



Preventing Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Raising Voices created a series of activities to support activist organizations in safely engaging communities to prevent violence against women (VAW) during this global crisis.

The activities aim to:

- ▶ provoke discussion and positive actions that mitigate the risk of violence against women.
- ▶ role model and encourage public health safety measures for COVID-19 during VAW prevention.
- ▶ promote social norms that strengthen solidarity, connection and compassion.
- ▶ support activist organizations with practical resources to strengthen their VAW prevention programming.

Who are they for?

The activities are for any organization or group working to prevent violence against women in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are designed to be used by organizations who have prior experience addressing violence with a team of skilled staff and community activists, and who are aware of the available referral points for women experiencing violence. Working on violence against women is sensitive and requires knowledge and experience. The activities are not recommended for groups who do not have ongoing VAW prevention programming as this could cause unintentional harm or increase women's risk for violence.

What activities are available and how are they used?

The activities are based on communications materials that use images and questions to spark reflection and discussion. They are intended to be facilitated by staff, community activists and/or leaders with community members in single or mixed sex groups (depending on safety and norms in your context). Each material includes suggested discussion questions on the back, with sample responses for the facilitator and a take home idea to support an impactful summary of the activity. Sample responses were included recognizing that staff, community activists and leaders using the materials may not have as much access to mentoring and support because of COVID-19 restrictions. The responses are there to support an analysis and discussion that aligns with gender equitable programming. Ideally, all materials will be given out to community members who participate in the discussion so they can share with their family, friends and neighbors to amplify reach and impact.

Why do the activities focus on the benefits of non-violence rather than the problem of violence against women?

Emphasizing a problem rarely inspires change, it often just reinforces what community members already know. On the other hand, focusing on alternatives and role modeling the positive can spark transformation. In addition, showing graphic images of violence can be harmful. For example, such images can be traumatic for women experiencing violence, cause shame and stigma which may drive the issue further underground and reinforce the harmful idea that using violence is the 'norm.' Therefore, Raising Voices' materials aim to recognize that VAW is a problem while helping community members to imagine and nurture relationships free of violence and based on respect, caring for and valuing each other.

Activities for Preventing VAW during COVID-19

Six Community Conversations



▶ What are they?

Community Conversations are simple, black and white, easily photocopied A4 images that provoke reflection and discussion.

Two of the Community Conversations address intimate relationships, two address outreach from neighbors and two address community dynamics.

▶ How are they used?

Community Conversations can be used in single sex or mixed sex groups from 2 to 20 community members.* Typical time required is from 15-30 minutes.

Two Infosheets



▶ What are they?

The Infosheets are A4 images that can be printed, preferably in color. They are designed to stimulate personal reflection and simple, practical actions.

One Infosheet addresses what men can do to reduce stress and maintain positive relationships and the other addresses what women can do to find support and increase their safety during this time.

▶ How are they used?

Infosheets can be used in groups from 2 to 20 community members.* While they can be used in mixed sex groups, single-sex groups are encouraged to promote deeper and safe discussion for women and men. Typical time required is 30 minutes.

Three Posters



▶ What are they?

The posters are A3 color images that ideally are professionally printed. They are designed to role model positive behavior in relationships, in families and in our communities.

▶ How are they used?

Posters can be used in groups from 2 to 40 community members.* The posters can be used in single or mixed sex groups. They can also be hung in the community after other relevant discussions. Typical time required is 45 minutes.

* Numbers are the feasible range for the activity, please follow the government/public health COVID-19 guidelines concerning the number of people who can safely gather in your community.



Tips for Effective Facilitation

- Try to have a copy of the material available for each community member.
- Set simple ground rules for the discussion (respecting others, one person speaks at a time, keep an open mind and heart, no discussion of specific individuals/cases, etc.)
- Use the discussion questions as conversations starters—encourage exchange and interaction between participants.
- Avoid telling community members what to think or lecturing, encourage critical thinking instead.
- When there is disagreement or a ‘hot’ topic, encourage sharing of diverse ideas and respectful language.
- Ask probing questions such as “Can you say more about that?” and encourage empathy, for example by asking “How do you think that makes her/him feel?”
- Appreciate everyone’s contribution while challenging the status quo. If a participant is reinforcing a gender stereotype, ask if others have a different opinion they can share and, if not, present an alternative analysis. For example, if a community member says women are to blame for violence, you could respond with I used to think that too but now I believe that no one can provoke someone else. We are all responsible for our own behavior.

What is required for safe and dynamic activities?

- ▶ As with any VAW prevention activity, ethical practice requires that all facilitators are familiar with, and have a list of available services, that are open during this time and can provide friendly, woman-centered services. This is especially critical during COVID-19, given the surge in violence against women.
- ▶ Support community activists, leaders and others involved in your VAW programming to become familiar and skilled at facilitating the activities. Living in the community, they will have greater outreach and social networks than staff who visit the community occasionally.
- ▶ Communication materials become an effective tool for social change when they are skillfully facilitated. Encourage facilitators to hold interactive, participatory discussions where community members can express their authentic thoughts, feelings, fears and aspirations. This is much more effective in promoting change than a lecture style of communication.
- ▶ As with any VAW prevention programming, document activities conducted and monitor for any unintended consequences. If useful, refer to this [planning and reporting tool](#) developed for partners using *SASA! Together* during the pandemic.

Feel free to add your organizational logo, contact information and any other local information to the communication materials. Please maintain the Raising Voices website for acknowledgement (and the logo, if appropriate in your community).

We’d love to hear how you are preventing violence against women in your communities with these or other activities! Share your experience with us at info@raisingvoices.org.

