

# THE POWER TO CHANGE

How to set up and run support groups for victims and survivors of domestic violence

## **The Power To Change**

### **How to set up and run support groups for victims and survivors of domestic violence**

This manual has been written and produced by the organisations participating in the Daphne project “Survivors speak up for their dignity – supporting victims and survivors of domestic violence, 2007-2009”



#### **Project coordination**

NANE Women's Rights Association (Hungary)

#### **Project partners**

AMCV – Association of Women Against Violence (Portugal)

Associazione Artemisia – Centro donne contro la violenza “Catia Franci” (Italy)

NGO Women's Shelter (Estonia)

Women's Aid Federation of England (UK)

#### **Authors**

Margarida Medina Martins, Petra Viegas and Rita Mimoso (AMCV)

Alessandra Pauncz (Associazione Artemisia)

Györgyi Tóth (NANE Women's Rights Association)

Reet Hiimäe (NGO Women's Shelter)

Nicola Harwin and Sally Cosgrove (Women's Aid Federation of England, UK)

#### **Editors**

Sally Cosgrove, Jackie Barron, Nicola Harwin (UK)

#### **Design/Layout**

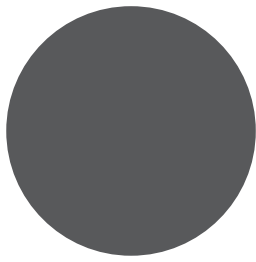
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# Foreword

*Just once, in this my only lifetime,  
to dance all alone and bare  
on a high cliff under cypress trees,  
with no fear of where I place my feet...\**

The Power to Change manual is the result of a collaboration between feminist activists and practitioners from 5 countries – Estonia, Portugal, Italy, UK and Hungary (who co-ordinated the project). Over the last 2 years we have worked together creatively through workshop sessions and email exchanges to develop this resource, drawing on our varied knowledge and experience of working with survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

From the first meeting where we developed and agreed the outline structure to our final meeting to plan dissemination and evaluation, the development and writing was a collective enterprise. It was our good fortune as UK partners that the discussions were held in English, and all the chapters were drafted in English by the 5 partners. We then, in consultation, edited and revised the whole document.

Extensive consultation on the manual and its content was also carried out with specialist domestic abuse practitioners and with survivors, and we hope that the end result reflects their experiences and their own achievements.

We are all proud of the useful resource we have produced, published in 5 languages, and of the process through which it was created.

Throughout the making of this manual we have all been inspired by the dignity and strength that we have seen in the women we work with, and the transformations that we know we can all make in our lives, in the challenge to live freely and safe from abuse.



Nicola Harwin, CBE  
Chief Executive  
Women's Aid Federation of England

.....  
\*Excerpt from a poem by Robin Morgan included in her book *Monster*



# Introduction to support and self-help groups for survivors of domestic violence

*I was living in my intimate relationships closed away from others... I have come to understand that I have been emotionally abused by my partner, and... that psychological abuse has been part of my whole life... I needed an opportunity where I could face the issues that I was uncomfortable with. [A survivor]<sup>1</sup>*

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

This manual outlines some of the practical and organisational considerations required to set up support groups for survivors of domestic violence in a way that enhances their safety and self-esteem. It also presents three possible models, any of which can be used as a basis for running such groups. Two of these models are facilitated support group programmes and the third model is that of the unfacilitated self-help group.

Domestic violence is physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. One in four women, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle, will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>. Domestic abuse should be seen within the context of all forms of gender-based violence against women, and as a violation of women's human rights<sup>3</sup>. Violence against women encompasses rape and sexual assault, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual harassment, trafficking and exploitation in the sex industry, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so called 'honour crimes', and is described by the United Nations as "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women"<sup>4</sup>.

.....  
<sup>1</sup> All survivor quotes used throughout the manual come from the following: participants of Estonian women's support groups; members of the support group run by NANE, Hungary; participants of the support groups run by AMCV, Portugal; and members from North Devon Women's Aid, Watford Women's Centre, Survive, Community Safety Partnership - Durham, and Pathways Project, all based in UK.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe (2002) *Recommendation Rec (2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence* (Adopted 30th April 2002)

<sup>3</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1999, and downloadable from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>; see also Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006) *Blueprint of the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence Against Women, including Domestic Violence* (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers 21st June 2006) (p.2)

<sup>4</sup> UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993).

Support groups for survivors of domestic violence should be understood within the context of the international development of the whole range of domestic and sexual violence services. The Power to Change programme can be adapted for use with groups of women who have experienced sexual abuse or other forms of violence from someone other than a partner.

Since the early 1970s, when the first refuges (or shelters) for women fleeing domestic and sexual violence were set up in the UK, women's voluntary organisations across the world have provided practical and emotional support as part of a wide range of services to women (and their children) experiencing abuse from intimate family members, most usually from violent male partners<sup>5</sup>.

This chapter briefly summarises the development of the domestic violence sector within Europe over the last 35 years. It also explains the importance of working within a multi-agency context.

## **1.2. DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The refuge movement grew from the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s: as women activists came together and shared their experiences, often in early 'consciousness raising' groups, the issue of violence in the home, as well as other forms of sexual and interpersonal violence against women, became highlighted. In the early 1970s, there were very few options available to women seeking to move on from violent intimate relationships. Getting protection under civil or family law was a very complicated process and almost impossible to achieve; domestic violence was not accepted as a reason for homelessness; the police dismissed "domestics" as a trivial and time-wasting use of their resources; very few domestic assaults were brought before the criminal courts; rape within marriage was not a crime; and the response of most agencies was to "go back home and make up".

Committed women, activists and survivors, in response to women's desperate need for a place to stay with their children, away from their violent partners, set up the first refuges (shelters). From the beginning, it was recognised that any woman could be at risk from domestic violence, regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, sexuality, disability or lifestyle, and that women working together could change things together.

By sharing their experiences, survivors and activists quickly learnt that "domestic violence" included a range of physical, emotional and sexual abuse – not all of which was immediately recognisable as violence – but all aimed at dominating and controlling the abused woman's behaviour and choices. As understanding of this power dynamic grew, those involved in

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<sup>5</sup> See Walby, Sylvia and Allen, Jonathan (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey* (London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate). Their analysis showed that women are much more likely than men to be the victim of multiple incidents of abuse, of more serious assaults, and of sexual violence; and that women constituted 89% of all those who had experienced 4 or more incidents of domestic violence – predominantly from male perpetrators.



the movement acknowledged the origins of domestic violence within the traditional and patriarchal family structures of domination and subordination, and within a global framework of discrimination against women and denial of women's human rights<sup>6</sup>. Relationships between men and women were now under scrutiny by those upholding the new feminist vision of equality and human rights for all – a vision that supported and reinforced the principles of non-abusive relationships. Responding effectively resulted in the creation of autonomous women-only services, which were both protective and empowering, and challenged the gender inequalities that reinforced and legitimised male violence.

So, while there was, before the 1970s, a resounding and worldwide silence on the issue of domestic violence across most criminal justice and social welfare agencies, today the issue of domestic abuse, and violence against women generally, has now become increasingly prominent.

Since then, a diverse range of women from a wide variety of backgrounds – including activists, survivors, and women from statutory and voluntary agencies – have worked together to develop and expand the worldwide network of advocacy and support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Most of these services are based on the following core beliefs, principles and outcomes for effective work with abused women and children:<sup>7</sup>

- understanding domestic and sexual violence and its impact;
- safety, security and dignity;
- diversity and fair access to services;
- advocacy and support;
- empowerment and participation;
- confidentiality;
- a co-ordinated agency response;
- challenging tolerance of domestic and sexual violence and holding perpetrators accountable;
- governance and accountability.

In many countries, domestic violence, like other forms of violence against women, is no longer of concern only to women's groups and voluntary organisations, but is now on the agenda of politicians, legislators and the media. In some European countries, significant changes have been made with regard to public awareness, legal frameworks, criminal justice initiatives, civil law, health and housing services, and multi-agency work to tackle domestic violence. Within these countries, some of the values, principles and vision of early feminist activists have become 'mainstreamed' leading to attempts (at least in principle) to:

- **prevent** abuse through education and awareness raising;
- **protect** victims through effective laws and policies;
- **provide** the right services and support.

<sup>6</sup> CEDAW (1999) *op.cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Search the UK National Service Standards for Domestic and Sexual Violence on the Women's Aid website: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-articles.asp?itemid=1332&itemTitle=National+Service+Standards+for+domestic+and+sexual+violence+services&section=00010001002200370001&sectionTitle=Articles%3A+domestic+violence+services>

While there are still some European countries where domestic violence is only just beginning to play a part in the political agenda, and there is continual debate on whether a feminist framework on tackling domestic violence can be effective, in theory, at least, the principles of empowerment, self-determination, and listening to the voices of women through survivor participation and feedback are beginning to be accepted. However, the extent to which governments' policies and actions reflect these beliefs varies from country to country, and whereas in some countries, strategic approaches are well developed, in others they are virtually non-existent<sup>8</sup>.

In countries such as the UK and Sweden, where real changes started in the 1970s, the range of **specialist support and advocacy** services available for abused women and children is now extensive, and some of these are mainstreamed into funding regimes. Some areas have also developed specialist programmes to support specific minority groups of women.

On the other hand, in other countries, activism and public discourse related to gender equality in general and domestic violence in particular, is less well developed. In the former state-socialist countries, for example, changes only began after 1989-90 and now there is a very diverse picture; but generally the level of partnership between women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the authorities is not very high. In Estonia, for example, directives on domestic violence began to be implemented effectively only in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Before that, domestic abuse was not on the public or government agenda, and, in consequence, there are few refuge or other specialist domestic violence services.

Specialist domestic violence initiatives and services have taken different forms within different countries. In some countries, community based outreach services – including drop-in centres or helplines/hotlines – are more common than refuge services; and multi-agency initiatives of various kinds may also be in place. Specialist advocacy and practical and emotional support for survivors may include any or all of the following:

- safe and secure emergency and temporary accommodation and support (ideally in a refuge/shelter);
- outreach services and other support to women and children in the community including drop-in centres, home visits and support groups;
- telephone helplines/hotlines giving information and/or support;
- intervention centres or criminal justice advocacy services;
- specialist services for children and young people;
- specialist services for women from Black, minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) communities<sup>9</sup>, migrant women, lesbian and bisexual women, disabled women<sup>10</sup> and older women;
- services employing specialist staff for different community languages.

<sup>8</sup> Specific information on what is being done to address violence against women in 47 member states of the Council of Europe is available at:

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/countryinformationpages/default\\_en.as](http://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/countryinformationpages/default_en.as)

<sup>9</sup> Where there are specific needs for different service users, these should be met if at all possible; however, we recognise that in some European countries, there are very few women from BMER communities, and specialist provision would therefore be impracticable.

<sup>10</sup> There is a lack of appropriate and accessible provision for disabled women in all countries.

### 1.3. THE ROLE OF SURVIVORS' SUPPORT AND SELF-HELP GROUPS IN A MULTI-AGENCY SETTING

While it is increasingly recognised by authorities that there is a need for a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to tackling domestic abuse, it is important to ensure that such multi-agency initiatives fully recognise the vital role of the specialist services for survivors provided by women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is well documented that women often draw strength and benefit from such specialist services, due both to their interaction with other survivors of abuse, and to the one-to-one support from trained staff or volunteers. Some women may also benefit from participation in a more formal group work programme, when they feel ready for this.

In the last decade, the development and role of community-based survivor support groups has grown. These groups – based on the principles of building self-esteem, self-determination and empowerment – have proved an important addition to the range of support services provided by specialised women's voluntary organisations. They have developed within the community as a result of the learning from the benefits of peer group support in refuges and other settings, and include at least three types of formal and informal structures:

- groups completely self-managed by survivors, who may or may not have accessed existing domestic violence services;
- informal groups – facilitated by staff and/or volunteers with experience of working with survivors;
- formal group programmes – such as Pattern Changing for Abused Women<sup>11</sup>, or the Freedom Programme<sup>12</sup> in the UK, – also facilitated by staff and/or volunteers with experience of working with survivors and a thorough knowledge of the effects of domestic violence on women and children.

While the majority of these support groups have been run ancillary to existing domestic abuse services, and have been accessed by women who have used shelters or outreach services, groups also have the potential to be run in different settings. Where they have been formally evaluated, there is evidence that they can be very beneficial and could provide a framework for use by appropriately trained staff in other settings.

#### **The importance of support and self-help groups for victims and survivors of domestic violence**

Domestic violence is a social problem and must be dealt with accordingly. When working with survivors of domestic violence, it is important to deal with the many social issues surrounding abuse, rather than concentrating solely on the personal difficulties of the victim. Group work fosters such a social approach. It is a safe space for personal bonding that enables women to talk about what is often felt to be an unspeakable experience: it gives a public and political status to an experience that has previously been lived as personal.

<sup>11</sup> Fallon, B. and Goodman, M. (1995) *Pattern Changing for Abused Women: An Educational Program*. London: Sage

<sup>12</sup> Information from: <http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/freedomprogramme/index.cfm>

Domestic abuse, in the long run, erodes self-esteem and social skills, destroys family intimacy, damages growing children, reduces parenting skills and creates intense feelings of shame, guilt, isolation and loneliness. In stark contrast to abuse, support groups lessen isolation and establish social bonds. Sharing life stories can combat feelings of shame and guilt; women can find help and learn coping strategies, for example for dealing with their traumatised children, while at the same time they lessen their sense of inadequacy.

When women were asked about what they have gained from attending survivor support groups, they responded with comments such as these:

- “To know that I am not the only one who has suffered from domestic violence and that what I am feeling is normal.”
- “Being able to talk openly and freely without being judged. Being with other women who understand.”
- “I felt I was believed for the first time.”
- “I don’t feel as if I am the only one.”
- “It has given me some hope to go on in life.”
- “I feel now like I’ve got the right to take action!”
- “I can let go more easily because I realise that not everything that goes wrong is my fault. I value myself more and I am better able to spot abusive behaviour.”
- “I now feel more confident in myself when I walk around; I tend to look where I’m going rather than on the ground.”
- “I now know I have the right to say ‘no’ and put myself first. I have become an assertive confident woman instead of a controlled, suicidal wreck!”

### **Settings for support groups**

Any or all of the following settings/organisations outside the domestic violence field might be appropriate to hold a support group, provided that a single sex setting is available, and safety can be guaranteed:

- primary health care settings, e.g. health centres, doctors’ surgeries, ante-natal/post-natal groups, etc.;
- therapeutic health settings such as psychiatric institutions;
- counselling services of various kinds – both voluntary sector and private – including relationship counselling organisations;
- drug and alcohol services (though residential services are not usually suitable, unless they are women-only, as confidentiality could not be guaranteed);
- probation services;
- women’s centres;
- Well Women clinics (England only);
- statutory social services;
- leisure centres;
- community centres (including those for particular minority ethnic communities).

All locations must always remain confidential and, if possible, the sessions should take place during designated “women-only” times.

The facilitator(s) also need a range of skills and competencies that are further discussed in Chapter 2.

### **Referrals to support groups**

In order to increase the effectiveness of support groups, it is important to see them in a wider organisational context, and to utilise other agencies on an operational and strategic basis within a multi-agency framework. However, while statutory agencies such as police or health services may usefully signpost and refer survivors to local support groups, they should not have the power to compel survivors to attend; nor should attendance at a group be seen as a mechanism for statutory agencies to pressure the survivor to comply with their strategies for risk management, child protection or any other issue they perceive as important. This would defeat the objectives of building self-esteem and empowerment, which are key elements of the design and ethos of the support group. Self-help support groups will only function effectively if the participants have made an active choice to attend.

It is vital, therefore, that participation in support groups should be an autonomous choice, based primarily on each survivor's assessment of the value and benefit she would gain from group participation.

In order to prevent statutory agencies from using support groups inappropriately, while at the same time receiving appropriate referrals from them, anyone setting up a group must build effective communication with local and national organisations that are already working with survivors, for example:

- health services – including primary care (health visitors, practice nurses, doctors), the local hospital (particularly Accident and Emergency), community mental health services, and paramedics;
- the police – particularly specialist domestic violence and community safety officers;
- social services, including children's and families' services;
- lawyers and other legal services;
- the judicial system (criminal, civil and family proceedings courts, judges, etc.);
- probation services;
- schools, colleges and universities;
- housing and homelessness services;
- domestic abuse services (which, in the UK, includes Independent Domestic Violence Advisors or IDVAs);
- women's rights services;
- community services, especially community groups and projects targeting local women;
- specialist services for lesbian and bisexual women, disabled people/women, Black, minority ethnic, refugee and asylum seeking women, migrant women, traveller women, etc.

For suggestions as to how to improve referral rates through developing multi-agency links, see Chapter 3, and for further detailed discussion of the role, skills and training needs of facilitators see Chapter 2.

**From some survivors:**

*... [My] only hope was that the group would open my eyes to something that I can't see myself.*

*I hoped that this would finally be a place where I will not be misunderstood.*

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Council of Europe: *Final reports from each state on the National Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (July, 2008)*. Available at: <http://www.coe.int>

### **Standards for domestic and sexual violence services**

See the UK National Service Standards for Domestic and Sexual Violence on the Women's Aid website: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

### **Group programmes for working with abused women**

Fallon, B. and Goodman, M. (1995) *Pattern Changing for Abused Women: An Educational Program*. (London: Sage)

Freedom Programme: see <http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk>



# 2 The facilitator

## ***What some survivors said about what they want from group facilitators:***

*She should not treat you like poor victims but like women who have power hidden inside them. She should help to find the way to this power.*

*She should be on the same wavelength with the participants – a friend, not a boss.*

## **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter we will look at the roles and responsibilities of the facilitator and the co-facilitator, and at the skills, knowledge, training and experience that are needed to run support groups for survivors of domestic violence.

The Power To Change Programme provides education and support in a group setting to women who are, or have been, in abusive relationships. Within the group, the facilitator plays a central role in making the sessions safe, supportive and inclusive. She uses her skills, experience and knowledge on issues such as domestic and gendered violence and the dynamics of self-help groups, to assist the participants during and after the group sessions and to maintain group cohesion, respect and stability.

We recommend that two people run the Power To Change Programme together, as facilitator and co-facilitator. The facilitator has the central role while the co-facilitator has a supporting role. The co-facilitator's function is to support the facilitator in each session, especially in crisis situations; for example, when a participant needs one-to-one support during a session, the co-facilitator is able to withdraw from the group setting with the participant, while the facilitator carries on with the session. Having two facilitators means there is always someone to run the group in case of unexpected absence, e.g. illness. Also, being a co-facilitator is an opportunity to learn about self-help group processes, and can act as hands-on training for the main facilitator role.

Broadly speaking, the facilitator and co-facilitator will need similar skills, knowledge and training – though the co-facilitator is likely to have had less experience than the facilitator. If both facilitators have similar levels of experience, these roles can be flexible from session to session.

For the purposes of the support groups in this manual, the facilitators must be women. There is considerable evidence that women are more likely to access a service, and feel comfortable within it, if it is run for women only<sup>13</sup>, and experience also shows that women best facilitate women's support groups. This helps to avoid the unconscious or conscious repetition of the male/female power imbalance that is so prevalent in violent partnerships. One of the goals of support groups is to empower women through the example of female leadership or, in this case, female facilitators. Therefore the Power To Change Programme has been put together with only female facilitators in mind.

## 2.2. CORE BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES

Anyone facilitating a self-help group must believe in the strengths and capabilities of the survivors themselves, and in their ability to change, adapt and discover their own solutions to their problems.

In the previous chapter, we set out the key principles and standards that should underpin any service provision for survivors of domestic violence and these should be fully embraced by any facilitator of a support group. These are:

- understanding domestic and sexual violence and its impact;
- safety, security and dignity;
- diversity and fair access to services;
- advocacy and support;
- empowerment and participation;
- confidentiality;
- a co-ordinated agency response;
- challenging tolerance of domestic and sexual violence and holding perpetrators accountable;
- governance and accountability.

First and foremost, it is vital that facilitators should always believe survivors and never ask for proof or evidence of their abuse. Facilitators should also uphold the following core beliefs:

- Domestic violence is preventable.
- Domestic violence is never the survivor's fault.
- Domestic violence is rooted in the relations of power and control in intimate family relationships.
- Perpetrators have sole responsibility for their violence.
- Children may also be victims of the abuse, and need a violence-free environment.

These fundamental beliefs and principles will, in turn, enable the group members to recognise their individual strengths, maintain their independence, and acknowledge their

.....  
<sup>13</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why women only?* (London: Women's Resource Centre) p.52; downloadable from <http://www.wrc.org.uk/downloads/Polycystuff/whywomenonly.pdf>



rights to respect, dignity, independence, choice and control (where this does not conflict with their safety).

In order to create an empowering atmosphere within the support group, it is important that the facilitators act in an empowered, assertive, non-judgmental and empathetic way, thereby promoting the skills that are discussed throughout the sessions and maximising the potential of the group.

## 2.3. KEY FACILITATOR COMPETENCIES

### Knowledge

It is of the utmost importance that the facilitators should have a sound and up-to-date working knowledge of domestic violence and its impact on women and children, as well as of the resources and support available in the field. The facilitators should also have a broad overview of all types of gender-based violence, gender discrimination and equal opportunities.

We strongly recommend that before the support group begins, any intending facilitators should also have an in-depth knowledge of the following areas:

- an understanding of the dynamics, range of forms, and extent of domestic violence and its psychological, emotional, financial and physical impact on women and children, within an equalities and human rights framework;
- an understanding of a feminist analysis of domestic violence, which recognises that domestic abuse takes place in a range of contexts and is rooted in relations of power and control;
- an understanding of the gendered meaning of violence, and the links between domestic and sexual violence, violence against women and the abuse and neglect of children;
- an understanding of the social context and history of women's oppression (and the consequent need to facilitate the group in a way that does not repeat the hierarchy and domination that is part of oppression and abuse);
- a sound knowledge of the risks faced by survivors of domestic abuse (adults and children), and of risk assessment, safety planning, and risk management;
- knowledge and understanding of the additional barriers some groups may face when attempting to access the support group;
- knowledge of relevant legislation pertaining to domestic violence, child protection, housing and other areas related to domestic abuse;
- a sound knowledge of the human and constitutional rights of the participants and the national legal framework related to domestic violence and child protection;
- knowledge of relevant local statutory and voluntary agencies and the roles they can play in supporting the group members;
- a good working knowledge of the local demographic profile of the community in which the support group is set.

## **Experience**

To ensure the group participants receive the best service, facilitators should ideally have the following experience:

- experience of working with survivors of domestic violence, preferably in a professional capacity, however, voluntary experience is also acceptable;
- experience of providing emotional and practical support to survivors of domestic violence;
- experience of safety planning and conducting risk assessments;
- experience of planning and facilitating group work, preferably with a self-help ethos.

## **Skills**

Facilitators should possess certain skills that enable them to run the group effectively and ensure that collective and individual needs are met. The following specific facilitator skills are essential for a successful self-help group:

- excellent group management skills, including the ability to plan and facilitate group sessions effectively;
- excellent communication skills, including clear verbal delivery and positive body language;
- active listening skills, and the ability to respond empathetically to the group members;
- the ability to challenge participants, where relevant and necessary, in a non-confrontational but assertive manner;
- the ability to handle issues, such as anger, in the group;
- an understanding of professional boundaries and the facilitator's limitations within the group, e.g. not getting personally involved with the women's lives;
- the ability to work on their own initiative and plan their workload effectively;
- the ability to apply anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities into all aspects of the support group;
- the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the support group and report on the outcomes;
- the ability to use basic information technology, such as word processing, searching the internet and creating spreadsheets.

## **Education, qualifications and training**

There is no specific qualification needed to run the Power To Change support groups, but we recommend that facilitators should have a good combination of experience, knowledge and relevant training.

Facilitators who come from a background of working with survivors will generally possess the fundamental knowledge, skills and attitudes needed. In addition, facilitators may have specific training that qualifies them for work within the domestic violence field, and/or a relevant degree or qualification such as social work.

Specific training courses might include the following topics:

- domestic violence awareness;
- sexual violence awareness;
- equal opportunities;
- group facilitation skills;
- counselling skills;
- child protection;
- criminal and civil law;
- housing legislation;
- diversity and equal opportunities;
- immigration;
- risk assessment and safety planning;
- human rights awareness;
- basic psychology (including an understanding of potential responses to trauma);
- facilitating self-help groups.

## 2.4. FACILITATOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Roles of facilitators

The facilitators' role is to promote the principles of empowerment and self-help within the group and to ensure that the group works as a constructive and cohesive unit. This role is vital to the success of the group.

From the outset, the facilitators should encourage the participants to share their experiences, express new ideas, and work through emerging issues such as basic rights, self-esteem, assertiveness and boundaries. They should always guarantee a safe, secure and supportive environment, while stimulating constructive and interactive debate between the participants.

The facilitators use their knowledge and experience in order to:

- create a warm, accepting and informal atmosphere which provides support, trust, and safety;
- involve all individuals in the group process, thus creating an environment of inclusion and equal participation;
- create an empowering environment within the group setting, enabling participants to increase their assertiveness and self-esteem, and thus take better control of their lives;
- help the participants understand the dynamics and processes of the group;
- help women to recognise what they are feeling, and why;
- promote and monitor individual and group growth and change;
- help the participants to understand the meanings behind certain behaviours and issues pertaining to domestic abuse;

- provide necessary information for group members, and be a source of knowledge and information on violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular;
- promote the understanding that domestic violence is unacceptable and a violation of human rights;
- describe and refer to other services in addition to, or in place of, the support group if necessary;
- provide one-to-one support for the group members if needed;
- let the group do most of the work: it is important to stress that the facilitator does not always need to take the initiative, nor does she know all the answers.

The members should be given ample opportunity to express their opinions and discuss the issues with one another. However, if the group strays too far from the original aims and objectives, or fails to stick to the agreed group rules, it is the role of the facilitators to guide the participants gently back into productive discussion and to ensure the group rules are respected by all.

### **Responsibilities of facilitators**

In order to ensure that these various roles are fulfilled, facilitators have a range of key responsibilities:

#### **a) Organising the group:**

- ensure the setting up and proper functioning of the meetings, taking into account any access, mobility or other needs of the group members;
- prepare the correct material for each session before the group meets, taking into account the needs of the group members.

#### **b) Within the group:**

- run the programme from the standpoint that all participants are believed and listened to with respect and dignity at all times;
- adopt effective means of structuring the group and encouraging the participation of each member;
- explain the necessary group rules, and ensure they are adhered to;
- encourage the women to take responsibility for their own behaviour;
- challenge any myths or stereotypes about domestic violence that arise within the group.

#### **c) Supporting participants:**

- ensure that the participants feel listened to, and not judged;
- recognise the individual needs and experiences of all group members;
- support group members in making informed choices and decisions in relation to the options available to them;
- be aware of relevant local agencies that may be able to support the participants in different ways – facilitators could, for example, create a support handout detailing the contact details of services and other types of support (such as websites and self-help books), and give it out at the beginning of the group;
- where possible and legal, recognise the needs of, and provide support for, any

group members that have insecure immigration status, no access to social or welfare benefits<sup>14</sup>, or are without work visas;

- be available to group members during and in between sessions, or (if this is not possible) refer women to other avenues of support that are appropriate for their needs.

#### **d) Safety:**

- ensure that the safety and security of the group and its members are always the first priority;
- make sure that the support group and any additional one-to-one sessions are always held within a safe and secure women-centred environment, in accordance with the women's needs;
- make the group members aware of the processes of risk assessment that are in place throughout the programme;
- take appropriate action if any risk of serious harm to the group members is identified, by providing relevant information and conducting realistic safety planning;
- prevent crisis situations in the group by using effective intervention strategies.

#### **e) Diversity and fair access:**

- respect the diversity of all participants, positively engage in anti-discriminatory practice, and support every member on an equitable basis;
- ensure that the support offered to members takes into account their individual needs and experiences;
- ensure that the support group is accessible and welcoming to all participants;
- take a positive approach to promoting diversity within the support group's literature and environment, making sure to avoid jargon;
- monitor access to the support group, ensuring that it fairly reflects the demographics of the local community in which it is set; for example by using your own anonymous equal opportunities monitoring forms<sup>15</sup>;
- recognise the additional barriers that some groups may face when attempting to access the group; for example Black, minority ethnic, refugee or asylum seeking women, migrant women, older women, lesbian and bisexual women, and disabled women;
- challenge any unfair prejudice and/or discrimination if it arises within the group, and keep records of any specific incidents by completing regular session notes.

#### **f) Confidentiality:**

- ensure the confidentiality of the group at all times by explaining and respecting the participants' rights to confidentiality, and clarifying with the members the situations where confidentiality may be limited e.g. reporting obligations based on child protection;
- ensure that all electronic or hard copy information regarding the group sessions is stored securely and confidentially – any information that might individually identify a group member cannot be released outside the group;
- at the beginning of the course, agree with group members that anything confidential will only be released with their express consent.

<sup>14</sup> Termed "no recourse to public funds" in the UK.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 7 for an example of an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form.

## 2.5. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN FACILITATION

### a) The facilitator dominates

The facilitator may try to solve all problems alone instead of engaging the whole group. This can impede the group's potential and lead to the artificial manipulation of group processes. From the participants' point of view, such a facilitator is in a position of power, and any dominating behaviour could potentially reinforce feelings of helplessness and inadequacy.

### b) The facilitator has fixed expectations

The facilitator has stereotypical and specific expectations about how a group member (a victim) should behave. This can lead to overlooking and/or not accepting many emotions such as anger or depression. The facilitator must create enough space within the group for each member to flourish and express her individuality. By labelling the women as victims and expecting certain behaviour from them, the group's mission is lost.

### c) The facilitator thinks that she is a greater expert on women's lives than the women themselves

Often the facilitator has good theoretical and practical skills in working with survivors. This might lead her to believe that she has a greater understanding of domestic violence than the women in the group. However, the facilitator should still consider the women the experts in relation to their own lives.

### d) The facilitator tries to avoid silence

Perhaps due to her own anxiety, or feeling pressured for time, the facilitator starts talking whenever there is a silent moment. Yet silence is a necessary tool of group work: it allows time for thinking and reflecting, and can create a certain tension that forces group members to seek solutions. The facilitator must be open to silence and be flexible regarding time.

### Suggestions for overcoming these problems

Some of these problems can be avoided or tackled at an early stage. Evaluation forms may highlight any impending difficulties – for example, if women regularly report feeling uncomfortable in the group, the facilitator should respond to this concern.

If problems with the facilitators do occur, many women will find it hard to confront the situation, or report back in evaluation forms. Because of this, it is important to have a complaints procedure in place.

The facilitator and co-facilitator can provide a check on each other; and regular supervision for facilitators is recommended. It can also be useful if the facilitators keep a record or a reflective diary about the group in order to evaluate their experience and support themselves with any issues.

### **Some more views from survivors about what they want from group facilitators:**

*We don't need sophisticated theories but just empathic understanding.  
Non-violence: we had more than enough of violence already..  
She should believe that good changes in our lives are possible.*

# 3

## Group development and management

*The group is a place where you can be honest and where nobody would laugh at you. [A survivor]*

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how to plan, promote, develop and manage a support group. We summarise the various issues that should be planned before the group starts, including:

- who the group will be for;
- the group's aims and objectives;
- how to promote the group;
- how to assess and manage risk;
- confidentiality;
- complaints procedures;
- how to provide support for the participants (including one-to-one support);
- how to fundraise and manage the finances of the group;
- how to evaluate its effectiveness.

### 3.2. PLANNING

This manual is addressed primarily to support group facilitators and intending facilitators. As facilitator, it is likely that you, possibly together with a co-facilitator, will be doing the planning on your own. If you are already working from a functioning service, however, you may decide to organise a planning team in order to represent different points of view. Colleagues who work with survivors in different capacities may be able to contribute additional valid points to the planning process. You might also like to consider including survivors in certain phases of the preparation, either through meetings or questionnaires, in order to get a better understanding of what they would like to gain from a support group.

Before initiating the support group, you should discuss and decide the following:

- **profile of participants:** who is the group for?
- **aims of the group:** the overall goal you intend to achieve by organising the group.
- **objectives of the group:** results that need to be achieved during group work in order to realise the aims.
- **key learning points:** what information, skills and attitudes need to be acquired by group members in order to achieve the objectives?



### **Profile of participants**

If you are already a part of an organisation providing domestic violence services, you may be setting up the support group as a direct result of a need identified by your current or past service users. If this is the case, then you will already know, to a large extent, the profile of your participants.

All participants must be women. Although men can also experience domestic violence, men and women should not attend the same group, as this inhibits disclosure, may reduce women's sense of safety, and severely reduces efficacy. Survivors of domestic violence will often have had traumatic experiences with the opposite sex. In mixed-sex groups, women may not feel safe enough to talk honestly and freely about their life. Safety, and feeling safe, is of the utmost concern, and it is well known that women feel safer and more comfortable in a women-only environment. Some women might also have a difficulty in expressing their anger in front of men. Others might take up valuable time of the group to defend men in general, because they are worried whether the men present might have been offended by a particular statement.

The Power to Change models are for group work with female survivors of domestic violence. However, there are different groups within this broad category, and you may decide to offer separate support groups for some of these.

