



# Raising Voices Guidelines for Safe and Ethical Community Engagement to Prevent Violence against Women and Children



Raising Voices is committed to preventing violence against women and violence against children. Our experience is that violence prevention requires holistic, systemic-level interventions that can inspire action across all levels of society. As such, the foundation of our work is largely based on building authentic relationships and the mutual trust necessary to facilitate a long-term process of change. Each time a staff member (or individual representing Raising Voices) enters a community or school—or even participates in work within our office—their actions reflect on Raising Voices as an organization, and can either help strengthen or diminish relationships that have been nurtured over many years.

The Guidelines for Safe and Ethical Community Engagement to Prevent Violence against Women and Children are designed to help ensure safe, ethical, and respectful engagement with community members. These are intended to be used when orienting new staff or briefing consultants or visitors. All Raising Voices staff (and consultants) are expected to adhere to the Guidelines during community activities, including programming, advocacy, program monitoring, and formal research.

## Who are these Guidelines for?

Everyone! All staff, consultants, and visitors that represent Raising Voices should be familiar with the Guidelines and commit to following the enclosed recommendations before, during, and after community visits.

## How can these Guidelines be used?

We hope that supervisors will go over these Guidelines as part of the staff orientation process and we encourage all staff to revisit them periodically (and especially prior to engaging with communities). In addition, Raising Voices staff can refer to the Guidelines when briefing consultants, interns, volunteers, researchers and any other visitors prior to entering a community or school.





## What is included in the Guidelines?

The Guidelines are organized as follows:



### 1. Preparation for the Visit

This section includes considerations for the planning stage in order to minimize risk and complete the necessary preparations for a safe and respectful visit.



### 2. Personal Conduct

This section is designed to promote respectful and ethical interactions during your community engagement, including protocols around: (a) introductions; (b) gifts and compensation; and (c) communication.



### 3. Responding to Violence

This section offers guidance on responding to potential, imminent, or actual acts of violence against women and children, as well as disclosure of violence.



### 4. Visit Follow-Up

This section includes appropriate follow-up steps within the community and at Raising Voices. Also included are considerations for your own emotional support.





# 1. Preparation for the Visit

- Be sure you have read, understood, and signed the “Raising Voices Child Protection policy”
- Provide Raising Voices with your contact information and visit itinerary (location of community visit; arrival/departure date; etc.)
- Ensure you have identified a Raising Voices contact person who you can consult with in case of emergency (or if you require advice)
- Assess and prepare for possible risks prior to departure and prepare accordingly (e.g., terrain, weather conditions, security risks, political activity, etc.)
- Determine the appropriate channel for introduction and/or approval (most often a Local Council member), and pursue accordingly
- When possible, jointly agree on the agenda and any planned activities with your host. Try to schedule meetings at an appropriate hour and avoid taking children out of school (or away from their home) whenever possible. Please be flexible when planning your itinerary – remember that community needs and schedules come first!
- Carefully plan where you will hold your discussions/activities (e.g., sensitive conversations should not be overheard by others)
- *If compensation is necessary, carefully consider what is fair and appropriate. These amounts should be in-line with previous payments made by Raising Voices and/or CEDOVIP. Note that the Government of Uganda also has standard payment rates depending on officer rank, which should be followed when relevant (<http://www.publicservice.go.ug/>). No reimbursement for time or other payment should be made without this due diligence*
- Bring a charged mobile phone (with a network that has good coverage in the area), a charger and sufficient airtime
- Prepare appropriate documentation and carry this with you during your visit:
  - Phone number for a contact person in/near community you are visiting
  - Phone number for Raising Voices contact (supervisor for staff; assigned point of contact for external visitors/consultants)
  - Personal identification
  - Introduction letter (from Local Council) if required
  - Ethical approval and consent form if required (e.g., for formal research)
  - Up-to-date referral card for VAW and VAC (can download from <http://www.cedovip.org/>). In case your visit is out of Kampala, identify at least one provider in the area to handle any potential VAC and VAW referrals
- Dress modestly to respect the relatively conservative culture. Do not dress in shorts, sleeveless tops, or revealing clothing, and endeavor to look ‘smart’ (e.g., no holes in clothing). In addition, please avoid overdressing (e.g., men wearing suits and ties, women wearing excess make-up or jewelry); though note that women may consider long skirts as most appropriate
- Avoid carrying expensive watches, cameras, phones, computers, tablets, and flashy jewelry
- When possible, avoid bringing personal food and drink when visiting communities. For example, if you are visiting schools, eat and drink before entering the compound and leave any unfinished food in the car





