

# SONDER

creating opportunities for  
open-minded discussions



## **SONDER**

sohn • duh

*the realisation that each random passerby  
has thoughts, feelings and opinions as  
complex as your own*

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# Overview

Currently, there is not a space on university campuses where students feel able to voice their own opinions on taboo topics without fear of judgement. There is a stigma around having these conversations because they have the potential to anger, upset, or offend other people. However these discussions are extremely important. They allow us to both learn from and educate others. They also create a sense of community within the campus, as students become more open and trusting of their peers.

Sonder is a monthly event which aims to create open and honest discourse between university students. It begins with the team building activity of cooking a meal. Students then sit down to eat together, where they are provided with some conversation starters to prompt shared discussions on issues such as campus safety. Through Sonder, students gain a deeper sense of respect for their peers, and become more empathetic to other people's points of view.

The following photos are an example of what a Sonder event looks like, along with quotes from previous participants





**“Every student needs to have these important conversations”**



**“This event made me  
rethink campus safety,  
and safety in general”**





**“It brought up a lot of interesting points that I’d never considered”**



**“Working as a team  
helped to break  
the initial tension”**





**“The discussion allowed me to understand other people’s points of view”**

**“Cooking together really  
made me feel like part  
of the group”**





# The Event

# Context

Although New Zealand may feel like a relatively safe country in comparison with the rest of the world, there are several issues that we still have yet to resolve. One of these issues is sexual violence.

In New Zealand, roughly 24% of women and 6% of men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime ([sexualabuseprevention.org.nz](http://sexualabuseprevention.org.nz)). Additionally, “the risk of experiencing sexual violence is at its peak during the first year” of university (Keene, 13) as young adults navigate their new-found independence. Orientation week activities such as toga parties and pub crawls encourage socialising, but also put the students at risk of peer pressure, manipulation, and non consensual experiences.

A Thursdays in Black survey from 2017 reported that 83% of respondents experienced sexual harassment and 53% of respondents experienced sexual assault while in tertiary education (O’Neill, 9). In fact, it was recently found that one third of New Zealand university students are sexually assaulted each year (Duff).

As a result, the issue of campus safety arises. Strategies that involve taking extensive precautions when walking alone, wearing conservative clothing, or carrying items such as pepper spray or rape whistles are putting the blame and responsibility on the victim instead of addressing the actual issue of perpetrators.

Currently, there isn’t a space on university campuses where both men and women feel able to voice their opinions on taboo topics. There is nowhere for students to talk openly about issues like sexual violence without fear of judgement. Lack of conversations result in even more stigma towards these taboo topics, and allows for misinformation to spread.

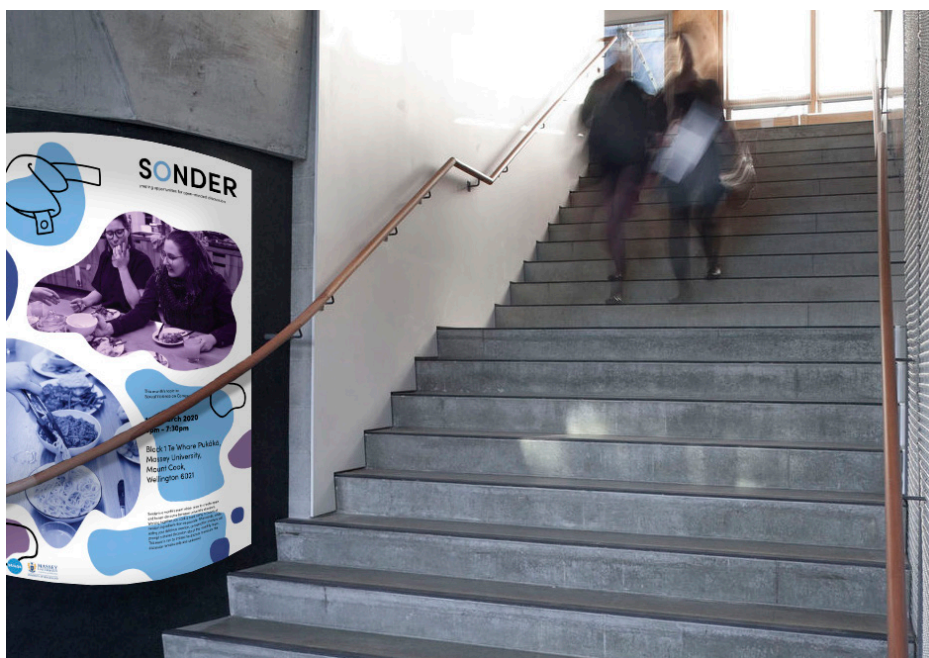
This is where Sonder comes in.