Different groups you could consider include the following:

- women whose experience of domestic violence is in the past;
- women currently living in abusive relationships;
- women in shelters or otherwise not living with the abuser, but still in danger;
- women from minority groups, e.g. lesbian women, disabled women, older or younger women;
- Black, minority ethnic, refugee and asylum-seeking women;
- women with specific support needs, e.g. in relation to mental health, drug or alcohol dependency;
- women from specific faiths, e.g. Jewish, Muslim, Christian, etc.

Your decision regarding the profile of participants will depend on a number of things, including the resources, knowledge and experience you have in working with survivors, and your ability to manage risk.

### **Setting up a group: aims and objectives**

At the outset, you should decide and state the aim of your group; for example, "to provide an environment of mutual self-help and support that will enable participants to address their experiences as survivors of domestic violence". Deciding this at an early stage is important for visualising the direction of the group, as it will impact on the promotion of the group. Once the group is set up, these aims can be developed and modified through discussion with the participants.

The next step in effective planning is to consider what objectives need to be in place in



order to achieve the aims of the group. Using the above example of an aim of the group, the following objectives could be put in place to realise the aim:

- create a safe space where each participant feels secure enough to talk about her personal experiences;
- ensure that women's experiences are shared within the group.

At this stage, you might wish to involve the future participants. Although the overall aims and general group profile call for certain strategies in developing your objectives, your group will consist of unique individuals with different personal backgrounds and individual needs.

When planning the aims and objectives of the group, it can be helpful to think of each objective having three key learning points:

- acquiring information on specific topics;
- acquiring skills;
- changing attitudes.

The chart below is an example of this:

Objectives	Learning points
<b>Objective 1:</b> Realising that abuse is not the woman's fault and understanding how abuse is about power and control.	<b>Information:</b> the 'Power and Control' wheel. The anatomy of abusive relationships. Relationship of gender socialisation and abuse in relationships. <b>Skills:</b> recognising patterns of power and control in one's own and other group members' lives; (primarily in intimate relationships, but also in other relationships such as those with parents, bosses, etc.) <b>Attitudes:</b> a change from victim-blaming to holding the perpetrator responsible; acknowledging the influence of social expectations and socialisation on the choices women make when it comes to intimate relationships.
<b>Objective 2:</b> Supporting self esteem.	<b>Information:</b> the positive effects of a better self-esteem on the individual's mental health, psychosocial situation and parenting skills. <b>Skills:</b> methods to discover one's own potential and abilities, acknowledge one's achievements, and present one's competencies in an appreciative way to others. <b>Attitudes:</b> understanding self-esteem as an expression of human dignity.
<b>Objective 3:</b> Understanding domestic violence as a form of human rights violation against women and children.	<b>Information:</b> introduction to human rights values (e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). <b>Skills:</b> analysing domestic violence situations from the point of view of human rights. <b>Attitudes:</b> understanding human rights as universal values extended to all human beings regardless of gender, race, age, ability, sexual orientation, citizenship, etc.

### 3.3. PROMOTING THE SERVICE AND WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

If you intend to extend participation in the support group beyond the existing users of your organisation, this section has some suggestions to increase referral rates through multi-agency working. These involve practical, operational activities that could apply to any support group, and some strategic suggestions.

#### Promotion

How the support group is promoted will very much depend on whom you expect to participate. If the group is meant for users of your own organisation only, and screening is provided through your regular service (helpline, refuge/shelter, drop-in centre, etc.), promotion simply means providing accurate information to your staff about the support group i.e. start date, venue, time of the meeting, duration, profile of prospective participants, and any other relevant parameters.

If you plan to extend participation to the wider public, you need to decide whether you want to advertise it publicly, or whether you want to restrict it to referrals from other agencies only.

#### Practical and operational activities

##### a) Letters

Write letters to local agencies to make them aware of the group and how you can work together to support survivors. Letters should:

- explain who you are;
- define domestic violence;
- give reasons why it is important to have a self-help group running in your local community;
- explain what the group aims to do and whom it is for;
- explain what the group cannot/will not do;
- ask for co-operation, and referrals to the service;
- give contact details for further information, to refer a potential participant, or to pass on to a survivor to self refer.

Letters **should not** give details of where the course is run.

Please see the example letter in Appendix 1: you could send this letter to agencies working with survivors of domestic abuse to build good multi-agency links and gain satisfactory rates of referrals. If contacting particular types of agencies, it might be useful to make the letter more specific to their line of work, and explain how the support group fits within it.

##### b) Leaflets

Design a leaflet advertising the support group. This can be circulated to local agencies (together with the letters), displayed in public areas, or given to women so they can self refer. It is a good idea to include brief **anonymous** case studies, or quotes from previous participants: this will encourage referrals and give an idea of the kinds of women for whom the group might be suitable. Be sure to **ask for consent** before using case studies, even if they are anonymous.

**c) 'Taster day'**

A 'taster day' is an opportunity for representatives from other local voluntary and statutory agencies to hear you talk about:

- who the group is for;
- the aims and objectives of the group;
- why such a group is necessary in the community;
- what the group can and cannot do;
- the course content;
- how other agencies can get involved.

Part of the taster day can be spent sampling some exercises from the Power To Change Programme, so that agencies can get a feel for the content of the course. Remember to ask them to fill out feedback forms at the end on how they thought the day went so you can improve the taster day sessions for the future.

**d) Networking**

Get in touch with other women's organisations locally and nationally. See if any similar groups are running in your area, advertise your group on their websites, and make local and national helplines/hotlines for domestic abuse aware of the group so they can refer survivors on to you.

You should be aware of other local and national support services for survivors so that you can refer women who contact you on to other or additional sources of support, as appropriate.

**e) Working in partnership**

Strategic planning involves a consideration of an organisation's overall goals and future direction. Strategic activities put this planning into practice.

It is important not to underestimate the power of effective strategic partnerships between organisations, whether they are local, regional or national. Sometimes the benefits are not immediately obvious; but invariably the initial time investment is repaid, due to securing the commitment (and maybe funding) of people with a wider breadth of experience that exists in any single organisation. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- **Local steering group and board meetings**

Try to get on to steering groups, boards, etc., so that your voice can be constantly heard: one discussion at steering group or board level of a partner organisation can result in a decision that may bring you more referrals than a month's work by an army of volunteers.

- **Create your own steering group or board of trustees**

Invite key individuals onto your steering group/board: people are often flattered by being asked to contribute to another organisation's high level discussions, but you will also be securing their commitment to your organisation's aims.

- **Aims and targets**

Think about how your activities can contribute to other organisations' aims and targets: if these organisations know that what you do can contribute to their success, you are far more likely to receive referrals from them.

- **Get a local champion of your service**

Identify a high profile, well respected champion: there may be someone who is well known in the locality, who has a passion for your work, and whose personal circumstances may enable them to spread the word among other people who also have influence in the community.

- **Annual report**

Ensure that a copy of your annual report goes to each partner organisation, and that credit is given to their contribution: nothing pleases an organisation more than to receive credit from a partner organisation, and will help increase support in the following year.

### **3.4. RUNNING THE GROUP**

There are several management issues that should be considered when running the group. The following section lists some of the issues that will arise, and suggestions as to how you can deal with them.

#### **Initial one-to-one session**

It is important to meet every woman who is referred to the support group before it starts. This initial meeting is an opportunity to carry out a risk assessment (see below), to talk about the group, and to discuss each person's expectations.

Within the European Union, screening methods vary in complexity. Virtually every organisation we asked finds it crucial to acquaint future participants with the structure of the self-help group and to clarify the aims and objectives of the group in order to ensure that the expectations of the participants and what is provided in the group are compatible. This is done in the setting of internal referrals, as well as in the cases of external or self-referrals.

At the initial meeting, we recommend putting together a support plan for each woman that should be followed throughout the whole group process (see Appendix 3 for a support and safety planning format). These individual sessions are also very useful in order to find out whether any woman has any specific support needs, and, if so, to decide with her the best way to meet her needs. For example, some women may need a personal assistant, sign language interpreter or other support person to attend the group alongside them.

If participants are generally referred to the group from within your organisation, or you work with the clients in another capacity, it is highly likely that an initial one-to-one session has taken place already. However, it may still be advisable to arrange a short individual session to discuss each woman's expectations of the group.

Some organisations prefer to organise group meetings alongside the individual meetings. This type of meeting is an opportunity for the facilitators to explain the group policies and protocols, and the content of the course, and applicants can share their expectations, discuss how they can be incorporated and have a chance to experience what a support group is like.

### **Risk assessment**

Risk can be defined as the likelihood of something adverse or dangerous occurring. In the context of domestic violence, it is imperative that you consider your ability to manage risk, and put in place a risk assessment and support plan framework.

Initially, it is important to risk assess the actual venue where the support group will be held making sure that the building is safe and secure. Regarding the participants, if there is an internal referral system in place within your organisation, it is likely that the service already has risk management policies, and that initial risk assessments have taken place if the participant is receiving another type of support. If admission to the group is external, or done through a wide variety of referral agencies, then it is good practice to determine the women's risk levels by:

- assessing the likelihood of further abuse;
- evaluating likely harm;
- assessing future security;
- deciding, along with the survivor, with whom to work and what resources (i.e. support outside the group);
- evaluating risk to other members in the group; (e.g. a stalking ex-partner might follow one woman to the meeting, and thus endanger other participants).

We recommend integrating a risk assessment framework within the whole group process. Risk should not only be assessed at the beginning, but during the programme (especially with the sessions that deal with potentially dangerous subject matter), and at the end. When conducting a risk assessment with a woman, you may come to the conclusion that this may not be the right time for her to join a support group – if, for example, she is in a very dangerous situation: attending the group may not only increase the danger she is in, but it could put other participants at risk. If a woman is in a dangerous situation, she should be helped to draw up a safety plan. In some cases, the initial risk assessment might result in a referral to individual counselling or other appropriate services, instead of, or in parallel to, the support group.

Depending on your ability to manage risk within the group, you may or may not be able to offer services to women who are high-risk. These decisions will depend on a combination of your previous experience and knowledge of risk assessments, and your own judgement of the women's different situations. If you are unable to offer a service to high-risk women, it is important to refer them to more appropriate services that have the resources to meet their needs, and other forms of support should also be offered.

For a ready-to-use risk-assessment table and sources of other risk-assessment forms, see Appendix 2.

### **Confidentiality and data protection**

Participants, facilitators and potentially the administrative staff of the organisation offering the support group will inevitably get to know certain sensitive information about participants of the group. Most countries have data protection legislation in place and this is not negotiable. In the first place, therefore, you need to look at and take into account your country's legal requirements regarding data protection and handling sensitive personal data. You also need to know the legal requirements relating to mandatory reporting and disclosure; for example, the obligations of staff and others when they become aware of ongoing child abuse.

Participants, facilitators and administrative staff all need to be clear about their rights and obligations regarding sensitive data and confidentiality. We suggest that such information is provided as written guidelines to the staff, and that they become part of the written agreement or contract between the participant and the facilitator/organisation. (See Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols).

### **Complaints procedure**

It is good practice to have a complaints procedure in place before the group starts. This will help deal with any problems that arise within the group, for example if the women have any complaints (e.g. about the venue or the facilitator). The participants must be able to complain externally, and not just to the facilitator, if they choose to. At the first session, the women must be made aware of the complaints procedure and the process of making a complaint should be explained.

### **Facilitator support**

It is important that support mechanisms are in place for the facilitators. For example, it is good practice for the facilitators to have supervision sessions with a line manager, or someone external, who is in a position to advise and support. It is a good idea to create a network of facilitators, not just within your organisation, but also from within the community. The network can then meet regularly as a space for trouble shooting, to discuss the support groups they run, share information and offer suggestions on how to improve, for example, funding, exercises or group work. Alternatively, the network could be online in the form of a message board and therefore can reach facilitators further afield.

### **Financing and infrastructural support: planning expenditure**

It is recommended that you secure the sustainability of any project before you start. Not only is this good practice, but also it is important for the women to know that the group will be able to continue for the duration of the programme, and will not be interrupted by any financial burdens of your organisation. This is an issue in which those responsible for the financial management of the organisation need to be involved.

The following are some typical forms of expenditure involved in the setting up and running of a support group:

- educational materials: photocopying handouts, paper for taking notes, pens/pencils, flipcharts and pads, markers, sticky notepads, plastic wallets, etc.;
- expenses related to the meeting space: room rental, contribution towards energy bills, etc.;



- communication expenses: phone calls to future and present participants of the groups, mailings (e.g. the announcement to potential referral agencies), production of leaflets and other advertising materials;
- expenses related to physical comfort: coffee, tea, water for participants, paper cups, paper tissues, etc.;
- human resources: facilitator(s), supervision for facilitators, childcare during the group work, support for transportation costs for economically disadvantaged participants, external evaluator.

## Fundraising

The context in which funding is available for non-governmental or charitable activities differs from country to country, and from region to region within them<sup>16</sup>. However, in general, since the primary beneficiaries of a support group are women living in a particular town or region, financial aid for your group is most likely to be provided by local, sub-regional or municipal governmental bodies, foundations or local businesses. You might also receive private (individual) funding as well.

You could also ask for contributions in kind; for example, if your organisation already has a meeting place for the group, energy costs may already be covered from an operational budget; it may also be the part of the job description of permanent staff (e.g. in a drop-in centre or a or a refuge/shelter) to facilitate support groups. Other items, such as coffee, tea, paper cups or even flipchart paper, can be sought from private donors or businesses that prefer to donate in kind rather than give money.

Depending on the target group and financial status of your (potential) participants you might consider asking them for a contribution towards the costs of the support group. You could use a “sliding-scale” approach to determine how much a given individual should contribute. If you request a contribution from participants, you need to decide early on whether you would accept participants who are unable to contribute at all. If you do, this option should be made available to anyone who might need it. If you do decide that the women should pay a small fee, you should include this, together with information on how to pay, as part of the Group Rules (see Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols).

## Childcare

Women who participate in the support group will often need to find care for their children for the duration of the programme: for many reasons, victims and survivors of domestic violence are more often left with sole responsibility for childcare than mothers who are not in abusive relationships. We recommend discussing with the participants your childcare policies (including the need for childcare provision) before the group begins. The following questions should be explored with potential participants:

- whether they have a need for organised childcare;
- whether they would need it every time, or only occasionally.

<sup>16</sup> There are two foundations providing support globally to grassroots women's groups to help them reach their aims: Mamacash Foundation [www.mamacash.nl](http://www.mamacash.nl) which is mainly for relatively new organisations, and the Global Fund for Women: [www.globalfundforwomen.org](http://www.globalfundforwomen.org)

- If so:
- the ages and gender of the children;
  - whether the children have any special needs that should be taken into account.

It is also important to decide any rules regarding children and childcare; for example, that no children are allowed into the group setting, and that if there is a problem with a child, the mother must leave the group to attend to her children outside.

### 3.5. EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SUPPORT GROUP

It is good practice to incorporate frameworks for monitoring and evaluation in order to assess the effectiveness of the support group.

#### **Evaluation by participants**

Participants' evaluation of their own progress, as well as their evaluation of the work of facilitators (and sometimes of other group members) can be valuable tools for improving the service, and providing self-reflection and feedback from the participants. We have provided some tools for evaluation in the Appendix (see Appendices 4, 5 and 6: weekly evaluation, mid-course evaluation and final evaluation). These tools should be used (respectively) each week, in the middle, and at the end of the course. You might want to choose a mixture of evaluation tools and methods. Some participants can express themselves better in writing, whereas others prefer speaking, or expressing themselves through drawing. However, an evaluation form (or interview, if forms are inappropriate) should always be part of the evaluation, since this provides the most comparable results.

#### **Internal evaluation by facilitators or the preparatory team**

The facilitator(s) should ideally keep a session log to evaluate how the session went. If there are several facilitators working with the group, providing feedback to each other after each session should be part of the facilitators' responsibilities, as well as being supportive for each facilitator.

#### **External evaluation**

External evaluators can offer an objective point of view on the effectiveness of the support group. The external evaluator can be a person observing the group continuously or from time to time. This can be a high-cost feature of the group. However, there are other solutions, such as using external evaluators who are in training or studying the issue, and can use their observations and the activity of being an external evaluator/observer as practice time or to contribute to a research project.

For support groups, externally developed psychological tests for self-esteem can be a useful external evaluation tool. They can be used at the middle and the end of the support group to track changes in the level of self-esteem of the participants.

#### **From a survivor:**

*I would recommend it to every survivor, because sometimes the others shared things that also happened to me in my relationship, but up to that point I did not realise that what I have experienced was also part of the abuse... If I were on my own, I would have not found out how many of my experiences could be related to domestic violence.*



# 4

## Group policies and protocols

*Now I know that there are many beautiful, healthy-looking women on the streets who have the same problems at home. [A survivor]*

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Having outlined the general principles in planning a support group for survivors (Chapter 3) and the roles, responsibilities, skills and experience needed by facilitators (Chapter 2), we now move on to looking at group policies and protocols, and how these can contribute to maintaining the proper environment necessary for supporting survivors of domestic violence.

Attending a support group can bring positive changes to women's lives. Violence against women is not an easy topic to deal with; undoubtedly the stories and experiences of survivors can be sad and terrifying, but equally they can be moving and inspiring.

Members of survivor support groups share a common identity and seek solutions to the same problems. Certain processes must be in place in order for group work to be effective. Once the group is set up correctly, participants are often able to accomplish goals as a group that they would not accomplish as individuals. Consequently the group is more than just the sum of its members. Awareness of various group processes, both negative and positive, enables the facilitators to manage the support group more effectively, and to equip the survivors with the necessary awareness, energy and strength to be able to move towards a life free of violence.

### 4.2. GROUP FORMAT

The standards for group work may vary to some extent according to the particular context and needs of the group; for example, the size of the group will probably vary depending on whether it is based in an urban or rural setting.

Following on from suggestions in previous chapters regarding planning, recruiting participants, and facilitators, the following are some additional general guidelines and suggestions for running a group effectively.

#### a) Size

The optimal size for group work is between eight and twelve people, although as few as six or as many as fourteen are also acceptable. It may be that for one session fewer

people attend than expected, so it is up to the facilitator's discretion to decide whether to proceed. We have known of groups that continue to run with only three or four participants, and although this is not ideal, women may find it easier to bond with each other. Generally speaking, groups over 14 are harder to manage, as there may not be enough time to work through all exercises and give every participant a chance to express herself. If you are planning to run more groups, and there is a high intake at first, it may be helpful to set up a waiting list.

#### **b) Frequency**

The frequency of meetings can vary according to the specific needs of members; however, once a week seems to be optimal. Frequent meetings increase trust and mutual familiarity between members. If sessions are too frequent, however, they may create a certain dependency between members, and/or become too much of a commitment for the participants; this means they may be less constructive. Meeting more than once a week may also be problematic with regard to childcare or costs of transport; and it may create suspicions if any members are still living with perpetrators. On the other hand, our experience shows that, if the group meets less frequently than once a week, participants do not feel the benefit of support of the group and find it harder to keep motivated about attending.

#### **c) Duration**

The Power to Change programmes are ideally designed to last for 14 weeks; however, the programmes are adaptable, and we give suggestions later for how some sessions may be combined in order to arrive at a shorter programme of 12 or (in the case of the first model, the Self Esteem Programme) 10 weeks only. Around three months gives enough time for personal development, without undue pressure. If the programmes are any longer than this, group members might see the commitment as too great. However, informal groups without a fixed programme may continue as long as the participants feel a need for the group and find it effective.

### **4.3. GROUP RULES**

#### **Why set norms and rules in a group?**

Norms and rules may be used in order to:

- provide predictable group interaction;
- provide stability for a group and to support the main goals of group communication – **trust**, **acceptance**, and **respect**;
- outline patterns of communication and coordination;
- act as a guide to agreed behaviour, particularly if in written form. (This may be useful if some participants violate agreed rules.)

At the very beginning of the programme, it is important to explain that group rules are necessary, and that having process guidelines in place helps to facilitate group discussions.

It is a useful and positive exercise to involve group members in the process of developing group regulations. By creating their own rules, participants are more motivated to follow

them, as they have been able to share their own opinions and ideas about how to organise the group work. Moreover, it may be the first time in a long while that they have had an opportunity to say something about the rules that they would, and would not, like to follow.

Some extra time should be spent developing these guidelines with the group. You could ask the women questions such as the following:

- “What would help you participate most fully in this group?”
- “What would make it possible to talk about your own experiences?”
- “What would prevent you from expressing yourself?”
- “What do you think fosters communication?” (E.g. ‘I’-messages.)
- “What do you think shuts communication down?”

Since the group will be working on changing abusive patterns, it is essential to set the rule that any belittling or abusive language or attitudes will not be tolerated. It may be appropriate for the group to agree a way of challenging and preventing such behaviour.

As a symbolic way to show commitment, you could write the group rules agreed by the participants on a flipchart, leaving some space at the bottom. Ask the women to walk up to the flipchart and sign the set of rules if they are happy with them. The flipchart should stay visible at every session in order to make it easy to refer to any of the rules.

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### Basic process guidelines

The following are important points to cover, although each group can come up with additional rules.

- **Give everyone an opportunity to speak.** Each person should avoid dominating the discussion (including the facilitator/s).
- **Good listening is important.** We should hear what a person is saying before speaking. Don't interrupt others.
- **Speak from your own experience.**
- **Be honest.**
- **Value and validate others' differences and experiences.**
- **Confidentiality.** All discussion and contributions are confidential – no personal information ever leaves the room without express consent.
- **Arrive on time.**
- **Attend regularly.** Members need to contact the facilitator if they are unable to attend a meeting; and if they have decided to leave the group for the time being, they should try to come to one more session, or, if this is not possible, contact the facilitator to explain their reasons.

### Informing newcomers about group rules

Groups that are following a programme will probably be “closed” – i.e. members will sign up at the beginning of a programme and will commit to attending until the end. However, some informal groups may remain open, and women can join at any point, or at least until the group reaches its agreed maximum size.

If anyone has missed the first introductory session, or if working in an open group, newcomers must be informed about the norms and rules that already exist. They should not be left to discover these norms on their own, and it should never be the case that a newcomer faces sanctions just because she did not know that a norm existed. Newcomers should also get the chance to add to the rules, or suggest modifications.

### **When group rules are violated**

Most of the time, members of support groups stick to the agreed rules, and are supportive of and cooperative towards each other. Unfortunately, there are exceptions when members of a group, intentionally or not, break the established group rules. If this happens, the facilitator should clearly indicate as soon as the violation is noticed, and use effective techniques such as the 'microphone technique'<sup>17</sup>, to overcome it. Repeated violation of norms are best solved with one-to-one sessions to discuss the meaning behind the behaviour, and try to come to an agreement on how this can be worked through.

### **In what kinds of situations should a participant be excluded from a group?**

Ideally, you/the facilitator will not be faced with a situation in which a member has to be excluded from the group. Nevertheless, in cases when an individual's behaviour is such that it prevents the group from functioning, exclusion should be considered as one option. In our experience exclusion is rare, but when it has occurred, the excluded group member was alleged to have done one or more of the following:

- jeopardised the safety of the group;
- disclosed personal information of group members outside of the group setting;
- attended the group while severely under the influence of alcohol or other substances;
- repeatedly broken the group contract and/or rules;
- behaved abusively towards other members.

You might also consider excluding someone who has participated ineffectively in the group, due to a change in her life situation. This reason is different from the others in that it does not involve breaking any of the rules; but sometimes the life situations of members change while they are attending the group, and this may impact on their participation in, or commitment to, the group.

It is important to undertake risk assessments with the women frequently and, depending on your or your service's ability to manage risk, you could use one-to-one support planning sessions to discuss the best and safest route forward. In some cases, this may mean that other alternative support would be more effective.

If you decide to exclude a member from the group for any reason, it is imperative that this is done with the utmost possible care. Never talk about the exclusion in front of other group members. Instead, arrange a one-to-one session to discuss the issue and explain to the group member kindly but firmly why it is not possible for her to continue in the group at this point. It may be useful to look back to what was originally agreed in the Group

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<sup>17</sup> See page 41

Rules or the Group Contract. It is also important to look at other support that does not involve group settings, and work out a support plan that is more appropriate for her at this point in her life.

### **Example:**

*In the interim period between two sessions, Sevim had decided to leave her violent partner. When the next group meeting started, she was visibly traumatised and began talking continually about her situation. Although the group could empathise with her position, her conduct was severely damaging the ability of the group to carry on with the session, and her suffering was starting to upset some members. To rectify the situation, the co-facilitator asked Sevim to come and talk to her outside the group. This meant that the group could continue with the session, and that Sevim could get the one-to-one support she needed. In the one-to-one session, Sevim had the time to talk through her problems, and a risk assessment and safety plan were carried out. It was suggested to Sevim that, because she was now in a crisis situation, it might be better for her to carry on with one-to-one support instead of group sessions, until she was in a more stable place. Understandably, Sevim was reluctant to leave the group early as she had formed tight bonds with other members. However, once she had talked through the issue with the co-facilitator, she decided to sign up for the next programme when she hoped she would be better able to cope with group work. She would stay in touch with her new friends from the current group in her own time.*

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## **4.4. GROUP CONTRACT**

Some members may be uncomfortable with the concept of signing a contract. However, to make the group sessions safe and consistent, there are some non-negotiable rules that must be set. Ease the members' anxiety by explaining the reasons behind signing a contract, and that it is not a legal document, but an aid to help everyone keep to the essential rules of the group (see Appendix 8). The following are subjects that all members must be aware of and agree to uphold at the beginning of the course:

### **a) Confidentiality**

Group members, including the facilitator/s, are responsible for keeping the location of the group meetings and the names, identities and other personal information of group members confidential. All information shared inside the group should never be discussed outside the sessions at any time, during or after the programme. Some groups even agree to use code names instead of real names, e.g. Mary Strawberry, Rosa Apple, although others think this could make the group work too light-hearted. It is important to note that if, for example, women see each other in public outside the group setting, they should be aware that an abusive partner or ex-partner may be present, and they need to act with caution.

**b) Legal issues related to disclosure**

Group members should be informed of the fact that laws relating to safeguarding children/child protection will require facilitators to inform the authorities (police, social care, child and family services, or other child care specialists) of cases where there is a serious risk of harm to the life or health of a child or other vulnerable person.

**c) Restrictions**

It must be made clear at the outset what kind of behaviour is not accepted in the group; for example, groups should be free of alcohol, illegal substances and violence (verbal, psychological and physical) at all times. Some services decide they are unable to offer support to women who currently have high-level support needs (for example in relation to their mental health and/or their use of alcohol or other substances), as they lack the resources to give appropriate support.

**d) Group rules**

Group members should affirm that they are aware of the group rules and willing to follow them. Group rules in written form can also be part of the contract. (See previous section of this chapter for more detailed information on group rules.)

## **4.5. GROUP DYNAMICS**

A support group run by women for women can be one of the best ways to empower survivors of domestic violence. Discussions in the group help the women to understand that domestic violence is not only an individual experience but is also a product of women's position in society, and that it affects one in four women in their lifetime<sup>18</sup>, regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, disability, sexuality or lifestyle. Understanding this helps the survivors to overcome their feelings of guilt, shame and loneliness as they become aware of the fact that their experience was not "their fault". The group is a resource that gives the members access to collective strength; it is an opportunity to share their own feelings, reactions, thoughts and coping skills with others.

As explained above, while informal groups can meet for varying lengths of time, from a couple of months to several years, depending on the decision of the members, groups following the formal Power To Change Programme continue for a pre-determined period of between 10 and 14 weeks. Within this, there is a starting phase, a phase of active participation, and a concluding phase.

**a) Starting phase**

In order for women to feel comfortable talking about their abuse and sharing their stories, there must be a sense of the group belonging together and of a mutual trust between members. Therefore, it is essential that this phase allows time for informal communication to enable positive personal contact between group members, e.g. coffee breaks, ice-breakers and name-games.

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<sup>18</sup> Council of Europe (2002) *Recommendation Rec 2002/5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of women against violence and Explanatory Memorandum Adopted on 30 April 2002*. (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe).



**b) The phase of active participation**

During the phase of active participation, the group members usually perceive the group as an essential, or even an indispensable, part of their lives. However, it is important for a group to assess its 'health' periodically. In this context, a 'healthy' group would mean that meetings are stimulating and constructive, participants are motivated, co-operative and interested, and misunderstandings or problems are solvable. Sometimes an evaluation needs to be done by an outsider because members cannot always detect unhealthy behaviour, and this can help facilitators to gain a fresh outlook on the situation.

**c) Concluding phase**

It is good practice to remind the members half way through the programme that the group will be coming to an end in the near future. Once the group starts approaching the end, it is important to prepare the members by incorporating discussions on closure within the last few sessions.

For the last session, the following are points to remember:

- Ask the members what they feel they have gained from the course.
- Allow time for socialising, e.g. a farewell party with music, food and drink.
- Stress the positives of closure, e.g. it is a new beginning and a chance for the women to practice what they have learnt.
- You may want to create a certificate for the women saying that they have successfully completed the course, as it will highlight their sense of achievement.
- All members should complete a final evaluation: this is not only good practice and an effective way to evaluate the service, but is also a useful way to gauge how far the women have come.
- Build risk assessment into the final session, or arrange one-to-one sessions with all women afterwards.

It is generally not good practice for you to agree to meet up with the group again. However, the facilitator should evaluate the situation, and some flexibility may be needed. For example, follow-up groups may be arranged, provided clear boundaries are set before the group is re-formed. Group members are, in any case, free to meet up as friends and individuals in their own time.

Group members may need time to get used to living and coping without the group. You should stress that the ending of the group doesn't mean that the women are alone when facing difficulties. Setbacks can occur in anyone's life and the best thing that a woman can do for herself in such a situation is to seek help; e.g. in a women's refuge, counselling centre, or another support group. The women may also continue the friendships they have made during the group – this is a great source of informal support and makes the end smoother and more natural.

## 4.6. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

There is a risk that women bring to the group the dominating or submissive behaviours that they have experienced in their violent homes. In some groups, conflict seems to focus around one or two particular group participants. If there are repeated conflict situations, it is necessary to try to find out the reasons for conflict as soon as possible. Sometimes, tensions can be connected with the facilitator. Some members may find the facilitator too authoritarian, while others may perceive her as demanding too much independence from them. In such cases, a discussion about mutual needs and expectations of group members and the facilitator is helpful.

Below are descriptions of some types of behaviour that may occur within the group. It is important to note that group members may sometimes adopt different behaviours at different times.

### a) Reticent participants

Some participants may find it very hard to talk in a group setting, saying only a couple of words when asked. Quite often, they feel that they have nothing important to say. This is likely to reflect their inherent belief that they are less important than others, which may hinder their personal growth. You should always, therefore, try to find opportunities to let them speak, asking them personally for their opinion, for example. Although they may seem uncomfortable at first, it is a good way to involve them in the process. Experience shows that if women who never talk are never asked to talk, they often feel useless and may finally stop attending the sessions. In some cases, for example with very introverted participants, individual one-to-one sessions outside the group setting can be the solution.

An exception is for newcomers who have just joined the group. They should be given time to observe the group and become familiar with their new situation. This should enable them to feel safer and think about what their role will be in the group.

There have been cases when women don't talk because they think that they have no right to talk (or to "complain") because they have had no broken bones or other physical injuries, and therefore their sufferings are "nothing to talk about". It should be stressed that the seriousness of physical injuries is not a yardstick used in the group, and in any case, survivors sometimes say that some forms of mental abuse can be even harder to bear than physical violence.

### b) Participants who are too talkative

Participants who talk too much can seriously limit the effectiveness of group work. Dominating group members overshadow the other women and create tensions within the group setting. Common reasons for this type of behaviour are high levels of anxiety, avoidance of intimacy, and/or a deeply engrained need to control. Participants who dominate tend to focus only on their own issues, often repeat themselves and go round in circles. However, they are often unaware of what they are doing, and more specifically why, and do not understand the impact it has on group dynamics<sup>19</sup>. Often a calm and friendly one-to-one session with such a person is helpful; this will enable you



to find out why she feels she has to talk all the time, and to decide on positive ways that will support her to overcome these issues.

The facilitator may want to ask everyone to pause a few seconds after anyone has spoken. This slows down the tempo and feels unnatural at first, but it encourages a different and more thoughtful type of interaction. The “microphone technique” can also be used when some members start to dominate: a pen or stick is used like a microphone, so that people can only speak once they are passed the ‘microphone’. Again, this slows down the tempo and leaves pauses, but it also encourages the members to listen to each other and not to interrupt.

### c) Participants who "know it all"

Some participants seem always to know exactly what the others should have done or need to do in particular situations. They offer sophisticated psychological theories and solutions – but only for others. The facilitator should be aware that this kind of participant may often only deal with the issues of others as a way of deflecting her own problems. Also, her ready-made solutions are usually unhelpful for the group members they are offered to, and may result in confrontation.

#### **Example:**

*Aziza says to Tanesha: “If I were you, I would take it much easier. You have only suffered three years of violence, yet my marriage lasted 15 years”. The facilitator explained that making comparisons helps nobody and that everybody has a unique experience.*

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### d) ‘Yes...but’ type of participants

If a solution is presented for a particular problem, some participants will block it immediately by a counter-argument ("I could move to my mother's but I can't because she doesn't like my daughter"; "I could go to a refuge but I can't because sooner or later my partner would find me there", "I have tried everything but nothing works", etc.) In such cases, going into more detail can be helpful ("What exactly did you try? What worked and what didn't?"). Often, it turns out that the woman has not tried anything because she was so sure that it would not work. Such behaviour frequently reflects high levels of depression and denial. It may also have been learned from past experiences; for example, a woman might have found that taking the initiative was a risky endeavour during the abusive relationship, and this experience seriously diminished her willingness to take action even after the relationship has ended.

