

Call Your Mother

Call Your Mother is a larp for **two people** about **child abuse**, played through a **series of voice messages, text messages, and phone calls**.

One of you is an adult survivor of child abuse; one of you is the other person's mother. To play this larp, you need two things:

1. The phone number of the other person.
2. SMS text messaging (this larp uses about 10 text messages).

This page is all you need to read to play the larp. The following pages include some documentation and an optional debrief.

Content Warnings

- Child abuse - Inherent to this larp.
- Gaslighting - Here's a link explaining [DARVO](#) (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender), which is encountered in this larp.

Designer Intent

During this larp, you'll develop your character over time. Choices you make early might contradict later parts of the larp. This is intentional. You do not have full freedom of choice in this larp, some decisions have been made for you.

Pronouns

While this larp uses gendered language as a design choice, you should discuss pronouns and character gender and sexuality before play. For example, the "Mother" could be any gender, as could the mother's spouse.

Summary of Play

This is a story about a mother trying to talk to their kid, and their kid not responding as much as they would like. It starts with the mother calling the adult survivor, and the latter letting it go to voicemail. You'll then send messages back and forth, guided by prompts from your

Conscience (see below). Eventually, you'll speak on the phone once or twice. The larp ends with the adult survivor telling their mother "I love you."

This larp can take place over the course of a single day, or it can take weeks to complete. It depends on how often you text each other.

Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide

This larp uses an online character called "Conscience" to guide you through the larp. Conscience is a bot and you can't argue or persuade it to change its mind. Conscience is just going to tell it like it is, and give you instructions throughout the larp. Assume when you get a message from Conscience, that it represents a voice in your head that a) tells the truth as best you know it, b) reveals what your gut thinks you should do. ***Whenever you receive a message telling you to send a message in "quotes", you should text your Conscience.***

Occasionally, Conscience might ask an uncomfortable question.

Before You Play

Before you play, decide who will be the mother and who will be the adult survivor. Also make sure you have each other's phone number, and maybe pick names for your characters.. You can pre-negotiate scenes, but your Conscience may have different plans for you.

There's one rule: the adult survivor can't say "I love you, mom" before they're prompted by Conscience. When they say "I love you" to their mother, the larp ends.

When you are ready, text your conscience at (251) 299-0210 to begin.

Documentation

While it is not required for play, this section addresses some concerns and can answer some questions that occur during play.

Safety

This is not a safe larp - this is a very difficult issue. Instead, this larp wants to make sure people make a risk-aware consent decision. The big risk in this larp is the content, which is addressed by making sure all participants know it is about child abuse. If participants choose to play, they're willingly and knowingly engaging in this content.

The safety mechanics come in the form of the conscience script: it purposely breaks up the narrative so the players have a chance to pace themselves. This opportunity to pause before continuing roleplay is the primary safety mechanic. There is **not** a calibration mechanic - such a mechanic is antithetical to the designer's experience as a child abuse survivor. A survivor cannot calibrate the response of their parents. Instead, the pacing mechanic allows the players to meter their level of engagement, while mirroring the designer's experience.

There is an out-of-role "stop" mechanic (the brackets) in place for situations where one person needs to stop. When this occurs, the participants should immediately end the larp and reach out to each other out of character.

This section is also a safety mechanic; the designer understands those apprehensive about the larp will likely read it for more information.

Use of Automation

The text tree depends on specific messages to trigger the next instruction. The messages should not be case sensitive, nor should punctuation matter. However, if the text

message system is failing, the full script for both the Mother and Adult Survivor can be used to work through the larp.

Deviations

This larp is tracked for the majority of it: the players don't have much agency. They also do not possess full knowledge of what they'll be asked to do. This is purposeful, and meant to simulate the ambiguity and uncertainty of childhood memories, which is often used against adult survivors. Further, participants aren't given a method to return to their "track" which is again purposeful: it is meant to simulate the frustration that there's no good answers in this situation.

However, the conversation between the Mother and the adult survivor should still be manageable: conversations meander, imply and ignore various parts to make them make sense to the participants. Furthermore, the larp becomes less restrictive as it progresses and the characters are established. By the end, the only requirement is that it ends with the Adult Survivor telling their mother "I love you, mom." Ideally, the first part of the larp functions as a workshop for the latter, encouraging the participants to create a common history, accept what the other introduces, and teaching them about the history of these two characters. After doing so, it gives the players freedom to explore, although not necessarily to change the reality of the character's situations.

Scripts

Mother's Conscience

1. Welcome to *Call Your Mother*. Are you playing the A) Mother or B) Adult Survivor? Type A or B.
2. If you need to stop playing the larp, write FULL STOP in a text to the other person. If you understand, type "yes"
3. If you don't hear from the other person, you can always text them "Still there?" This is a signal to the other person you're waiting on your response. If you need to coordinate with them, put out-of-role messages in brackets, like [[this]]. If you understand, type "yes"
4. You're the mother of several children, all very successful. You rarely see the oldest (the only one who moved far from home); you don't talk as much as you like. Call them to share news about their siblings - but only good news. Focus on the positive. If they don't answer, leave a message. After you've done this, text your Conscience, "Miss You"
5. If you left a message, wait for them to call back. Unfortunately you're busy, so let it go to voicemail. After you listen to the voicemail, text your Conscience, "Well then."
6. You're not sure why your oldest likes to bring up that thing about their siblings, but it is what it is. Try calling them again: you miss them and just want to say hi. When you hear from them (if they pick up, call you back, or text) text your Conscience, "Hmmm."
7. They never have time. Are they coming to your spouse's birthday this weekend? Text them "Are you coming to your father's birthday this weekend." When you hear from them (if they pick up, call you back, or text) text your Conscience, "Forgiveness."
8. Wow... that was... it happens. You know your oldest is angry with their father, but they shouldn't talk like that,. Talk to them (call them back if need be), and try to *calmly* and *patiently* deal with their anger and defend your spouse. When you've engaged with them long enough, clearly say the phrase "You have to forgive your father." After the conversation, text your Conscience, "That Happened"
9. Usually after these conversations, you have to reach out multiple times before they respond. Keep texting and calling them... you're their mother, you have to keep trying. Eventually, they'll respond. *When they respond, immediately text your conscience with the word "denial" - Don't agree with them or validate their statements before you receive a response*
10. No. They're talking about how your spouse beat them. They've done this before. You indulge them a great deal and understand they have issues with their father, but that's just not true. It's your job to defend your spouse... and put your oldest in their place. After all, they used to beat their siblings quite viciously - they once hit your youngest in the head with a baseball bat. You're proud of who they grew up into but they were a very difficult child, and their father was just doing his best to stop them from harming themselves or others. After the conversation, text your Conscience, "Choices."
11. That was a conversation. Think about the last forty years... you've spent it all with one partner. You don't know how to be apart from them. Plus, if what your oldest said were true... what would that make you? Respond as you please to your child until the end of the larp.

