

# Collected Wisdom

FACILITATED FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT GROUPS  
WITH WOMEN IN THE NORTHERN SUBREGION

2ND EDITION



**WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN THE NORTH**

Women’s Health In the North would like to thank people for their generous contributions to this manual, particularly the thousands of women who have been members of the various family violence groups in the area. Your energy, courage and hope are on every page.

WHIN would also like to thank the family violence group workers who shared their time, ideas and activities with good will, enthusiasm and a sense of collaboration during interviews and forums. This appreciation extends to those women who have worked in the region over the last ten years, who now work in other regions, and to those who work with all women’s groups. Finally, WHIN would like to thank those who prioritised meeting times or finances to the project.

WHIN expresses gratitude to the committed members of the original 2008 Family Violence Group Work Project Reference Group.

Members of this group were:

- Cass Dolby - Moreland Community Health Service;
- Mary Micallef - Berry Street Victoria;
- Maureene Foster - Dianella Community Health Inc.;
- Romy Same and Saliha Julardzija - Department of Human Services North and West Metropolitan Region, Family Outreach Support Services, Child and Family Team, Disability Client Services (DHS);
- Angela Nesci - Women’s Health In The North; and
- Wafa Ibrahim - Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service. WHIN also offers thanks to the management and staff of The Northern Integrated Family Violence Counselling and Support Partnership and the broader NIFVS system.

Thanks also to the encouragement of the Department of Human Services North and West Metropolitan Region

**ADDENDUM FOR EDITION TWO**

In the two years since Collected Wisdom was first launched, it has been accessed by many family violence group work providers across Australia. As well as its initial circulation to regional partners, the manual was distributed to 69 different organisations in metropolitan and rural Victoria and interstate. A review of the manual was conducted in September 2010 by student Jacquie Milburn.

The key recommendation of the review was to update and relaunch the manual in its new PDF format.

Other review recommendations highlighted the increased need for creative group work design and facilitation which could lead to increased access for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women. These developments are recorded in section five written by Jennifer Dawson of inTouch Inc. (formerly known as Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service). The review also highlighted the need to clarify that group co-facilitation is the practice standard in section 7.4: Co-facilitation. Another recommendation was that the sector work towards the national family violence group work conference to share ideas about family violence group work practice across states and territories. Other additions also highlight the role of new technologies in group work.

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# MAIN TEXT AND FURTHER READING



## I.0 WHY A FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK PROJECT?

### I.1 FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK IN MELBOURNE'S NORTH

In May 2006, the State Government of Victoria announced significant reforms to family violence services which aimed to develop an innovative integrated system where community, police and justice agencies worked together. Women's Health In the North (WHIN), Berry Street Victoria, Elizabeth Hoffman House and Anglicare Victoria were funded by the Department of Human Services North and West Metropolitan Region to lead and coordinate these changes in the northern subregion.

As part of the reform strategy, eleven organisations, including the nine Community Health Centres in the northern metropolitan subregion, are now funded to run family violence support groups for women. WHIN coordinates this work at a subregional level. The partners involved in The Counselling and Support Alliance in the northern subregion are:

- Darebin Community Health Service;
- Nillumbik Community Health Service;
- Plenty Valley Community Health Service;
- Sunbury Community Health Service;
- North Yarra Community Health Service;
- Banyule Community Health Service;
- Moreland Community Health Service;
- Dianella Community Health Service;
- North Richmond Community Health Service;
- inTouch Inc. (formerly the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service);
- Berry Street Victoria; and
- Anglicare, Plenty Valley and Anglicare, Hume-Moreland.

### I.2 WHY A FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK MANUAL?

The Counselling and Support Alliance believes that family violence group work enhances quality services to women by offering distinctive settings of validation, safety, interaction and empowerment. This reflects a long-standing history of family violence group work in Melbourne's north.

