

## **Keeping Our Activism Safe**

*(Without Optional Section- 1 hour 30 minutes /  
With Optional Section- 2 hours 30 minutes)*

**DRAFT - For Field Test**

*Local Activism Series  
Staff Skill Building Library  
Raising Voices*

This module is part of a *Staff Skill Building Library* developed by Raising Voices. The *Library* consists of competency based training modules designed to strengthen skills of staff implementing or supporting community-based violence against women (VAW) prevention programs. The *Library* is designed for organizations using the *SASA! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence against Women and HIV* but can be used by anyone working to mobilize their community to prevent VAW. If you are not using *SASA!* simply replace the word *SASA!* wherever you see it in the text with the name of your methodology.

This module is part of the Local Activism series in the *Staff Skill Building Library*.

All materials in the *Library* can be downloaded at [www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php) or requested at [info@raisingvoices.org](mailto:info@raisingvoices.org) The *SASA! Activist Kit* can be downloaded at [www.raisingvoices.org](http://www.raisingvoices.org)

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## Keeping Our Activism Safe

(Without Optional Section- 1 hour 30 minutes /  
With Optional Section- 2 hours 30 minutes)

Note: This module fits best sometime after SASA! Action 3.3 B - Supporting Change module.

### Objectives

- Discuss potential threats to safety that can occur in activism on violence against women.
- Optional: Create a plan to reduce risk.

### Competencies

By the end of this session, participants should be able to . . .

- Demonstrate safer ways to take action when they witness violence.
- Optional: Name 3 things they will personally do to keep their activism safer.

### Preparations

- Write evaluative questions (No. 13) on flip chart.
- (If doing **Optional: Creating a Risk Reduction Plan**) Write questions about assessing the level of risk (**Optional: Creating a Risk Reduction Plan** No. 2) on flip chart.
- (If doing **Optional: Creating a Risk Reduction Plan**) Photocopy 1 copy of **Group Work Scenarios** and cut apart.

## Steps

1. Ask: *Are there any times that the work we are doing may lead us as activists to feel or be unsafe?*
2. Solicit responses and experiences, e.g.
  - If we intervene in specific cases of violence.
  - If some community members feel threatened by the idea of balancing power between women and men.
  - Etc.
3. Explain:
  - *Sometimes, in the process of an activist wishing to take action against violence, there is a tendency to try to get in the middle of the abuse as it is occurring. (For example, a CA hears a neighbor being beaten by her husband and wants to rush in and step in between them.)*
  - *Other times, the work we do—because it directly relates to power—makes people with power uncomfortable or even angry, if they do not see the greater benefit in what we are saying. It might be that we are at risk because of a particular, violent perpetrator, or because the community as a whole sees staff as somehow outsiders or targets, or for some other reason.*
4. Explain:
  - *In this section, we will focus on planning to take action effectively and safely against the violence we hear around us.*
  - *Imagine that you as an activist, sees or hears violence occurring in a neighbor's house. In a moment, we are going to turn to our neighbors and discuss a few things about how to do this safely.*
5. Ask participants to turn to their neighbor to form pairs.
6. Divide the room into thirds, and assign one third, each one of the following topics:
  - The timing of our intervention.
  - The persons intervening.
  - How we approach the person using violence and the person experiencing violence.
7. Explain: *Spend 5 minutes discussing with your neighbor the topic you have been given. Create tips for how you would intervene safely, considering your topic (timing, people who should be involved, and how and who you would approach).*

8. After 5 minutes, call “*stop!*”
9. Open the conversation up for all pairs discussing *Timing* to share.
10. Write down all their suggestions on a flip chart, saying we will come back to comment on these later.
11. Repeat process with second and third groups.
12. Once ideas are exhausted, ask the whole group to evaluate the ideas.
13. Write the following questions on a flip chart, and invite the group to evaluate the ideas they have shared in light of these questions.
  - Are these ideas safe (for survivor and activists)?
  - Do they avoid judgment and enabling of violence?
  - Do they promote self-reflection and accountability of the person using violence?
  - Do they respect the will and choices of the survivor?
14. Give the group a few moments to look through.
15. Invite comments, and amend lists as needed.
16. Explain: *Now, we can practice. We will divide into 3 groups and each group will create a 3-minute role play where we hear violence, and intervene safely in the violence.*
17. Explain:
  - *You have only 10 minutes to prepare this role play.*
  - *Remember, do not focus the role play on the violence, but on the way you will safely intervene and how that will go—when will you do it? Who will you get to help you? Who will you approach? What will you say?*
18. Ask groups to count off, 1-3, to form 3 groups.
19. After 10 minutes, call “*stop!*”
20. Invite each group to present their role play. Ask other groups to give feedback, using the same questions as earlier:
  - Is it safe (for you and the survivor)?
  - Does it avoid judging—instead provoking thought and interaction?
  - Does it avoid enabling the violence—and instead hold the person using violence accountable?