## 2. Personal Conduct

### Introductions

- For initial visits to a new community, gain access through appropriate channels (as determined in the planning stage); carry a letter of introduction with you if possible
- Explain the nature, duration and purpose of your visit when introducing yourself
- Communicate with respect, confidence and kindness with community members

### Gifts and compensation

- Refrain from giving gifts and try to politely decline gifts (including food and drink) whenever possible. Note that this may require proactively declining food prior to purchase! Remember it is inappropriate to give personal money/other goods when visiting
- Think through compensation at the planning stage (see above). While in the community, manage expectations accordingly. Language should be direct to ensure no empty promises are made and that trust is maintained

### Communication

- Throughout your visit, greet people in a polite and courteous manner while you are interacting with people in the community
- Endeavor to communicate in a respectful, non-judgmental tone that is not 'tough,' confrontational or bored. This is inclusive of body language – remain engaged!
- If you are carrying out research, always obtain informed consent prior to initiating your discussion. Please provide a realistic estimate of when findings will be available and how they will be shared back to the community. Respect your promises!
- Avoid possible suspicion. If you are having a sensitive conversation with children or an adult of the opposite sex, talk in a place where you are visible (though not overheard)
- Know the local language or bring a translator, especially for community conversations
- When speaking, limit acronyms, jargon and other 'technical' language that can feel alienating
- Request permission before taking any photographs of individuals, their property, or government buildings
- Respect people's time. Be on time for appointments and do not stay longer than necessary
- As a courtesy to your guests, please put your phone on silent mode for the duration of your visit and avoid using mobile applications, such as Facebook
- If asked for your contact information, share organizational (rather than personal) contact





# 3. Responding to Violence

## Violence against children at school

Such cases require a sensitive response that may vary on a case-by-case basis. Your main responsibility when you directly witness a child being beaten is to ensure a follow-up action occurs. If possible, please inform the head teacher in a private location. However if the head teacher is not present and/or not receptive, call your supervisor (or Raising Voices contact) to discuss the best course of action. In some cases, it may be to stop the violence directly, by interrupting the act and politely requesting that the adult stop harming the child.

## Violence against women and/or children at home

Witnessing imminent or actual violence in the home is a difficult and risky situation. In such cases, your own safety is the first priority. If you feel comfortable, you can express your concern for the individual and request that the violence stop. However, depending on the environment, you may need to leave the home and immediately contact your supervisor/Raising Voices contact to agree on the best course of action. If you cannot reach a Raising Voices team member, contact the Local Chairman (LC)

if available or another trusted member of the community, and defer to them regarding the most appropriate follow-up.

## Talking to survivors of violence

Follow recommended practice when talking to women or children survivors of violence. For example, ensure no one else is present (even if asleep) and be mindful that a violent husband/parent may retaliate if they learn the woman or child has shared their experience with someone from Raising Voices. Ask about the possibility of a family member returning home and being angry prior to initiating the conversation. If you feel uncertain, request another location for the discussion. Never force a survivor to tell their story, never prompt them to critically analyze their situation (e.g., asking "Why do you think he abuses you?" etc.), and never push the individual to make any decisions about her/his situation. Be an empathetic listener and emphasize that no one should have to suffer violence. To protect your own safety, do not have your back to the door if possible and always know where exits are. Ideally, hold any discussions outside the house. Offer referral services, though in the case of VAW be mindful that a woman has a right to make her own choices around whether or not she

wants to pursue support or report the violence. Do not leave a referral form unless she says it is okay (safe for her). See below for children's referrals.

## Children's disclosure

If children disclose ongoing violence or you are concerned for their safety, you may have a responsibility to act even if the child does not want to disclose to others. Please contact your supervisor/Raising Voices staff member to make a joint decision about how best to follow-up. This may require support from a child protection agency. In case the child needs immediate assistance, it may be necessary to escort the child to a safe location or service provider from the VAC referral directory, though ideally this would be done with the assistance of another Raising Voices staff member or a service provider.

## Referral protocols

Both women and children can be offered the up-to-date referral card (provided by CEDOVIP). If you are making a direct referral, please call the service provider to let them know someone is coming (or in some cases in might be preferable to write a letter of introduction) as this may help create a better reception for the woman/child.