Sometimes elaboration of a step-by-step action plan can be helpful for such women. We recommend using one-to-one sessions to talk through the deeper meanings of this behaviour, and work on practical solutions that might be acceptable.

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<sup>19</sup> Hampton, Jerry (2006) *Group dynamics and community building*  
 Available at: [http://www.community4me.com/faq\\_smallgrp.html](http://www.community4me.com/faq_smallgrp.html)

**e) Participants dwelling on the past**

There are participants who seem to live very much in the past. They repeatedly describe details from abusive incidents that they have suffered. Although it is important to acknowledge past events and give the women time to express themselves, such participants should be asked to focus a little more on how they could move on from these events using the emotional skills discussed in the programme. Again, elaboration of a step-by-step action plan can be helpful. One-to-one sessions may also be useful in order to discuss specific traumatic events, especially with regard to sexual violence, and to discuss practical coping mechanisms and extra support if needed.

**f) Women who don't turn up**

There are cases when one or more women suddenly stop attending the group, sometimes giving no reason for leaving. This can cause feelings of guilt in some group members because they may believe they caused the person to leave. In cases where the partner of such a woman was very violent, other group members might fear that she has been severely hurt or even murdered. This fear can be traumatising and impede the work of remaining members. If the doubts become too haunting, the facilitator can try to contact the person and find out what happened. Sometimes the reason is simple, for example the woman just needed to move away to a different area, and cannot attend the group any more.

Another issue is when a person just does not want to be a member of the group any longer. There could be a number of reasons for this, and it is important to ascertain the real reasons why each woman made her decision. For example, she may need a different kind of support and you may be able to refer her to a more suitable service, or she could be leaving due to a specific problem in the group. Understanding why members leave can improve the group for the future, and women should be encouraged to come to a final group session to explain their reasons, or – if that is not possible – to contact the facilitator and let her know.

**Example:**

*After attending the group for several months, Hatsuko suddenly stopped coming. As she had a very complicated divorce process going on, the group members started worrying that something really bad had happened to her. The facilitator made a phone call to Hatsuko to find out if she was OK, and suggested that she come to a final group session to explain her decision. Hatsuko said that she just wanted to have a break until her life was more under control. A couple of months later Hatsuko called with good news, saying that she had been able to move away and start a new life.*

## 4.7. CONFLICT AND CONFLICT-SOLVING

Most women come to the group to find help and support, and they are also willing to offer support to others. There are, however, some individuals who may unintentionally hinder the learning and development of other group members. The facilitator needs to be prepared to deal with group members who may impede the potential growth of others.

### Is there a real conflict or just a misunderstanding?

Firstly, the facilitator should find out if there is real conflict and dissension, or if it is just a misunderstanding. Reflective feedback, I-messages and other tools of communication can be helpful for this purpose. Survivors of domestic violence may sometimes believe that there is always someone to blame in cases of conflict (in their partnership, they are usually the ones who are told “it’s your fault”). Therefore women may start defending themselves even before they have been criticised, if they believe that someone in the group is against them. In such cases, role-play can be a good tool for helping to find out the truth of the situation.

#### **Example:**

*Emily described how frightened her children are every time after they meet their father who lives separately.*

*Jackie: “Poor children! It would be probably better for them if they did not meet him at all.”*

*Emily: “Are you accusing me of not protecting my children? You don’t know anything about me and my children.”*

*The facilitator asked Jackie to say in other words what she had heard, and Emily to say in other words what she wanted to say. Emily saw that Jackie’s comment was actually well meant and not accusing.*

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It is important to note that some seemingly similar problems might have different solutions. Therefore one cannot just ‘copy and paste’ a successful solution of another woman into one’s own life; usually it needs at least some modifications to fit into the given frame of reference.

### Possible conflict management strategies

The best way to deal with a conflict is to act before it even starts, i.e. prevent it happening at all. However, if a conflict has already occurred, these are the main principles to follow:

- Define the problem.
- Consider alternative solutions to the problem.
- Make a choice as to the best way forward.
- Take action.

Conflict management strategies include the following:

**a) Constructive decision-making**

If there is an issue that concerns the whole group, decision-making that involves all members in a discussion on the problem, in order to come up with a consensus, can have an empowering effect for all participants. If handled well, this approach leads to 'win-win' solutions; every group member feels that her voice is important and respected.

**b) Focus on the problem, not the person**

In cases of conflict people tend to take sides, making it essential that you separate persons from problems. Such a non-blaming approach should be taken in all conflict situations. However, one should also be careful if the solution to a conflict comes too quickly; it may be that some of the group members did not express their real thoughts or feelings.

**c) Sending 'I' messages**

An 'I' message allows someone who is affected by the behaviour of another to express to that person how she is affected by the behaviour. The responsibility of changing the behaviour then lies with the individual who demonstrated the behaviour. 'I' messages help to build relationships between group members because they do not place blame.

'I' messages can be formulated in the following ways:

- "I hear what you're saying, but I don't fully understand the meaning."
- "I appreciate your concern for the situation and I understand your opinion, but I see the situation a bit differently."
- "I understand that you mean well, but I feel that you're not really listening to what I'm saying about my own experiences."

**d) Reflective feedback**

Good communication skills require that people demonstrate in two ways that they are listening: nonverbally, with their body language, and verbally, by repeating in their own words what they thought they heard another person say. This repetition is called reflective feedback.

**What is positive about a conflict?**

A conflict can be positive in the sense that its resolution requires those involved to listen and think about the opinions of others. It shows women that there are peaceful ways to solve conflicts. After solving a conflict or misunderstanding it may be useful to refer to this positive side of conflict. Conflict is sometimes an expression of hidden anger or tension that a person feels towards another (often not a group member; for example it could be a husband, colleague, or family member) or a situation. Discussion helps the women to understand their feelings and reactions better, and cope with them constructively.

Many survivors are used to fearing conflict or misunderstandings because, according to their experience, they may lead to violence. Solving disputes in a non-violent way shows that there is no fundamental causality between conflict and violence.

**Survivors said they gained the following from attending a support group:**

*I thought that I'm the only fool leading such a miserable life. I learned that I don't need to blame myself and that I'm not the only one.*

*I have learned that I have taken over many things from the relationship of my parents. Now I see that I don't need to repeat their faults.*

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# 5

## The Power To Change: programme models

*The experiences of others helped me to face my own life, step-by-step... First I felt very much an outsider...but the more I have listened to the others, the more I was confronted with their pain and sorrow, the more I was able to confront my own emotions. It gave me great security that I am among others with similar experiences. [A survivor]*

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

Research has shown how important social support is in mitigating the terrible consequences of violence, and demonstrates the positive links between social support and individual wellbeing<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, research on domestic violence has frequently shown how the social support system of survivors of abuse is often impoverished<sup>21</sup>. In Chapter 1 we discussed the value of self-help support groups for women survivors of abuse. In this chapter, we will give an overview of the two Power To Change Programmes, either of which can be used as a basis for such groups.

In the following chapters, we look in detail at these programmes, and provide ‘how-to’ guides for running sessions for the two different facilitated models that are known to work effectively. We also talk briefly about unfacilitated self-help groups.

Whichever model you follow, the format can be flexible. We suggest you read through these models carefully and work out your own format, according to your previous experience, ideas, professional background and the specific needs of the women you will be working with, and if you feel more comfortable running the sessions differently, that is fine. It is very important that you know what you are working towards and plan your aims and objectives carefully. (For more information on aims and objectives, please see Chapter 3, Group development and management).

### 5.2. THE ‘POWER TO CHANGE’ MODELS

The first model, the Power To Change: Self-Esteem Programme, centres primarily on building self-esteem. It does not confront the issues of abuse or abusive behaviour

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen, S. & Wills, T.A. (1985) ‘Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis’ *Psychological Bulletin*, 98, (pp.310-357).

<sup>21</sup> Levendosky, et al. (2004), ‘The Social Network of Women Experiencing Domestic Violence’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 34 ½, (pp.95-109).

directly, but instead tends to focus on more general issues of self-worth, assertiveness, and rights, and the difficulties many women face in feeling entitled to them. This model also focuses on identifying needs and finding ways to fulfill them. It may be of interest not only to survivors of domestic abuse but also to a wider range of women; for example, it may be included in abuse prevention programmes for young women.

The second model, the Power To Change: Educational Self-Help Programme, and focuses on changing abusive relationship patterns. This model primarily takes its inspiration from *Pattern Changing for Abused Women*<sup>22</sup>. It focusses on assertiveness techniques, boundaries and assessing abusive and healthy relationships.

The third model is for those setting up informal self-help support groups, without a facilitator or a set programme.

It is important to understand that group work alone may not always be the right solution for survivors of domestic violence. One-to-one counselling may also often play a fundamental part in supporting survivors. Group work and individual counselling work very well in combination, and it is good practice to offer individual support during the group. It is also vital that the support groups are always held in a safe place where women can experience a sense of protection.

When working with survivors of domestic abuse, these three key concepts must always be kept in mind:

- Protection.
- Security.
- Safety.

For information on the logistics of running the group, please see Chapter 4, Group Policies and Protocols. We strongly advise you to read through the whole manual before engaging with the following sessions, and then read this chapter carefully as a whole, in order to understand the content fully.

### **5.3. THE FORMAT OF THE SESSIONS**

To make the Power To Change Programmes as user-friendly as possible, each session has a consistent format (see overleaf for an overview of the format of all sessions.) Depending on the session, other sections may be added to this standard format. This is particularly true of the first few sessions, for example, where more time is given to introductions.

Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount, and that you are available for one-to-one sessions for any woman who wants to discuss her personal situation or go through her safety plan.

.....  
<sup>22</sup> Fallon, B. and Goodman, M. (1995) *Pattern Changing for Abused Women: An Educational Program*. (London: Sage).

The following items (detailed in the table below) always feature in each session:

<b>Goals:</b>	Summarise the main goals of each session.
<b>Beginning the session:</b>	At the beginning of each session, there should be a consistent routine that lasts about 20 minutes. This time is best used to recap the last session, making sure that the women feel OK about moving on to the next subject, and for the women to express briefly how they feel. It is up to you to decide whether this expression is general or specific; e.g. “How have you been feeling over the last week”, or, “How did the last session make you feel?” It is important to allow only a few minutes per member, and to stress that there will be plenty of time to discuss feelings in more depth later in the session. Also discuss briefly the ‘personal touch’ from last week; for example, ask the women to say what treat they gave themselves. (See below for more details). After every member has spoken, briefly introduce the week’s session by summing up what will be discussed.
<b>Session:</b>	This section deals with the main content of the session and includes all the relevant exercises. It is important to be really familiar with this section before the session starts. However, it is also OK to be flexible; for example, it is fine to miss out exercises if you think they are not necessary for your group, or if you want to allow more time for in-depth discussion.
<b>Question time:</b>	This section should only be about 5 minutes long, and is a time for members to ask questions about the content of the session, or to go over anything that is still unclear. Again, this is flexible. If a good discussion is going on, you can ask the members whether they would like to leave question time out.
<b>Closing the session:</b>	Closing the session should take approximately 5-10 minutes only, and is a time for all members to briefly express how they feel about that specific session. You can end each session consistently, e.g. always ending each session with the same question, such as – “In one word, describe how you feel after this session”, or – “Name one positive thing that you will take away with you from this session”. Alternatively, you can ask different questions each week. However, you should still try to keep it brief. Also mention in this section the ‘personal touch’ for the week ahead (see below for some ideas).
<b>Evaluation</b>	At the end of every session, each member should complete an evaluation form. (See Chapter 3, Group development and management and appendices 13, 14 and 15 for more information).
<b>Trouble shooting:</b>	At the end of each session, we have listed potential issues that can arise with each particular session. For example, some sessions are more emotionally challenging to the women than others. Also, while safety should always be the programme’s top priority, there are some sessions where safety issues are of particular importance in the group.

## Personal touches

We recommend including some extras in the support group to give it a more personal feel, and encourage the women to be kind to themselves in between the sessions. You could choose one of the following ideas and ask the group members to complete them between sessions. However, it is up to you if you want to use only one idea for the whole programme or to mix and match per session. (This is not appropriate however for the journal, which – if you use at all – needs to be completed throughout the course).

<b>Keeping a journal:</b>	Personal journals can act as a woman's 'me-time' where she can put her thoughts to paper, keep her own secrets in a safe place and write about any issues she doesn't feel comfortable discussing with others in the group. It is also a good tool for women to see how far they have progressed in the course. A word of caution, however: <b>if any women are still living in an abusive situation, it is not a good idea to keep a personal diary in close proximity to the perpetrator, and it may not be safe for her to undertake this exercise at all.</b>
<b>Giving and gaining a treat:</b>	This is where each member is encouraged to give herself a 'treat' in between the sessions. It is important to stress that does not necessarily mean going shopping, as often there are severe economic boundaries to survivors' budgets. The treat should be something done for oneself by putting oneself first. For example, it could be taking the time for a walk, reading a good book, having a long soak in a hot bubble bath, visiting an art gallery or talking to a friend. A treat is something that should help the women to feel good.
<b>A personal mantra:</b>	This is where each woman is asked to think of a personal mantra at the end of each session to help get her through the next week. The mantras can draw on the issues discussed at the sessions; e.g. for the session on Rights, a mantra could be one of the rights from the Bill of Rights. These mantras can be personal or discussed with the group: it is an individual choice whether to share them or not. The idea is that each woman repeats her mantra (in her head or out loud) every morning and evening and when she feels emotionally challenged, to give herself strength and remind her of who she is.
<b>A weekly inspiration:</b>	In between sessions, each woman can be encouraged to think of what inspires her. It can be something general, for example her children; or it could be something arising specifically from that week, e.g. a news story that has inspired her. Each woman then brings to the group a symbol of her inspiration, e.g. a photo, a magazine article, a plant she has grown, or an inspirational book or song.
<b>One strength:</b>	Each group member is given a small slip of paper and is asked to think of a strength pertaining to the woman sitting on her right. Each woman writes this down on the slip of paper and then hands it over to the other woman, who will then have a physical reminder of her strength for the rest of the week. If this is done on a regular basis, it is good to mix up seating arrangements.

## Multimedia tools

If appropriate, it is sometimes helpful to bring in relevant literature and/or media to illuminate the issues of particular sessions. For example, film clips, photographs, relevant news stories, excerpts from books, or articles from magazines. You will of course need to supply appropriate equipment, such as a video/DVD player and television for visual media.

## Seating arrangements

At the first session, you should already be aware of any support needs of the women attending the group. It is essential to accommodate these needs from the outset. For example, it is important to make sure that the seating is comfortable and suitable for the women. There should be enough space for wheelchairs, or enough chairs to accommodate a woman's personal assistant or sign language interpreter. It will be worthwhile asking the women if they can see the flip chart clearly from their seating positions. Furthermore, if some women are hard of hearing, they may need to sit closer to you to hear better, or be opposite you to lip-read, and ideally the room should also be fitted with a hearing loop system.

## Breaks

We do not specify when to include breaks/time out in each session. At the initial individual sessions with the women before the group starts, you should find out whether any members need breaks at specific times throughout the sessions, and/or for certain amounts of time. If no one has any specific needs of this kind, then you might like to discuss the length and frequency of breaks at the first session with the group as a whole.

Time out is especially important in the first few sessions, to allow time for social bonding and building trust between the members. Towards the end of the programme, the women may feel they would like more time for discussion within the group and completing the exercises, rather than having breaks. The main points are:

- to remain flexible as a facilitator;
- always to discuss these kinds of decisions with the participants;
- to bear in mind any specific needs of the members.

## Handouts

The appendices for each session are at the end of the manual. Some of the handouts are used in both models. We have tried to keep the number of handouts to a minimum, as too many can cause confusion. The first session has the most handouts, and it is necessary to work through them. Ask the women to keep the handouts together and bring them along to each session. You could provide a plastic wallet for the women to keep them in so they don't get damaged. (Please note that some women who are still with their abusers may need you to look after their handouts for them between sessions.)

At the initial individual sessions with the women before the group starts, it is important to ascertain whether the use of handouts is suitable for all members of the group. If some women have trouble reading it is good practice to offer other learning resources. For example, handouts could be recorded in audio format for the group to listen to, or printed in a larger font, and you could consider using Braille or audio-visual resources. In producing handouts, the following are good general guidelines:

- use clear fonts, such as Arial;
- avoid using type sizes (fonts) lower than 12 – size 14 is generally easier to read;
- avoid light print on dark backgrounds – black type on white background is easiest to read;
- avoid laminating handouts as reflections can make them harder to read;
- when discussing anything on handouts or on the flip chart, always read out what is written on them.

**Materials Checklist for each session:**

- ☐ Flip chart
- ☐ Colour markers
- ☐ Labels for name tags
- ☐ Photocopies of all handouts needed for session
- ☐ Photocopies of relevant evaluation sheet
- ☐ Pens and/or pencils for group members
- ☐ Blank paper for group members
- ☐ Plastic pocket folders for members to keep handouts all together in one place
- ☐ Any extra materials you may need (e.g. newspaper/magazine clippings, poems, film clips, DVDs, CDs, TV and DVD/video player).

**Views from some survivors:**

*I realised that we were destroyed psychologically. It [the group] was an opportunity to speak out and to know how I could react to the situation, by sharing our experiences. It gave me more information about domestic violence.*

*I feel so relieved. Before joining the group I tried to change myself and wondered why the violence continued. Now I'm starting to see that it is not my behaviour that causes violence.*



# 6

## The Power To Change Self-Esteem Programme

*I gained so many things... but maybe the most important was that I could finally put into words what was done to me... although it is still difficult to share. [A survivor]*

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

The following psycho-educational programmes contain 14 sessions, which have been planned to run over 14 weeks; however, this is adaptable, and we have made suggestions for combining some of the sessions to form a 12 week programme, or (in the case of model 1) 10 weeks, if this suits the needs of participants better.

Both models can be used for women still in abusive situations; however, constant attention must be given to risk assessment and safety throughout all sessions. The discussions on assertiveness need particularly careful consideration, and it is important that women are warned not to try out assertiveness techniques on the perpetrator, as this could be potentially dangerous.

The fundamental curricula of both programmes centre on basic rights, an understanding of, and ability to set, boundaries, and the use of basic assertiveness techniques. We have aimed to provide ready-to-use sessions, and some pieces will be repeated in each session and in both programmes, so you can use the session as a whole.

The Power To Change Self-Esteem Programme, which is the focus of this chapter, works well both as group work for survivors, and as preventive work with young women. The core activities include building self-esteem, understanding needs and desires, practicing assertiveness skills and learning about positive, nurturing relationships.

### 6.2. THE SELF-ESTEEM PROGRAMME: SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

#### **Session 1: Defining self-esteem**

This session aims, among other things, to create a warm, safe and welcoming environment for everyone attending, and ensure that everyone has a good understanding of what self-esteem means.

#### **Session 2: Understanding self-esteem**

This session aims to create a group definition and gain a deeper understanding of the concept of self-esteem.

### **Session 3: Rights**

This session aims to ensure participants have a basic understanding of fundamental human rights, and to encourage healthy and positive debate.

### **Session 4: Needs**

Participants will be helped to identify and prioritise needs, and learn how to differentiate between different types of needs. (This session may be combined in a joint session with Session 5.)

### **Session 5: Self-evaluation of personal needs**

Following on from the last session, participants will continue to identify and prioritise needs, learn practical steps for fulfilling them, and identify obstacles to their fulfillment. (This session may, if preferred, be combined with Session 4.)

### **Session 6: Education and socialisation of girls and young women**

In this session, participants will become better able to understand how upbringing can affect children, and, in particular, how girls and young women are socialised into behaving and expressing themselves. (This session may be combined in a joint session with Session 7.)

### **Session 7: Gender stereotyping and social norms**

This session aims to enable participants to think about women's roles in society, their effects, and how they can potentially affect self-esteem. The participants will also be encouraged to identify positive female role models. (This session may, if preferred, be combined with Session 6.)

### **Session 8: Needs within a relationship**

Participants will be helped to identify their needs within a relationship, and communicate these to their partners. They will also be encouraged to identify the positive aspects about being single.

### **Sessions 9 and 10: Boundaries**

The aims of these sessions include: defining boundaries, identifying potential situations in which boundaries could be challenged, looking at positive ways of asserting boundaries (and the potential dangers in this), and understanding the link between the lack of clear, healthy boundaries and domestic abuse. (These issues may be addressed either in one session, or in two, depending on the time available and the needs of the women in the group.)

### **Sessions 11 and 12: Emotions: Anger, guilt, grief and fear**

The aim of these sessions is to acknowledge and start to understand feelings of anger, grief, fear and guilt, and learn to manage these emotions constructively. (Participants will probably need two sessions to cover all the issues here, so it is not recommended that they are combined into one session, though it is possible.)

### **Session 13: Assertiveness**

In this session, participants will gain a better understanding of assertiveness (including the difference between assertiveness and aggression) and learn practical ways of being assertive.

### **Session 14: Endings and new beginnings**

The final session will recap what has been learnt in the course, celebrate how far the women have come, help women to recognise individual strengths, and accept the ending of the course, while anticipating new beginnings.

## **Session 1    Defining self-esteem**

### **Goals of Session 1:**

- Create a warm, safe and welcoming environment for everyone attending.
- Meet all members of the group and learn a little about everyone.
- Allay any fears and concerns about attending the first meeting.
- All members should understand the aims and format of the programme.
- Gain a good understanding of what each member expects from the group.
- Agree on group rules.
- All members should sign the Group Contract.
- All members should have a good understanding of what self-esteem means.
- Create anticipation for the next session.

### **1. Introductions**

Introduce yourself, including details about who you are, why you are running the course, your past work experience, any training and qualifications you have, and something personal (e.g. your favourite colour, film, TV programme). The co-facilitator should do the same. Then go on to ask everyone to introduce herself. To start the course on a positive note, this would be a good time to start an 'icebreaker' such as a name game. See Appendix 9 for a selection of ideas for icebreakers.

### **2. Important information**

Explain to the group that there are a few things that should be announced briefly before the session starts properly. The following are examples of the issues you may want to cover:

- Emphasise that the location of the venue must be kept confidential, and that no partners or ex-partners are allowed on the premises. (This is non-negotiable).
- The location of the bathroom and the food and drink facilities should be pointed out.
- Explain any safety features of the building (such as where the fire exits can be found.)
- Go through any access issues.

- If there is any provision for childcare, explain this.
- Explain the complaints procedure.
- Explain the smoking policies of the venue.

### 3. The Power To Change Self-Esteem Programme

Take about 5-10 minutes to describe briefly what the course entails, making sure to explain the following:

- Who designed the course.
- How the format works, including the length of each session, the length of the entire course, and how often the group will meet.
- What the group will discuss at each session. (See Appendix 10, Details of the course.) You may find it helpful to produce a more detailed course descriptor handout for the women, summarising what the course content will be for each session, as well as when they take place. (See Summary of sessions, above, as a basis for this).
- How to communicate in between the sessions. (See Appendix 10, Details of the course).
- Discuss with members their views on the length and frequency of breaks.

### 4. Group expectations

At the outset, it is very important to ascertain what members of the group expect from each other, and from the facilitators and the course itself. It is also important that you join in this discussion and explain what you expect. See Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, for a more detailed discussion of these issues.

#### Exercise 1a:

- Starting with yourself, go around the group asking each member to give one expectation they have of the group.
- Write each expectation on a 'Group Expectations' flip chart.
- Once completed, ask if the group members are happy with these expectations, and if they would like to contribute some more ideas.
- Once the flip chart is complete, put the sheet up on the wall to use as a reference point. This sheet should be put on the wall at each session as a reminder, and to look back on at the end of the group to see if the expectations have been met.

## 5. Group rules and contract

At this point, it is essential to agree on the group rules and for members to sign the group contract. (See Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, for a more detailed discussion of these issues.)

- Refer to the Basic Process Guidelines handout (see Appendix 11) to start a conversation about basic rules, how to respect each other, and deal with the women's fears of participating in the group.
- Discuss ways in which everyone can encourage and support one another through the sessions.
- Like the flip chart exercise for establishing group expectations, have an 'ideas storm' about what the group would like to have as group rules. The chart can also be put on the wall for future sessions. If someone forgets about a group rule this can be used as an easy reference to refer to what was agreed at the first session.
- Have handouts of the contract for members to sign (see Appendix 8). It is good practice to photocopy these once signed; the members can keep the originals and you the copies.

## 6. Beginning the session

Briefly sum up what will be discussed in this session and ask if everyone understands. As everyone is still very new to the group, the first session should be used to create a warm atmosphere of safety and trust, and to begin forming bonds between the members. Take a few moments here to relax the group a little before going on to discuss self-esteem.

### Exercise 1b:

- Each member of the group should give one statement beginning with 'I feel'. These statements could refer to how they feel about the group, the course, or their life in general.
- Ask if anyone would like to start and work clockwise from there. If no one volunteers to start, offer to go first.
- As a lot of the women will be nervous, be ready to ask questions that might help them come up with a statement for themselves, e.g. "How did you feel today before the session?"



## 7. Self-esteem

### Exercise 1c:

- Ask the group to define what self-esteem means to them.
- Using an 'ideas storm' format, write up all answers on the flip chart, even if you do not agree with all the statements. It is important to have a record of how the members defined self-esteem at the beginning of the course, to compare with definitions made at the end.

#### **Examples of ideas from this exercise:**

- *not judging others;*
- *being sincere;*
- *trusting oneself;*
- *reasoning calmly;*
- *accepting oneself;*
- *loving oneself;*
- *not caring if other people act or seem superior;*
- *not being materialistic;*
- *liking oneself;*
- *being capable of doing things;*
- *being self assured;*
- *being able to perceive the wishes, desires and needs of others;*
- *having faith in the future;*
- *not being afraid of one's emotions;*
- *being intelligent;*
- *being able to face everyday life;*
- *being loved by others;*
- *not feeling in debt with oneself.*

It is important to validate everybody's input even if some of their definitions of self-esteem seem distant from your own. Once all women have contributed, give your own ideas about what self-esteem is, making sure to include references to believing in oneself and having self-respect. Introduce briefly the concepts of self-worth, confidence, and boundaries, and ask the women to think some more about their definitions of self-esteem for next week's meeting.

## **8. Question time**

Before the session closes, it is good practice to allow a few minutes for specific questions from the group on the content of the session. The members may not feel confident enough at this stage to raise questions, so state that you will be in the building for a little while after the group finishes for anyone wanting clarification on any issues.

## **9. Closing the session**

End the session by explaining the 'personal touch' element of the course, and choose one to ask group members to complete over the next week (see Chapter 5, page 50). Spend a little time discussing this with the group if it is unclear, giving examples if necessary.

As this is the first session, allow approximately 15-20 minutes for closing, as everyone will need a little encouragement to speak up. Remember to do the following:

- Congratulate everyone for completing the first session of the Power To Change Programme.
- Go round the group and ask everyone to give a brief statement of their feelings about the first session.
- Introduce the Weekly evaluation sheet (Appendix 4), explain why it is important to have a system of evaluation in place, and ask all participants to complete a sheet.

## **Trouble Shooting**

- As it is the first meeting, expect emotions to be running high; both group members and facilitators are likely to feel nervous, shy, awkward, and apprehensive. Refer to Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, on how to overcome these challenging emotions, be prepared and discuss any issues with the co-facilitator.
- Set the standard for future sessions. Although you may feel nervous or apprehensive, it is important to stick to the guidelines referred to in Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols.

- Avoid spending lots of time discussing announcements and explaining the course in lots of detail. The majority of this session should be dedicated to talking about group rules, allaying worries, creating a positive environment, and discussing self-esteem.
- Although you will give your availability after the session for questions, encourage the women to try and build up their confidence to ask questions in the group.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.

## **Session 2**

# **Understanding self-esteem**

### **Goals of Session 2:**

- Get to know each other a little bit more.
- Encourage active participation in the group.
- Build trust in the group so participants start to feel comfortable about sharing stories.
- Create a group definition of self-esteem.
- Gain a deeper understanding of the concept of self-esteem.

### **1. Introductions**

Take some time to introduce any new members who may have missed last week, and reintroduce everyone, including yourself, as it can take a while to remember names. You could also use another 'icebreaker' exercise: see Appendix 9 for a selection of icebreakers.

### **2. Beginning the session**

Spend a little time recapping the last session, making sure that the women feel OK about moving on to the next subject. Then move on and briefly sum up what will be discussed in this session. Go round the group asking how everyone's week has gone. Discuss the 'personal touch' they decided to give themselves over the last week, and ask the women how it made them feel.

### **3. Defining self-esteem**

#### **Exercise 2a:**

- Start a discussion by asking the women what they think is a good definition of self-esteem after having thought about it for a week.
- After hearing everyone's ideas, come up with a definition of self-esteem that the whole group can agree on, and write it on a flip chart, which should be pinned up on the wall as a constant reminder of the goal of the group.

**Examples:**

*The group that had produced the ideas in Exercise 1c on page 59, suggested in the second session the following new ideas:*

- *listening to one's needs;*
- *hoping to improve;*
- *finding strength;*
- *believing in oneself;*
- *being centred;*
- *trusting oneself;*
- *being self-reliant;*
- *possessing liveliness and determination;*
- *having knowledge of one's qualities that are independent from others;*
- *having the courage to disagree.*

*The group agreed that these elements were important parts of a definition of self-esteem, and went on to discuss each element to understand clearly what every participant meant.*

**Exercise 2b:**

Using the group's new definition of self-esteem, ask the group the following questions:

- How much do you feel that this definition matches the way you currently feel about yourself?
- Do you think you have a healthy amount of self-esteem?
- What are the things in life that you feel you have a right to?
- What do you feel hinders the growth of your self-esteem?

You will probably find that the same words start to recur through the exercise. Write these words up on the flip chart, and discuss the results with the group as a whole.

## Exercise 2c:

This exercise is useful in helping the women to start thinking about themselves positively.

- Give the group blank sheets of paper and ask everyone to write down two positive things they have done this week.
- Then ask each in turn to explain the good things they have done to the rest of the group.

A lot of the women may find this very tricky, so you could offer the following suggestions as starting points:

- What positive things have you done for other people? e.g. have you tried a new recipe when cooking a meal for the family, offered to look after your friend's children, written to an old friend?
- What have you done to make yourself feel better? e.g. reading a paper, visiting a friend, watching a good film, going for a walk, etc.
- What have you done to gain more control of your life? e.g. attending this course, trying something new, avoiding negative people, etc.<sup>23</sup>

## 4. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

## 5. Closing the session

Thank the women for showing their commitment to the course by coming to the second session. End the session by explaining the 'personal touch' element of the course, and ask everyone to complete it over the next week. Ask participants to complete the evaluation form.

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<sup>23</sup> NicCarthy, G. (1990) *Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Situations*. London: The Journeyman Press. p.91



## Trouble Shooting

- Although the exercises should help participants to gain a more in-depth understanding of self-esteem, they may not necessarily be able to see themselves as deserving to feel good about themselves.
- Do not expect too much from the group at this early stage. It is only the beginning of the programme and it will take time for the self-esteem and confidence of the group to grow.
- Make sure there is enough time to work through Exercise 2b, as it might be very hard for the women to think about themselves as doing anything positive.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any women want to discuss their personal situation, arrange one-to-one sessions to go through their safety plan.

## Session 3 Rights

### Goals of Session 3:

- Understand basic and fundamental rights.
- Encourage healthy and positive debate within the group.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Rights

A good way of starting a discussion on basic rights is by using the 'Bill of Rights' (see Appendix 12). It is a good idea to have photocopies of this to give to each participant.

### Exercise 3:

Discuss how much each woman feels entitled to the rights that are listed. The following examples can be used as starting points for the discussion:

#### **Example:**

**Kaija** is 35 years old and is a first time mother of a 2-year-old. With regard to her daughter Elisabet, Kaija is adamant that she cannot "put herself first". In Kaija's view, her daughter's needs come first, meaning that her own needs are always secondary. **Samina**, 42 and mother of three, said she sometimes feels totally overwhelmed by the demands of her children, and although she thinks they should come first, she often feels unable to put anybody first because she's just too tired and confused.

**Louise**, 61, spends the majority of her spare time looking after her grandchildren, and is often expected to cancel appointments, for example with friends or the doctor, to meet the needs of her daughter and her children. Although Louise adores her grandchildren, she feels worn-out from looking

*after them, is starting to resent her daughter, and feels taken for granted. However, when she thinks about talking to her daughter about her concerns, she starts feeling guilty because she believes she is failing to be a good mother and grandmother. This in turn makes her angry with herself, and creates tension with her daughter.*

It is important to highlight here, for example, how a mother should be able to be attuned to a child's needs but also to put her own wellbeing first. A mother who is overtired, not eating well or stressed out will find it harder to be in touch with her child or grandchild's emotional needs, and may transmit nervousness to the child or have trouble soothing him or her. Putting oneself first should be reinterpreted as a positive and important way of taking good care of oneself, which will ultimately enable better care of others.