Family violence groups have been run in the north for over 20 years, and over this time many resource materials have evolved. Often however, this knowledge base was not widely shared or collectively owned as each service provider had often developed their own material. This is an issue beyond Melbourne's north: Laing emphasises the general lack of historical family violence group work documentation:

*While some Australian group work approaches are reported in the literature (e.g. Condonis, Paroissien and Aldrich, 1990; Flannery, Irwin and Lopes, 2000; Phillips and Wright, 1996; Poels and Berger, 1992), much of the creative work which has been undertaken in settings such as community and women's health centres is undocumented...<sup>1</sup>*

This lack of documentation means that best practice has remained less recorded, less evolved and under-evaluated. It also means that the contribution of group work to both women and to the family violence sector has remained less visible and less persuasive.

This manual aims to fill this gap. By recognising both the wealth of material in this region and the expertise of group workers, this manual collates practice ideas and activities that can be used by other group workers.

This manual has been developed to build a collective, consistent and accessible knowledge base for family violence group work.

1. Lesley Laing (2001). *Working with Women: Exploring Individual and Group Approaches*, available at [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues\\_paper\\_4.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues_paper_4.pdf). Retrieved March 2008. p7.

### 1.3 HISTORY OF GROUP WORK IN MELBOURNE'S NORTH

The regional decision to direct funding to family violence group work has been a pioneering decision as previously several different sources of funding had to be used to run these groups. Most programs in the past were 'heavily subsidised by other programs or funded out of budgets for core business...'<sup>2</sup> This lack of financial focus often meant that groups were under-resourced and not consistently available.

Throughout 1997 and 1999, there was a very successful family violence group facilitators' network in the northern subregion which provided staff support to their often under-funded group work and which offered an arena for the exchange of practice skills and ideas. Libby Eltringham, the Northern Region Family Violence Networker at that point, saw this network as an important way to support the workers doing group work; she established the original network of this type in Melbourne at the time.<sup>3</sup> The de-funding of the networker positions saw the eventual end of this initiative.

Family violence group workers in the north have been keen to revive the network, and the local funding priority given to the group work project in late 2007 has allowed the re-creation of the family violence group facilitators' network. This network is currently taking the form of regular forums to discuss contemporary issues with a view to collect and publish some practitioner's work as had been hoped for ten years earlier.

Local partner services see groups working together as a central vehicle in all parts of an integrated response to family violence. The group work project has been an opportunity to record the efforts of family violence group workers in the northern subregion, and to honour the valuable long-term contribution of these efforts to women's lives and community safety and wellbeing; the Collected Wisdom manual is a contribution to that work. In the two years since Collected Wisdom was first launched, it has been accessed by many family violence group work providers across Australia. As well as its initial circulation to regional partners, the manual was distributed to 69 different organisations in metropolitan and rural Victoria and interstate.

A review of the manual was conducted in September 2010 and it recommended the update and relaunch of the manual in its new PDF format.

Other review recommendations highlighted the increased need for creative group work design and facilitation to increase access for CALD women and that the wording in section 7.4: Co-facilitation, needed to clarify that group co-facilitation is the practice standard. A further proposal suggested the sector work towards a national family violence group work conference, to share ideas about family violence group work practice across the states and territories.

The Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS) partners have done a lot of work since 2008, to increase group work options for CALD women. Over the last 18 months, inTouch Inc., in partnership with the NIFVS has been offering help to diverse groups of women in the north including Chaldean, Arabic speaking, Turkish and Chinese women.

In addition to this, a group design process has been developed which allows all aspects of the group design and delivery to have cultural integrity. These developments are recorded in section five of this new edition and have been written by Jennifer Dawson of inTouch Inc.

### 1.4 PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

This manual has been created in the context of a feminist and socio-political understanding of family violence, and is based on the values articulated by the Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children. These values include a commitment to diversity, human rights and social justice, to the safety and valuing of children, and to women's empowerment, access and equity. These principles encourage responsible, accountable and collaborative practice<sup>4</sup> Within this context, this manual addresses the group work access needs of women with a disability, indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

This resource manual aims not to be prescriptive, but assumes that facilitated family violence group work is only one part of a broader response to family violence. The concept of diversity is relevant to all family violence group work approaches. Memmott and Chambers note it is important to:

*...Adopt holistic approaches to the problem enabling the implementation of a range of different concurrent activities, including community education, preventive activities, support groups for victims, awareness groups and post-prison follow-up for perpetrators, support for carers including grandmothers etc., and activities and resources for children and young people... (Have responses that are) flexible, responsive and able to adapt to the specific needs of the local community. Under this approach, activities may vary over time and in different localities, depending on the specific needs of communities... (This) does not focus solely on crisis intervention/support services, but attempts to integrate local culture, art, dance and music into community-based activities.<sup>5</sup>*

2. Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Jenni Southwell (2004), *Support Groups for People Affected by Family Violence: a Key Element of a Coordinated Response*, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne, Victoria, p2.