Sonder is a monthly event held on university campus, which aims to create open and honest discourse between students. The topic changes each month which allows the students to choose which issues they feel comfortable discussing. Events are run by trained facilitators to ensure that the conversations remain safe and respectful. Through Sonder, students gain a deeper sense of respect for their peers and become more empathetic to other people’s points of view. This in turn will make the campus a safer space as it will give the students a sense of community and unity.

# Poster

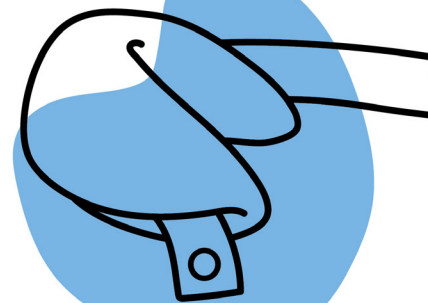
Posters are used to advertise the event each month. They are displayed around campus; in classrooms, the student services building, the library, and other common areas.

People who want to participate can sign up via the students association on campus (MAWSA), with a limited number of slots per event. This limit is to ensure that the event remains safe and respectful, as it's more challenging to mediate the discussion with larger groups. For this reason, groups should be restricted to between 4 to 8 students. However, multiple events can be held each month if required.



# SONDER

creating opportunities for open-minded discussion



This month's topic is:  
Sexual Violence on Campus  
Sign up at [mawsa.org.nz](http://mawsa.org.nz)

**16th March 2020**  
**5pm - 7:30pm**

**Block 1 Te Whare Pukākā,  
Massey University,  
Mount Cook,  
Wellington 6021**

S onder is a monthly event which aims to create open and honest discourse between university students. Working in small groups, you cook a meal using the range of fresh ingredients provided. Afterwards, while eating your delicious creation, conversation starters will prompt a shared discussion about the monthly topic. This event is run by trained facilitators to ensure the discussion remains safe and unbiased.

## Workshop Part One

Cooking is used as a team building activity and a way to break the ice between the group of strangers. Cooking is both enjoyable and rewarding, so it is an effective way of getting people involved in the events. Free food is also an appealing incentive, especially to university students.

Divided into pairs, participants choose from an assortment of ingredients provided and create a meal within 30 minutes. This time limit allows enough time to prepare and cook a standard dish, while preventing the cooking portion of the event from dragging on too long. Additional time pressure also encourages students to collaborate; making decisions and compromises, and delegating roles within the teams.

When the 30 minutes are up, teams put all of the prepared dishes in the middle of the table for everyone to enjoy. Sitting down to eat together gives the participants an opportunity to have friendly discussions. The relationships which have been established through cooking will enable participants to be empathetic towards their peers, resulting in more honest and open-minded discussions.



## Workshop Part Two

Mutual respect that was gained in the first part of the event enables students to share their honest opinions. The students have established a safe space, so they won't be judgmental or disrespectful towards their peers' points of view.

Conversation starter cookies are used to guide the discussion so that there's less pressure put on the students. The cookies are placed in the centre of the table so that anyone can take one whenever they like throughout the meal. These prompts allow the discussion to flow smoothly while the students enjoy their food.