The group doesn't need to arrive at a definite position and it is OK to agree to disagree – different women may have different ideas, and these should be respected. You are modelling positive ways of dealing with conflict, and you must always keep in mind that when women come from abusive situations where it is dangerous to have a different opinion, there is no real model for constructive discussion.

At the end of the discussion, ask the women to give themselves one of the rights discussed as a treat during the next week.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Thank the women for showing their continuing commitment to the course, and ask them to complete the evaluation form.

## **Trouble Shooting**

- Discussing some elements of the Bill of Rights can cause a lot of disagreement within the group; for example, some women see the right to put oneself first as selfish. This will need to be addressed in further detail as the course proceeds, but it is important for all women to feel safe enough to disagree (politely) with each other and the facilitators, without fear of the severe reproach they are used to.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount, and that one-to-one sessions can be arranged if any woman wants to discuss her personal situation.



## Session 4 Needs

### Goals of Session 4:

- Identify and prioritise needs.
- Learn how to differentiate between different types of needs.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about the 'right' they chose in the previous session and their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Needs

To start the discussion on needs, refer back to the Bill of Rights (Appendix 12) and ask whether group participants feel a need to have any or all of these rights fulfilled. You can also look at the extent to which their needs were met in childhood.

Needs can be generally defined as a condition or situation in which something is required or wanted. Needs therefore depend on our wishes and perceptions of what we deserve and what we should or can ask of ourselves and others, in different situations. In working on self-esteem, it is important to examine the link between recognising what our needs are and being able to express them fully.

This session will bring up lots of examples of the needs of the group, so it is important to point out that there are different types of needs. There may be confusion within the group between **internal needs** which are often linked to self-esteem, depend on the individual's own decisions, and on which she can exert some control; and **external needs** that the individual may wish for, but which are not influenced by her direct actions, and are often dependent on others.

An example of an internal need is the need to have one's own space. Examples of external needs are 'the need to be loved' or 'the need to be accepted and respected by other parents in my child's school as a single parent'. These do not depend on the individual's own course of action, and the women should be encouraged to re-phrase apparent needs of this kind into, for example, 'I need to feel good about myself, even if people don't like me'.

Very often in working with a group, women will express their needs in terms of external needs, and it is important to stress what we have control over and can work towards, and what does not depend on our efforts and desires. It is also possible to stress that strengthening self-esteem also means becoming less dependant on external evaluation and judgment.

Needs can also be divided into **negotiable** and **non-negotiable** needs. It is important to develop the capability to evaluate different kinds of needs and be able to put them on a scale of priorities; for example, to differentiate those needs that are fundamental, necessary and non-negotiable from those that are non-essential and negotiable, and may perhaps more correctly be described as 'wants' rather than needs. These may, and sometimes should, be put to one side in order to concentrate on the priority needs.

### Exercise 4:

- Ask the group to spend 15 minutes or so to complete the 'I Need, I Want, I Deserve'<sup>24</sup> handout (Appendix 13). This is a very useful tool in getting the women to start thinking about their own needs and desires, and to start thinking about practical ways of fulfilling them. It is important that each woman completes the exercise in the first person, and that it is about what she is thinking, feeling or doing, and not what somebody else thinks, feels or does.
- After the women have completed the handout, ask if anyone would like to give an example of a need, and how they would achieve it.

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the session

Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Thank the women for showing their continuing commitment to the course, and ask them to complete the evaluation form.

<sup>24</sup> Goodman M. S. & Fallon B.C. (1995), *Pattern Changing for Abused Women* (London: Sage) p.166.



## **Trouble Shooting**

- Be prepared to challenge statements such as 'I need to be liked' or 'I need to be thin'. These are potentially negative statements which women should aim to replace with more positive and realistic needs.
- It may be hard for the women to think of themselves as having needs or deserving to have them fulfilled. Have plenty of fun examples of what women might want (e.g. a holiday in Italy, a daily dose of chocolate, a magazine subscription, etc.). Once the ball is rolling, start using more serious examples of what the women may fundamentally need in their lives (e.g. privacy, freedom of expression, a healthy diet, etc.).
- All needs are personal and subjective: it is important not to imply judgment of any woman's priorities, while at the same time encouraging them to focus on internal needs which they can potentially achieve as a result of their own decisions and actions.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount.



## Session 5

# Self-evaluation of personal needs

### Goals of Session 5:

- Further identify and prioritise needs
- Identify obstacles to having needs met
- Learn practical steps for fulfilling needs

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Self-evaluation of personal needs

Picking up from where the discussion was left the previous week, ask the group if they have anything extra to contribute to the discussion on needs after thinking about it for a week.

### Exercise 5:

- Using the Evaluation of Needs handout (Appendix 14), ask the group to spend 15 minutes or so completing it. The needs can be anything the members want, from needing more privacy to needing a daily dose of chocolate!
- The important function of this exercise is for the members to start identifying their needs, rating how essential they are, and making steps to meeting and maintaining them.
- To get the group started, do an example of your own on the flip chart, and then read the following example to the group.

#### **Example:**

*Ching Lan needed more space for herself and was fed up with sharing everything. When asked to specify in more depth what she meant, Ching Lan explained that she needed to define a clear space in the house that is only hers. When Ching Lan was asked to analyse what obstacles were stopping her from fulfilling her needs, she explained that there was no clear definition of space in the house, nor any space for privacy.*

*At this point, Ching Lan had to figure out what to do to regain control of her needs. She came up with the following plan:*

- She decided to put some firm boundaries on personal spaces within the house – Mama’s drawers and desk were not to be touched at any time!*
- She also decided to ask her family if they felt the same need for privacy; if so, they would try together to find personal spaces for all who wanted them.*

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the session

Encourage finding a ‘personal touch’ for the next session in the area of need that has been acknowledged. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### Trouble Shooting

- As in the previous session – be prepared to challenge statements such as ‘I need to be liked’ or ‘I need to be thin’. These are potentially negative statements, and should be replaced with ones which are more positive, realistic, and achievable as a result of one’s own efforts rather than being reliant on external evaluation.
- It may be hard for the women to think of themselves as having needs and deserving of having them fulfilled. Have plenty of fun examples that discuss what women may want; (see above).
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount.

## **Session 6**

# **Education and socialisation of girls and young women**

### **Goals of Session 6:**

- Understand how upbringing can affect children.
- Think about how girls and young women are taught to behave and express themselves.
- All members should fill out the Mid-Course Evaluation sheet.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Education and socialisation of girls and young women**

This session is dedicated to thinking about how we, as women, have been raised to express ourselves, and how we have been educated to behave in certain ways.

#### **Exercise 6a:**

Interesting general discussion points are:

- How are young girls taught to behave in the education system?
- What types of jobs do women tend to do?
- How are women received in the workplace?
- How do we relate as parents to our children's needs, and in particular to the needs of our daughters?

#### **Exercise 6b:**

Ask the women about what they experienced as a girl:

- Do they feel they were encouraged by their parents and teachers to follow what they wanted to do?
- Were they ever told by teachers and/or parents that they were unable to do something because they were girls?
- Do they feel they were treated differently to boys at school, and if yes, how?
- Do they feel they were treated differently to their male relatives, and if yes, how?
- Do they feel positively or negatively about how they were treated?

It is important to examine the positive and the negative aspects of upbringing. It might be the case that some group members will have been brought up in a dysfunctional family and/or have received a poor education.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Make sure that you bring up the fact that you are now at or near the middle of the course and that there will be an ending; see session 11 for a discussion on closure.

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next session in the area of need that has been acknowledged. Ask group members to complete the mid-course evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- For women who have experienced a dysfunctional childhood, it may be that this is the first time they have discussed its effect on them. There may be things they do not wish to disclose in the group setting, so explain that this may be a positive way of protecting oneself, and in doing so boundaries are being set – this is totally fine. Make sure you tell the women you are available after the session to discuss anything that they might want to disclose in a one-to-one setting.
- If the women are sad about being reminded that the course will finish, make sure you stress the positives that come with closure. It will be sad, but it will also be exciting to use the skills they will learn from the course in their daily lives.

## **Session 7**

# **Gender stereotypes and social norms**

### **Goals of Session 7:**

- Start thinking about women's roles in society and how this can potentially affect women's self-esteem.
- Identify stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics.
- Analyse the effect of gender roles on women.
- Identify positive female role models.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Gender stereotypes and social norms**

This discussion follows on from the one in session 6 on the education and socialisation of girls and young women. Start the discussion by asking the group what they feel to be their roles as women and people in society. Some interesting discussion points are:

- How much value do they think society puts on their roles?
- What is the political representation of women in their country; e.g. how many women sit in parliament, and how many hold top responsibilities in the government?
- What is the economic representation of women; e.g. what kinds of jobs do women tend to do? How many women are there in top firms, and how many are in positions of power within those organisations?
- Is there equal pay for equal work done by men and women?

### **Exercise 7a:**

- Split the group into two subgroups and give them a large sheet of paper. Ask one group to discuss masculine gender roles, and the other feminine gender roles.
- Ask both groups to write down examples of stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics, such as:



**Masculine:** tough, strong, unemotional, sexually driven, egotistical, funny, logical, mathematical, intelligent, scientific, sporty, obsessive, possessive, the provider/protector.

**Feminine:** gentle, soft, nurturing, caring, illogical, emotional, needy, hysterical, demure, faithful, modest, bitchy, sedentary, maternal, non-scientific, virgin/whore, pretty, sweet.

- Regroup, pin the sheets up on the wall, and ask the group to look at the examples and see which feminine characteristics they can relate to. Then ask which masculine characteristics they relate to. Ask the following questions:

- Is it better to refer to these characteristics as human traits?
- Is this a realistic and positive representation of the sexes?
- Do these norms impact on the types of jobs women do?
- How do these gender norms affect women in how they view themselves and others?

### Exercise 7b:

Bring in some newspapers and magazines for the group to look at together and see what professions the famous women and men are doing. Is there disparity between the representations of the sexes?

### Exercise 7c:

Go around the group and ask each member in turn who has been a positive female role model for them, and why, at any point in their lives. Answers could be anything from close friends and family (such as their mum, daughter, sister, or best friend), to a famous politician, a writer they admire, an old school teacher, an artist, a musician or a celebrity.

As an alternative, especially for younger women, we suggest the “Gender-in-a-box” activity in the Gender Matters manual:

[http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/chapter\\_4/4\\_4.asp](http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/chapter_4/4_4.asp)

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Encourage the women to look at newspapers, magazines, television adverts and shows over the next week, keeping in mind this week's activities. Ask group members to complete an evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- It is important to be aware of the current situation of women in your culture and society. Try to come to the session with up-to-date statistics regarding women's position economically, politically, etc.
- Some women may not relate to any masculine characteristics and enjoy the fact that they are feminine. This is OK. What is important is that not all people relate to gender norms, and to discuss how this can be damaging to individuals and communities.
- Try to make the exercises as fun as possible. Laughter is a great way to build self-esteem.
- Let the women express anger over women's position in society, if they wish. However, do focus on the potential for change in their personal lives and in their communities, and keep the session upbeat and positive.
- If women make comments that reinforce women's inequality, try to facilitate a discussion which allows participants to question, and perhaps challenge, these taken for granted statements.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.



## Session 8

# Needs within a relationship

### Goals of Session 8:

- Identify one's needs within a relationship.
- Learn how to communicate one's needs to partners.
- Be realistic about expectations from partners.
- Identify the positive aspects about being single.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Choice of partner

#### Exercise 8a:

- Start a discussion on love: ask group participants to define 'true love'.
- Write their answers on the flip chart.
- There will probably be a mix of answers, but single out ideas like the following for further discussion:
  - two becoming one;
  - finding a soul mate;
  - love at first sight;
  - finding one's other half;
  - feeling whole, complete.
- All the definitions of true love listed above are seen as romantic, yet they can be damaging as they imply that people are incomplete as individuals and essentially lacking until they find another person with whom to merge.

Suggest to the group that if 'two becomes one', it is likely that one personality dominates the other. Instead of this, ask the women what they think of describing a relationship not as one entity, but as three. Within a relationship, there are two autonomous individuals with their own, but probably similar, interests and beliefs, and then there is the third entity, the couple. By having a third entity, the individuals do not need to be dominant or subordinate as there is freedom to be oneself. This 'couple' is not merely a concept; it can

make decisions or have ideas that don't exist in the singular individual; for example, the separate individuals may not be able to decide to buy a house, but as a couple this decision can be taken. Importantly, this third entity can get damaged and cease to be, but although it may affect the individuals, it does not destroy them; the death of a 'we' does not stop either individual from being themselves and moving on, always as an individual whole, and maybe creating another 'we' with someone else in the future.

### Exercise 8b:

- Ask participants to share with the group what makes them (or would make them) feel loved; e.g. physical affection, consistent emotional support, sexual satisfaction, etc.
- Select one of the ideas suggested by all or most of the women, write it on the flip chart and ask the following questions:
  - Why does this make them feel loved?
  - Do they think their expectations and desires are realistic and fair?
  - How can these needs and desires be communicated to their partners?
- The questions posed in the above exercise can actually be quite hard to answer. The group may find it difficult to articulate their needs in relation to their relationships, and might find the idea of addressing and negotiating these needs with a partner very daunting. Yet it is important to help group members to start identifying needs, however small.

### Exercise 8c:

- Using the Duluth Equalities Wheel (Appendix 15), discuss within the group the different elements of an equal relationship.
- Go on to compare the differences between the Equalities Wheel and the Duluth Power and Control Wheel (Appendix 16).
- Ask group members how they would feel as women if they were involved in healthy relationships, and write down their answers on the flip chart.

Negotiation with others about one's needs can only come after they have been identified: without this, one tends instead to surrender passively to others' needs and desires, and this can be a gateway to abuse.

The practical approach can be mapped out as follows:

- Identify needs.
- Analyse how to communicate those needs to a partner.
- Communicate needs to partner.
- Negotiate needs.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next session in an area of need that has been acknowledged. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- Be prepared to challenge any unrealistic, and often damaging, ideas about what it is that makes us feel loved; e.g. prolonged intensity, possessiveness, and jealousy.
- Some members may find it hard to realise that they do not feel loved in their current or past relationships. They may believe this is totally their fault. Focus on the positives they have learnt and stress that, step-by-step, they have the power to change. This group is a stepping-stone to change.
- Some members, if they are currently single, may feel too tired to even think of having another relationship. This is OK. If this comes up, use it as an exercise; e.g. ask the women what they think they will gain from being single for a while. Our lives are not just about our partners, and women can have fulfilling lives whether they are single or have partners.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.





## Sessions 9 and 10 Boundaries

### Goals of Sessions 9 and 10:

- Define as a group the concept of 'boundaries'.
- Identify potential situations when boundaries are challenged.
- Look at positive ways of starting to assert boundaries.
- Understand the link between the lack of clear, healthy boundaries and domestic abuse.
- Realise the importance, but also the dangers, of asserting boundaries.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session, summing up briefly what will be discussed this time, and asking members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Boundaries

It will probably take two meetings to work through these sessions. Many topics are covered as we move from setting boundaries to definitions of abuse, and start to distinguish between conflict and abuse.

This is an essential session, as having a lack of boundaries is one of the prerequisites for abuse. Developing healthy boundaries is fundamental to avoiding chronic victimisation.

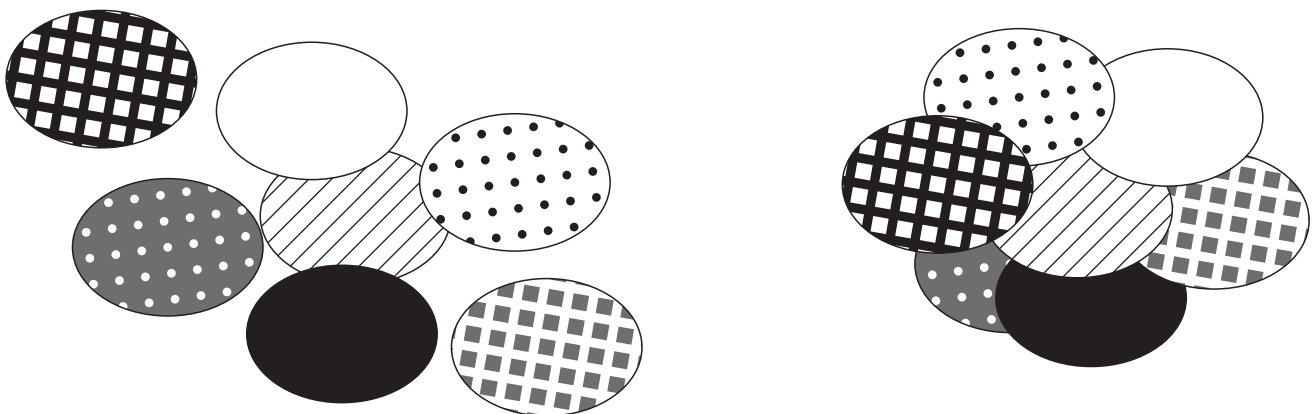
One way of looking at boundaries is by asking the group to try to define what the term 'boundary' means to them. Often their definitions will be very unclear and confused, and this is a good way to test the level of awareness within the group.

If the group finds it too difficult to define clearly what a boundary is, suggest a broad definition like: **'boundaries are limits drawn by each of us to define our separateness and identity, while helping to uphold our basic rights'**. Explain the importance of boundaries and how they should not be disregarded. A core essence of dignity, self respect, sense of worth and identity is and must be held within boundaries; each individual needs to have their personality respected if they are to thrive.

## Exercise 9/10a:

This visual exercise is helpful in explaining boundaries.

- Using differently coloured or patterned paper plates, ask a participant to demonstrate the current state of the boundaries within her life (see below). She can do this by labelling each plate with a different part of her life. For example, she is the striped plate, black check stands for co-workers, white for children, white spots for friends, black spots for parents, white check for siblings, black for partner/ex-partner.
- Ask the participant to place her plate in the middle, and arrange the others around it to reflect how her boundaries currently stand.
- The plates will probably look a lot like the second figure; the other plates are smothering the striped plate. Put the plates into something like the first figure and explain why these are healthier boundaries; they are allowing the striped plate more space to thrive.



Once the concept of boundaries is clearer, make sure you give practical examples of how the women can start working on achieving healthy boundaries. These could include:

- understanding your rights;
- increasing self-esteem;
- being in touch with feelings and needs;
- deciding where to set boundaries on the basis of rights and needs;
- developing assertiveness techniques to keep boundaries in place;
- understanding your patterns of control and learning to let go;
- developing equal mature relationships;
- gradually developing trust in self and others.

It is also important to introduce the idea that a price may have to be paid for setting clear boundaries. Participants should be encouraged to evaluate the consequences of certain choices, and to choose their battles very carefully. The group should also be encouraged to strategise as to the outcome they wish to obtain.

You might like to suggest to the group that if they are thinking about changing some boundaries in their lives, they discuss the initial phases with each other within the group setting to get some feedback before trying them out.

### **Exercise 9/10b:**

Using Appendix 17 on 'Setting boundaries', ask the women to read the examples and give their opinions on the situations. Ask the following questions:

- What do they think Olenka should have done in Example 1? Do they find it hard to assert their boundaries in the workplace?
- Can they relate to Sarah's position in Example 2? How do they feel about their own boundaries with their children or their parents? How could these improve?
- In Example 3, do they agree with Rozsa's decision to confront Hajna? Would they have done a similar thing if they were in that position? Do they think the confrontation and Hajna's initial sadness were worth it?
- Ask the women if they have experienced anything similar to these examples. How do they feel about asserting boundaries? Do they find it harder in some situations compared to others; (e.g. at home, with friends or in the workplace)?
- Can they see connections between a lack of healthy boundaries, and abusive relationships?

Control is another central issue that must be discussed with the participants at this point. As women learn to set boundaries and gain more control over their life, they must also analyse their belief system linked to control. Power and control are central issues in abusive situations, so changing the belief system on control is a complex matter. It is very important that a clear divide is made on what we think we can control as opposed to what we can really control; the women should recognise what we have and do not have a right to control. The only real control we have a right to exert is over ourselves – our goals, our choices, our decisions, our responsibilities, and our actions.

The importance of clear communication, recognising and avoiding abusive language, and strategies for dealing with conflict, should – as before – be emphasised.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

You should end the session with a brief discussion of the emotions women may experience when dealing with conflict; for example anger, guilt, fear, etc. This will provide a good introduction to the next session. Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- It is crucial that women's safety is discussed within this session. State that although asserting boundaries is positive, it is important to practice in safe situations – such as in the support group. If any woman feels she would like to start asserting boundaries with an abusive partner or ex-partner, arrange a one-to-one session as soon as possible to go through her individual support plan, and carry out more risk assessment. It is never a good idea to practice asserting boundaries on an abusive partner or ex-partner.
- Be a good role model with regards to setting boundaries within the group, and be consistent.
- Make sure you discuss a wide range of possible boundary conflicts and encourage a variety of different examples: do not just stick to one issue. It is better to explore different areas of life and highlight the possible conflicts that can arise in any of them.

## Sessions 11 and 12

## Emotions: anger, guilt, grief and fear

### Goals of Sessions 11 and 12:

- Acknowledge and start to understand feelings of anger, grief, fear and guilt.
- Learn to manage these emotions constructively.
- Learn practical ways of coping with anxiety.
- Understand how to overcome the cycle of shame.
- Realise that anger is a natural emotion, and in the right circumstances can be channelled into positive use.
- Understand the potential danger in unresolved and/or misplaced anger.

### 1. Begin the session

The next two sessions will be presented together. It is for you to decide when to end one session and start the next, but we suggest that in session 11, the group discusses feelings of pain, guilt, grief and fear. Session 12 can then be used to focus wholly on anger. In our experience, discussing anger is very important for women that have experienced domestic violence, and you will need enough time to explore the issue in depth.

Start the session by recapping the last session. Sum up briefly what will be discussed in each of the following two sessions. Ask members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Boundaries and emotions

#### a) Grief

It is important to discuss the feelings of grief, sorrow and pain that are often experienced when abusive relationships come to an end. Ending relationships is always painful. Women will face the failure of an important personal commitment, and must mourn the end of a relationship in which – despite the problems – there are likely to have been deep ties. At the outset of the relationship, women will have hoped for trust, companionship, love and physical intimacy. The perpetrator may also often be the father of the woman's children. The woman may have overwhelming feelings of loss and solitude when she leaves, or considers leaving, her abuser. Far from feeling relieved by ending the abuse, some women may experience waves of pain coming to the surface.

In the safe environment of the group it is important to legitimise and give space to these feelings. It is also essential to understand that life free from abuse is not the only thing needed for happiness.

If the discussion on pain or grief becomes too overwhelming, make sure to give some positive messages of change and some indications on how to handle these feelings.

There are many techniques for exploring grief, fear and guilt, one of which is identifying a 3-step process. It is a good idea to write this process on the flip chart and discuss with the group:

**Step 1: Understanding the stages of grief:<sup>25</sup>**

- Denial. ('It's not really happening, and if it is, it isn't that bad'.)
- Anger. ('He is not loyal to his promises; he will never change; why should I be alone to fight this?')
- Bargaining. ('Maybe if I try harder, or if I do what he wants – e.g. stop working, or have another baby – things will be better.')
- Depression. ('Nothing will ever change, I can't do anything.')
- Acceptance. ('I did the best I can, now I must think for myself and children. I deserve a better life.')
- Hope. ('I know I can control my destiny.')

**Step 2: Get support from friends, family and professionals.**

**Step 3: Explore new possibilities for yourself:** try new things, meet new people, and face new challenges.

**b) Fear and anxiety**

These two feelings are very common in violent situations, or on leaving abusive relationships. However, as they are often confused, this may lead to higher levels of anxiety for non-threatening situations, but lower levels in dangerous ones.

**Fear** is a primary feeling working to activate our response system to protect ourselves; it is a positive feeling and works in our best interest. Anybody leaving, or thinking about leaving, an abusive situation should have rational fear.

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<sup>25</sup> Kübler- Ross, E. (1969) *On death and dying* (New York: Macmillan).

In contrast, **anxiety** is an apprehensive uneasiness of mind over an anticipated ill.

It is really important that survivors gain the ability to differentiate between the realistic fear of impending danger, and general anxiousness. One of the ways of working through this distinction is a step-by-step fear assessment. Again, have this written on the flip chart for discussion with the group.

**Step 1:** Gather information from knowledgeable professionals about your options for taking action.

**Step 2:** Identify your choices.

**Step 3:** Make a decision about what action seems right for you.

**Step 4:** Be centred and act with awareness.

**Step 5:** Be sure you are in a safe place for yourself and your children.

**Step 6:** Take action.

As fear and anxiety can be incredibly paralysing, remind the women to try and take one step at a time.

### **c) Guilt**

Discussing and working on the issues linked with childhood dysfunctional legacies, and the consequences for children living in a violent household, can result in a strong sense of guilt for women attending the group. These feelings should be acknowledged without becoming paralysing, and should as much as possible be channelled into taking responsibility. It is important to recognise the suffering that has been caused, make amends if possible, and move on to a position of strength in which you guide your actions towards security and shelter.

### **Exercise 11/12a:**

Some important questions you should ask the group are listed here. It is a good idea to pick out key words that the women repeat when answering the questions, and write them up on the flip chart. This way the women can see that they are not alone in their feelings of guilt and/or shame:

- Do you feel guilty because you feel you are never doing enough?
- What kinds of things make you feel guilty?
- Which ones are valid, and which ones are guilt trips? How do you recognize the difference?



- Has your religious training or your religious beliefs influenced your sense of guilt?
- Does the community from which you come influence your sense of guilt?
- How do you deal with a guilt trip?

### **Exercise 11/12b:**

How do we move from guilt to responsibility?

- Hand out Appendix 18 to the members and discuss the Cycle of Shame with the group.
- Can they relate to this cycle?
- Have they created ways for dealing with these feelings, and – if so – are they positive or negative? Do they have any more suggestions to add to the positive cycle?
- Explain that, by overcoming these feelings, the women are no longer being controlled by negative emotions as they are positively controlling them themselves.
- Discuss with the group how this is connected to building self-esteem.
- Finally, ask each member to come up with one positive affirmation of themselves. It is up to them whether they share it with the group or not.

### **d) Anger**

Anger, like fear, is a very important feeling that arises when we perceive that our boundaries are being trespassed. There are many reasons why we might feel anger: for example, if we feel threatened with harm, if our rights are not respected, or if we feel severe injustice. It is a powerful feeling that can lead to positive action, but can also put oneself at risk.

### **Exercise 11/12c:**

- Ask the group to think of positive situations (personal or general) to which anger has contributed in some way.
- Write the answers up on the flip chart.
- The sheet can then be pinned on the wall for the following sessions as a reminder that anger can be controlled and channelled into good.
- Some examples are:
  - abolishing the slave trade;
  - women fighting for the right to vote;
  - the Civil Rights movement;
  - a survivor of rape bringing the attacker to justice.

For women in psychologically and physically abusive situations, anger is often a strongly felt and deeply hidden feeling. Anger with an abusive partner can be very dangerous, and although more women than we commonly think become openly angry with the perpetrators, many others – and most, over time – learn to ignore and hide their feelings of anger. Furthermore, most cultures socialise girls and women to be nice, polite and sweet; women are not encouraged to express anger. While an angry boy is seen as fulfilling the masculine stereotype, an angry girl is more harshly reproached; it is seen as unladylike, unbecoming, hysterical, over the top, or melodramatic. At this point it is worthwhile to ask the group about their own experiences of expressing anger as girls and young women.

Survivors' anger can often be destructive and badly placed; for example, sometimes they may lash out on social workers or supportive friends, rather than confront their abuse, or the shortcomings of the legal system. It is important to find ways of encouraging women to express anger, and help them channel it into constructive solutions.

### **Exercise 11/12d:**

- Using the Anger Management handout (Appendix 19), discuss ways of dealing with anger-inducing situations.
- Ask the group how they deal with their anger. Do they think these ways are positive?
- Ask them to think of positive ways of dealing with their anger, and write up positive suggestions on the flip chart.

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the sessions

As these sessions might elicit depressive responses from the group, make sure you leave some time at the end to restore a good atmosphere. You might want to share a song, a reading or something uplifting. Also, ask the group to think of their own personal anger-management mantra, and stress the importance of giving oneself the weekly 'personal touch'. Ask group members to complete an evaluation form.

Another topic that should be dealt with in these sessions is the forthcoming closure. At this point, the group is likely to have become a really important part of the women's lives. Through sharing their personal experiences, the participants realise – often for the first time in their lives – that experiences of abuse are common to many other nice, intelligent and capable women. This knowledge helps lessen the feelings of isolation and guilt that the perpetrator has often deliberately instilled in them. The group experience is often the first time that the women have been able to see the effects of violence on other women and children, thus creating empathy towards other survivors, but also toward themselves. They are also able to see the value of other women, and feel anger at their unjust treatment.

Sometimes the issues of dependency that are so prevalent in abusive relationships are transferred to the group; therefore, at this stage, it is important to start dealing with how the women feel about the group experience drawing to an end. Usually, they find it a very sad and depressing thought, and you need time to work through this "mourning" as a group, so that the feelings of depression can be contained when the end arrives. This will give the group members some time to think of how they would like to close the group; for example, perhaps by having a party, or a meal to which each member brings food and drink.

## Trouble Shooting

- Do not dismiss or try to wash over any sadness or tears. These sessions are about managing emotions, so it is important to give the women time to express their sadness. Do not hurry them through explaining how they feel.
- Women might be reluctant to admit they feel depressed: they might think they should 'pull themselves together' or 'get a grip'. It is important to get the right balance between explaining that it is OK to have these feelings, and discussing how to deal with them, so women are not at the mercy of their negative emotions.
- These sessions can lead to other discussions on self-harm, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and so on. These are all important and relevant issues, and the group's experiences, often shared, should be validated. However, try not to digress into an extensive discussion of these issues, but stay focused on working out how to deal with the feelings effectively.
- Have available resources and support relating to eating disorders, self-harm, depression, etc., and remind the group that you are available for one-to-one sessions.
- Time is a real issue for these sessions. It is likely that the women will talk a lot throughout both sessions, so it might be worth asking how they feel about shortening or forgoing the breaks.
- Some women will be scared or unsure about expressing their anger, as in the past they will most likely have suppressed it. Remind the group that this is a safe and non-judgmental place where they will not be reproached for sharing their feelings.
- Advise the women to avoid confronting their abusive partner/ ex-partners about their anger. This session is strictly about how to cope with their own anger, as one only has control over one's own feelings and no one else's.
- Extreme caution must be expressed in this session about expressing anger with an abusive partner or ex-partner. Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount.



## Sessions 13 Assertiveness

### Goals of Session 13:

- Gain a better understanding of assertiveness.
- Learn practical ways of being assertive.
- Gain more confidence in being assertive.
- Realise the difference between assertiveness and aggression.

### 1. Begin the session

The next session follows on from the previous two and looks in more detail at various aspects of assertiveness. Sum up briefly what has been covered so far, and what will be discussed in this session and in the next session.

### 2. Assertiveness techniques

It is important at this stage to work out what assertiveness techniques could be used in different situations, by using practical examples. (As pointed out below, women often find it difficult at the beginning to understand the difference between aggressiveness and assertiveness, and the examples will help here.)

#### **Example of an unsuccessful attempt to be assertive:**

*After the first session on assertive behaviour, Anca proudly reported to the group her behaviour with the ticket man at the train station. When he decided to close the service in front of her, even when she had already queued and risked missing her train, she started yelling at the top of her lungs that he was a lazy public servant, that he should be ashamed of himself and that she wished him every possible ill. The result was that he insulted her, closed the teller, and she missed her train by continuing to shout at him well after he had left.*

Very often when working on assertiveness, as women start setting boundaries, issues of anger arise and should be dealt with effectively. It is important to review the topic of anger as well as aggressiveness when dealing with assertiveness because sometimes, when survivors start using assertiveness skills, they realise how much abuse they have experienced in their lives. This may lead to overwhelming feelings of anger that may heavily interfere with

assertive behaviour. It is important that at some time during the sessions on assertiveness, the facilitators assess levels of anger and talk about feelings again.

In discussing the above example, group members should also consider alternative strategies that Anca could have used, in order to be assertive and achieve the end she wished. This could lead into a more general discussion of techniques for acting assertively. The following can be written on the flip chart and be used as a discussion point:

### **The Eight Golden Rules of Assertiveness**

- Choose your battles carefully. Determine your goals and decide exactly what you want to accomplish or change.
- Talk in the first person, be brief, and choose your wording carefully.
- Don't expect everyone to like your new boundary setting style. If they respond angrily and things are not working out as you hoped, drop the issue and leave.
- Try not to raise your voice. Be calm, firm and in control.
- Repeat and rehearse your speech before doing it for real.
- Do not apologise; setting a boundary is always appropriate.
- Repeat your statement if necessary.
- After the exchange, evaluate how you feel, how things went, what you got out of it, if it turned aggressive at any point, and how you could improve your assertiveness techniques for the future.

The following three assertiveness techniques can be very useful. Go through each with the group, giving lots of examples.

### **The broken record**

This technique is very useful when you are setting a boundary and the person you are talking to is not listening or beginning to argue with you. It is a simple technique in which you make an assertive statement, and if necessary just repeat and repeat and repeat it. The idea is to be repetitive and unrelenting.