3. Lesley Laing (2001), *Working with Women: Exploring Individual and Group Approaches*, available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues\\_paper\\_4.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues_paper_4.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, p18.

4. Domestic Violence Victoria (2007), *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children*, available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/42883/cop\\_sfvs\\_27032007.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/42883/cop_sfvs_27032007.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p16.

5. Paul Memmott, Catherine Chambers, Carol Go-Sam and Linda Thomson (2006), *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention - Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs*, Issues paper 11, June 2006, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper\\_11.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper_11.pdf). Retrieved February 2008, pp29-30.

## 1.5 MANUAL CONSULTATION AND EVALUATION

Two consultation approaches were used to develop this manual: the establishment of an ongoing Project Reference Group, and one-off discussions with local specialists, either individually or in groups. With both approaches, the project used inclusive and reflective conversational methods, recognising that practitioners' partnerships and valued relationships are what make for quality group work and sustained staff. This also acknowledged that practitioners had often discussed, shared, researched and evaluated their own work but had not had the time to record these insights. In 2010, the manual was evaluated. The evaluation included project work, liaising with those who had used the manual, and an advisory session with some members of the original project reference group.

## 1.6 PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP

Firstly, a reference group was engaged to help develop this manual, representing both specialists and key stakeholders in family violence group work in the northern subregion.

Specific reference group members were recruited to help drive the creation of the group work manual and the reference group met monthly across the length of the five-month project. Representatives for the reference group were sought from counselling and support partnership members, as well as from workers who had experience in family violence group work with women.

These members were:

- Cass Dolby - Moreland Community Health Service;
- Mary Micalef - Berry Street Victoria;
- Maureene Foster - Dianella Community Health Inc.;
- Romy Same and Saliha Julardzija - Department Of Human Services North and West Metropolitan Region, Family Outreach Support Services, Child and Family Team, Disability Client Services;
- Angela Nesci - Women's Health In the North; and
- Wafa Ibrahim - inTouch Inc.

Particular reference group tasks included:

- Determining the best methods of material collation for this manual;
- Assisting with obtaining existing group work documentation from service providers;
- Helping best express the models of quality group work that were built on the practice guidelines in Standards for Counselling and Group Work;
- Generating ideas for group work access for indigenous and CALD women;
- Generating ideas to shape the logic of the manual's layout and format; and
- Assisting with the evaluation.

## 1.7 CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL SPECIALISTS

In addition to the Project Reference Group, key informants were also approached for consultation on particular aspects of local speciality.

- The Islamic Women's Welfare Service;
- The Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service;
- The North Richmond Community Health Centre;
- The Darebin Community Health Service counselling staff;
- The Sunbury Community Health Centre counselling staff;
- The Plenty Valley Community Health Service counselling staff;
- The Anglicare Plenty Valley Family Services staff;
- The DHS North West Disability Client Services, Family Outreach Support Services Child and Family Team;
- The Grove;
- Berry Street Victoria;
- The Moreland Community Health Service;
- Elizabeth Hoffman House; and
- The Banyule Community Health Service.

A group discussion was also held with Northern Area Mental Health Services Partnership Project participants which included:

- Sabin Fernbacher - Women's Mental Health Consultant and Families Where A Parent Has A Mental Illness Coordinator, Northern Area Mental Health Service;
- Kath McCarthy - Manager, Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault;
- Robyn Humphries - Manager, Northern Area Mental Health Service, North Western Mental Health;
- Christine Hodge - Manager, Primary Mental Health Service; and
- Julie Boffa- Project Manager, Children's Protection Society on behalf of the North East Metropolitan Child and Family Services Alliance (Incorporating Child FIRST).