Discussions during the meal are valuable because they allow for multiple viewpoints, rather than having a bias or intended outcome. This encourages learning and growth between the students as they listen to others' opinions, and recognise that they may not have all the answers. These conversations will give students a sense of community, therefore helping them to feel safer on campus.





# Conversation Starters

Conversation starter cookies contain the prompts for the discussion section of the event. They are made of coloured fabric that has been sewn into the shape of fortune cookies. These cookies are reusable, and the prompts inside can be changed to suit the monthly topic. Their uniqueness makes participants excited to interact with them, and minimises the mess and food wastage of normal cookies.

A few of the prompts are worded in a way that participants won't expect, for example '*men get objectified just as much as women*'. These provocative statements encourage more interesting discussions within the group.

The prompts are sorted into 3 different coloured categories. This way, if a student doesn't feel comfortable discussing a certain category, they know which cookies to avoid.

## Categories:

- campus (light blue)
- safety (blue)
- sexual violence (purple)

Campus isn't safe at night

There is sufficient lighting on campus

I feel respected by my peers

It is the university's responsibility to keep me safe

Campus security can be relied on to keep me safe

It is safe to walk home alone at night

Safety precautions should be taken when walking alone at night

I would intervene if I saw someone getting harrassed

Catcalling doesn't count as sexual harassment

People shouldn't be held accountable for their drunk actions

Men get objectified just as much as women

Consent is a "yes" and nothing else

People should dress appropriately if they want to be respected

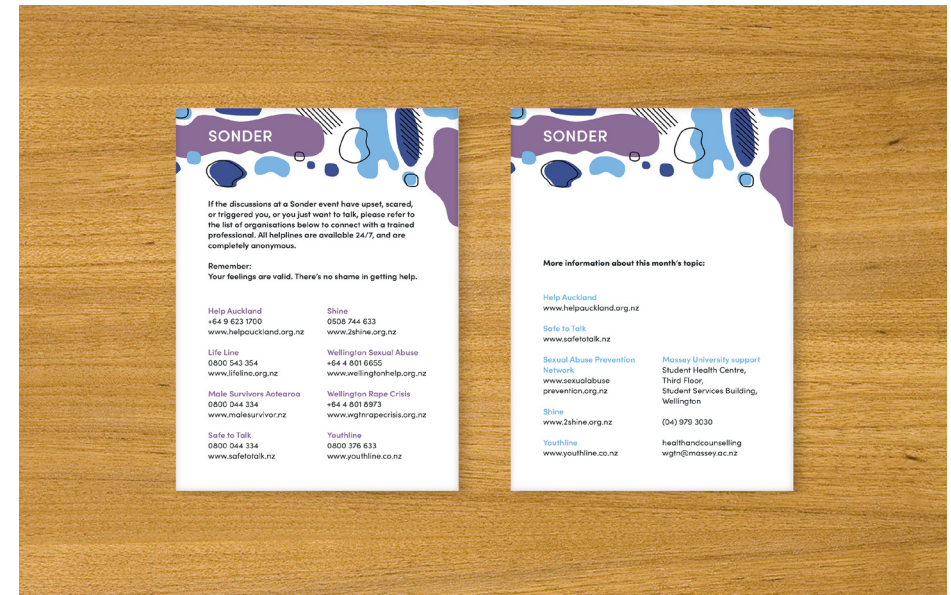
# Take Away

After the event, the participants are given a resource to take away with them; a box of 6 conversation starter cookies, and an information sheet.

The cookies have blank slips of paper inside for participants to fill in themselves. This encourages people to continue to have open-minded discussions with their friends and family, long after the Sonder event.

It is important that students don't try to replicate this event themselves without following the correct procedures, as these discussions have the potential to do more harm than good if not facilitated properly. By providing blank paper, the conversations don't have to be about the serious and potentially dangerous topics that are discussed at the event.

