unstuck* presents a seven-step body-based program for alleviating depression somatically. I offer additional practical advice to combat depression, **SEASONAL AFFECT DISORDER**, and the holiday blues in the appendix on page 263.

Of course, the mind needs attention, as well. I've gotten relief over the years with talk therapy, cognitive therapy, mindful meditation, journaling, and practicing positive mental feedback loops. Don't go without the support you deserve: I list resources to find low- and no-cost mental health care professionals in the appendix on page 280.

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## SEX WORK AND SELF CARE

like to think that it's love, or family, or connection, all that stuff in the movies, but so often it's not. People who have come back from the brink report that what keeps them here are things like privacy—not wanting the neighbors to gossip about them after they're dead. Or pride—not wanting to give the lover who jilted them the satisfaction. Or the unwillingness to say goodbye to life's little pleasures, like a favorite meal. So often it's the littlest things.

I have my own story, which I'll share in the hope that someone finds it useful. When I was thirty-four years old, I was in graduate school and escorting, but became suicidal after a client broke my heart. I couldn't process the levels of shame and despair I felt having fallen for a married man. All I could obsess over was the fact that I was that dumb whore.

As I mentioned before, I kept a loaded gun in my apartment. I remember sitting on my bed and thinking, *I could just end it all here right now*. I came very close—I had everything I needed: motive, method, opportunity. Turns out I had a seminar that afternoon with a guest speaker I'd been looking forward to. I thought to myself, *Well, I'll go to class, and then if I still feel like it, I'll do it after I get home*. So I went to class. Honestly, I can't remember a thing about that lecture—it's not like I heard something earth-shattering. My situation hadn't changed, and my heart was still deeply broken. But I stepped outside into the sunshine, I rode the train, my classmates gave me hugs and asked how I was doing. It allowed me to forget my problems for a few hours. It wasn't much, but it was enough.

Intellectual curiosity kept me going that day. If you're feeling terrible right now, let's get you what you need to get through this awful moment to the other side, where you can remember all the reasons why you love your beautiful life. **Please reach out for help.** Talk to your friends, the ones who are there for you when things get really tough. Don't isolate, don't feel this way alone. Your despair is not a burden to others.

Call the nationwide 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255 | [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)). If you want to speak to someone fluent in trans\* issues, call the Trans Lifeline

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Finally, if you've been struggling for more than a few weeks, you might consider anti-depressants. Sometimes we need a pharmaceutical cushion against anxiety, despair, and intrusive negative thoughts; sometimes we need an assist to reset our brain chemistry. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about getting back to feeling good again.

## SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

I wasn't sure if I should even tackle this subject—after all, I have no professional training. But the whole point of this book is to talk about difficult emotions as best I'm able, and, regrettably, suicidal thoughts are something many of us in this line of work struggle with. So, with full disclosure that I'm doing nothing more than offering amateur advice, I'm wading in. Feel free to skip this section if you're not ready for it right now.

If you're thinking about ending your life, stay with me—don't go anywhere. Be with me right here and now. Your life is so, so precious. I've never known anyone who hasn't at some time wanted the pain to go away. For each and every one of us, there are days when it's a struggle to just stay here. It can be especially easy as sex workers to fall into a black hole believing we are worthless, we mean nothing, nobody loves us, and Life Itself doesn't care if we live or die.

I can tell you right now, as powerful as that feeling may be, it is not true. I know this because everything had to go right for you to be alive. Thousands of people stretching back into the distant past had to meet, mate, and survive through winter, war, famine, and illness, all so you could be born and live to this day. If anything had gone differently, if some great-great-great-great-grandparent had tripped in front of a mad yak, you never would have happened. So Life does want you here, most definitely—it made sure of it.

The best book I've ever read on suicidal thoughts is Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon*. It's a huge book, an encyclopedia of sadness, and I recommend it for anyone struggling with clinical depression. He studied what keeps people from ending their lives. We'd

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## SADNESS, DEPRESSION, AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

(877-565-8860 | [translifeline.org](http://translifeline.org)). You'll be talking with someone who got out of bed this morning in order to help you, someone who wants to listen. Wherever you are, whatever the cause of your pain, your life has tremendous value, and you are not alone. You can find additional crisis hotlines and free and low cost mental health resources in the appendix on page 280.