## 1.8 PROJECT CONSULTANT

Cath Lancaster was employed as project consultant. She has worked extensively within community health, family support, and education and project positions in the northern subregion. She has a particular interest in supporting adult learning and in the facilitation of family violence support groups. The research for her Master of Education degree focused on what women learn from family violence group attendance and she has drawn on her prior academic and work experience for the collation of this manual.

## 1.9 USING THIS MANUAL

The audience for this manual is intended to be organisations currently providing, or planning to provide, family violence group work for adult women.

This manual is divided into group work session themes and individual activities. These themes reflect issues and challenges commonly experienced by women affected by family violence. Women's lived experiences are varied and unique at different life points, and this themed approach tries to offer a broad outline for women's groups addressing family violence; it is not meant to be prescriptive. This approach also takes account of both the need for flexible and negotiated group contents, processes and timings, and the need to not offer a narrow and set curriculum for family violence group work. Subsequently, this manual can be used for designing support groups, especially for new groups of women, or it can be used within an existing support group.

This manual is informal in its language and offers a number of examples from personal communications, and from group members' feedback on evaluations since 1998. This manual's tone is colleagues sharing with each other, and assumes group workers will have previous tertiary level training in group work and family violence. There are also large numbers of lists, tips and references to support group workers pursuing ideas, articles or resources for their work. Within this manual there are sections on family violence group work theory and practice, group work planning, outlines for 50 session activities, and options for further resourcing and reading.

## 2.0 WHAT ARE THE CONTEXTUAL POLICIES AND LEGISLATIONS?

This project lies within an Australian, Victorian and northern metropolitan subregional context, and within research and practice intersections.

### 2.1 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

A number of significant legislative developments related to family violence within Victoria form the backdrop for this manual. The most significant of these is the revised Family Violence Protection Act 2008. The new act defines 'family like' relationships, so that those who are carers of others are also included as family members. The act also broadens the definitions of family violence to include:

- Causing a child to witness, hear or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence;
- Economic abuse including specific examples, e.g. removing a family member's property;
- Emotional or psychological abuse including specific examples, e.g. threatening to commit suicide with the intention of tormenting or intimidating a family member; deliberately isolating someone from their family, friends or cultural connections; or preventing them from expressing their cultural identity; and
- Causing, or threatening to cause, the death of an animal so as to control, dominate or coerce the family member (whether or not the animal belongs to the family member).

The Act has a preamble that acknowledges the social realities and gendered dynamics of family violence as well as articulating clear human rights principles<sup>6</sup>. These aspects of the Act make it a powerful and innovative piece of legislation.

### 2.2 POLICY CONTEXT

In the last five years, numerous policies have emerged to influence family violence practice, enhance quality and focus on service provision.<sup>7</sup>

Two recent developments relevant for family violence group work include:

1. Policy and practice shifts to violence prevention; and
2. The critiques made of the Family Law Act.

Both state and federal governments stress their plans to prioritise a focus on the prevention of violence against women. An indigenous violence prevention policy also currently focuses on prevention through addressing the principles, processes and community structures that help maximise indigenous health while minimising violence.

The Victorian Women with Disabilities Network also highlights the prevention efforts required to end violence against women with disabilities. The promise of prevention, combined with resources, creates opportunities for workers to be innovative in service development, as violence prevention operates in many sites and at many levels. Group work can also be preventative at many levels and these policy shifts offer increased scope to define group work.

A recent Family Law report commissioned by the Attorney General makes wide ranging criticisms of and recommendations to overhaul federal family law. Family law currently operates in ways that compound the negative health effects of existing family violence especially for women and children who are seeking to rebuild their lives after leaving violence.

*...They expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the services of the family law sociolegal service system and their Act in 2006. Their constant complaint was that, instead of receiving sympathy and support from the service providers, they received disbelief and disregard in relation to their experiences of family violence and their concerns for their children's safety. Furthermore, a higher proportion of mothers reported increased fears as to their own and their children's safety subsequent to the new legislation, and the intensity of their fear was much greater than for men...<sup>8</sup>*

Family Violence group workers support clients who are experiencing these areas of legal complexity. This review of Collected Wisdom offers insight into systemic and structural issues for women and children that may have implications for both group work content, process and planning, as well as for the types of groups created.