**Example of a successful use of the broken record assertiveness technique:**

*Raveena was having trouble getting the plumber to come and repair her leaking sink. Every time Raveena called the plumber, he gave her an excuse and told her he would call back to let her know when he could come. Needless to say he never did call or turn up to fix the sink.*

*After learning the broken record technique, Raveena drove up to his store early in the morning when she knew she would find him and said: "I need to have my sink fixed, please tell me when you can come, or if you can't come within three days I will find another plumber". He answered: "Oh, yes, Madam, I was going to call you, I'm almost finished and will come as soon as possible".*

*Raveena answered: "Very well, when are you coming?"*

*Plumber: "Very soon, I promise."*

*Raveena: "Very well, when are you coming?"*

*Plumber: "Listen, Madam, I know you need it fixed, and I'm absolutely sure I can make it sometime between tomorrow and the day after."*

*Raveena: "That is progress, but I need to know exactly when you are coming."*

*Plumber: "I can't be that precise because I don't know when I will finish this work I'm doing."*

*Raveena: "You can be very precise, because you can come tomorrow at 8am, and after you have finished your work at my house you can go and finish the other one."*

*Plumber: "OK lady, tomorrow at 8."*

*Raveena: "I'm going to call you tonight at 5 and tomorrow morning at 7.30, just to make sure you remember."*

*Plumber: "You don't need to, I'll come."*

*Raveena: "Thank you, but I will call. See you tomorrow!"*

**The 'I' message**

This technique is best applied when trying to change an unsatisfactory situation. It is not appropriate for making or refusing a request.

**Example of the use of the 'I' message technique:**

*Solange is upset because her 28-year-old son Bastien only comes by to leave his dirty clothes and then to pick them up a few days later. To explain how she feels about the situation, and to assert her boundaries, Solange confronts Bastien by saying the following: "I feel upset that you drop in only to leave your dirty clothes and then leave. I feel used. I'd rather meet you for a coffee, or do something together that we both enjoy like seeing a movie or playing tennis. I feel that washing your dirty clothes is not my responsibility since you are a grown adult. If you need to use my washer, maybe we can arrange a time that you can come and use it on your own."*

In this case Solange has identified her feelings ('I feel upset'), described the situation non-blamefully ('You leave dirty clothes and then leave'), explained the effect of the behaviour ('I feel used'), and described the behaviour she would like instead: 'Do something together/use it [the washer] on your own').

**Exercise 13a:**

- Hand out blank sheets of paper, and ask the women to think of a situation in the past where their boundaries were invaded but they did not have the confidence or the techniques to be assertive.
- Participants should write down briefly how they would have liked to respond to that situation, using the four phases of the 'I' message technique:
  - Identify your feelings.
  - Explain the behaviour.
  - Explain the effect of the behaviour on you.
  - Describe the behaviour you would prefer.
- Ask the women if anyone would like to read their example out to the group.

### **Getting out of a situation that is out of control**

The third technique is to get out of a situation that is getting out of control – for example, if the person is getting nasty, offensive, derisive, sarcastic, or aggressive. In this case, closing remarks like the following should be used:

- “This is not working out. Let’s talk when things are calmer.”
- “I have a right to be heard and I have a right to be respected.”
- “I don’t allow anybody to talk to me like that.”

After ending the conversation, quickly walk away or hang up the phone. If the person is really interested in proper and equal communication, they are likely to be more careful in the future. If this does not happen, then it will be evident that they are aiming to maintain power and control, and disregard the rights of others.

### **Exercise 13b:**

It is important when discussing assertiveness to go back to the ‘Bill of Rights’ (Appendix 12) and show how these rights are the basic bricks with which you build boundaries, and how you can protect them with assertiveness techniques.

- Ask the group to spend approximately 5 minutes completing the handout, ‘Assessing Levels of Assertiveness’ (Appendix 20).
- As a group, discuss which issues the women find the hardest to deal with assertively, and ask them to explain why.
- Connect each issue with a corresponding right from the Bill of Rights.

## Comparing assertive and aggressive behaviour

<b>Assertiveness</b>	<b>Aggressiveness</b>
You express your needs, wants and feelings without trespassing the rights of others. You are honest, sincere and direct.	You express your feelings and needs at the expense of others. You violate the rights of others and try to dominate.
<b>Why the need to be assertive?</b>	<b>Why be aggressive?</b>
To set boundaries. To request and obtain respect from others. To keep your self-esteem and a feeling of empowerment. To create honest, healthy relationships.	You are angry and you want to achieve your goal. You are not interested in other people's feelings.
<b>What do you get?</b>	<b>What do you get?</b>
You gain respect and feel proud and in control of your life. You choose the people that support you from among the ones that respect your boundaries. You learn to protect yourself from abuse.	You still feel angry, guilty and hungry for control. You are abusive to others, and can become violent. You end up destroying relationships.

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the session

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next (and final) session. Ask the group members to complete the evaluation form.

## Trouble Shooting

- Try to make the session fun when discussing examples. This way you can show participants that assertiveness can be positive!
- Some members of the group may feel they are being rude when they are assertive. Ask why they think they are being rude, and go back to the discussion of boundaries and rights to show that they have a right to assert their boundaries. It is important to expose the myths about women being assertive.
- Emphasise that **extreme caution** is necessary before using assertive techniques in an abusive or potentially abusive situation. Be sure to talk about safety issues when working on assertiveness, and stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount.



## Sessions 14

## Ending and new beginnings

### Goals of Session 14:

- Recap what has been learnt in the course.
- Celebrate the successes of the course and how far the women have come.
- Get to know each other in a less structured and more social setting.
- Gain an awareness of individual strengths.
- Accept the ending of the course.
- Anticipate new beginnings.

### 1. Begin the session

Sum up briefly what has been covered so far, and what will be discussed in this final session.

### 2. Endings and new beginnings

The group has become a safe environment in which to experiment with new patterns of behaviour. For many women, it is the first time they have listened to other women and shared similar experiences. This breaks down their feelings of isolation and creates strong bonds between them.

For this reason, it is important to have started tackling the issue of closure early in the group sessions, and to recognise that ending the group may be difficult. However, by this point, the group members will be ready, even if also rather sad, for the group sessions to draw to an end.

You will probably have planned some special ending dinner or party for the final session. You could also suggest that each woman brings the group a present.



**Example:**

*At the closing of one group, Mai Ly made special stones for each woman. She had hand-painted a dozen small stones, and had attached a little note to each. She then asked each of the women (including the facilitators) to choose a stone with an attached message. It turned out that she had had specific women in mind when she wrote each message and painted the stone, and most of the women actually chose “their stone”. It was a very moving gift to the group.*

This is the moment to stress how much has been achieved. You might like to create a certificate for each woman congratulating her on the completion of the Power to Change programme. The group is a fantastic way to start trying out new skills, but after that, they must become part of everyday life; i.e. assertiveness needs to become the regular way of dealing with issues.

It is important in closing to give each participant time to share what she has gained from the group. Stress how the sad occasion of the group ending is really a new beginning, allowing them to take the experience a step further into daily life. Also, there is no reason why friendships that have developed during the group must end. People can keep in touch and you may want to encourage the group to meet on its own after the end of the structured programme.

**Exercise 14:**

It is good for the women to have something to take away from the group, so we recommend personalising some pretty stones or decorative cards, and bringing these to the group.

- Go around the members one by one, asking each participant what she thinks her strengths are.
- Write these on the stone or card and give to the woman to take away with her.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Evaluation**

It is important that – in addition to the weekly evaluation sheets – each woman fills out a final evaluation sheet (Appendix 6). Explain the importance of evaluation and of giving women a chance to express anonymously how they feel, and have their voices heard.

### **5. Closing the session**

Even though this session is less structured than the rest, and is more social in its nature, it is still important to have a final closure. Thank the women for attending the course and talk a little about how you have found the group experience, highlighting all the positives. Ask each woman in turn to say what she feels to be the most important aspect of the course she is taking away with her. Explain that you will be available briefly after the session and for individual one-to-one support over the next couple of weeks, and can also refer the women on to other agencies, courses or services. Ask participants to fill out the Final Evaluation form. Then it is time to say goodbye.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- Make sure resources for further support are available.
- Have information on courses or trips that you think the women may be interested in pursuing now that the group has finished.
- The social section is not structured like the rest of the course so it has the potential to be a little awkward at times. Make sure you have ideas for conversation starters ready in your head.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. It is good practice to arrange a one-to-one session with each woman to carry out a risk assessment now the course has finished, and to go through her safety plan, update if necessary, and work out what further support might be needed.

- It is not usually good practice to agree to meet up with the group again as it is important for the women to accept closure. However, the facilitator should evaluate the situation, and some flexibility may be allowed, if clear boundaries are set beforehand. Group members are, in any case, free to meet up as friends and individuals in their own time.

***A view from a survivor:***

*A supportive community for going on with my life. Support for my emotions that are not acceptable for many outside this group. The opportunity to talk about my feelings in a group. I had a chance to look at my own life from a different perspective, to become conscious about the fact that I have my own life and I am in control of my life. I started to make my own decisions, without always looking for the opinion of others.*

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# The Power To Change Educational Self-Help Programme

*I would only recommend it to women who are open with themselves, because you need that in order to be able to work in a group. During the group work we shed light on all the dark corners, and you need to be ready for that. [A survivor]*

## 7.1. INTRODUCTION

Like the previous Power To Change model, the following psycho-educational sessions also form a flexible 14 week programme, which may be adapted to a slightly shorter 12 week programme, if that is more appropriate and suits the needs of participants better. This educational self-help programme is, more specifically than the previous model, targeted at women coming out of abusive relationships, and focuses on changing patterns of learned behaviour.

As before, the fundamental curriculum centres on basic rights, an understanding of and ability to set boundaries, and the use of basic assertiveness techniques. The 'Power To Change Educational Self-Help Programme' works on changing the women's ability to respond to abusive situations, and can be used for women who are still with their abusers. If used inappropriately, however, it may actually endanger women who are still living with, or in contact with, a violent partner or ex-partner, since it encourages assertiveness. It is important that careful consideration is given to the discussions on assertiveness, and that women are warned not to try out assertiveness techniques on the perpetrator, as this could be potentially dangerous. It is also essential that group participants understand that the programme does not provide a crisis framework.

Constant attention must be given to risk assessment and safety throughout all sessions; and the risk assessment and safety planning procedures detailed in Appendices 2 and 3 must be followed.

## 7.2. THE EDUCATIONAL SELF-HELP PROGRAMME: SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

### Session 1: Basic rights

This session aims, among other things, to create a warm, safe and welcoming environment for everyone attending, and ensure that everyone has a good understanding of their basic rights as women.

### **Session 2: Definition of abuse**

This session develops an understanding of domestic violence as an issue of power and control, involving sexual, emotional, financial and physical abuse, and which is solely the responsibility of the perpetrator. Participants will be encouraged to build trust in the group so that they feel comfortable about sharing their stories.

### **Session 3: Why is it so hard to leave?**

In this session, participants will look at the complex reasons why women find it hard to leave abusive relationships, and analyse how women's place in society contributes to these difficulties. The Duluth 'Power and Control Wheel'<sup>26</sup> and the Walker 'Cycle of violence' models of abuse will also be introduced<sup>27</sup>.

### **Session 4: Families and children**

Participants will be helped to connect emotional patterns learned in childhood to difficulties in constructing healthy adult relationships, and will also learn some practical ways of supporting children experiencing domestic abuse.

### **Session 5: Boundaries**

The aims of this session include: defining boundaries, identifying potential situations in which boundaries could be challenged, looking at positive ways of asserting boundaries (and the potential dangers in this), and understanding the link between the lack of clear, healthy boundaries and domestic abuse.

### **Session 6: Coping with grief, fear and guilt**

Participants will be helped to acknowledge, start to understand, and learn to manage the feelings of grief, fear, guilt and anxiety that accompany abusive relationships.

### **Session 7: Coping with anger**

Participants will start to realise that anger is a natural emotion, understand the potential dangers in unresolved anger, and learn how to manage angry emotions constructively.

### **Sessions 8 and 9: Assertiveness skills and boundary setting**

In these sessions, participants will gain a better understanding of assertiveness (including the difference between assertiveness and aggression), discuss the 'Bill of Rights' (Appendix 12), and learn how to maintain safety while being assertive. These issues may be addressed either in one session, or in two, depending on the time available and the needs of the women in the group.

### **Session 10: Assertiveness techniques**

Participants will begin to learn practical ways of being assertive.

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<sup>26</sup> Pence, E. (1987) *In our best interest: A process for personal and social change* (Duluth: Minnesota) [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

<sup>27</sup> Walker, L. E. (1979) *The battered Woman*. New York: Harper & Row

### **Session 11: Dealing with requests and authority figures**

Following on from previous sessions, participants will gain a better understanding of why it is difficult to make and refuse requests, learn how to make and to refuse requests, and to deal assertively with authority figures. This session may, if preferred, be combined with Session 12.

### **Session 12: Practicing assertiveness**

This session will continue to build the participants' confidence in using assertiveness skills, and will help them identify and overcome the stumbling blocks they may face when being assertive. This session and the preceding one may, if appropriate, be combined into one session.

### **Session 13: Healthy relationships**

The aims of this session are to identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, distinguish between healthy and unhealthy forms of conflict, and gain an understanding of the lack of realism in stereotypical representations of romantic love.

### **Session 14: Endings and new beginnings**

The final session will recap what has been learnt in the course, celebrate how far the women have come, recognise individual strengths, and accept the ending of the course, while anticipating new beginnings.



## **Session 1    Basic rights**

Note that the Goals of Session 1 of this programme, the Introductions, exercises 1a and 1b, 'Important information', 'Group rules and contract', and "Group expectations" are the same as for the first session of the Self-esteem programme.

### **Goals of Session 1:**

- Create a warm, safe and welcoming environment for everyone attending.
- Meet all members of the group and learn a little about everyone.
- Allay any fears and concerns about attending the first meeting.
- All members should understand the aims and format of the programme.
- Gain a good understanding of what each member expects from the group.
- Agree on group rules.
- All members should sign the Group Contract.
- All members should have a good understanding of what their basic rights are.
- Create anticipation for the next session.

### **1. Introductions**

Introduce yourself, including details about who you are, why you are running the course, your past work experience, any training and qualifications you have, and something personal (e.g. your favourite colour, film, TV programme). The co-facilitator should do the same. Then go on to ask everyone to introduce herself. To start the course on a positive note, this would be a good time to start an 'icebreaker' such as a name game. See Appendix 9 for a selection of ideas for icebreakers.

### **2. Important information**

Explain to the group that there are a few things that should be announced briefly before the session starts properly. The following are examples of the issues you may want to cover:

- Emphasise that the location of the venue must be kept confidential, and that no partners or ex-partners are allowed on the premises. (This is non-negotiable).

- The location of the bathroom and the food and drink facilities should be pointed out.
- Explain any safety features of the building (such as where the fire exits can be found.)
- Go through any access issues.
- If there is any provision for childcare, explain this.
- Explain the complaints procedure.
- Explain the smoking policies of the venue.

### **3. The Power to Change – Educational Self-Help Programme**

Take about 5-10 minutes to describe briefly what the course entails, making sure to explain the following:

- Who designed the course.
- How the format works, including the length of each session, the length of the entire course, and how often the group will meet.
- What the group will discuss at each session. (See Appendix 10, Details of the course.) You may find it helpful for the women to produce a more detailed course descriptor handout, that summarises what the course content will be for each session, as well as when they take place. (See Summary of sessions, above, as a basis for this).
- How to communicate in between the sessions. (See Appendix 10, Details of the course).
- Discuss with members their views on the length and frequency of breaks.

### **4. Group expectations**

At the outset, it is very important to ascertain what members of the group expect from each other, and from the facilitators and the course itself. It is also important that you join in this discussion and explain what you expect. See Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, for a more detailed discussion of these issues.

### **Exercise 1a:**

- Starting with yourself, go around the group asking each member to give one expectation they have of the group.
- Write each expectation on a 'Group Expectations' flip chart.
- Once completed, ask if the group members are happy with these expectations, and if they would like to contribute some more ideas.
- Once the flip chart is complete, put the sheet up on the wall to use as a reference point. This sheet should be put on the wall at each session as a reminder, and to look back on at the end of the group to see if the expectations have been met.

### **5. Group rules and contract**

At this point, it is essential to agree on the group rules and for members to sign the group contract. (See Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, for a more detailed discussion of these issues.)

- Refer to the Basic process guidelines handout (see Appendix 11) to start a conversation about basic rules, how to respect each other, and deal with the women's fears of participating in the group.
- Discuss ways in which everyone can encourage and support one another through the sessions.
- Like the flip chart exercise for establishing group expectations, have an 'ideas storm' about what the group would like to have as group rules. The chart can also be put on the wall for future sessions. If someone forgets about a group rule this can be used as an easy reference to refer to what was agreed at the first session.
- Have handouts of the contract for members to sign (see Appendix 8). It is good practice to photocopy these once signed; the members can keep the originals and you the copies.

### **6. Beginning the session**

Briefly sum up what will be discussed in this session and ask if everyone understands. As everyone is still very new to the group, the first session should be used to create a warm atmosphere of safety and trust, and to begin forming bonds between the members. Take a few moments here to relax the group a little before going on to discuss Basic rights.

## Exercise 1b:

- Each member of the group should give one statement beginning with 'I feel'. These statements could refer to how they feel about the group, the course, or their life in general.
- Ask if anyone would like to start and work clockwise from there. If no one volunteers to start, offer to go first.
- As a lot of the women will be nervous, be ready to ask questions that might help them come up with a statement for themselves, e.g. "How did you feel today before the session?"

## 7. Basic rights

A good way of starting a discussion on basic rights is by using the 'Bill of Rights' (see Appendix 12). It is a good idea to have photocopies of this to give to each participant.

## Exercise 1c

Discuss how much each woman feels entitled to the rights that are listed. The following examples can be used as starting points for the discussion:

### **Example:**

**Kaija** is 35 years old and is a first time mother of a 2-year-old. With regard to her daughter Elisabet, Kaija is adamant that she cannot "put herself first". In Kaija's view, her daughter's needs come first, meaning that her own needs are always secondary.

**Samina**, 42 and mother of three, said she sometimes feels totally overwhelmed by the demands of her children, and although she thinks they should come first, she often feels unable to put anybody first because she's just too tired and confused.

**Louise**, 61, spends the majority of her spare time looking after her grandchildren, and is often expected to cancel appointments, for example with friends or the doctor, to meet the needs of her daughter and her children. Although Louise adores her grandchildren, she feels worn-out from looking after them, is starting to resent her daughter, and feels taken for granted. However, when she thinks about talking to her daughter about her concerns, she starts feeling guilty because she believes she is failing to be a good mother and grandmother. This in turn makes her angry with herself, and creates tension with her daughter.

It is important to highlight here, for example, how a mother is able to be attuned to a child's needs but also to put her own wellbeing first. A mother who is overtired, not eating well or stressed out will find it harder to be in touch with her child or grandchild's emotional needs, and may transmit nervousness to the child or have trouble soothing him or her. Putting oneself first should be reinterpreted as a positive and important way of taking good care of oneself, which will ultimately enable better care of others.

The group doesn't need to arrive at a definite position and it is OK to agree to disagree: different women may have different ideas, and these should be respected. You are modelling positive ways of dealing with conflict and you must always keep in mind that the women you are working with come from abusive situations where it may be dangerous to have a different opinion and there is no real model for constructive discussion.

At the end of the discussion, ask the women to give themselves one of the rights discussed as a treat during the next week.

## **8. Question time**

Before the session closes, it is good practice to allow a few minutes for specific questions from the group on the content of the session. The members may not feel confident enough at this stage to raise questions, so state that you will be in the building for a little while after the group finishes for anyone wanting clarification on any issues.

## **9. Closing the session**

End the session by explaining the 'personal touch' element of the course, and ask group members to complete it over the next week (see Chapter 5). Spend a little time discussing this with the group if it is unclear, giving examples if necessary.

As this is the first session, allow approximately 15-20 minutes for closing, as everyone will need a little encouragement to speak up. Remember to do the following:

- Congratulate everyone for completing the first session of the Power To Change Programme.

- Go round the group and ask everyone to give a brief statement of their feelings about the first session.
- Introduce the Weekly evaluation sheet (Appendix 4), explain why it is important to have a system of evaluation in place, and ask all participants to complete a sheet.

## **Trouble Shooting**

- As it is the first meeting, expect emotions to be running high; both group members and facilitators are likely to feel nervous, shy, awkward, and apprehensive. Refer to Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, on how to overcome these challenging emotions, and be prepared and discuss any issues with the co-facilitator.
- Set the standard for future sessions. Although you may feel nervous or apprehensive, it is important to stick to the guidelines referred to in the chapter on Group policies and protocols.
- Avoid spending lots of time discussing announcements and explaining the course in lots of detail. The majority of this session should be dedicated to talking about group rules, allaying worries, creating a positive environment, and discussing basic rights.
- Discussing some elements of the Bill of rights may cause a lot of disagreement within the group; for example, some women see the right to put oneself first as selfish. This will need to be addressed in further detail as the course proceeds, but it is important for all women to feel safe enough to disagree politely with each other and with the facilitators, without fear of the severe reproach they are used to.
- Although you will give your availability after the session for questions, encourage the women to try and build up their confidence to ask questions in the group.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.

## Session 2 Definition of abuse

### Goals of Session 2:

- Get to know each other a little bit more.
- Encourage active participation in the group.
- Understand that domestic violence is about power and control.
- Realise that the abuse is not in any way the women's fault and that the perpetrators are wholly responsible for the abusive behaviour.
- Identify how domestic abuse consists of sexual, emotional, financial and physical violence.
- Build trust in the group so participants start to feel comfortable about sharing stories.

### 1. Introductions

Take some time to introduce any new members who may have missed last week, and reintroduce everyone including yourself as it can take a while to remember names. You could also use another 'icebreaker' exercise: see Appendix 9 for a selection of icebreakers.

### 2. Beginning the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about the 'right' they chose in the previous session, and discuss the 'personal touch'.

### 3. Definitions of abuse

In this second session it is important to construct a definition of abuse based on control and power. We suggest using the Duluth 'Power and Control Wheel'<sup>28</sup> as a resource for reaching a common definition of what constitutes abusive behaviour. Make photocopies of the wheel and give them out to participants (see Appendix 16).

.....  
<sup>28</sup> Pence, E. (1987) *In our best interest: A process for personal and social change* (Duluth: Minnesota) [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org) Reproduced in: WAVE Network (2006) *Bridging Gaps – From good intention to good cooperation* Vienna: WAVE. Downloadable from <http://www.wave-network.org/start.asp?ID=284&b=11>



Discuss how each behaviour in the wheel is linked to power and control. This is very important in acquiring the skills necessary for understanding abusive behaviour, and better prepares women to set boundaries and use assertiveness skills. Quite often survivors continue to be surprised and baffled by the perpetrator's behaviour because they don't understand the reasons that lie behind it. A good understanding of control and power issues is imperative for understanding and dealing with abusive behaviour.

Women may be talking for the first time about the violence they have experienced, or certainly for the first time in a group setting, so this session has the potential to be very powerful.

### **Exercise 2a:**

- Using the Definitions of abuse handout (Appendix 21), start a discussion within the group about different types of abusive behaviour.
- Ask the group to name what they think constitutes abusive behaviour and write their answers on a flip chart.
- Then ask the group to discuss the differences between sexual, emotional, physical and financial abuse, and to fill in their handouts.

## **4. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **Exercise 2b:**

Ask each participant to think of one word that sums up what she wants to gain from the support group (e.g. hope, courage, or strength). Each woman should keep this as a reinforcing statement for herself, and as something she can repeat as a mantra over the next few weeks if times get tough, or if she finds parts of the programme material emotionally challenging.

## 5. Closing the session

Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Thank the women for showing their commitment to the course by coming to the second session, and ask them to complete the evaluation form.

### Trouble Shooting

- Women might start comparing the different levels of abuse that they have experienced. It is important for women to share their different experiences, but it must be expressed in a way that is not detrimental to others. For example, one woman may start feeling as if she doesn't belong in the group because she hasn't experienced physical abuse like others have. It is important to discuss how different abuse affects women differently; e.g. controlling and nasty behaviour is not visible like a bruise, but it still violates your rights and can scar you emotionally.
- Make sure that everyone's experiences are validated, and encourage women to support and listen to each other. However, avoid letting the women give each other advice on how to handle their situation. State that the support group will be helping the women to give themselves their own advice, and that, if they need practical help, you are available outside of the group setting for one-to-one support.
- Be open to humour from the group. This is a hard session and many women will feel a real mix of emotions. A little laughter is fun and will make the participants feel happier about coming back for the next session.
- Be prepared for the women to play down the abuse they have experienced, or for them to stand up for the perpetrator and excuse his behaviour. You should listen to all views – but when myths about domestic abuse are stated, they need to be challenged: find a way to do this gently.

- Be prepared to deal with anger on the part of women who come to recognise during the session the enormity of the abuse they have suffered or are still experiencing.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.

## **Session 3** **Why is it so hard to leave?**

### **Goals of Session 3:**

- Look into the complex reasons why women find it hard to leave abusive relationships.
- Discuss the safety issues relating to leaving an abusive partner.
- Explain the Duluth "Power and Control Wheel" and the Walker "cycle of violence" models of abuse<sup>29</sup>.
- Understand and lessen the shame that women feel when in abusive situations.
- Analyse how women's place in society contributes to the difficulties women face when leaving abusive situations.

### **1. Beginning the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Discuss the 'personal touch'.

### **2. Why is it so hard to leave?**

Start the session with an exercise to get the women thinking about their own situations, stressing that there are no right or wrong answers.

#### **Exercise 3a:**

- Write on the flip chart 'Why is it hard to leave?' and suggest one answer yourself to get the ball rolling.
- Ask the women to contribute to the discussion by speaking about their own experience. Some examples might be:
  - fear of the consequences;
  - fear of legal procedures;
  - fear (and often the reality) of being unable to support oneself economically;
  - fear of losing "marital status" (e.g. "I don't want to be a lonely divorced woman");
  - fear of damaging the children by taking them away from their father;
  - fear of partner carrying out threats (e.g. committing suicide, kidnapping/harming the children, killing her);
  - hope that the perpetrator will change and that the abuse will stop.

<sup>29</sup> Walker, L. E. (1979) *The battered woman*. (New York: Harper & Row)

If some participants seem ashamed or guilty when speaking about why they found or find it hard to leave, it is a good idea to ask if anyone else in the group can relate to those situations. It is very likely that there will be other women who can understand and empathise with these feelings.

Below we present two alternative models that have been developed to indicate why women find it hard to leave abusive situations. Present both of these models to the group, making sure that both are discussed in an open way. Be clear that these are models, only, and that you are not dictating how women should experience abuse, or that they are 'one size fits all' explanations for abuse. Not all women recognise these patterns as fitting their situations.

### **Model A: The cycle of violence**

The 'cycle of violence'<sup>30</sup> is a model that can be used to explain why, in some cases, it is so hard for women to leave abusive relationships. The cycle of violence focuses on the behaviour of the perpetrator, which in turn affects the responses of the victim, and is constructed in three phases:

#### **(i) Tension rising:**

There is an increasing tension emanating from the perpetrator. Women often describe their response during this phase as "walking on eggshells". This stage is very stressful and often becomes unbearable, and invariably leads to an incident of abuse, either verbal or physical. The woman lives in fear of the abuse occurring again.

#### **(ii) Episode of abuse:**

After perpetrating an incident of abuse, the abuser will often blame the victim for provoking it, and will refuse to take responsibility for his abusive behaviour. The woman will be accused of many shortcomings (e.g. bad mothering, poor cooking, lousy housekeeping, ugly appearance, madness etc.). It is important in discussing this phase to stress that all relationships have difficult times and that it is normal to disagree on issues, but that it is never legitimate to be abusive to your partner, whether emotionally, physically, psychologically or sexually.

#### **(iii) Honeymoon period:**

By this stage, the abuser has usually realised that he has lost ground with the woman and therefore apologises, cries, promises that it will never happen again, professes undying love, brings presents, etc. It is often the phase in

<sup>30</sup> Walker, L. E. (1979) *The battered woman*. (New York: Harper & Row)

which the woman is persuaded back into the relationship, as it appears that the abuser has turned back into the person with whom she originally fell in love. (However, it is important to note that some women find the idea of ‘honeymoon periods’ totally foreign; the abuse they experience may start and end in a random way, appears more linked to stressful periods of life – unemployment, pregnancies, illness etc. – or is not cyclical and more occasional. Other women may experience constant abuse without a break.)

In cases in which ‘honeymoon periods’ do occur, it might be useful to highlight that women may have fallen in love with the feeling of being absolutely central to the abuser’s life. When abusers are in this phase and appear vulnerable, women can reconnect to their tender feelings for the person they love, the father of their children, etc. It is imperative that the honeymoon phase is seen as part of a continuing pattern of power and control; that is, the perpetrator uses remorse or gifts as a way to absolve himself from the responsibility of the abuse, and to manipulate his partner into staying with him, in order to abuse her again.

### **Model B: Power and control wheel**

The group should already be acquainted with this theory from the last session. Look back at the handout (Appendix 16) and go through the different types of abusive behaviour explained in the wheel. Ask participants whether they can see how this behaviour is geared towards manipulating women into staying in the abusive situation.

It is important to explain that this model was developed in response to many women’s inability to relate to Walker’s ‘cycle of violence’ theory: they felt they never had a reprieve from the tension and the abuse, and were always ‘walking on eggshells’.

Open this up for discussion in the group. Do the women feel that they relate to one model rather than the other, or to both? Or do they feel that neither of these models effectively illustrates their abusive relationship? It is important to emphasise that there are many ways of looking at abuse, and it is not wrong if they cannot relate to either model.

### Exercise 3b:

- Take some examples of abusive behaviour and write them up on the flip chart. For example:
  - preventing his partner from taking or keeping a job;
  - threatening to take the children away;
  - calling her names, e.g. stupid, crazy, mad, slut, whore, lazy, ugly, a joke, etc.;
  - hitting or kicking her;
  - threatening to commit suicide;
  - forcing her to have sex;
  - using jealousy to justify actions;
  - saying she caused the abuse.
- Then ask the women how much responsibility they might feel for these kinds of abuse – could they try to give a percentage of responsibility for the abuse to each partner; for example, one woman might say that she thought the woman's responsibility was 50% and the abuser's was 50%.
- Write answers on the flip chart, and discuss the reasons for why the participants feel that a percentage of the responsibility lies with the victim.
- At this stage of the group, women will tend to take a lot of the responsibility for the abuse. It is important to stress that abuse is always 100% the responsibility of the abusers, even if many members do not fully accept this in these initial phases of the group.

You might want to do this same exercise in the last sessions: by then, usually the women's perception has changed, and as the group comes to a close, they tend to take on less responsibility for the abusive behaviour, and place it where it belongs – with the perpetrator.

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the session

Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Thank the women for showing their continuing commitment to the course, and ask them to complete the evaluation form.

## Trouble Shooting

- Asking the question ‘Why do women stay?’ can often make women feel defensive and on guard. Avoid using these kinds of statements and stick to questions like ‘Why is it hard to leave?’ or ‘What keeps women in abusive relationships?’
- When using Walker’s ‘cycle of abuse’ model, try to show that the ‘honeymoon period’ is also about power and control.
- Women may feel guilty, embarrassed, and ashamed for experiencing an abusive relationship. Stress the seriousness of their reasons for staying; for example, they may do so in order to try to ensure the survival and safety of themselves and their children. Also stress that, in attending this course, they are making steps for change.
- Be aware of the effect this session may have on women still in abusive relationships – and make sure that the women who are now free from their abusers respect and listen to their opinions, offer support, but do not advise them how to get away. Giving advice can be problematic, and no woman should feel under pressure to leave her partner at any time during the course. Be careful to manage this type of situation without offending the advice giver.
- Be prepared for a wide range of feelings and emotions being expressed in this session, and make sure that every woman gets a chance to talk about her own situation and how she feels about it.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.
- If you are concerned that a woman may confront her partner, or decide to leave, and you are worried about her safety, say to the group as a whole (without singling anyone out) that you are available after the session to help make a safety plan or to give professional advice about the most appropriate ways to move forward.





## **Session 4 Families and children**

### **Goals of Session 4:**

- Connect emotional patterns learned in childhood to difficulties in constructing healthy adult relationships.
- Understand how domestic abuse can affect children.
- Look at the differences between functional and dysfunctional families and how this can impact on children.
- Learn some practical ways of supporting children experiencing domestic abuse.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Families and their effects on children**

In functional families, children develop healthy boundaries, whereas in chaotic and unpredictable households they do not. As a result of growing up in a dysfunctional family, the child, and eventually the adult, may experience difficulty being in touch with her or his feelings, may often be in denial of her or his needs, and may find it hard to trust anyone. The child may also struggle with an overwhelming need to be in control, have low self-esteem and/or fear of being alone.

### **Exercise 4a:**

- Split the group into four sub-groups and give each a flip chart sheet and some marker pens.
- Assign one of the following topics to each group: Functional family; Dysfunctional family; Needs of children; Effects of abuse on children.
- For the first two topics, ask the groups to write on their flip chart examples of behaviours and/or situations that occur in that category. For the last two topics, ask the group to write down specific, not general, examples. Discussion time should be approximately 10 minutes. The result might look a little something like this:

**‘Functional’ family:**

This is when:

- children’s emotional needs are respected;
- children are encouraged to express their feelings;
- communication between family members is open and honest;
- the parents are relatively consistent;
- the behaviour of adults is predictable;
- there is a clear divide between children’s and adults’ responsibilities;
- realistic, flexible and humane rules govern the household.