The information sheet contains a list of online resources for further information if the students want to learn more about a topic which was discussed during an event. The page also lists organisations where people can go to get help; campus councillors, helplines, and official websites. This is necessary to include as some of the topics which are discussed may be unknowingly triggering. Ensuring that every participant feels safe and has access to professional help is vital.





# Finer Details

# Facilitation

Facilitation is an important part of Sonder.

Events need to be held in a safe and welcoming environment so that participants are relaxed enough to open up. If there is an imbalance of power then participants will immediately put up barriers because they feel uncomfortable. Trust and honesty are significantly easier when students feel equal to their peers. Therefore, university campus is an ideal space for these events because it is common ground for everyone.

Clear structure and rules are essential for controlling group activities. Letting students know, both verbally and written down, what is acceptable behaviour for the event ensures that everyone understands what is expected of them. It also minimises the chance of negative interactions in the group.

Remaining neutral and unbiased is crucial when facilitating these conversations. Avoid using trigger words such as 'toxic masculinity' or 'feminism' unless participants bring up those terms themselves. These words are often met with hostility or negative connotations depending on the person's beliefs, so it is best to stay clear of any potentially controversial words when prompting discussions.



# Resources

## For more information

### Help Auckland

[www.helpauckland.org.nz/](http://www.helpauckland.org.nz/)

### Safe to Talk

<https://www.safetotalk.nz/>

### Sexual Abuse Prevention Network

[www.sexualabuseprevention.org.nz/](http://www.sexualabuseprevention.org.nz/)

### Shine

[www.2shine.org.nz](http://www.2shine.org.nz)

## Massey University support

Student Health Centre, Third Floor,  
Student Services Building,  
Wellington

Phone: (04) 979 3030

Email: [healthandcounsellingwgtn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:healthandcounsellingwgtn@massey.ac.nz)

## For professional support

### Help Auckland

+64 9 623 1700

[www.helpauckland.org.nz](http://www.helpauckland.org.nz)

### Life Line

0800 543 354

[www.lifeline.org.nz](http://www.lifeline.org.nz)

### Male Survivors Aotearoa

0800 044 334

[www.malesurvivor.nz](http://www.malesurvivor.nz)

### Wellington Sexual Abuse HELP

+64 4 801 6655

<https://www.wellingtonhelp.org.nz>

### Wellington Rape Crisis

+64 4 801 8973

[www.wellingtonrapecrisis.org.nz](http://www.wellingtonrapecrisis.org.nz)

### Youthline

0800 376 633

[www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz)

# Bibliography

Duff, Michelle. "A Third of NZ University Students Are Sexually Assaulted, a Study Suggests." Stuff, Stuff, 6 June 2019, [www.stuff.co.nz/national/113090659/a-third-Of-women-university-students-report-being-sexually-assaulted-what-do-we-owe-them?cid=app-iPhone](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/113090659/a-third-Of-women-university-students-report-being-sexually-assaulted-what-do-we-owe-them?cid=app-iPhone).

Keene, Samantha Maree. "Risky residences: An exploratory study of sexual violence in university halls of residence." Wellington. 2015.

O'Neill, Izzy. In Our Own Words: Student Experiences of Sexual Violence Prior to and During Tertiary Education. New Zealand Union of Students' Associations, 2017, pp. 1-178.

Sexual Abuse Prevention Network. Statistics. Sexual Abuse Prevention Network, [www.sexualabuseprevention.org](http://www.sexualabuseprevention.org)

**Photography by Olivia Melhop**  
@oliviamelhopphoto

**Food donation by Commonsense**  
[www.commonsenseorganics.co.nz](http://www.commonsenseorganics.co.nz)

The background is a white canvas filled with various abstract shapes and patterns. There are large, irregular blobs of purple and blue. Smaller circles and ovals in shades of blue and purple are scattered throughout. Some shapes are filled with black diagonal hatching. There are also several thin black outlines of circles and irregular shapes.

**Melissa  
Dann-Hoare**