- Does it respect the will and choices of the survivor?

21. Give feedback after each group, related to these issues.

22. Thank all the groups for participating.

### **Validation Option: Activity in Training**

This activity allows for group validation of the competency:

- Demonstrate safer ways to take action when they witness violence.

Did group role plays demonstrate actions that were safe, non-judgmental, held the perpetrator of violence accountable, and respected the will and choices of the survivor? If so, then the group demonstrated the competencies. If not, further training is recommended.

### **Optional: Creating a Risk Reduction Plan**

1. Explain:

- *Quite simply, people in communities have different characters. In some areas, it would be unheard-of for even a very violent person to try to hurt a CA or staff. In others, that is a real risk.*
- *This conversation is designed for areas where the safety of staff and CAs talking about the issue is a concern.*
- *This may be a concern from the beginning, or it may be after a certain, high-profile case, or possibly simply after having an interaction with one particular person who is antagonistic to program goals—and who feels that SASA! is somehow stripping them of their POWER OVER.*
- *There is much we can do with our approach and our planning that can help to keep ourselves, CA's and survivors to stay safer—we just need to plan in advance.*
- *One important idea to reduce safety risks to activists is to learn to assess the level of risk around us. By thinking through where risks may be coming from, and how severe that risk may be, we can better make an appropriate plan to keep ourselves and others safe.*

2. Post the following questions:

- How might we know if there is a risk to us?--Have we gotten threats, or is there a person or group we suspect might pose a risk to us?
- What might be the objective of the person/ persons who pose a risk to us?

- What means to those persons have to hurt us? (e.g. weapons, support or complicity of local officials to do what they want, access, etc.)
3. Ask participants to turn to their neighbors and discuss the questions. If they do not feel, after question 1, that there is any risk or that they should continue discussing, that is ok.
  4. After 5 minutes, ask pairs to come back together and invite them to share their thoughts as a large group.
  5. Go through each question, discussing and writing key ideas on flip chart.
  6. Ask: *How might knowing the above help us to make a better plan to keep ourselves and others safe?*
  7. Invite participants to count off, from 1-4, to form 4 groups.
  8. Ask the groups to imagine for a moment that they work in a community where there might be some risk to activists working on these issues. Their group will brainstorm how the technique they will be presented with may help them. They will take only 15 minutes to do this, and find a creative way to teach the rest of the group about their ideas, presenting in 3 minutes or less.
  9. Distribute Creating a Plan for Risk discussion questions—1 to each group.
    - Group 1: Buddy system
    - Group 2: Communication tools
    - Group 3: Support of local leadership
    - Group 4: Confidentiality
  10. After 15 minutes, call “stop!”
  11. Invite each group to present their ideas, in 3 minutes or less.
  12. After each group presents, ask participants for any reactions or additions. Write important ideas on a flip chart.
  13. The following are suggestions for tips under each category, in case groups are struggling to build their own that fit into the local context.
    - Group 1: Go out as staff in pairs.
    - Group 2: Use available communication equipment to the best of your ability. If you have radios, be sure they are functioning and with batteries, or if you have mobile phones, be sure there is credit on the phone and you have local police or other important numbers. Even if you have only your own voice, be sure you know what response there is locally if someone makes an alarm or yells for help. Have an agreement with local allies of how you want them to respond.

- Group 2: Do not give out personal mobile numbers to survivors, as the person using violence might find her phone and call recently dialed numbers—putting both the survivor and yourself at risk.
  - Group 3: Work toward the public support of specific, local leadership
  - Group 4: Keep confidentiality strictly, with cases of violence you come to know about. The less information is out there about a particular case of violence, the safer you and the survivor both are. Remember—survivors know most about their situation, so if they do not want someone to know, follow their lead. If they do want someone to know, talk through it carefully and let them be the ones to decide, safety considerations in mind.
14. After all groups have presented, thank participants for their participation and go over group list, adding ideas or questioning them where necessary.
  15. Explain: *In addition to these ideas, it is important that we continuously assess level of risk in the current situation and to think through escape plans in the most likely dangerous situations. We can create a risk reduction plan for ourselves that includes specific details of where we usually go and where we would run to/ who we could ask for immediate help/ what else we would do in those situations, it can truly help us to stay safe.*
  16. Invite a few participants to share ideas of what their most likely dangerous situation may be and what they would do in that situation.
  17. Explain: *Further thinking about this can be an action point after this session, for each of us.*
  18. Be sure to discuss which of these ideas will be useful to CA's as well, and make a plan for who will discuss these with the CA's.
  19. Summarize:
    - *We hope that people will never need this risk reduction plan, since the best way to stay safe is to present our work in an inclusive, positive, benefits-based way—which is what SASA! is based on.*
    - *At the same time, it is good to have a plan so that we can all continue to feel confident, supported and safe when we do our work.*
    - *Agree, as an action point, which participant will type up and distribute their risk reduction action plan ideas and when.*