Adult Survivor's Conscious

1. Welcome to *Call Your Mother*. Are you playing the A) Mother or B) Adult Survivor? Type A or B.
2. If you need to stop playing the larp, write FULL STOP in a text to the other person. If you understand, type "yes"
3. If you don't hear from the other person, you can always text them "Still there?" This is a signal to the other person you're waiting on your response. If you need to coordinate with them, put out-of-role messages in brackets, like [[this]]. If you understand, type "yes"
4. You're the oldest of three siblings. You don't get along with your siblings anymore, and really don't like talking to your family. You're generally happy with your life, as long as you don't think about them. When your mother calls, you'll let it go to voicemail. After you listen to the voicemail, text your Conscience: "Mom."
5. Your mom may have mentioned your siblings... fuck them. You don't want to hear the good news. Ask you mom about one of their dirty secrets... maybe one of them is getting divorced because they had an affair or has to go to court for drunk driving. Pick something you know your mom doesn't want to talk about it. Call her back, and if she doesn't answer, leave a voice message asking your nasty question. When she gets back to you, text your Conscience, "Fine."
6. Your mother will call you again; send it to voicemail, then delete the voicemail, & text back "Can't talk now. Sorry." When they text back, text your Conscience, "Fuck Off."
7. Fuck that guy. No you're not coming to his birthday. Call your mom and tell her all the reasons your dad's an asshole... except don't mention anything that may have happened before you were 18 years old. Make up whatever you want about him... it may or may not be 100% accurate (you have a tendency to exaggerate his flaws).

When your mother calls you back, talk with her until you hear the words "you have to forgive your father." When this happens, end the conversation and text your Conscience, "Hell No."

8. Your mom is going to talk more. You really don't want to. They're going to keep texting you though. Eventually, after 3 - 5 attempts, you'll break down and call them. You're ready to talk to her about your dad, and how he abused you from the ages of 3 to 15. This was physical abuse *that your mother witnessed.* It's not the first time you've confronted her about this, but maybe this time it'll be different. Come up with details about when it would happen, how severe it was, and other details. However, there is one important detail: at no time did your father leave marks or injuries on your body where it would have been seen at school. You're doing this because you want her to admit you have a good reason for hating your father. Talk to her for as long as you like; when you're done, text your Conscience, "Childhood."
9. This isn't what you wanted. She's done this before. You can't help but ask yourself, "why do you keep talking to your mother about this, and not your father?" Eventually, you will reach out to your mother again. Wait as long as you want. You two can talk as much or as little as you like... you can respond to their messages, or not, call them a bunch or not at all. At some point, end the larp by saying to them (by voice or by text) "I love you, mom." You don't have to mean it, but you do have to say it. When you do, text your Conscience, "Finish."
10. Text the other person [[OOOC - That's the end of the larp. Here's the debrief: <https://rb.gy/5iby26>. Let's talk?]]

Debrief

First, take a breath... take a moment to respond to the larp however you like. When you're ready, continue with the debrief.

Questions For Each Other

How are you feeling?

Why did you want to play this larp?

How did this larp meet your expectations?

How did it not?

What's one good experience you had during the larp? One bad experience?

Is there anything you feel like you would like to say now that the larp is over?

Questions For The Adult Survivor

Why do you think your character kept talking to their mother, despite the history?

Do you think they ever find a way to comfortably interact with their mother?

Questions For The Mother

How did it feel to deny the Adult Survivor's experiences?

If you, as a player, could rewrite your half of the conversation these two characters had during your experience in the larp, what would you change about what you said or did?

One last question...

It wasn't clarified at the beginning what kind of abuse this larp included. How did it feel when you found out it was physical? Did it change anything?

Questions For The Designer

What actually happened during the adult survivor's childhood?

The father, the primary disciplinarian, used to physically abuse their oldest child. The oldest child, in turn, used to attack their siblings.

Why physical abuse?

Because that's the designer's experience.

How come there's no opportunity for both players to come together and negotiate what happens?

Because that's not the child abuse survivor's experience. You have something happen to you when you're most vulnerable, and then spend the rest of your life trying to reconcile it with what everyone else knows as reality.

When confronted, why does the mother have to DARVO (deny, attack, reverse victim and offender)?

Because that's what happens to the designer when he brings it up with his mother.

Why does the larp end with the survivor saying "I love you" to the one who enabled their abuse?

There's multiple reasons why, but in a general context, the adult survivor has to either say "I love you" or abandon their mother completely. If they don't love their mother, there's no reason to answer all those phone calls and texts.