Get outside, and breathe fresh air. Eat some tasty food, listen to soulful music. Sit in the park and wait for a friendly dog to come by—they're always so happy to see you. You ever notice that even when dogs have only two teeth and one eye and three legs, they never hate themselves? No matter what, they always believe they deserve a nice ear scratch, a treat, and a few kind words, and they are absolutely right. **You do too.**

As hopeless as I felt on that terrible day, I'm so glad I stuck around to find out how the rest of my life turned out. Who knows what marvelous things lie ahead for you, what love, what connection, what adventures? What will you do with your tremendous gifts? Promise me you'll find out.

*Tasking our minds with pulling ourselves out of despair ignores the body's deep aquatic logic. When our bodies and hearts are tender, our intention must be gentle, gentle, like a mother soothing a heartbroken child. Sadness always comes with a message, and we must sit still enough to hear what it has to say.*

*Depression is a natural part of life, a function of having a body and a mind, but it is not an inevitable state of constant being. There are times when each of us stares into the pit and wonders whether to jump. Remember there is always enough love for us, always some good we can do for others, always a reason for us to be here.*

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## SHAME, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND STIGMA

"Shame" is defined many ways, but I find Brené Brown's description of how it *feels* to be helpful: "The extremely painful belief or experience of being unlovable, unworthy of connection or belonging." In the case of sex workers, I'd add "unworthy of protection, dignity, or humanity" for good measure. It is a dreadful feeling, like a soul death. When I spiral down into the shame pit, I wish I'd never been born.

### SHAME, STIGMA, AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM

"Shame" is an umbrella term, but more precise language is helpful. Shame, stigma, and low self-esteem are interrelated but distinct, and can get all snarled up and feed into each other. Let's break them down in order to get to know them better. "SHAME" is a deep-seated belief of being bad, dirty, or wrong. "LOW SELF-ESTEEM" is feeling incapable, incompetent, or not good enough. "STIGMA" is the anxiety or pressure to hide because of judgment from other people.

If sex work is making you feel bad about yourself, it helps to know why. I'll tackle shame and stigma first, and then talk about low self-esteem and its BFF envy in the next few chapters. You may not agree with all of my conclusions, but hopefully they'll get you started thinking about why you feel like you do.

### THE CASE AGAINST SHAME

So, let's start with the obvious question: Is sex work shameful? My answer: *No*. There is nothing inherently shameful about sex work; there is nothing inherently disgraceful about sex workers. Sure, the industry has problems, and many, many folks in it struggle and

suffer—no different than the rest of humanity. Now, it is true the adult industry is ... unusual. Our days are spent in places most people only visit for a short time, in environments that are disorienting, playing by different rules than polite society. Most of us want privacy when we're turned on, and sexuality out in the open or on demand can be shocking.

What's your take? Do you think sex work is dirty or wrong? How is it different from "respectable" employment? Do you think that makes sex workers *unworthy of love*? Disqualified from care and celebration? That is a spectacularly cruel fate. For the life of me, I can't see why.

Let me break it down three ways. First: There is no shame in *being* a sexual person. Sex is what got us here; sex is how we are made. In order to survive, our species needs to dance and to shimmy and to hum and to flirt and to fuck. The sexy fuels health, beauty, music, joy, creativity, inspiration, and curiosity—who would want to live without those things? Every single person alive on this earth today is a product of the erotic. Even test-tube baby-daddies need dirty magazines.

Second: There is no shame in getting *paid* to be a sexual person. Making a living tapping into the divine is no crime. If it were, linguists would be criminals for profiting from a love of language, dancers for their love of movement. Benefiting materially from being deliciously human is what professional cooks, artists, singers, models, actors, and writers do. Sex workers are no different.

Third: There is no shame in sexual availability. Getting paid to do things we otherwise wouldn't is pretty much the definition of having a job—not much shame in that. Of course, there can be "yuck" factors in sex work, certain unpleasant bodily realities. Also true in dog walking and nursing and plumbing and lots of other worthwhile careers. Nothing to make us dirty or disposable. Here's what I know: some of the most loveable people on this planet are sex workers. Know what *you* believe.