<sup>6</sup>. See details in Chris Atmore, Policy Officer, Federation of Community Legal Centres The Family Violence Protection Act 2008, A Media Information Kit at [www.communitylaw.org.au/public\\_resource\\_details.php?resource\\_id=1255](http://www.communitylaw.org.au/public_resource_details.php?resource_id=1255)

<sup>7</sup>. Background and recent documents at Domestic Violence Victoria.

<sup>8</sup>. Dale Bagshaw and Thea Brown - Co Directors (2010), Family Violence and Family Law in Australia, *The Experiences and Views of Children and Adults from Families who Separated Post 1995 and Past 2006*, Vol 1, p182. Available at [www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/\(9A5D88DBA63D32A661E6369859739356\)-FLB+-+Monash+Family+Violence+Research+-+FINAL+REPORT+Volume+1+-+April+2010.pdf/\\$file/FLB+-+Monash+Family+Violence+Research+-+FINAL+REPORT+Volume+1+-+April+2010.pdf](http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/(9A5D88DBA63D32A661E6369859739356)-FLB+-+Monash+Family+Violence+Research+-+FINAL+REPORT+Volume+1+-+April+2010.pdf/$file/FLB+-+Monash+Family+Violence+Research+-+FINAL+REPORT+Volume+1+-+April+2010.pdf)

## 2.3 WORKFORCE CONTEXT

Community sector research has highlighted the aging community worker sector. As a result, the industry including those organisations with a focus on family violence, need to address the issue of staff retention, 'including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), training and retaining mature-aged workers, and generally promoting the industry as an attractive career path for school leavers, older workers, men and workers from diverse backgrounds'.<sup>9</sup> How to support the workers doing family violence group work is an ongoing issue for consideration. Ideas raised in the northern subregion during the course of the group work project have included:

- Accessing RPL processes for family violence group workers in order to enable them to do some self-directed learning about family violence. This could be done through units from the community services training package and being assessed by accredited assessors such as VETASSESS, Skills Stores and other registered training organisations, technical colleges and the Integrated Pathways training consortium;
- Offering practice forums for group workers on contemporary themes and challenges in their work;
- Developing a website for the publishing of family violence practitioner articles; and
- Designing family violence group work training for those new to group work facilitation.

## 2.4 OTHER GROUP WORK INITIATIVES

There are other group work initiatives happening in the northern subregion, including the creation of group work coordination positions within some family services agencies and the creation of a generalist group workers' networks within the Moreland-Hume and Whittlesea districts: both are initiatives of Anglicare. These latter, exciting initiatives are meeting to discuss the cross-referral and promotion of groups, the targeting of referrals and funding, and the facilitation of partnerships and lobbying, particularly at the intersections of family violence, children's services and family support. The networks are also supportive and educative, drawing a large range of workers from maternal and child health services, schools, community agencies, and community health, all working with a broad age range of client group members.

## 2.5 LANGUAGE AND KEY TERMS USED IN THIS MANUAL

### 2.5.1 FAMILY VIOLENCE

Within this manual the definition of family violence used is drawn from Practice Guidelines: Women and Children's Family Violence Counselling and Support Program:

*Family violence is the repeated use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by an individual against a family member(s), or someone with whom they have, or have had, an intimate relationship. Violent behaviour includes not only physical assaults but an array of power and control tactics used along a continuum in concert with one another, including direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, property damage, social isolation and behaviour which cause a person to live in fear.<sup>10</sup>*

Definitions of family violence that are inclusive of culturally diverse, indigenous and disabled women's experiences are further expressed in section five. Across all groups of women, it is important to note that women's own, accurate and lived definitions of family violence are often clouded by men's descriptions, excuses and acts of minimisation.

### 2.5.2 FACILITATED GROUPS

Facilitated family violence groups refers to those groups which are run with paid facilitators and where the focus is on groups run for adult women. Fenwick notes, in assuming an educator or facilitator within non-formal learning experiences, that we are making powerful 'assumptions that certain experiences can be enhanced in ways that produce desirable outcomes'.<sup>11</sup> This also assumes a responsibility for group workers to conduct quality, reflected, ethical, principled and evaluated work.