## Validation Options

Validation is another way to say “assessment” or “pre/post-test”. It is used to determine whether the participants in a training learned what the facilitator intended for them to learn. Instructions for how to use each validation method can be found in *Training Validation Methods: A how-to guide for assessing participant learning* downloadable at [www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php)

Select validation methods for each competency using the table below:

1. Choose whether the competency (specific skill) needs to be validated at a group or individual level.
2. Looking at the validation methods listed in that category (group or individual), select only **one** of the validation methods marked with an 'X' for each competency.
3. Plan a time in the training agenda to use the validation method you've chosen to test each competency.

### Suggested Validation Methods

Competency (Specific skill)	Group Validation					Individual Validation			
	Activity in Training*	Game Show	Card Game	Answers Bingo	Pick and Play	Activity in Training*	Exit Interview / Role Play	Game Show (All Play)	Written Quiz
Demonstrate safer ways to take action when they witness violence. Optional: Name 3 things they will personally do to keep their activism safer.**	X								
		X	X	X	X		X	X	X

\* Activity in Training includes many possibilities, depending on the module, including brainstorms, group practices, debates, agree/disagree/not sure exercise, and others.

\*\*See Validation Questions for this competency, to be used in Game Show, Card Game, Answers Bingo or Pick and Play methods, on next page.

*Note: There are no Validation Questions needed for this module.*

## Validation Questions

- Name 3 things they will personally do to keep their activism safer.
- Facilitator's Note: Find out what the participants really learned! These cards can be cut out and used with Game Show, Card Game, Answers Bingo or Pick and Play validation methods. Full descriptions of how to use each of these validation methods are available in the *Staff Skill Building Library*. Download at: [www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php) and go to *Training Validation Methods: A how-to guide for assessing participant learning*.

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## • Group Work Scenarios

### **Group 1: Buddy system - Creating a Plan to Reduce Risk**

Summary:

One important idea to reduce safety risks to activists is to use the “buddy system”. This means that, if we have at least one person looking out for us, who we look out for also, we are safer than when we are alone. For example, there are at least two community activists in each community, so there can be support and safety between them. Similarly, if the risk level is high, it is important for staff not to go out alone.

Discussion question:

- What might be some ways to apply the idea of a “buddy system” to help us stay safe in our work?
- 

### **Group 2: Communication tools - Creating a Plan to Reduce Risk**

Summary:

One important idea to reduce safety risks to activists is to use any available communication tools to our advantage. How can communication tools like radios, mobile phones, our own voices, or other tools help us? For example, how are staff safer if they have a plan and any needed training to use available communication tools (how to use a radio, how to make an alarm that the neighbors will understand and respond to, etc) than if they don't have those tools?

Discussion question:

- What might be some ways for us to use communication tools to help us stay safe in our work?
- 

### **Group 3: Support of local leadership - Creating a Plan to Reduce Risk**

Summary:

One important idea to reduce safety risks to activists is to use gain the support of local leadership. This means that, if we have the support of respected community members, we are safer. For example, if a local religious leader or auntie or government official, who is very well-respected, is on our side—our safety is increased.

Discussion question:

- What might be some ways to gain the support of local leadership, and assure that it helps us to stay safe in our work?

## Group 4: Confidentiality - Creating a Plan to Reduce Risk

Summary:

**Confidentiality** is: Keeping all information related to a survivor secret and sharing it **only** with others who need to know in order to provide assistance and intervention, as requested and agreed to by the survivor.

When working with individual cases of violence, one important idea to reduce safety risks to activists is the same as the most important idea to keep survivors safe—confidentiality!

For example, if you hear about a survivor's story in the course of your work and talk about it with others in the community, how could that put a survivor or yourself at risk? If you keep that survivor's personal stories confidential, how could that help keep yourself and the survivor safe?

Discussion question:

- What might be some specific ways we can keep confidentiality, which helps us to stay safe in our work?
  - Who should we give our phone numbers/ contact information to?
  - How should we answer our phones?
  - Should we agree to meet alone or with just the survivor, face to face with those allegedly using violence?
  - Who should we talk with about cases of violence we have heard about?
  - Etc.