## DEMONS: SHAME

### FUCKING UP

You might well agree that sex work is honest work—that doesn't mean you can't still feel lousy on the job. That's because all of us, at times, cross a line and do something we shouldn't. We say "yes" when we should say "no." We forget to count the money. We get caught in a lie. Because the work is so personal, it's easy to sink into a shame spiral: I messed up. I sold myself cheap. I let myself down. This can trigger terrible doubt: Am I bad? Am I stupid? Am I damaged goods?

Again, the answer is *no*. Not once, not ever. Never forget: Sex work is hard! We operate under crazy pressures, juggling all kinds of extremes. It's not like there's a job manual—the right thing to do is rarely obvious. We try our best, sometimes we fail, but we learn from our mistakes. Most important, we are *fundamentally and indisputably loveable*. Don't believe me? Let me ask you this: If your best friend messed up like you did today, could you forgive them? I'm guessing yes. I'm betting no matter what, love is bigger than the crime. Let that be your guide.

Now, if you keep letting yourself down again and again on the job, that's not good. You deserve to be cherished and protected, inside and out. Find someone you trust, a **BUDDY** or therapist or sponsor, to talk to about how you can be kinder to yourself.

### CLIENTS BRING THE CRAZY

Getting our heads right isn't enough to immunize us from on-the-job shame. That's because clients show up with all their baggage, expecting us to deal. They want to be turned on; they want to get off. They crave beauty, kink, variety, danger, and role-play. They're insecure about their bodies. They want to be irresistible. They feel weird about fantasies that threaten to veer out of control. They want us to read their thoughts, blow their minds, and deliver peak experiences. But sex isn't something you're supposed to pay for—shouldn't you get it for free by looking fine, smelling good, and all the rest? Clients internalize the message: There is something wrong with me. So, strip

## SHAME, LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND STIGMA

clubs are for losers, dungeons are for creeps, and seeing prostitutes is pathetic.

Not only that: as high as clients soar, that's how far they plummet, and can you get any higher than having sex just for yourself? Clients crash back to earth naked and exposed. The sex industry reeks of the same sticky regret as carnivals and casinos. All that dislocation and self-loathing has to go somewhere.

Like black holes in reverse, clients bend badness and blame away from themselves. I call it "OUTSOURCING SHAME." They de-mean and objectify us, leering and groping and calling us names. The humiliation of their non-normative desires can be especially excruciating, so they dole out particularly dehumanizing treatment to BBW, people of color, pro doms, and queers.

Clients also wrestle with guilt. Many clients are married or partnered or come from religious backgrounds, taking a little taste of something they don't want anyone to know about. Nobody wants to feel bad while paying to feel good, so they shunt their ick onto us, sluts for pay.

It is not nice to be on the receiving end of bad behavior, especially as a reward for doing our jobs so well. In the immediate aftermath of getting slimed by a client, you may well be furious; I cover anger in a later chapter. If you're feeling ashamed, deflated, or gross, I recommend the shame exercise in the next section. In the longer term, we can build up resistance to toxicity through self-acceptance, self-respect, and not tolerating bad behavior. We can model how shame-free sexual adventurers behave. We reward the clients who treat us well; those who spread grief, we let them walk right on by.

### STIGMA

Unfortunately, no matter how well you handle yourself and the Biz, there's still the rest of the world to deal with. Like a slow-moving zombie, stigma feasts on our brains. We've all heard the phrase, "You can't please everyone; you can only please yourself." Well, that's all good and fine, but on some level, most of us care what other

people think. Stigma keeps us from living out in the open for fear the straight world will judge us as: out of control. Lazy. Stupid. Uneducated. Flaky. Messy. Sex-crazed. Diseased. Addicted. Damaged. Worthless. The irony is as many people outside the sex industry fit those descriptions as in it! But, unfortunately, those negative stereotypes stick to us.

My advice is to spend some time pulling stigma and shame apart. As tightly as they're woven together, they're not the same. Ask yourself: Is there anything wrong with sex work? If your gut answer is "no," but you still feel insecure, you're most likely grappling with the fear of other people's disapproval. Which is fine. Those consequences can be very real—I'll talk about them at length in the upcoming sec-