**‘Dysfunctional’ family**

This is when:

- children are not encouraged to express themselves;
- there is a lack of honest and calm communication between family members;
- the child’s wellbeing is not considered;
- one or both parents are inconsistent and unpredictable;
- the household is often chaotic.

**Needs of children**

Children growing up need to:

- be loved, respected and cared for;
- be protected from harm;
- have an education;
- have nutritious food;
- have regular sleep patterns;
- be in close proximity to friends and extended family;
- have freedom of expression;
- have their opinions and feelings respected.

**Effects of abuse on children**

Children can experience both direct and indirect harm as a result of growing up in a dysfunctional or abusive family. These effects may include:

- disrupted sleep patterns and nightmares due to tensions in the home, arguments at night, and/or anxiety over the family situation;
- feeling isolated and cut off from other family members;
- not having their feelings listened to;
- experiencing feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, confusion, powerlessness;

- impact on education, including high levels of truancy from wanting to stay home with their mother;
- difficulties in making friends and other personal relationships;
- becoming a bully or the victim of bullies;
- physical ill-health: e.g. digestive problems, eczema, asthma, and so on;
- mental health issues: anxiety, depression, self-harming behaviour, etc.

Once the subgroups have finished their discussions, pin the sheets up on the wall to discuss the results as a group together. Ask if anyone has anything to add, or whether they agree or disagree with what has been written down.

Using the results of these exercises, move on to a more in-depth discussion about how the group thinks growing up in a dysfunctional family will affect children; for example, in dysfunctional families young children are often forced into a parenting role, as the parents are physically and emotionally unavailable, or very needy themselves. There are many ways in which women can relate to this topic – from their own upbringing, from their partners, and from what their children may have experienced. Ask them to speak of their own experiences as children themselves, and as mothers.

It is important to stress at this point that children are individuals and may respond to witnessing and/or experiencing abuse in different ways; for example, some may appear resilient and not exhibit any negative effects, whereas others may appear very distressed. Nevertheless, each person's experience is equally relevant.

This discussion may bring a lot of pain and maybe denial as to the consequences of growing up in dysfunctional families. When facing this session, therefore, it is really important to stress the positives: for example, the possibility of change, and that the first step towards this is the recognition of something negative. In relation to women's feelings of guilt about the impact on their children, it is important to stress that they did the best they could at the time, and that there are many important lessons that can be learned today from bad experiences in the past.

Some mothers and children use silence or denial to help them cope with the abuse they have experienced. Sometimes children will wait until they feel safe and are no longer in the violent environment before they start to talk about their feelings; however, most children appreciate an opportunity to

acknowledge the violence and to talk about what they are feeling. As this is a hard session for the women, use the following exercise to end on a more positive and practical note:

### **Exercise 4b:**

Ask the women for ideas on how they can best support their children now, and write their responses on the flip chart. Women who do not have children can be asked how they would support others' children, or how they would like to have been supported when they were children.

#### **Ideas:**

Suggest group members do some of the following with their children:

- Talk to your children.
- Listen to what your children have to say.
- Try to be calm and consistent with your children.
- Try to be honest about the situation.
- Reassure them that the violence is not their fault and that they are not responsible for adult behaviour.
- Try to explain that violence is wrong and doesn't solve problems.
- Respect your children; try not to break the trust that lies between you by lying directly to them.
- Encourage the children to talk about their wishes, dreams and feelings.
- Do some activities together and try and get some quality time with them.
- Encourage the children to draw or write about what is happening and how they feel about it.
- Ask the children's teachers for support.

You could suggest that women show their children the Women's Aid (UK) website for children and young people, The Hideout, or look at it together. This website has information, activities, a quiz and stories of children living with domestic violence. See <http://www.thehideout.org.uk/>.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

## **4. Closing the session**

Following on from previous sessions, and in particular Session 1, suggest to the women that one of the best ways of supporting their children is by taking care of themselves: allowing themselves more 'me-time', focusing on their 'personal touch', or giving themselves more of the basic rights from the Bill of Rights. Ask each participant in turn how they will try to incorporate being kind to themselves over the next week. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- This is a very painful and often depressing session for the women. They may find it distressing to look back at their own experiences of childhood, and/or they may feel guilt and shame at what their children have suffered. It is important to remind participants that individual counselling is available, and that there may be things they do not wish to disclose in the group setting. Explain that choosing not to share with the group may be a positive way of protecting oneself, and that, in doing so, boundaries are being set: this is totally fine. Make sure you tell the women you are available after the session to discuss anything that they might want to disclose in a one-to-one setting.
- Women without children may feel left out, but it is important to stress that this session is not primarily about being parents, but about the consequences of being brought up in a dysfunctional family. A good way of dealing with this issue is to ask women how they felt as children, and how they would have liked to have been supported and raised.
- Women who do have children may start to feel very guilty about the experiences their children have gone through, and think it is their fault. Explain that this is a very natural emotion, but that they are courageously making steps to change their situation, and therefore their children's, for the better. Also point out that the programme will deal with how to manage guilt later in the course.

- Women may worry that by bringing their sons up in an abusive environment, they will grow up to be perpetrators themselves. Domestic abuse is damaging to children in many ways, yet there are no consistent research findings to back up this inter-generational theory, and there is no proven automatic cause and effect relationship.
- The content of this session may also touch on issues from childhood that have never been discussed before. Most notably, women who have experienced sexual abuse as a child will find this session particularly difficult. If any woman is particularly distressed, the co-facilitator should be prepared to support her one-to-one outside the group setting.
- Make sure you have plenty of resources relating to children and domestic violence.
- There is no such thing as a perfect family! Healthy does not mean perfect. For example, fit and healthy people still get sick from time to time, just as a healthy, functioning family goes through rough patches. The important thing is to understand when a family moves from healthy to dysfunctional and damaging.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, or that of her children, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.

## Session 5 Boundaries

### Goals of Session 5:

- Gain a group definition of boundaries.
- Identify potential situations when boundaries are challenged.
- Look at positive ways of how to start asserting boundaries.
- Understand the link between lack of clear, healthy boundaries and domestic abuse.
- Realise the importance, but also the dangers, of asserting boundaries.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Boundaries and patterns of behaviour

This is an essential session, as having a lack of boundaries is one of the prerequisites for abuse. Developing healthy boundaries is fundamental to avoiding chronic victimisation.

One way of looking at boundaries is by asking the group to try to define what the term 'boundary' means to them. Often their definitions will be very unclear and confused, and this is a good way to test the level of awareness within the group.

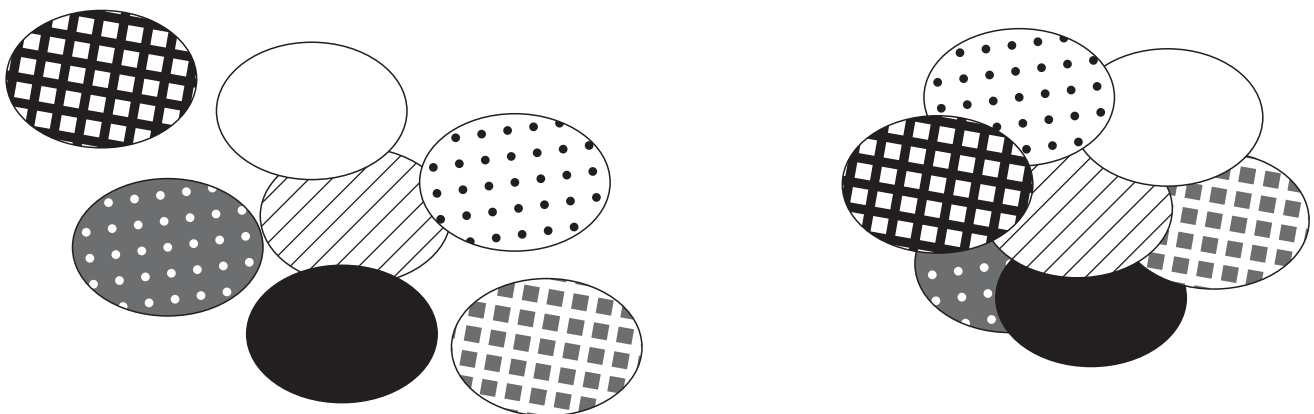
If the group finds it too difficult to define clearly what a boundary is, suggest a broad definition like: **'boundaries are limits drawn by each of us to define our separateness and identity, while helping to uphold our basic rights'**. Explain the importance of boundaries and how they should not be disregarded. A core essence of dignity, self respect, sense of worth and identity is and must be held within boundaries; each individual needs to have their personality respected if they are to thrive.



## Exercise 5a:

This visual exercise is helpful in explaining boundaries.

- Using differently coloured or patterned paper plates, ask a participant to demonstrate the current state of the boundaries within her life (see below). She can do this by labelling each plate with a different part of her life. For example, she is the striped plate, black check stands for co-workers, white for children, white spots for friends, black spots for parents, white check for siblings, black for partner/ex-partner.
- Ask the participant to place her plate in the middle, and arrange the others around it to reflect how her boundaries currently stand.
- The plates will probably look a lot like the second figure; the other plates are smothering the striped plate. Put the plates into something like the first figure and explain why these are healthier boundaries; they are allowing the striped plate more space to thrive.



Once the concept of boundaries is clearer, make sure you give practical examples of how the women can start working on achieving healthy boundaries. These could include:

- understanding your rights;
- increasing self-esteem;
- being in touch with feelings and needs;
- deciding where to set boundaries on the basis of rights and needs;
- developing assertiveness techniques to keep boundaries in place;
- understanding your patterns of control and learning to let go;
- developing equal mature relationships;
- gradually developing trust in self and others.

It is also important to introduce the idea that a price may have to be paid for setting clear boundaries. Participants should be encouraged to evaluate the consequences that certain choices may have, and to choose their battles very carefully. The group should also be encouraged to strategise as to the outcome they wish to obtain.

You might like to suggest to the group that if they are thinking about changing some boundaries in their lives, they discuss the initial phases with each other within the group setting to get some feedback before trying them out.

### **Exercise 5b:**

Using Appendix 17 on 'Setting boundaries', ask the women to read the examples and give their opinions on the situations. Ask the following questions:

- What do they think Olenka should have done in Example 1? Do they find it hard to assert their boundaries in the workplace?
- Can they relate to Sarah's position in Example 2? How do they feel about their own boundaries with their children or their parents? How could these improve?
- In Example 3, do they agree with Rozsa's decision to confront Hajna? Would they have done a similar thing if they were in that position? Do they think the confrontation and Hajna's initial sadness were worth it?
- Ask the women if they have experienced anything similar to these examples. How do they feel about asserting boundaries? Do they find it harder in some situations compared to others; (e.g. at home, with friends or in the workplace)?
- Can they see connections between a lack of healthy boundaries, and abusive relationships?

Control is another central issue that must be discussed with the participants at this point. As women learn to set boundaries and gain more control over their life, they must also analyse their belief system linked to control. Power and control are central issues in abusive situations, so changing the belief system on control is a complex matter. It is very important that a clear divide is made on what we think we can control as opposed to what we can really control; the women should recognise what we have and do not have a right to control. The only real control we have a right to exert is over ourselves – our goals, our choices, our decisions, our responsibilities, and our actions.

## 5. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

## 6. Closing the session

Discuss the 'personal touch' for the week ahead. Thank the women for showing their continuing commitment to the course, and ask them to complete the evaluation form.

## Trouble Shooting

- It is crucial that women's safety is discussed within this session. You should point out that, although asserting boundaries is positive, it is important to practice in safe situations, such as the support group. If any woman feels she would like to start asserting boundaries with an abusive partner or ex-partner, arrange a one-to-one session as soon as possible to go through her individual support plan and carry out more risk assessment. It is never a good idea to practice asserting boundaries on an abusive partner/ex-partner.
- Be a good role model with regard to setting boundaries and being consistent within the group.
- Make sure lots of possible boundary conflicts are discussed: don't stick just to one issue, and give everyone a chance to give examples.
- Explore different areas of life and the possible conflicts that can arise in each of those areas.

## **Session 6**

# **Coping with grief, fear and guilt**

### **Goals of Session 6:**

- Acknowledge and start to understand the feelings of grief, fear and guilt that accompany abusive relationships.
- Learn to manage the feelings of grief, fear and guilt more effectively.
- Learn practical ways of coping with anxiety.
- Understand how to overcome the cycle of shame.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Grief, fear and guilt**

#### **a) Grief**

It is important to discuss the feelings of grief, sorrow and pain that are often experienced when abusive relationships come to an end. Ending relationships is always painful. Women will face the failure of an important personal commitment, and must mourn the end of a relationship in which – despite the problems – there are likely to have been deep ties. At the outset of the relationship, women will have hoped for trust, companionship, love and physical intimacy. The perpetrator may also often be the father of the woman's children. The woman may have overwhelming feelings of loss and solitude when she leaves, or considers leaving, her abuser. Far from feeling relieved by ending the abuse, some women may experience waves of pain coming to the surface.

In the safe environment of the group it is important to legitimise and give space to these feelings. It is also essential to understand that life free from abuse is not the only thing needed for happiness.

If the discussion on pain or grief becomes too overwhelming, make sure to give some positive messages of change and some indications on how to handle these feelings.

There are many techniques for exploring grief, fear and guilt, one of which is identifying a 3-step process. It is a good idea to write this process on the flip chart and discuss with the group:

**Step 1: Understanding the stages of grief:**<sup>31</sup>

- Denial. ('It's not really happening, and if it is, it isn't that bad'.)
- Anger. ('He is not loyal to his promises; he will never change; why should I be alone to fight this?')
- Bargaining. ('Maybe if I try harder, or if I do what he wants – e.g. stop working, or have another baby – things will be better.')
- Depression. ('Nothing will ever change, I can't do anything.')
- Acceptance. ('I did the best I can, now I must think for myself and children. I deserve a better life.')
- Hope. ('I know I can control my destiny.')

**Step 2: Get support from friends, family and professionals.**

**Step 3: Explore new possibilities for yourself:** try new things, meet new people, and face new challenges.

**b) Fear and anxiety**

These two feelings are very common in violent situations, or on leaving abusive relationships. However, as they are often confused, this may lead to higher levels of anxiety for non-threatening situations, but lower levels in dangerous ones.

**Fear** is a primary feeling working to activate our response system to protect ourselves; it is a positive feeling and works in our best interest. Anybody leaving, or thinking about leaving, an abusive situation should have rational fear.

In contrast, **anxiety** is an apprehensive uneasiness of mind over an anticipated ill.

It is really important that survivors gain the ability to differentiate between the realistic fear of impending danger, and general anxiousness. One of the ways of working through this distinction is a step-by-step fear assessment. Again, have this written on the flip chart for discussion with the group.

<sup>31</sup> Kübler- Ross, E. (1969) *On death and dying* (New York: Macmillan).

**Step 1:** Gather information from knowledgeable professionals about your options for taking action.

**Step 2:** Identify your choices.

**Step 3:** Make a decision about what action seems right for you.

**Step 4:** Be centred and act with awareness.

**Step 5:** Be sure you are in a safe place for yourself and your children.

**Step 6:** Take action.

As fear and anxiety can be incredibly paralysing, remind the women to try and take one step at a time.

### **c) Guilt**

Discussing and working on the issues linked with childhood dysfunctional legacies, and the consequences for children living in a violent household, can result in a strong sense of guilt for women attending the group. These feelings should be acknowledged without becoming paralysing, and should as much as possible be channelled into taking responsibility. It is important to recognise the suffering that has been caused, make amends if possible, and move on to a position of strength in which you guide your actions towards security and shelter.

### **Exercise 6a:**

Some important questions you should ask the group are listed here. It is a good idea to pick out key words that the women repeat when answering the questions, and write them up on the flip chart. This way the women can see that they are not alone in their feelings of guilt and/or shame:

- Do you feel guilty because you feel you are never doing enough?
- What kinds of things make you feel guilty?
- Which ones are valid, and which ones are guilt trips? How do you recognize the difference?
- Has your religious training or your religious beliefs influenced your sense of guilt?
- Does the community which you come from influence your sense of guilt?
- How do you deal with a guilt trip?

## **Exercise 6b:**

How do we move from guilt to responsibility?

- Hand out Appendix 18 to the members and discuss the cycle of shame with the group.
- Can they relate to this cycle?
- Have they created ways for dealing with these feelings, and – if so – are they positive or negative? Do they have any more suggestions to add to the positive cycle?
- Explain that, by overcoming these feelings, the women are no longer being controlled by negative emotions as they are positively controlling them themselves.
- Discuss with the group how this is connected to building self-esteem.
- Finally, ask each member to come up with one positive affirmation of herself. It is up to her whether she shares it with the group or not.

## **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

## **4. Closing the session**

As this session might elicit depressive responses from the group, make sure to leave some time at the end to restore a good atmosphere. You might want to share a song, a reading or something uplifting. Also stress the importance of giving oneself the weekly 'personal touch'. Ask group members to complete the mid-course evaluation form.

## **Trouble Shooting**

- Do not dismiss or try to wash over any sadness or tears. Because the session is about managing emotions, it is important to give the women time to express their sadness. Do not hurry them through explaining how they feel.
- There might be some reluctance in admitting they feel depressed, thinking that they should 'pull themselves together' or 'get a grip'. It is important to get the right balance between explaining that it is OK to have these feelings and explaining how to deal with them, so they are not at the mercy of their negative emotions.
- This session can lead to other discussions on self-harm, depression, anxiety, eating disorders and so on. These are all important and relevant issues, and the group's experiences, often shared, should be validated. However, try to keep the session from sticking with a discussion of these issues, only. Keep focused on dealing positively with negative emotions.
- Have available resources and support relating to eating disorders, self-harm, depression, etc., and remind the group that you are available for one-to-one sessions.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan.





## **Session 7    Coping with anger**

### **Goals of Session 7:**

- Realise that anger is a natural emotion, and in the right circumstances can be channelled into positive use.
- Understand the potential dangers in unresolved anger.
- Learn how to manage angry emotions constructively.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Anger**

Anger, like fear, is a very important feeling that arises when we perceive that our boundaries are being trespassed. There are many reasons why we might feel anger: for example, if we feel threatened with harm, if our rights are not respected, or if we feel severe injustice. It is a powerful feeling that can lead to positive action, but can also put oneself at risk.

### **Exercise 7a:**

- Ask the group to think of positive situations (personal or general) to which anger has contributed in some way.
- Write the answers up on the flip chart.
- The sheet can then be pinned on the wall for the following sessions as a reminder that anger can be controlled and channelled into good.
- Some examples are:
  - abolishing the slave trade;
  - women fighting for the right to vote;
  - the Civil Rights movement;
  - a survivor of rape bringing the attacker to justice.

For women in psychologically and physically abusive situations, anger is often a strongly felt and deeply hidden feeling. Anger with an abusive partner can be very dangerous, and although more women than we commonly think become openly angry with the perpetrators, many others – and most, over time – learn to ignore and hide their feelings of anger. Furthermore, most

cultures socialise girls and women to be nice, polite and sweet; women are not encouraged to express anger. While an angry boy is seen as fulfilling the masculine stereotype, an angry girl is more harshly reproached; it is seen as unladylike, unbecoming, hysterical, over the top, or melodramatic. At this point it is worthwhile to ask the group about their own experiences of expressing anger as girls and young women.

Survivors' anger can often be destructive and badly placed; for example, sometimes they may lash out on social workers or supportive friends, rather than confront their abuse, or the shortcomings of the legal system. It is important to find ways of encouraging women to express anger, and help them channel it into constructive solutions.

### **Exercise 7b:**

- Using the Anger Management handout (Appendix 19), discuss ways of dealing with anger-inducing situations.
- Ask the group how they deal with their anger. Do they think these ways are positive?
- Ask them to think of positive ways of dealing with their anger, and write up positive suggestions on the flip chart.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Ask the group to think of their own personal anger-management mantra. At this point, you should also begin to discuss closure issues. (Please read Session 12 on this). Ask group members to complete an evaluation form.

## Trouble Shooting

- This programme is not intended as group therapy. For this reason, you should not get drawn into an in-depth discussion of childhood feelings. If this is happening, or if the group is intensely seeking definite answers, you might think about suggesting referral to individual therapy. Some of the people in the group may not know what therapy entails, so you might want to invite a therapist to this session to explain the process briefly. It is very important that any therapist working with survivors has an extensive background on domestic violence and survivor therapy.
- Time is a real factor for this session. It is likely that the women will be talking a lot throughout the whole session, so you might consider asking how they feel about shortening or forgoing the break for this session.
- Some women will be scared or unsure about expressing their anger, as – before coming to the support group – they will most likely have suppressed it. Remind the group that this is a safe and non-judgmental place where they will not be reproached for sharing their feelings.
- Advise the women to avoid confronting their abusive partners/ex-partners about their anger. This session is strictly about how group members can cope with their own anger: one has control only over one's own feelings and no one else's.
- In this session, the facilitator should stress the need for **extreme caution** in expressing anger with an abusive partner or ex-partner. Emphasise that the safety of the woman is at all times paramount. As before, if any woman wants to discuss her personal situation, arrange a one-to-one session to go through her safety plan and carry out another risk assessment.



## **Sessions 8 and 9**

# **Assertiveness skills and boundary setting**

### **Goals of Sessions 8 and 9:**

- Gain a group definition of assertiveness.
- Examine why women, in particular, can find it hard to be assertive.
- Discuss the 'Bill of Rights' (Appendix 12) in relation to assertiveness, and understand how these work together.
- Differentiate between assertiveness and aggression.
- Understand how to maintain safety while being assertive.

### **1. Beginning the sessions**

The next five sessions on various aspects of assertiveness (8–12 inclusive) need to be developed consequentially. It is important to strike the right balance between theory, discussion, group support and practice; for this reason the next two sessions will be presented together, and it is for you to decide when to end one session and start the next.

Recap what was covered in the last session, and sum up briefly what will be discussed in this session and in the next few sessions.

### **2. Assertiveness skills and boundary setting**

#### **Exercise 8/9a:**

- Ask the participants to share what comes to mind when you say the word assertiveness.
- Write up all answers on the flip chart for discussion.
- Using the flip chart, ask the group to think of one definition of assertiveness.

Sometimes negative comments result from the above exercise. Often assertiveness is identified with aggression, and may consequently be considered particularly negative when displayed by women; images of the whore, the witch, and the bitch all feed on the idea of hysterical, angry, aggressive females, who are crazy and unpredictable. Not surprisingly, women may be afraid of exploring assertiveness if they believe it to be associated with such images. They may also be concerned that, by setting boundaries, they may lose friends and relatives.

It is important to discuss how changing one's behaviour and re-establishing boundaries may lead to conflict and tension in some relationships; but by demanding self-respect and the respect of others, one can gain a better understanding of those who are real friends and those who are not. If setting positive boundaries leads to the loss of a few relationships, it may be for the better in the long run. Assertive behaviour is never aggressive and is always respectful of others. The group needs to define assertiveness as opposed to aggressiveness, and realise how being assertive stems from self-respect and respect for others.

### **Exercise 8/9b:**

It is important when discussing assertiveness to go back to the 'Bill of rights' (Appendix 12) and show how these rights are the basic bricks with which you build boundaries, and how you can protect them with assertiveness techniques.

- Ask the group to spend approximately 5 minutes completing the handout, 'Assessing levels of assertiveness' (Appendix 20).
- As a group, discuss which issues the women find the hardest to deal with assertively, and ask them to explain why.
- Connect each issue with a corresponding right from the Bill of rights.

## Comparing assertive and aggressive behaviour

Assertiveness	Aggressiveness
<p>You express your needs, wants and feelings without trespassing the rights of others.</p> <p>You are honest, sincere and direct.</p>	<p>You express your feelings and needs at the expense of others.</p> <p>You violate the rights of others and try to dominate.</p>
Why the need to be assertive?	Why be aggressive?
<p>To set boundaries.</p> <p>To request and obtain respect from others.</p> <p>To keep your self-esteem and a feeling of empowerment.</p> <p>To create honest, healthy relationships.</p>	<p>You are angry and you want to achieve your goal.</p> <p>You are not interested in other people's feelings.</p>
What do you get?	What do you get?
<p>You gain respect and feel proud and in control of your life.</p> <p>You choose the people that support you from among the ones that respect your boundaries.</p> <p>You learn to protect yourself from abuse.</p>	<p>You still feel angry, guilty and hungry for control.</p> <p>You are abusive to others, and can become violent.</p> <p>You end up destroying relationships.</p>

### 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### 4. Closing the session

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next session. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.



## Trouble Shooting

- Survivors are very familiar with aggressive behaviour, and the combination of aggressive patterns and anger may result in a lot of difficulty in understanding assertiveness, and its distinction from aggressiveness. The concepts can often be confusing, so you should leave enough time to discuss what each means. It is important to give a lot of examples, based on women's own experiences, and reassert the ways in which aggressive behaviour differs from assertiveness.
- **Extreme caution** must be expressed in this session about being assertive in abusive situations. Be sure to emphasise safety issues when working on assertiveness, and stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. Re-emphasise the opportunity for women to arrange one-to-one sessions if they want to discuss their personal situation.

# Session 10

## Assertiveness techniques

### Goals of Session 10:

- Gain a better understanding of assertiveness.
- Learn practical ways of being assertive.
- Gain more confidence in being assertive.
- Realise the difference between assertiveness and aggression.

### 1. Begin the session

The next session follows on from the previous two and looks in more detail at various aspects of assertiveness. Sum up briefly what has been covered so far, and what will be discussed in this session and in the next few sessions.

### 2. Assertiveness techniques

It is important at this stage to work out what assertiveness techniques could be used in different situations, by using practical examples. (As pointed out above, women often find it difficult at the beginning to understand the difference between aggressiveness and assertiveness, and the examples will help here.)

#### **Example of an unsuccessful attempt to be assertive:**

*After the first session on assertive behaviour, Anca proudly reported to the group her behaviour with the ticket man at the train station. When he decided to close the service in front of her, even when she had already queued and risked missing her train, she started yelling at the top of her lungs that he was a lazy public servant, that he should be ashamed of himself and that she wished him every possible ill. The result was that he insulted her, closed the teller, and she missed her train by continuing to shout at him well after he had left.*

Very often when working on assertiveness, as women start setting boundaries, issues of anger arise and should be dealt with effectively. It is important to review the topic of anger as well as aggressiveness when dealing with assertiveness because sometimes, when survivors start using assertiveness skills, they realise how much abuse they have experienced in their lives. This may lead to overwhelming feelings of anger that may heavily interfere with

assertive behaviour. It is important that at some time during the sessions on assertiveness, the group leaders assess levels of anger and talk about feelings again.

In discussing the above example, group members should also consider alternative strategies which Anca could have used, in order to be assertive and achieve the end she wished. This could lead into a more general discussion of techniques for acting assertively. The following can be written on the flip chart and be used as a discussion point:

### **The Eight Golden Rules of Assertiveness**

- Choose your battles carefully. Determine your goals and decide exactly what you want to accomplish or change.
- Talk in the first person, be brief, and choose your wording carefully.
- Don't expect everyone to like your new boundary setting style. If they respond angrily and things are not working out as you hoped, drop the issue and leave.
- Try not to raise your voice. Be calm, firm and in control.
- Repeat and rehearse your speech before doing it for real.
- Do not apologise; setting a boundary is always appropriate.
- Repeat your statement if necessary.
- After the exchange, evaluate how you feel, how things went, what you got out of it, if it turned aggressive at any point, and how you could improve your assertiveness techniques for the future.

The following three assertiveness techniques can be very useful. Go through each with the group, giving lots of examples.

### **The broken record**

This technique is very useful when you are setting a boundary and the person you are talking to is not listening or beginning to argue with you. It is a simple technique in which you make an assertive statement, and if necessary just repeat and repeat and repeat it. The idea is to be repetitive and unrelenting.

**Example of a successful use of the broken record assertiveness technique:**

*Raveena was having trouble getting the plumber to come and repair her leaking sink. Every time Raveena called the plumber, he gave her an excuse and told her he would call back to let her know when he could come. Needless to say he never did call or turn up to fix the sink.*

*After learning the broken record technique, Raveena drove up to his store early in the morning when she knew she would find him and said: "I need to have my sink fixed, please tell me when you can come, or if you can't come within three days I will find another plumber". He answered: "Oh, yes, Madam, I was going to call you, I'm almost finished and will come as soon as possible".*

*Raveena answered: "Very well, when are you coming?"*

*Plumber: "Very soon, I promise."*

*Raveena: "Very well, when are you coming?"*

*Plumber: "Listen, Madam, I know you need it fixed, and I'm absolutely sure I can make it sometime between tomorrow and the day after."*

*Raveena: "That is progress, but I need to know exactly when you are coming."*

*Plumber: "I can't be that precise because I don't know when I will finish this work I'm doing."*

*Raveena: "You can be very precise, because you can come tomorrow at 8am, and after you have finished your work at my house you can go and finish the other one."*

*Plumber: "OK lady, tomorrow at 8."*

*Raveena: "I'm going to call you tonight at 5 and tomorrow morning at 7.30, just to make sure you remember."*

*Plumber: "You don't need to, I'll come."*

*Raveena: "Thank you, but I will call. See you tomorrow!"*

**The 'I' message**

This technique is best applied when trying to change an unsatisfactory situation. It is not appropriate for making or refusing a request.

**Example of the use of the 'I' message technique:**

*Solange is upset because her 28-year-old son Bastien only comes by to leave his dirty clothes and then to pick them up a few days later. To explain how she feels about the situation, and to assert her boundaries, Solange confronts Bastien by saying the following: "I feel upset that you drop in only to leave your dirty clothes and then leave. I feel used. I'd rather meet you for a coffee, or do something together that we both enjoy like seeing a movie or playing tennis. I feel that washing your dirty clothes is not my responsibility since you are a grown adult. If you need to use my washer, maybe we can arrange a time that you can come and use it on your own."*

In this case Solange has identified her feelings ('I feel upset'), described the situation non-blamefully ('You leave dirty clothes and then leave'), explained the effect of the behaviour ('I feel used'), and described the behaviour she would like instead: 'Do something together/use it [the washer] on your own').

**Exercise 10:**

- Hand out blank sheets of paper, and ask the women each to think of a situation in the past where their boundaries were invaded but they did not have the confidence or the techniques to be assertive.
- Participants should write down briefly how they would have liked to respond to that situation, using the four phases of the 'I message' technique:
  - Identify your feelings.
  - Explain the behaviour.
  - Explain the effect of the behaviour on you.
  - Describe the behaviour you would prefer.
- Ask the women if anyone would like to read their example out to the group.

### **Getting out of a situation that is out of control**

The third technique is to get out of a situation that is getting out of control – for example, if the person is getting nasty, offensive, derisive, sarcastic, or aggressive. In this case, closing remarks like the following should be used:

- “This is not working out. Let’s talk when things are calmer.”
- “I have a right to be heard and I have a right to be respected.”
- “I don’t allow anybody to talk to me like that.”

After ending the conversation, quickly walk away or hang up the phone. If the person is really interested in proper and equal communication, they are likely to be more careful in the future. If this does not happen, then it will be evident that they are aiming to maintain power and control, and disregard the rights of others.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Encourage finding a ‘personal touch’ for the next session in the area of need that has been acknowledged. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- Try to make the session fun when discussing examples. This way you can show participants that assertiveness can be positive!
- Some members of the group may feel they are being rude when they are assertive. Ask why they think they are being rude, and go back to the discussion of boundaries and rights to show that they have a right to assert their boundaries. It is important to expose the myths about women being assertive.
- Emphasise that **extreme caution** is necessary before using assertive techniques in an abusive or potentially abusive situation. Be sure to talk about safety issues when working on assertiveness, and stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount.

## Notes

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## Session 11

# Dealing with requests and authority figures

### Goals of Session 11:

- Understand why it is difficult to make and refuse requests.
- Learn how to make a request assertively.
- Learn how to refuse a request assertively.
- Understand why authority figures are often problematic for survivors.
- Learn how to deal assertively with authority figures.

### 1. Begin the session

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### 2. Making and refusing requests

Making and refusing requests can often be very difficult for women, and may be particularly challenging for survivors. You can start this session by working from examples and introducing the issues as they arise from the group discussion.

### Exercise 11a:

- On the flip chart, write a few examples of refusing and making requests. The following are some suggestions:

#### Refusing a request:

- Thank you for the offer, but I won't be able to come next Friday because I already have other plans.
- Unfortunately I won't be able to help you with your preparations because I have a commitment with the community centre that day.

#### Making a request:

- I need to ask you a favour. If you are available, could you please baby-sit my children tomorrow morning from 10.00 to 11.30 because I have a doctor's appointment that I don't want to miss?
- Could you please pick up some bread and milk when you go to the shop?



- Split the group into pairs and have them take turns in refusing a request and then making one.
- After they have done this for five minutes, regroup and discuss any difficulties they faced in the exercise.

## Why is making a request so hard?

- **Low self-worth**

Usually, the fundamental difficulty in making a request stems from a lack of self-worth. We don't think we deserve or have the right to make a request, and think that other people's time is more valuable than our own. Of course, we are worthy and we need to treat ourselves as such. Refer back to the Bill of Rights (Appendix 12) to justify this stance.