While the focus of this manual is on the facilitated groups in the northern subregion, there is a strong acknowledgment of the significance of all women's groups and gatherings as potential entry points for women in beginning to address family violence, and that these facilitated groups are only one of the many important support avenues for women.

9. Community Services and Health Industry Training Board Victoria (2007), *Industry Drivers Report* for 2007, available at: [www.intraining.org.au/Documents/Industry%20Drivers%20Report%202007.pdf](http://www.intraining.org.au/Documents/Industry%20Drivers%20Report%202007.pdf). Retrieved January 2008, p2.

10. Claire Grealy, Cathy Humphreys, Karen Milward and Janet Power (2008), *Urbis, Practice Guidelines: Women and Children's Family Violence Counselling and Support Program*, Department of Human Services, Victoria, available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/168970/fvsa\\_dha\\_counseling\\_support\\_2008.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/168970/fvsa_dha_counseling_support_2008.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p6.

11. Tara Fenwick, (2000), 'Expanding conceptions of experiential learning', *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol.50, No.4, p245. Available at: [www.ualberta.ca/~tfenwick/publications/PDF/21Experiential%20Learning%20in%20Adult%20Education%20A%20Comparative%20Framework.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~tfenwick/publications/PDF/21Experiential%20Learning%20in%20Adult%20Education%20A%20Comparative%20Framework.htm). Retrieved March 2008.

### 2.5.3 WOMEN AND DISABILITY

Disability is a broad term which covers intellectual, physical, psychiatric or sensory disability, acquired brain injury and neurological difficulties. These disabilities may occur through accident, illness or genetics, and may affect a person's learning, mobility and/or communication. The disability may occur over a range of longer time frames, and may be acquired, exacerbated or maintained at different ages. While disability can refer to the individual's difficulties, Crowe suggests that such a definition can be shifted to acknowledge:

*...the social construction of disability as a dynamic and culturally determined interaction between a person's individual function and the social meaning and response imposed upon that function. Disability, then, is the result of disabling social, environmental and attitudinal barriers. Social change, in this context, is about the eradication of oppression experienced by people with impairments. This contrasts strongly with the dominant 'medical' construction of disability, which emphasises overcoming or conquering disability through medical treatment or individual fortitude.<sup>12</sup>*

In addition to pre-existing disabilities, women accessing family violence groups may also have disabilities as a direct result of the abuse suffered, including emotional, health, psychiatric and physical disabilities. Group workers consulted through this project have given examples of women in their groups who had acquired disabilities because of family violence. These include a woman with a permanent acquired brain injury from being intentionally run over by her partner in his car, an older woman with a broken shoulder which was misdiagnosed by doctors as arthritis, and several women experiencing depression, anxiety, and chronic Hepatitis C infections. Women may also experience an exacerbation of their existing health difficulties through abuse and violence.

### 2.5.4 CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD)

Women from CALD backgrounds have vulnerabilities that can intersect with family violence. These vulnerabilities can include a sense of not belonging, a lack of citizenship, migration and settlement issues, language difficulties, experiences of trauma, fear, social proscriptions relating to relationships, and a lack of support and knowledge about rights and choices. The use of the term culturally and linguistically diverse in this manual is not meant to imply a universalising of these experiences to all CALD women. Lalende and Lavery note that 'women should be thought of as a unifying term and not necessarily a unified experience'.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly relevant for CALD women.

### 2.5.5 INCLUSIVITY

Throughout this manual there is an emphasis on inclusivity of practice, and of the particular sensitivities that may need to be considered for different population groupings to enhance them accessing and sustaining benefit from family violence groups. As noted by Domestic Violence Victoria (DV VIC), women with disabilities, and indigenous and CALD women face particular barriers in accessing family violence services in general.<sup>14</sup> This is also true for lesbians and bisexual women. Most groups in the northern region are run for heterosexual women and the language in many groups assumes a male/female partnership. The creation of family violence support groups for lesbian women has been discussed by one health service and may be initiated soon to support women on a subregional basis.