## Suggested Steps – VAC at School

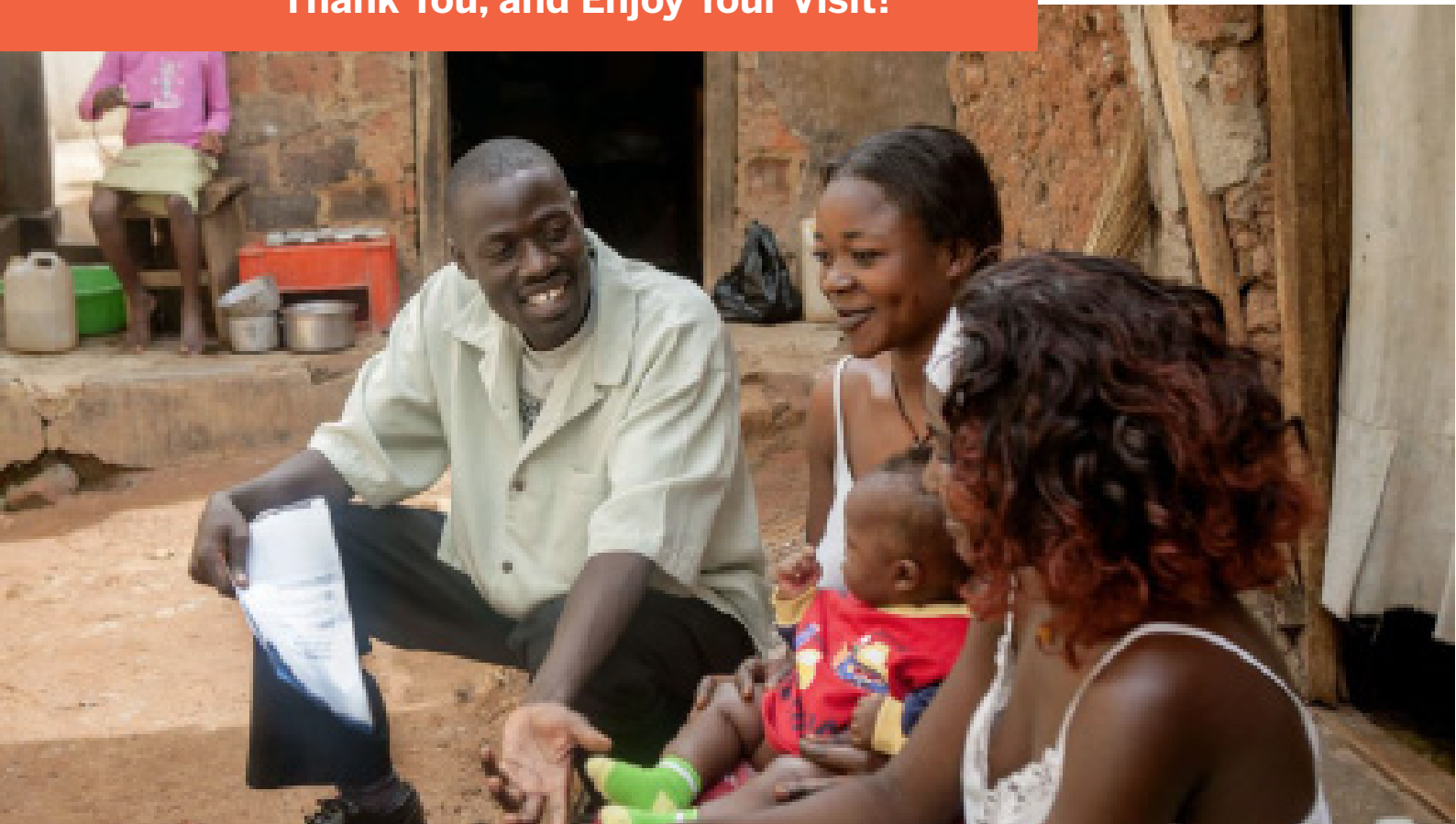
- First recognize the importance of discipline in the classroom and the staff members' efforts
- Express your concern and discontentment: "While I appreciate your efforts to maintain discipline, I am concerned with your approach, as you are causing harm to this child."
- Ask if they will be willing to learn more about the alternative approach: positive discipline. Offer your support to share more about positive discipline as a way to improve the school environment
- If the response is favorable, follow-up with Raising Voices program team on how more support can be provided



## 4. Visit Follow-Up

- Note that all visitors and/or consultants must have a formal debrief with their Raising Voices contact following the visit. Staff must complete a trip report and/or other reporting mechanism as per the protocols within your team
- Any act of violence witnessed or child disclosure must be immediately reported to your supervisor/ Raising Voices contact upon your return to the office. In addition, please share any unanticipated, stressful experiences or negative reactions from community members that may have occurred
- While it is normal to feel some anxiety or distress after a difficult visit, if your symptoms persist make a plan for follow-up care. Consider joining the Raising Voices/CEDOVIP monthly peer support group. If this is not possible, refer to the VAW Referral Directory for a list of psycho-social support providers
- For research activities, develop a plan for how to feed back any findings to community members in consultation with Raising Voices staff

**Thank You, and Enjoy Your Visit!**



These guidelines were developed by Raising Voices © 2017, inspired by our work in communities around Kampala, Uganda.