- **Fear of rejection**

We may be afraid the person will say no and that we will feel rejected by their refusal. It is important that we keep in mind that if the other person is not abusive, he/she is refusing the request, not rejecting us as a person. We will all have had our share of refusals in life, and we can probably handle another one.

- **Need to be in control**

Asking for something means that we need help: we realise that we can't control everything. For some women this is a very threatening thought. Many survivors have suffered from a chaotic and unpredictable life that is lived in many abusive families, and, as a result, have developed a deep need to control their environment. However, control is more often imagined than real.

In the light of their new awareness of boundaries, rights and assertiveness, participants may now be starting to have a different (and better) view of what 'control' means. Making requests should enable group members to start to feel stronger and more capable, and thus be able to set boundaries in an appropriate manner and ask for help when needed.

- **Fear of using others**

Also linked to our sense of self-worth is the fear that, by making requests of others, we are using them. If, however, we are making our request in an honest and open way, we can also accept the fact that the other person has a right to say no. The responsibility of being available to others (or not) belongs to the other person.

## **Why is refusing a request so hard?**

- **We don't know how to say no in an assertive way**

It may be difficult to see a refusal simply as establishing a boundary. Instead, it may be easier to fall into the trap of feeling guilty, or obliged to comply.

- **We feel selfish**

It is difficult to refuse a request because we may feel selfish by putting our needs and desires first. Remember that our self-worth should be at least equal to the worth of others.

- **Fear of rejection**

We are afraid that, if we refuse requests, we are not going to be liked any more. We want people to like us, and our fear of rejection often brings us to do things we would rather not. It is important to bear in mind that people who really care about us will appreciate us for whom we are, and will like us even if we set clear boundaries.

- **We want to be in control**

We want to handle everything, and often think we can do anything and handle all requests. Saying no may make us realise we cannot handle everything that comes our way, even though we like feeling that we can and having people see us that way. We should work on feeling like a valuable human being, even when we say no to certain things.

- **It might be dangerous**

If we are in a confrontation with someone who is abusive, it may be dangerous to refuse a request as they may become violent. In these circumstances, our fears may be realistic, and we must keep in mind that safety is always the first priority.

## **Helpful tips for saying NO:**

- When you say no, say it clearly and without any detailed explanation.
- You can postpone your decision. If you are unsure of the request, or if you want to say no but do not have the courage, ask for time to think about it. (This is very important to remember!)
- Minimise your apologies – there is nothing to apologise for.

## Dealing with authority figures

Dealing with authority figures may be very challenging for women who have experienced domestic abuse, since they are perceived as people in a position of power. It is difficult to be assertive with people such as a boss, lawyer, doctor, social worker, judge, and so on; but it is important to keep in mind that everyone has the same rights to respect, and these authority figures should also respect you.

A technique that may be useful in these situations is the broken record technique, especially when you believe that the authority figure is ignoring your opinion or dismissing your comments. If, however, you feel the authority figure is hostile or abusive, leave as soon as you can. You should never stay in a situation you sense is dangerous.

## 3. Question time

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

## 4. Closing the session

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next session. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

## Trouble Shooting

- Try to make the session fun when discussing examples or role plays.
- The group may struggle with the exercises. Explain that assertiveness takes time and lots of practice, so they need to continue with the different role plays.
- Some of the group may feel they are being rude by being assertive in the role-plays. Ask why they think they are being rude, and go back to discussing boundaries and rights: explain that they have the right to assert their boundaries. It is important to expose the myths about assertiveness not being appropriate for women.
- Stress that the safety of the woman is at all times paramount and remind members of the opportunity for individual sessions.

## **Session 12**

# **Practicing assertiveness**

### **Goals of Session 12:**

- Build confidence in using assertiveness skills.
- Identify and learn how to overcome the stumbling blocks women may face when being assertive.
- Start dealing with the reality of the course finishing.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Practicing assertiveness**

There are a variety of ways to get the group to work on practicing assertiveness and it is really important to make time for this.

It is imperative to give a word of caution about real-life situations when practicing assertiveness as a group. For example, in being assertive with a verbally abusive boss, one might restore one's rights but also risk being fired. Being assertive with an abusive partner could be dangerous. Assertiveness should be used with extreme caution in abusive situations, where the key factors are first of all security and safety.

### **Exercise 12:**

- Split the group into pairs.
- Give each pair one of the following role play situations and ask them to take it in turns to practice the assertiveness techniques they learnt last week.
- After they have done this for approximately 5-10 minutes, regroup and discuss any difficulties they faced in the exercise.
  - Your lawyer doesn't return your calls and you are not informed of your legal situation.
  - Your co-worker regularly leaves early and asks you to substitute for him/her. You would like to take turns in leaving early.

- Your sister often leaves her children with you when she goes shopping, but every time you ask her to look after your children, she always has some reason why she can't.
- Your non-abusive boyfriend is in the habit of coming home from work, taking a shower, and then sitting at the computer, always saying he needs some 'down time' after work. You feel that when you get home it would be nice to eat dinner first and then relax together afterwards. You need to work out a compromise solution that will suit both of you.
- Your 17 year-old son comes home from his soccer training and leaves his dirty clothes in the bag for you to wash and get ready for the next training. You think it's time he took some responsibility for his personal activities.
- You have always been expected to prepare meals and do the dishes for your family and would like to renegotiate the household responsibilities.
- Your mother always expects you to call her at 8.30 every evening, but it is not always convenient for you to do so.
- One of your co-workers expects you to take care of a tedious job that is not in your job description but is in his/hers. You have always done it, but now want your co-worker to take over this responsibility.

### 3. Dealing with closure issues

Another topic that should be dealt with in these sessions is the forthcoming ending of the group sessions. At this point, the group is likely to have become a really important part of the women's lives. Through sharing their personal experiences, the participants realise – often for the first time in their lives – that experiences of abuse are common to many other nice, intelligent and capable women. This knowledge helps lessen the feelings of isolation and guilt that the perpetrator has often deliberately instilled in them. The group experience is often the first time that the women have been able to see the effects of violence on other women and children, thus creating empathy towards other survivors, but also toward themselves. They are also able to see the value of other women, and feel anger at their unjust treatment.

Sometimes the issues of dependency that are so prevalent in abusive relationships are transferred to the group; therefore, at this stage, it is important to start dealing with the way the women feel about the group experience drawing to an end. Usually, they find it a very sad and depressing thought, and you need time to work through this "mourning" as a group, so that the feelings of depression can be contained when the end arrives. This will give

the group members some time to think of how they would like to close the group; for example, perhaps by having a party, or a meal to which each member brings food and drink.

#### **4. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

#### **5. Closing the session**

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next session in the area of need that has been acknowledged. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

#### **Trouble Shooting**

- Time is likely to be an issue in this session. Make sure there is plenty of time for practicing assertiveness techniques with a variety of different role plays. By now the group should be gaining confidence and will therefore become increasingly verbal. Allow extra time for this growth, but try to keep to the session format.
- **Extreme caution** must be expressed in this session about being assertive in an abusive situation. Do talk about safety issues when working on assertiveness. Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. Explain that, in their day-to-day lives, women should take things slowly and allow enough time to adapt to these big changes on which they are embarking. It is always important to think through the consequences of change.
- If the women are sad about the course coming to an end, make sure you stress the positives that come with closure. It will be sad, but it will also be exciting. Suggest that it is an opportunity to use the practical techniques they have learnt to deal with sadness, and to focus on the positive aspects of their lives.

## Notes

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## **Session 13**   **Healthy relationships**

### **Goals of Session 13:**

- Identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Gain an understanding of the often unrealistic expectations of stereotypical representations of romantic love.
- Distinguish when conflict is healthy from when it is unhealthy.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed today. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Healthy relationships**

#### **Exercise 13a:**

Start a discussion on love: ask group participants to define true love. Write their answers on the flip chart. There will probably be a mix of answers, but single out ideas like the following for further discussion:

- two becoming one;
- finding a soul mate;
- love at first sight;
- finding one's other half;
- feeling whole, complete.

All the definitions of true love listed above are seen as romantic, yet they can be damaging as they imply that people are incomplete as individuals and essentially lacking until they find another person with whom to merge.

Suggest to the group that if 'two becomes one', it is likely that one personality dominates the other. Instead of this, ask the women what they think of a relationship not as one entity, but as three. Within a relationship, there are two autonomous individuals with their own, but probably similar, interests and beliefs, and then there is the third entity, the couple. By having a third entity, the individuals do not need to be dominant or subordinate as there is freedom to be oneself. This 'couple' is not merely a concept; it can make decisions or have ideas that don't exist in the singular individual; for example, the separate



individuals may not be able to decide to buy a house, but as a couple this decision can be taken. Importantly, this third entity can get damaged and cease to be, but although it may affect the individuals, it does not destroy them; the death of a 'we' does not stop either individual from being themselves and moving on, always as an individual whole, and maybe creating another 'we' with someone else in the future<sup>32</sup>.

### **How does an equal relationship begin?**

People with a healthy sense of self-worth tend to have effective boundaries in place and normally attract similar people. Healthy relationships tend to start in much the same way as unhealthy ones; there is an initial attraction usually because of similar interests, a shared sense of beliefs, and physical chemistry. A mature, adult relationship starts from there, and must be nurtured with time, patience, laughter and understanding in order for it to grow.

In contrast, unhealthy relationships very quickly become intense and fast-paced; and early, premature commitment may be a sign of an unhealthy relationship setting in. Furthermore, abusive partners often try to "take over" the woman's life, for example by offering to solve her accommodation, child or work-related problems. Women must be wary of any solutions that aim to take away their power and control in the situation.

#### **Example:**

*Emily was a divorced woman with two children. She worked long hours and started very early in the morning. She was forced to move back with her parents when she divorced so they could help her with the childcare. Emily soon became very unhappy because she felt she wasn't spending enough time with her children. When Emily was feeling incredibly low about her life, she met Andrew who arrived like a 'knight in shining armour'. He offered to take on responsibility for her and the children. Within the first month of meeting, Andrew asked Emily to leave her job, be a stay-at-home mum and move in with him. Initially, it seemed like a dream come true for Emily, so she accepted his offer. However, once Emily was in Andrew's domain, he rapidly became very abusive with her and her children. She then realised that it wasn't love and understanding that motivated his offerings, but his need to control and dominate. At that point Emily was jobless and felt quite powerless.*

### Exercise 13b:

- Using the Duluth Equalities Wheel (Appendix 15), discuss within the group the different elements of an equal relationship.
- Go on to compare the differences between the Equalities wheel and the Duluth Power and Control Wheel.
- Ask group members how they would feel as women if they were involved in a healthy relationship, and write down their answers on the flip chart.

### Love and romance

Romantic love often plays a major part in how we construct our ideas of love and relationships; yet many of the ideas we get from television, romantic novels and movies are not really good representations of equal relationships. Some are very stereotypical representations of what is commonly believed to be 'true love', and the roles of men and women within it.

### Exercise 13c:

- Ask the women what they think is 'romantic' and write their answers on the flip chart.
- Looking at the flip chart, ask the group to come up with examples of how romance is portrayed in society; e.g. Hollywood 'chick flicks'; fairy tales for young girls in which the knight rescues the helpless maiden; soap operas; women's magazines, etc. (It might be a good idea to bring in some examples yourself). Can the women relate to these depictions of romantic relationships? Do they think they are realistic?
- Looking again on the Duluth Equalities Wheel, do members of the group think that stereotypical romantic relationships can be equal?

Romance relies heavily on stereotypical ideas of femininity and masculinity that can be incredibly alienating for many women (and men) in real life. This heterosexual romantic ideology boxes women into strict categories that often do not relate to the realities of their lives, and tries to deny them the freedom to express themselves emotionally, physically and sexually. The consequences of such stereotypical beliefs are feelings of inadequacy and alienation.

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<sup>32</sup> Friedman, M. (1998) 'Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy' in P. French and H. Wettstein (eds) *The Philosophy of Emotions, Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 22 (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, pp/162-81

It is more helpful to realise that men and women are in many ways very similar and often share the same wishes and feelings. Finding closeness within a partnership depends on recognising each person for whom they are, and not closing them in cages of “who or how they should be”.

Should there be conflict in relationships, and, if yes, how should it be dealt with? When there are two separate individuals, there will always be conflict at some point within the relationship. The challenge is to manage disagreement with respect.

### Exercise 13d:

- Using the flip chart, split the sheet in two with one section entitled Healthy Conflict and the other Unhealthy Conflict.
- Ask the group to think of examples that highlight both situations, and to give reasons for their suggestions. The following chart gives some examples.

Healthy Conflict	Unhealthy Conflict
Fairness in disagreements.	Unfairness in disagreements.
No fear of violence or verbal abuse.	The threat of abuse is always present.
The current issue of disagreement is discussed.	The current issue gets clouded by bringing up past problems, blaming relatives, etc.
Honest communication of feelings by using assertiveness techniques.	Denial of facts and attempts to put the other on the defensive.
Speaking one at a time.	Constant interruption, ignoring the other person, refusing to talk.
Agree on time out when tensions rise.	Tensions escalate to explosion point.
Respect.	Personal insults, name-calling.
Willingness to say “I’m sorry”.	Refusal to take responsibility when wrong, and a tendency to blame others.
Both have a feeling of having dealt well with the issue.	The person in control wins over the other.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Closing the session**

Encourage finding a 'personal touch' for the next and final session. Ask group members to complete the evaluation form.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- Some members may find it hard that their relationships, current or past, are not what the course deems healthy. They may feel this is totally their fault. Focus on the positives they have learnt and stress that, step-by-step, they have the power to change; this group is a stepping-stone to change.
- Some members may find this session hard as they feel they don't even know what their identity is any more. Ask a couple of well-thought-out questions that will get the women to start thinking about themselves as individuals. By joining this course, the women have decided autonomously that they deserve more and want to change their situation for the better.
- It is very important that the concept of healthy is not confused with being perfect. Stress the differences!
- Some members, if they are currently single, may feel too tired to even think of creating a healthy relationship. This is OK. If this comes up, use it as an exercise; e.g., ask the women what they think they gain from being single. Their lives are not just focused on their partners, and they can have fulfilling lives without them.



## **Session 14**

# **Endings and new beginnings**

### **Goals of Session 14:**

- Recap what has been learnt in the course.
- Celebrate the successes of the course and how far the women have come.
- Get to know each other in a less structured and more social setting.
- Gain an awareness of individual strengths.
- Accept the ending of the course.
- Anticipate new beginnings.

### **1. Begin the session**

Start the session as before by recapping the last session and briefly summing up what will be discussed in this final session. Ask the members about their 'personal touch'.

### **2. Endings and new beginnings**

The group has become a safe environment in which to experiment with new patterns of behaviour. For many women, it is the first time they have listened to other women and shared similar experiences. This breaks down their feelings of isolation and creates strong bonds between them.

For this reason, it is important to have started tackling the issue of closure early in the group sessions, and to recognise that ending the group may be difficult. However, by this point, the group members will be ready, even if also rather sad, for the group sessions to draw to an end.

You will probably have planned some special ending dinner or party for the final session. You could also suggest that each woman brings the group a present.

**Example:**

*At the closing of one group, Mai Ly made special stones for each woman. She had hand-painted a dozen small stones, and had attached a little note to each. She then asked each of the women (including the facilitators) to choose a stone with an attached message. It turned out that she had had specific women in mind when she wrote each message and painted the stone, and most of the women actually chose “their stone”. It was a very moving gift to the group.*

This is the moment to stress how much has been achieved. You might like to create a certificate for each woman congratulating her on the completion of the Power To Change Programme. The group is a fantastic way to start trying out new skills, but after that, they must become part of everyday life; i.e., assertiveness needs to become the regular way of dealing with issues.

It is important in closing to give each participant time to share what she has gained from the group. Stress how the sad occasion of the group ending is really a new beginning, allowing them to take the experience a step further into daily life. Also, there is no reason why friendships that have developed during the group must end. People can keep in touch and you may want to encourage the group to meet on its own after the end of the structured programme.

**Exercise 14:**

It is good for the women to have something to take away from the group, so we recommend personalising some pretty stones or decorative cards, and bringing these to the group.

- Go around the members one by one, asking each participant what she thinks her strengths are.
- Write these on the stone or card and give to the woman to take away with her.

### **3. Question time**

Allow a small amount of time for any questions relating specifically to this session. Again, state that you will be available for a short time after the session finishes for questions.

### **4. Evaluation**

It is important that – in addition to the weekly evaluation sheets – each woman fills out a Final evaluation sheet (Appendix 6). Explain the importance of evaluation and of giving women a chance to express anonymously how they feel, and have their voices heard.

### **5. Closing the session**

Even though this session is less structured than the rest, and is more social in its nature, it is still important to have a final closure. Thank the women for attending the course and talk a little about how you have found the group experience, highlighting all the positives. Ask each woman in turn to say what she feels to be the most important aspect of the course she is taking away with her. Explain that you will be available briefly after the session and for individual one-to-one support over the next couple of weeks, and can also refer the women on to other agencies, courses or services. Ask participants to fill out the Final evaluation form. Then it is time to say goodbye.

### **Trouble Shooting**

- Make sure resources for further support are available.
- Have information on courses or trips that you think the women may be interested in pursuing now that the group has finished.
- The social section is not structured like the rest of the course so it has the potential to be a little awkward at times. Make sure you have ideas for conversation starters ready in your head.
- Stress that the safety of the women is at all times paramount. It is good practice to arrange a one-to-one session with each woman to carry out a risk assessment now the course has finished, and to go through her safety plan, update if necessary, and work out what further support might be needed.



- It is not usually good practice to agree to meet up with the group again as it is important for the women to accept closure. However, the facilitator should evaluate the situation, and some flexibility may be allowed, if clear boundaries are set beforehand. Group members are, in any case, free to meet up as friends and individuals in their own time.

***One survivor's views on what she gained from attending a support group:***

*The conviction that my problems are real, and so are my feelings in relation to those problems. I learned patterns to deal with my problems, and gained a small community where I can be open.*

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# 8

## Informal self-help groups

### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

This manual focuses predominantly on formal support group programmes that have a set beginning, middle and end, and which use structured sessions involving specific exercises. In this chapter, however, we look briefly at open-ended informal self-help groups, where the emphasis is much more on the participants themselves deciding on the direction of the course and content of the group.

The main aim of this type of group is to strengthen and empower female survivors of abuse. Many of the benefits of participating in open-ended, informal self-help groups stem from the emphasis on participants themselves deciding on the direction and organisation of the course and content of the group. Through social interaction, participation in the decision-making process, and expression of their feelings, ideas, and experiences, the group members stimulate the development of their autonomy, self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional stability. They also gain strength and empowerment through their involvement in the group process itself, and in sharing experiences, ideas and opinions with other survivors.

This type of group has an open-ended and informal format, so it may often be more suitable for women who are unable to commit to regular sessions or for a long period of time.

If you know of women survivors who want to set up their own group, this chapter might be the most useful one for them. It is important to note, however, that although many elements of the previous chapters are less relevant to informal self-help groups, we still recommend reading the whole manual as there is considerable cross-over. For instance, Chapter 3, Group development and management, covers important issues that always need to be considered, such as:

- how to manage effectively the risk involved in running a group for survivors of domestic violence;
- how and where to advertise a group through the dissemination of leaflets and posters;
- how to liaise with other agencies to raise awareness of the group and increase referrals;
- how to manage the finances of the group, and where to look for funding.

Similarly, Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols, gives more insight into the inner workings of a group, and offers plenty of useful examples on how to deal with the problematic aspects of group work. You may also find some of the exercises helpful.

Although input from professionals is still needed, particularly in order to provide correct information and resources about local services, and to help with an understanding of risk and safety, they are not directly involved in the running of the self-help group.

## **8.2. BENEFITS OF SELF-HELP GROUPS**

Informal self-help groups are managed and organised by survivors, and there is no formal facilitator. One primary benefit, therefore, is that – in contrast to the more formal groups described in the previous chapters – the self-help group gives the participants space to decide autonomously and collectively where the focus of group sessions will lie.

One of the most important aspects is the group process itself; women are creating a space for themselves to relate to each others as peers, establish strong bonds with one another, and develop supportive relationships based on their shared experiences. This group dynamic generates an atmosphere of understanding, encouragement and support, which in turn reduces the feelings of loneliness, shame and isolation that so often accompany abusive relationships.

Women belonging to self-help groups have identified the following benefits as a result of their participation:

- feeling listened to and understood;
- feeling that they were not alone;
- being respected in their decisions;
- having a space for sharing (both their stories and emotions, and information about resources and/or other services in their community);
- gaining more knowledge about domestic violence;
- gaining proximity with other women through companionship and support;
- developing the autonomy to address some of their problems or concerns about their life situations.

## **8.3. RUNNING THE GROUP**

### **Setting up the group**

In order to set up a group, it is a good idea to have a core group of women to share the various responsibilities. Such a core group may be found among friends and acquaintances, via professional organisations, or from advertising the group in community announcements, conferences, seminars and so on. The core group should have enough time to meet regularly and organise the practicalities of running a self-help group effectively, especially in the initial phases, which tend to be the most time consuming. They should also be able to participate regularly in the meetings and share group facilitation tasks.

## Roles and responsibilities within the group

Unlike the two other models outlined in this manual, this type of group does not have a professional facilitator. The role of professionals in this group context is not one of leadership, decision-making or facilitation, but should be mainly in the capacity of consultancy; for example, by providing correct and up-to-date information and resources, supporting the core group when they face problems, or responding to particular group requests. It is important that any professionals from outside the support group respect the group's autonomy, and discuss and negotiate their involvement with the group.

The core group of women can fulfil the facilitation needs of the group. Alternatively, once the group is set up, participants can elect a facilitator for the next session or for a few sessions. It is important that the group members define, agree and commit to certain roles and responsibilities, such as:

- who will be responsible for the facilitation of the group, as a whole or for particular sessions?
- who will be the secondary facilitator, if this need is identified?
- who will do the preparation for the group sessions, e.g. preparing group materials, organising guest speakers if the group decides they would like this, tidying the venue, organising coffee-breaks and so on?

## Participants

Each group is defined by the women that constitute the group. All participants must be women. Although men can also experience domestic violence, men and women should not attend the same group, as this inhibits disclosure, may reduce women's sense of safety, and severely reduces efficacy. Survivors of domestic violence will often have had traumatic experiences with the opposite sex. In mixed-sex groups, women may not feel safe enough to talk honestly and freely about their life. Safety, and feeling safe, is of the utmost concern, and it is well known that women feel safer and more comfortable in a women-only environment<sup>33</sup>. Some women might also have a difficulty in expressing their anger in front of men. Others might take up valuable time of the group to defend men in general, because they are worried whether the men present might have been offended by a particular statement.

With regard to informal self-help groups, there are generally two types of participants:

- women who are interested in founding a self-help group and becoming a member of the core group (mentioned above), who have the availability to support other women and the skills to interact well in group situations;
- women who are interested in participating in a group that is already established and functioning.

For more information on the profile of participants, please see Chapter 3, Group development and management.

<sup>33</sup> Women's Resource Centre (2007) *Why women only? The value and benefits of women for women services* (London: Women's Resource Centre) p. 52 downloadable from <http://www.wrc.org.uk/downloads/Polycystuff/whywomenonly.pdf>

## 8.4. GROUP RULES

It is fundamental to establish some basic rules of functioning in order to guarantee the safety, equality and fairness of the group (see Appendix 11). The rules should be discussed and agreed as a group. It might be worth considering adapting a group contract for the purpose of encouraging all participants to stick to the group rules (see Appendix 8). If this is the case, all participants should have a copy of this document, which should be available for consultation during the meetings, and when possible fixed and visible for all participants to see.

There are some rules that are essential for effective group work, including:

- **Confidentiality:** The location of the group meetings and the names, identities and other personal information of group members must never be disclosed to anybody outside the group setting, at any time during or after the group. The only exception is when there is a serious threat to the life or health of a child; in such cases a professional should be informed, who will then be obliged by the law to inform the authorities (e.g. the police, or children and family services) about the child in danger.
- **Drugs/Alcohol:** Alcohol and illegal substances should not be brought to the group at any time. Members should not come to the group if they are under the influence of alcohol or any other mood-altering substances.
- **Violence:** No form of violence (verbal, psychological or physical) is allowed in the group under any circumstances.
- **Contacts:** You should agree on a contact strategy; for example, how to contact each other between meetings, or what to do if someone stops coming to the group and does not contact anyone to explain why. Agreeing safe means of contacting each other is particularly essential if any group member is currently involved in a violent relationship.
- **Respect:** All members must listen to and not interrupt each other, and should try to use positive and empowering language.

For more detailed discussion on group rules and contracts, please see Chapter 4, Group policies and protocols.

## 8.5. ORGANISATION AND FORMAT

### Organising the group

- **Duration**

The duration, timing and frequency of group sessions should be established between the women. Generally speaking, informal groups work on a rolling basis with women being able to join at different times. The format is not progressive as in formal groups because some members might not have attended previous sessions. (Punctuality for each session, and regular commitment to attend, are still important, however.)

- **Venue**

The space for the group should meet the required conditions for running a safe and accessible self-help group for survivors of domestic violence. For more information see Chapter 3, Group development and management.

- **Resources**

It is important to decide in advance what resources and materials will be needed, what expenses might be incurred, and how these are to be paid for; for example, you may need to allow for management expenses, payment of transport to the group for participants, cost of venue, etc. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, please see Chapter 3, Group development and management and Chapter 5, The Power To Change: programme models.

### **Format of the sessions**

Sessions are normally arranged by focussing on one issue per session. Group members choose the issues themselves. Participants can take it in turns to suggest a theme, or take a vote on what the women would like to talk about. Some of the exercises from this manual may also be used, but may need to be amended to fit this style of group.

Despite the fact that the style of group is informal, having a basic routine during the sessions improves the effectiveness of the group. For example:

- welcome the members of the group and spend some time talking about the highlights and/or concerns of the week;
- debate these issues, discuss an agreed theme, or continue with some reflection on a previously discussed matter;
- agree on a subject for the next meeting.

### **The first meeting**

It is particularly important to have an agreed structure for the first meeting, and to make time to discuss certain important elements of the group, such as goals, confidentiality and safety. These issues should also be discussed with any new members who join at a later date.

Plenty of time should be given to Icebreakers (see Appendix 9) so that the participants become familiar and more relaxed with each other. An initial discussion to clarify and agree the aims of the self-help group is important as it gives each a woman a chance to input into the group process. The roles of the participants can also be defined in this preliminary discussion; for example, who will assume the facilitation role and for how long.

### **Goals of the first meeting:**

- Create a warm, safe and welcoming environment for everyone attending.
- Meet all members of the group and learn a little about everyone.
- Discuss and agree the aims of the self-help group.
- Ensure that all participants understand about confidentiality and safety. (For more information on this, please see Chapter 3, Group development and management).

- Discuss and agree to hold the meetings in a particular and safe venue. The sessions could be continued in the same venue, but it is still important to discuss if the group have another proposal; for example, if they feel that the locality is unsafe or doesn't meet their needs.
- Decide on the duration, frequency and timing of the meetings.
- Discuss and agree date, time and subject matter of the next meeting(s).

## 8.6. TROUBLE SHOOTING

- The safety of the women is at all times paramount. If any woman wants to discuss her personal situation and wants to make changes, it is important that she is signposted to the correct support.
- It is worthwhile to note that group dependency is a potential problem in informal self-help groups.
- The women who organise the informal group need some form of mentoring in order to understand safety strategies and boundaries. The organisers must also be clear about how they can and cannot help the other women of the group.
- Make sure resources for further support are available.

For more information on troubleshooting, see the previous programme sessions.

### **Views from survivors:**

*It [the group] changed my way of thinking. Now I speak instead of keeping in silence.*

*I gained back something of my old self. My self-esteem is returning.*

*There is hope in my life again.*



## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Model letter – multi-agency working

### Your contact details:

Include details of any local or national networks to which you are affiliated

### Addressee's contact details

### Today's date

Dear .....

I am writing with regard to the self-help support group, 'Power to Change', that I facilitate.

'Power to Change' is run specifically for survivors of domestic abuse, and is based on the idea that women working together in a safe, friendly and non-judgmental environment can change their lives for the better. The formal programme is a psycho-educational group run in weekly 2-hour sessions over a period of 14/12/10 weeks. **Delete as appropriate.**

The three main aims of the support group are:

- to change patterns of behaviour learned by women within abusive relationships;
- to raise awareness of women's basic rights;
- to build self-esteem, self-determination and empowerment.

Domestic abuse includes physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. One in four women, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, age, sexuality, disability or lifestyle, will experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes.

Survivors often draw strength and benefit from interaction with other survivors of abuse. 'Power to Change' increases survivors' understanding of the dynamics of abusive relationships by working through the weekly activities; and, by sharing their experiences with other women, survivors' feelings of shame, guilt and loneliness diminish. For the self-help group to function effectively, however, participation must be an autonomous choice.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer the group's services to any survivors of domestic abuse with whom your agency works. Women who are referred to the group are under no pressure whatsoever to join, and all women prior to attendance undergo a full risk assessment which helps to determine whether they are at the right stage in their lives to participate in the course, and to do so safely. Both self-referrals and agency referrals are accepted.

I enclose a leaflet on the 'Power to Change' programme, which can be used for your further information, or be given to women who might wish to contact the service.

Thank you for your co-operation, and I hope to hear from you soon.

With best wishes,

## Appendix 2: Risk assessment tools

Over the past few decades, several instruments to assess the level of danger of a perpetrator of domestic violence and the extent of risk to the victim have been developed through research and practice. However, none of these instruments can, nor are they designed to, measure or predict risk precisely. Rather, they serve to gather information systematically and to compare it with previous experience and knowledge, in order to assess whether a victim is at risk of serious harm.

In multi-agency cooperation, it is important to share information and engage in co-ordinated risk assessment. Risk assessment should be carried out with the victims of violence – but only if there is a relationship of trust and support. It should also always be accompanied by safety planning.

There have been a number of different risk assessment models operating in the UK in the last few years. Below is a model<sup>1</sup> for assessing high risk, and tends to be used by Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs) with regard to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) for high-risk victims and survivors. The framework is, however, effective outside MARACs, and deals with all the important aspects of risk assessment.

Different risk assessment models are currently being reviewed and evaluated in the UK to create a national model. When this model is available it will be included in the PDF version of this manual on the Women's Aid website: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk>

<b>Questions<sup>2</sup></b> (DO NOT FILL IN SHADED BOXES)	<b>Yes</b> (tick)	<b>No/ Don't Know</b> (N/DK)	<b>Significant Concern</b>
1. Does partner/ex-partner have a criminal record for violence or drugs?			
If 'yes', is the record domestic abuse related?			
2. Has the current incident resulted in injuries?			
If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			
3. Has the incident involved the use of weapons?			
If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			

<sup>1</sup> CAADA (Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse) recommended risk indicator checklist for IDVAs and other agencies

<sup>2</sup> This was adapted from the South Wales Police check-list, using non-police language and assuming the IDVA or other professional will be discussing this with the client

Questions (DO NOT FILL IN SHADED BOXES)	Yes (tick)	No/ DK	Significant Concern
4. Has your partner/ex-partner ever threatened to kill anybody? If 'yes', which of the following? <i>(tick all that apply)</i> Client <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Other Intimate Partner <input type="checkbox"/> Others <input type="checkbox"/>			
If 'yes', does this cause significant concern?			
5. Has the partner/ex-partner expressed/behaved in a jealous way or displayed controlling behaviour or obsessive tendencies?			
If 'yes', describe in summary:			
If 'yes', does this cause significant concern? Give details:			
6. Has there been/going to be a relationship separation between you and your partner/ex-partner?			
7. Is the abuse becoming worse and/or happening more often?			
8. Are you very frightened? Give client's perceptions of the situation indicating what they think the partner/ex-partner will do.			
9. Is your partner/ex-partner experiencing/recently experienced financial problems?			
10. Does your partner/ex-partner have/had problems with the following: Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health <input type="checkbox"/> Drugs <input type="checkbox"/>			
11. Are you pregnant?			