It is important to note that women's lives are intersectional and a woman can be many things at once. As such, the groupings of CALD women, women with a disability, or indigenous women are not meant to read as exclusive categories but as a means of highlighting issues of access.

<sup>12</sup> See Crowe's comments in Keran Howe (2000), *Violence against Women with Disabilities - An Overview of the Literature*. Women with Disabilities Australia, available at: [www.wda.org.au/keran.htm](http://www.wda.org.au/keran.htm). Retrieved April 2008, p6.

<sup>13</sup> Domestic Violence Victoria (2007), *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children*, available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/42883/cop\\_sfvs\\_27032007.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/42883/cop_sfvs_27032007.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p16.

<sup>14</sup> Domestic Violence Victoria stresses these points throughout their publication *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children* available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/42883/cop\\_sfvs\\_27032007.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/42883/cop_sfvs_27032007.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p16.

## 3.1 WOMEN IN THE NORTHERN METROPOLITAN SUBREGION

The northern subregion covers the municipalities of Darebin, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Yarra, Moreland, Banyule and Hume. Within these areas, local demographics for women vary.

## 3.1.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION

In terms of age:

- Hume has the highest proportion of women aged 15-24;
- Almost one-third of women in Yarra are aged 25-34, representing a significantly high proportion of women in this age group;
- Nillumbik has the highest proportions of women aged 35-44 and 45-54;
- Banyule has the highest proportion of women aged 55-64;
- Moreland has the highest proportion of women aged 65-74; and
- Banyule, Darebin, and Moreland have the highest proportions of women aged 75 and over.<sup>15</sup>

## 3.1.2 COUNTRY OF BIRTH

Country of birth:

- Darebin and Moreland have the highest proportions of females born in Italy;
- Darebin and Whittlesea have the highest proportions of females born in Greece;
- Yarra has the highest proportion of females born in Vietnam;
- Whittlesea has the highest proportion of females born in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Hume has the highest proportion of females born in Turkey;
- Moreland has the highest proportion of females born in Lebanon; and
- Darebin and Yarra have the highest proportions of females born in China.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, there are prominent emerging communities from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Iraq, India and China.

## 3.1.3 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER (ATSI) WOMEN

According to the 2001 Census, there were 1,301 women in the region aged 15 and over who stated that they were ATSI-identified. This figure reflects 16.5% of the population of ATSI-identified women in Victoria and 0.4% of women aged 15 and over in the northern region. Of the local government areas in the north, Darebin has the highest numbers of ATSI-identified women.<sup>17</sup>

## 3.1.4 WOMEN AND DISABILITY

Women in Hume experience comparatively high numbers of years lived with disability, suggesting poorer health status due to the junctures of poverty, education and migration distress.<sup>18</sup> This can result in many barriers to accessing health services and thus to an aggravation of health problems. Mental illness and neurological and sensory disorders cause the highest rate of years lived with disability in the region. In particular, women in Darebin have the highest rate of years lived with disability due to poor mental health, whilst women in Hume have the highest rate of years lived with disability due to neurological and sense disorders.

<sup>15</sup> All figures are correct as at 2005. See Women's Health In the North (2005), *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, p6.

<sup>16</sup> Women's Health In the North (2005), *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, p120.

<sup>17</sup> Women's Health In the North (2005), *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, P15.

<sup>18</sup> Women's Health In the North (2005), *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, p116.

## 3.2 WHERE IS FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK BEING DONE?

Through the family violence reforms, DHS, through regional partnerships, is funding specific family violence support groups that run once or twice a year. In addition, some partner agencies run groups more often in the context of other complementary groups, whilst some operate in collaboration with each other to fulfil funding agreements.

### 3.2.1 WHAT ARE THE GROUPS LIKE?

The majority of facilitated groups for adult women in the northern subregion run on a schedule of eight to ten weeks, and closed to new members after approximately the second week. These two 'open-access weeks' allow for both last minute referrals and for women to attend who are hesitant or are requiring more access support and planning. Sessions run for approximately two and a half hours each and are often held during daytime hours in order for mothers to attend. Family violence groups can be planned to be culturally specific, religiously specific, have diverse ability memberships, or to be ability specific. Over the last ten years, family violence groups in the north have been attended by a diverse group of women. Diverse in terms of age, cultural and religious background, parenting status, current challenges with addiction, disabilities - including mental health - and living circumstance and housing type.