Questions	Yes (tick)	No/ DK	Significant Concern
12. Is there any conflict with your partner/ex-partner over child contact? Describe in summary:			
13. Has your partner/ex-partner attempted to strangle/choke you or past partner?			
14. Have you or your partner/ex-partner ever threatened/attempted to commit suicide? If 'yes', which of the following? Client <input type="checkbox"/> Partner/ex-partner <input type="checkbox"/>			
15. Has your partner/ex-partner said or done things of a sexual nature that makes you feel bad or that physically hurts you? Give details:			
16. Are you afraid of further injury or violence?			
17. Are you afraid that your partner/ex-partner will kill you?			
18. Are you afraid that your partner/ex-partner will harm her/his children?			
19. Do you suspect that you are being stalked?			
Do you feel isolated from family/friends? Give details:			
<b>Advocacy Worker's perception</b> (please complete this section with your observations about the client's risk especially where there are lower numbers of 'yes' responses):	<b>Total</b>		<b>Total Significant concerns from Q1-5</b>

## Risk Assessment and Safety Planning

### The BIG 26 (Duluth, Minnesota)

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Program (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota, USA, has developed 26 questions to assess the dangerousness of a perpetrator:

- |     | Yes                      | No                       | Don't know               |   |
|-----|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the perpetrator become more violent, brutal or dangerous over time?   |
| 2.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever hurt you so much that you needed medical help?  |
| 3.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever tried to strangle you?  |
| 4.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever hurt or murdered a pet?   |
| 5.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever threatened to strangle you?   |
| 6.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever sexually abused you?  |
| 7.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever threatened you with a weapon? If yes, which one?  |
| 8.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is he possessive or extremely jealous and does he observe and control you?  |
| 9.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are his attacks becoming more frequent?   |
| 10. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever threatened to commit suicide, or has he ever attempted to commit suicide?   |
| 11. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever attacked you during your pregnancy?   |
| 12. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you split up, or tried to split up with the perpetrator during the last 12 months?   |
| 13. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you tried to organise or to get help during the last 12 months (police, counselling centres, women's shelters, etc.)?                                |
| 14. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you been isolated or hindered from getting help (telephone, car, family, friends, etc.)?   |
| 15. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the perpetrator been under exceptional stress during the last 12 months (loss of job, death of someone he is close to, financial difficulties, etc.)? |
| 16. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the perpetrator drink a lot of alcohol/does he have a problem with alcohol?  |
| 17. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has he ever had withdrawal symptoms/has he undergone a cure for drug addiction or alcoholism?   |
| 18. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the perpetrator have a weapon; does he wear it, or does he have any other access to weapons? Which ones?   |
| 19. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you think that he could seriously injure or murder you?  |
| 20. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you tried to protect the perpetrator in any form (attempted to change the police report, or to get the bail reduced, etc.)?                          |
| 21. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Was the perpetrator abused himself by a family member when he was a child?  |
| 22. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the perpetrator witnessed abuse towards his mother?   |
| 23. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the perpetrator show remorse or grief about the incident?  |
| 24. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the perpetrator committed other criminal acts (apart from violence)?  |
| 25. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Has the perpetrator also abused other people (outside the family)?  |
| 26. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the perpetrator take drugs (speed, cocaine, crack, etc.)?  |

The more questions are answered with "yes", the higher is the risk of serious harm.

Further risk assessment forms can be found under the following links, collected by WAVE for the manual Logar, Rosa (2006) *Bridging the gaps – from good intentions to good co-operation* (Vienna: WAVE Co-ordination Office):

**DANGER ASSESSMENT TOOL BY JACQUELYN C. CAMPBELL**

Jacquelyn C. Campbell has developed a similar danger assessment instrument that can be downloaded from her website. She also offers online training in danger assessment.  
<http://www.dangerassessment.com/WebApplication1/pages/da/> (June 27, 2006)

**INITIAL RISK ASSESSMENT FORM**

ASSIST, Glasgow, Scotland, has developed a risk assessment form for advocates that can be found on the website of CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse).  
[http://www.caada.org.uk/library\\_resources/Referral%20form.doc](http://www.caada.org.uk/library_resources/Referral%20form.doc) (June 27, 2006)

**LONDON METROPOLITAN POLICE RISK ASSESSMENT MODEL FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES**

The London Metropolitan Police have developed a risk assessment tool (SPECSS) for their police force that can be downloaded from their website.  
[www.met.police.uk/csu/pdfs/AppendixIII.pdf](http://www.met.police.uk/csu/pdfs/AppendixIII.pdf) (June 27, 2006)

An evaluation of the application of the risk assessment instrument has been carried out by the University of Warwick and can be downloaded:  
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/shss/swell/research/> (June, 27, 2006)

## Appendix 3: Individual safety planning framework

Discuss the following with each participant in a one-to-one setting:

- What does the woman need to be safer?
- What limitations exist with the safety options identified?
- What options are available if the woman needs to leave home?
- If the woman has children, what options are there to increase her children's safety?
- What can the woman put in place alongside the support group to improve her emotional and physical wellbeing?
- What can the woman put in place to keep safe at work?
- What can the woman put in place to keep safe in public places?
- What can the woman do to protect her privacy and change identity if necessary; e.g. mobile phones, computers, etc.
- How can the woman keep safe while still living with an abusive partner?
- How can the woman keep safe while living apart from the abuser?
- What routes can the woman take regarding civil legal options and receiving protection?
- What other support is available and relevant for the woman?
- Put together a crisis plan and risk assessment for immediate action.
- Discuss with the woman the best form of contact, the safest times to get in contact again, and how she can contact you about general issues and in emergency.
- Together, decide upon the next steps to be taken – by you and your service; by the woman herself; and by other agencies; and the timescale for these actions.
- Together, decide what support she needs for the duration of the support group.
- Do other agencies need to be contacted about the woman on her behalf? If so, explain to the woman about the procedures for sharing information with other external agencies.
- Is there anything else she needs from you right now?
- Give the woman a list of important contact numbers, and explain how she can keep the information safe.
- Remind the woman to always call the police in an emergency, and explain ways in which she can get the call prioritised.
- Write up an action plan for your use in order to provide support specific to the woman.



## Appendix 4: Weekly evaluation

1. How useful did you find the **information** in this session? *(Please circle)*

Very useful      Quite useful      Satisfactory      Not very useful      Not useful at all

2. What part(s) did you find the **most useful**, and why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. What part(s) did you find the **least useful**, and why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. How useful did you find the **handouts** and **other resources** provided for this session?  
*(Please circle)*

Very good      Quite good      Satisfactory      Not very good      Very bad

Comments on the handouts and other resources:

.....

.....

.....

5. **How are you feeling now** – compared to how you felt before the session? *(Please circle)*

Significantly better      Slightly better      No different      A bit worse      Significantly worse

6. Do you have any **ideas for improving this session** in future?

.....

.....

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.....

7. **Other comments:**

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**Appendix 5: Mid-course evaluation**

1. How **helpful** has the course been for you so far? *(Please circle)*

Very helpful      Quite helpful      Satisfactory      Not very helpful      Not helpful at all

2. What part(s) of the course are you finding the **most useful**, and why?

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.....  
.....  
.....

3. What part(s) of the course are you finding the **least useful**, and why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. Is there anything you would like the facilitators to do in a **different way**?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. Compared to how you felt before the course started, **how are you feeling now**?

Significantly better    Slightly better    No different    A bit worse    Significantly worse

6. **Why** do you think you feel this way?

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.....  
.....  
.....

7. Do you have any ideas on how to improve the course?

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.....  
.....  
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8. **Other comments:**

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# Appendix 6: Final evaluation

1. Overall, how would you **rate your experience** of the support group? *(Please circle)*

Excellent      Very good      Good      Satisfactory      Poor      Very poor

2. Compared to how you felt before the course started, **how are you feeling** now?

Significantly better      Slightly better      No different      A bit worse      Significantly worse

3. **Why do you think this is?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. How **helpful** has the course been for you?

Very helpful      Quite helpful      Satisfactory      Not very helpful      Not helpful at all

5. What **aspects** of the course were **particularly helpful** to you, and why?

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.....  
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6. What **aspects** of the course were **particularly hard** for you, and why?

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7. Do you think that attending the course has **changed your outlook** in any way?

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8. Please rate the facilitators on the following criteria:

Facilitators	Yes, very	Moderately	No, not at all
Approachable			
Knowledgeable on domestic abuse			
Positive influence in group setting			
Sensitive to each person's needs			
Non-judgemental towards all members			
Skilled at group management			

9. Do you have any further comments about the facilitators? **YES/NO**

.....

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10. Please indicate how satisfied you were with the **amount of information** given on the following issues discussed throughout the course:

Topic	Too much	Just right	Not enough
Basic rights			
Definition of abuse			
Physical abuse			
Sexual abuse			
Psychological abuse			
Financial abuse			
Leaving an abusive relationship			
Children			
Boundaries			
Feelings: Anger, grief, fear and guilt			
Needs			
Assertiveness			
Authority figures			
Healthy relationships			
New beginnings			
Further support			

11. Is there **anything else** that you think should be **included** in the course?  
If yes, what topics? **YES/NO**

.....

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.....

12. Do you feel that your opinions and contributions to the group have been **listened to** and **respected**?

**YES/NO**

Please explain:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

13. Were you happy with the **venue**?

**YES/NO**

Please explain why/why not:

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.....

14. Did you find the **time** of the course suitable?

**YES/NO**

Please explain why/why not:

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.....

15. How easy was it to get **transport** to the group?

Very easy      Easy      Quite easy      Quite hard      Very hard      Not applicable

16. How easy was it to get **childcare**?

Very easy      Easy      Quite easy      Quite hard      Very hard      Not applicable

17. Are you going to access further support now that the group has finished?

**YES/NO**

If yes, what kind of support?

.....

.....

.....

.....

18. Would you **recommend this course** to someone else if they were experiencing or had experienced domestic abuse?

**YES/NO**

Please explain why/why not:

.....

.....

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19. Do you have any **suggestions** on how the group can be **improved**?

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20. **Other comments:**

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete this final evaluation.**

## Appendix 7: Equal opportunities monitoring form (Women's Aid, UK)

### Age Group

What is your age group? *Please select.*

20 – 30 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	41 – 50 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
51 – 60 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	60 years +	<input type="checkbox"/>
31 – 40 years	<input type="checkbox"/>		

### Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines a disability as a “physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. An effect is long-term if it has lasted, or is likely to last, over 12 months.

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person? *Please select.* Yes ☐ No ☐

### Ethnic Origin

*Please note that these categories reflect those used in the 2001 Census.*

How would you describe your ethnic origin? (If you do not identify with any of the categories listed, please use the “other” categories). *Please tick one box.*

WHITE	British	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other white	<input type="checkbox"/>
MIXED	White & black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
	White & black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
	White & Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other mixed	<input type="checkbox"/>
ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
BLACK OR BLACK BRITISH	Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
	African	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other black	<input type="checkbox"/>
CHINESE OR OTHER	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other ethnic group	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Don't know/not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Would rather not state	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Religion/Belief

How would you describe your religion/ belief?

Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know/not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would rather not state	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Sexual Orientation

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay/lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know/not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would rather not state	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Gender

Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix 8: Group contract for 'Power To Change'

In order to help make 'Power to Change' group sessions pleasant and safe for every group member, all members of the group, including the facilitator/s, agree to comply with the clauses stated in this contract.

### Confidentiality

I agree that the location of the group meetings and the names, identities and other personal information of group members will not be disclosed to anybody outside the group, at any time during or after the group. The only exception is when there is a serious threat to the life or health of a child; in such cases the facilitator is obliged by the law to inform the authorities (the police, child and family support services, etc.) about the child in danger.

### Restrictions

I agree that alcohol and illegal substances should not be brought to the group at any time. Members should not come to the group if they are under the influence of alcohol or any other mood-altering substances.

No form of violence (emotional, verbal or physical) is allowed in the group under any circumstances.

### Commitment

I agree to attend all sessions of the programme and to be punctual for each one, unless my absence is unavoidable (e.g. due to illness). If I am unable on any occasion to arrive on time, or to attend a session, or if I decide not to finish the course, I agree to contact the facilitator/s to make them aware of my situation.

### Group Rules

I agree to follow the group rules at all times.

I am aware that if I breach any of the above clauses, I may face expulsion from the group.

### Participant

Signature:.....

Print name:.....

Date:.....

### Witness

Signature:.....

Print name:.....

Date:.....



## Appendix 9: Icebreakers

### The Ball Game

- **Aim of the exercise:** To learn each other's names
- **Materials:** A small ball
- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Instructions:** Ask the group to stand in a circle and throw a small ball to one of the members. On catching the ball, the member should say her name and then throw the ball to another member, where the process starts again. The game stops once everyone has said her name a few times.

### The Name Game

- **Aim:** To learn each other's names and one thing about each participant
- **Materials:** Sticky labels and pens
- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Instructions:** A fun and gentle name game: ask everyone to say their name and give one adjective describing their personality that begins with the same letter as their name. For example, 'My name is Aliyya and I am arty!' Get everyone to write this on a label and stick on themselves (e.g. Arty Aliyya).

### The Coin Game

- **Aim of the exercise:** An original way for participants to share parts of their life stories and get to know each other better. (This is intended for later on in group sessions, not for introductory icebreakers).
- **Materials:** Coins
- **Time:** 20-30 minutes
- **Instruction:** Prepare as many coins as the number of participants in the room; (try to find relatively new coins). Each participant chooses a coin and reads the year when that coin was issued. Each participant then recalls an important (good, bad, whatever) event from her life from that year. Start from the year closest to now, and go back in time until everybody is finished.

### The Carousel Game

- **Aim of the exercise:** To enable participants to get to know each other better in an interactive way.
- **Materials:** 4-5 sets of post-its, one set of questions, pens/pencils, sheets of paper
- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Instructions:** Participants are placed in two circles, one inside the other, each circle having an equal number of places/chairs. Chairs should face each other in pairs, each from a different circle.
- Each participant receives a pen or pencil and a set of post-its, preferably in different colours.
- The facilitator then asks a series of questions in rounds. (See suggested questions below).
- After the questions are posed, the participants respond in their pairs. One (the listening participant) writes the other person's name on the post-it, followed by her answers to the facilitator's questions.

- After each round, members of the outer circle move one or more places – either to the right or left, as specified by the facilitator. This “spins” the carousel.
- The exercise is now undertaken again with the new partners.
- **Tips for the facilitator:**
  - Keep the ‘spin’ going in same direction during the entire exercise.
  - Remind the participants to write the name of their partners on the post-its.
  - Physically disabled members should be sitting in the inner circle, as only the other circle will move.
- **Suggested questions**
  - Who are you? Explain something about your family, friends, studies, work, etc.
  - Where do you come from?
  - Where would you like to live?
  - Share something that you are very good at!
  - Share a bad habit that you would like to get rid of!
  - Tell one of the reasons for joining this group.
- **An extra round:** After all the post-its are gone, you could give out markers and sheets of white paper (A4 size) to all participants. Instead of writing the name of the person sitting opposite on this paper, each participant should try to draw her, while holding eye contact with her, and without looking at the paper! Participants are not allowed to show the portraits to each other.
- When everyone has finished, the facilitator collects the papers and then redistributes them. The idea is to try to identify each picture. When everybody has a picture, ask them to show it to the circle, and make a guess at its identity. The person who drew the picture can then correct it, if the guessed identity is wrong.
- Once everybody has their own portrait, ask them to write their first name on it, and stick them on the wall. You could then create everyone’s ‘portfolios’ on the wall: ask women to stick the post-its belonging to each individual next to her picture.
- **Tips for the facilitator:**
  - Leave some time at the end of the exercise for the participants to see the other pictures and the characteristics of the others in the group.

# Appendix 10: Details of the course

The course facilitators are:

.....  
.....

The crèche workers (if applicable) are:

.....  
.....

If you need to contact one of us outside of the course times you can do so by:

Telephone:

Email:

The venue is:

Details of all the sessions are as follows. *Please complete the table for your reference:*

Week	Topic	Date	Time
Session 1:			
Session 2:			
Session 3:			
Session 4:			
Session 5:			
Session 6:			
Session 7:			
Session 8:			
Session 9:			
Session 10:			
Session 11:			
Session 12:			
Session 13:			
Session 14:			

## Appendix 11: Basic process guidelines

**Give everyone an opportunity to speak.** Each person (including the facilitator) should avoid dominating the discussion, and should try not to interrupt.

**Good listening is important.** Everyone should hear what a person is saying before speaking themselves.

**Speak from your own experience.** Speaking in the first person will help with this.  
**Be honest.**

**Value and validate others' differences and experiences.** Put-downs of other people will not be tolerated.

**Confidentiality and trust.** All discussion and contributions are confidential – no personal information leaves the room.

**No drugs or alcohol** are allowed on the premises, nor should they be consumed immediately before attending the group.

**Consistent and punctual attendance.** The effects of the group can only be achieved if everyone commits to attending the sessions on a regular basis.

How can we ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to put forward her point of view?

.....

.....

.....

How can we make sure that no one is discriminated against?

.....

.....

.....

How can we create an atmosphere of respect and kindness?

.....

.....

.....

Please look at the following list of situations. Have you ever held back contributing your ideas and feelings because of any of these?

Situation	Yes	No	Don't know
Not enough time			
I was worried I might be laughed at			
Another person kept on interrupting me/speaking over me			
I felt I wouldn't be believed			
I thought I wouldn't be understood			
I was unsure how to say what I felt			
I didn't trust some of the people in the group			
I would get upset and depressed			
I was too shy			
Someone else had already said what I wanted to say			
I couldn't follow the conversation properly			
I thought people would disagree with me			
I thought people might judge me			

## **Appendix 12: My bill of rights**

I have the right to say 'no'

I have the right not be abused

I have the right to express anger

I have the right to change my life

I have the right to freedom from fear of abuse

I have the right to request and expect assistance from police and social care agencies

I have the right to want a better role model of communication for my children

I have the right to raise my children in safety

I have the right to be treated like an adult, and with respect

I have the right to leave the abusive environment

I have the right to be safe

I have the right to privacy

I have the right to develop my individual talents and abilities

I have the right to prosecute and get protection through the law from my abusing partner

I have the right to earn and control my own finances

I have the right to make my own decisions about my own life

I have the right to change my mind

I have the right to be believed and valued

I have the right to make mistakes

I have the right not to be perfect

I have the right to love and be loved in return

I have the right to put myself first

I have the right to be me

Appendix 13: I need, I want, I deserve

	Description	Is this being met?	Two ways of keeping/meeting what I need/want/deserve
I need...		YES / NO	1. 2.
I want...		YES / NO	1. 2.
I deserve...		YES / NO	1. 2.

# Appendix 14: Evaluation of needs

Need	Importance*	How much it is being met**	Obstacle to its being fulfilled	Short-term steps to meet the need	Long-term steps to meet the need
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5			
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5			
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5			
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5			
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5			

\* 1 = Very important  
\*\*1 = Completely

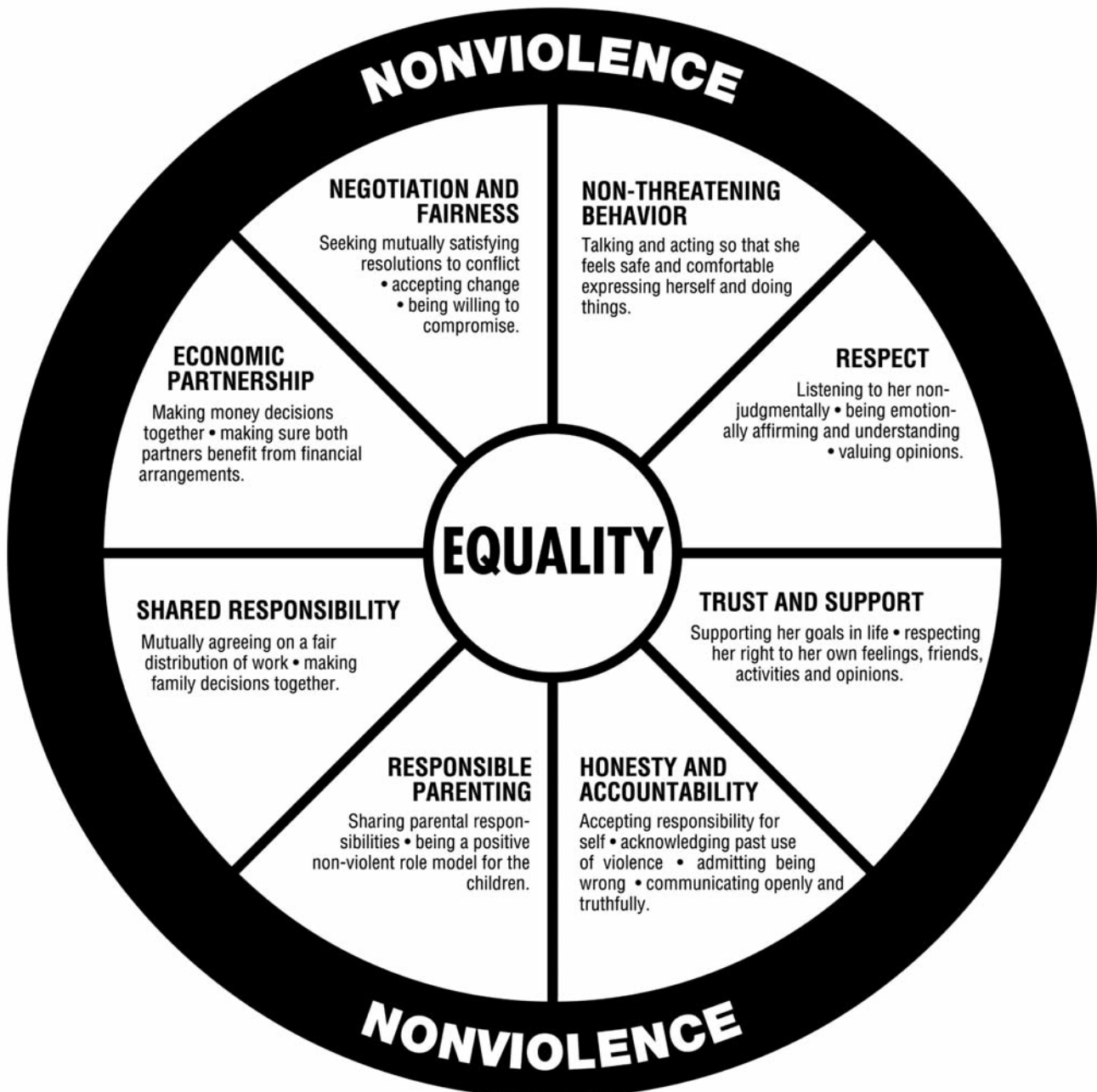
2 = Important  
2 = Mostly

3 = Fairly important  
3 = Partly

4 = Not very important  
4 = Slightly

5 = Not at all important  
5 = Not at all

## Appendix 15: Duluth Equalities Wheel





## Appendix 16: Duluth Power and Control Wheel



## Appendix 17: Setting boundaries

### **Example 1:**

*After attending the lesson on boundaries, Olenka worked herself up and decided to confront her boss on what she believed were abusive attitudes towards her. She had noticed that her boss never said hello when coming into the building, always avoided direct contact, and humiliated her in front of colleagues with abusive language when she didn't think Olenka's work had been done well. She talked to her boss, who denied any responsibility for any of the behaviour of which Olenka accused her, and then complained of Olenka's unprofessional behaviour to her superiors. This resulted in a written reprimand and her working position was jeopardised.*

### **Example 2:**

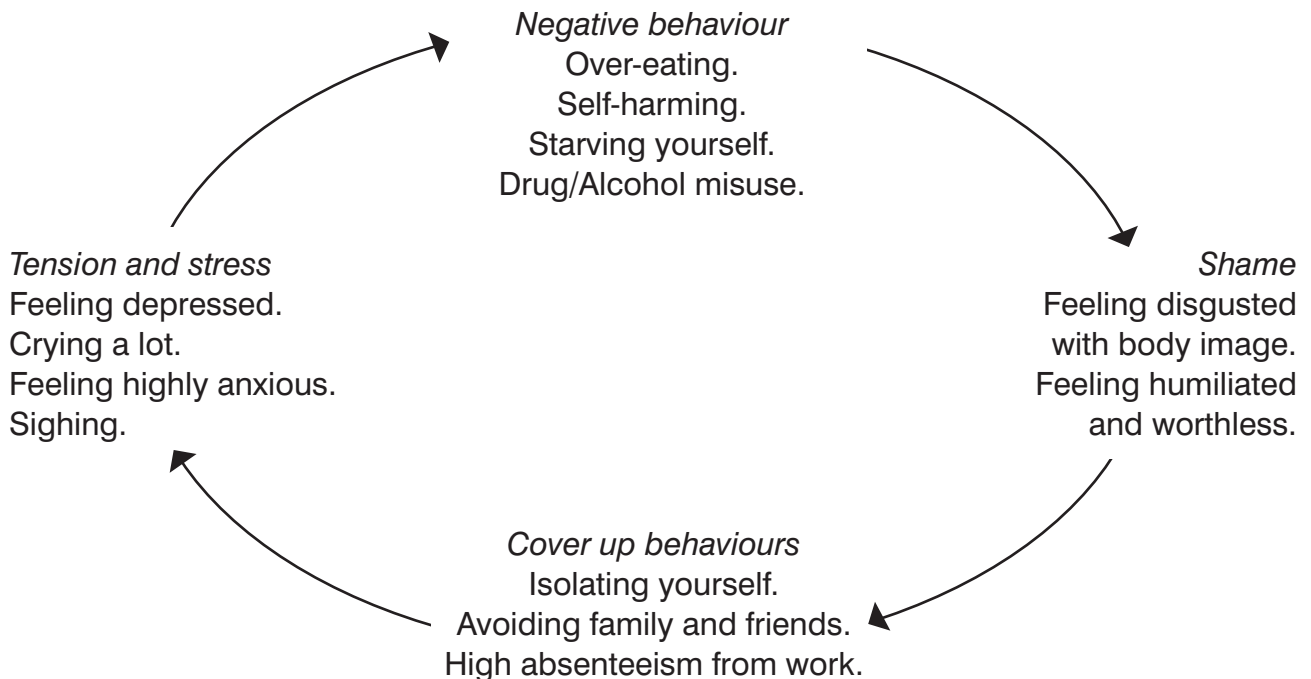
*Sarah, months after the group had ended, reported how important the boundary setting sessions were for her in learning to deal with her daughter Kate. She realised, listening to a young participant talking of her relationship with her mother, how much her daughter must have suffered; it was the first time she really understood how her attitude could have hurt Kate deeply. She also realised that she should respect her daughter's boundaries; for example, turning up at seven o'clock on Sunday morning with fresh pastries when Kate just wanted to sleep was not appreciated. A few months later, Sarah's daughter got pregnant. This was her third pregnancy, from three different men. Sarah was not at all happy about her daughter's pregnancy, but she realised that she must try to accept Kate's decision.*

### **Example 3:**

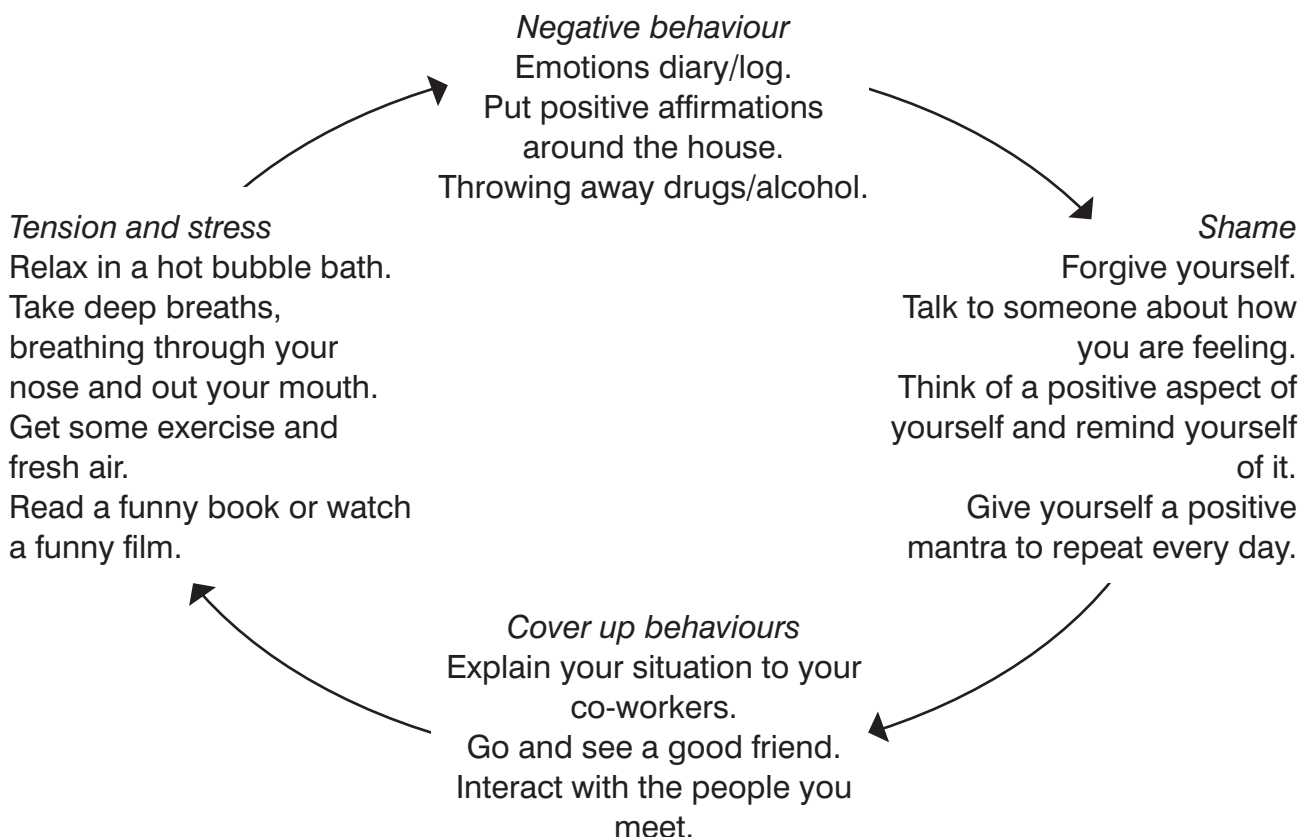
*Rozsa brought a different example. After discussing the boundaries session, she realised that her friend Hajna was overstepping her welcome by calling her at home at odd times and wanting to talk for hours. Rozsa decided to discuss the issue with Hajna. She invited her over and explained that she valued her friendship very much and loved talking to her, but the awkward timing and the length of the phone calls were starting to become a great problem for her. Hajna was quite upset at first, but after discussing it at length she understood her friend's point of view. Their friendship ended up even stronger, partly because Hajna was better able to understand her friend and her needs, and partly because Rozsa felt better and happier because she no longer felt she was being treated unfairly.*

## Appendix 18: The cycle of shame: moving on from shame and guilt

### From negative...



### ...to positive



## Appendix 19: Anger management

Five steps to help cope with anger:

**Step 1: Stop! Take ten deep breaths.**

**Step 2: Think of a positive personal mantra.**

'I am in control of my feelings, I can stay calm and manage this situation.'

**Step 3: Acknowledge and identify the feeling.**

'I feel angry. In order to deal with my anger I must be calm and reasonable, and look at why I feel this way before I act.'

**Step 4: Analyse the situation to understand it.**

Try to identify the main reason why you are feeling angry. If there is a genuine reason for feeling angry, whose problem is it? Is it in your power to deal with it? It is important to identify clearly what kind of power you really have in each particular situation.

**Step 5: Act on the situation.**

Acting on a situation that makes you angry can take many forms. For example, if you decide that you shouldn't really be getting angry over something, walking away from it is still acting on the situation. If you do have the power to change something, work out the best way forward to resolve the situation, using assertiveness techniques.

**Some ideas for relieving the intensiveness of anger:**

- Learn relaxation or deep breathing techniques.
- Take some time out every day to meditate.
- Start attending a yoga class.
- Go walking or running.
- Take a moment to shout and scream when you are by yourself in a private place.
- Write an honest letter to the person who has made you angry, and tear it up or burn it afterwards. Do not send it!
- Be creative. Vent some of your anger through drawing, singing or expressive dance.
- Create a good support network around you with friends who will listen to you.
- Avoid people who intensify your anger and who make you feel negative.
- To deal with ongoing and in-depth feelings of anger, start some counselling or therapy sessions.

## Appendix 20: Assessing levels of assertiveness

Please state how often you find it hard to be assertive in the following situations:

Situation	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<b>1. Friends</b>				
When a good friend drops in unexpectedly, but I have already made other arrangements.				
When people I know ignore me.				
When a friend wants to borrow from me.				
When friends ask me to baby-sit for their children regularly.				
<b>2. Work</b>				
When I need to give positive criticism about a piece of work my colleague has done.				
When I am asked to take on more responsibility than I can cope with.				
When a colleague always asks me to cover for their mistakes/lateness.				
When people with authority speak down to me.				
<b>3. Family</b>				
If my adult children only visit to use my utilities.				
When my children want me to drop what I am doing in order to spend time with them.				
When my children expect me to clean up after them constantly.				
If my parents constantly criticise my life choices.				
<b>4. Relationships</b>				
When my partner wants me to cancel my appointment so I can spend time with him/her.				
When my partner wants to have sex but I don't.				
If my partner doesn't want me to do paid work.				
When my partner says he/she doesn't like what I'm wearing and wants me to change.				
<b>5. Myself</b>				
When I need to ask for practical help.				
When I want to add my opinion to a conversation.				
When I want to be by myself.				
When I need to ask for emotional support.				
<b>6. Other</b>				
When my baby-sitter is late.				
When a salesperson puts pressure on me to buy something I don't want.				
When I want to return an earlier purchase to a shop.				
If my food arrives late and cold when I am at a restaurant, and I want to complain.				

# Appendix 21: Definitions of violence and abuse

Domestic violence is physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour.

In this exercise, please write in the boxes what you think may constitute physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse. There are some examples to get you started. Compare your thoughts with the other members in the group.

<b>PHYSICAL</b>  Hitting Spitting	<b>SEXUAL</b>  Sex for favours Forcing you to perform sexual acts
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL</b>  Silent treatment Threatening to take the children away	<b>FINANCIAL</b>  Withholding money Stealing money

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