After the initial groups, some organisations have follow-up groups, some facilitated and some self-help. Follow-up groups or second-phase groups have been run periodically since at least 1998 in order to offer women a chance to maintain contact and sustain support at the conclusion of their initial group. These second-phase groups are also a means to do some longer-term follow-up evaluation and to question women on the retention of any ideas that they have gained from their group. Plenty Valley Anglicare, North Yarra Community Health Centre and Darebin Community Health Service have all run periodic second-phase groups. Highly successful ongoing self-help support groups such as Café WOW in Lalor and the Darebin Expressive Women Singing Group have also been a result of initially facilitated groups.

Another approach taken in family violence group work is to offer a series of approximately eight sessions dedicated to the theme of healthy relationships within the context of an ongoing or longer-term group. For example, the Turkish Women's Group of Anglicare in Broadmeadows is a 12 month weekly intensive group that devotes one term to healthy relationships. In this group, regular group members can attend and others are invited with a maximum of twelve women.

Similarly, Richmond Community Health Centre's Timorese Women's Group, whilst ongoing, designates a series of sessions to the theme of healthy relationships.<sup>19</sup> The group's focus is on building self-esteem and resilience. It removes women from their usual environments through outings to relaxed and scenic locations, and thus allows women the freedom to talk about issues which they would not usually discuss. Being involved in an activity, such as cooking together, creates a more conducive atmosphere for discussion. In this context, family violence is expressed by women as a range of issues which usually do not use the term 'family violence' or equivalent wording. This approach is another method of addressing family violence in a context of safety and support. Women can elect not to join the group for these discussions should they wish.

A third approach to family violence group work is creating an ongoing healing space that is dedicated in all its processes to healing from all types of hurt and abuse. MAYA Healing Centre in Thornbury is working towards this approach with its indigenous women's days. These days are:

*...opportunities for the women to come to a safe environment, where they can bring their children and have some rest. The interaction with the other women also assists them, particularly the younger ones in developing the strength and skills for parenting and relationships. It is through talking, sharing stories/experiences and actively listening that women are able to identify what their needs are. In the process, the Women's Day program will continue to adapt to these needs, tailoring group work, inviting speakers and running healing workshops to reflect the requirements of the women.<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> Sally Mitchell, Manager Counselling and Group Work North Richmond Community Health Centre, personal communication May 1st 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Available on the Maya Healing Centre website at [www.maya.org.au/](http://www.maya.org.au/), paragraph seven on healing aboriginal women. Retrieved April 30 2008.

### 3.3 OVERVIEW OF RECENT GROUP WORK HISTORY

The Australian history of non-formal group work in community settings for women starts with the feminist movements of the 1970s. Feminist community work is linked to family violence group work through a history of engagement with political activity, through women's collective group work, and through women's social capital formation.<sup>21</sup> It is important to acknowledge the broad legacy of these efforts in establishing the first refuges, sexual assault services and women's consciousness-raising groups in Australia. These services have run support gatherings for women for many years, being present at times of crisis and enabling significant changes for women and their families.

From the 1980s, the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC) have held a central and pioneering position in supporting group work development in Melbourne.<sup>22</sup> Their publications have offered direction, values clarity, theoretical integrity and practice sensitivity to many of the group workers in the field since that time. Their practice publications and advocacy work for family violence group work have been central to the successful funding of family violence group work by the Victorian Government.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, neighbourhood houses continue to have a vital place in offering safe venues and skilled facilitators to assist many women in their journeys with family violence.<sup>24</sup> Family violence groups offer women learning, therapy and support with others in a space that is felt, touched, heard and experienced. In the northern subregion, neighbourhood houses run many specific groups for women that offer significant health benefits. Neighbourhood houses are often sites for women's social and cultural groups, helping reduce women's isolation, assisting with settlement, offering a sense of community and offering empowering and educative experiences that are all part of the picture of family violence healing and prevention.

### 3.4 LOCAL FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK HISTORY

Below are a number of examples of family violence groups run in the northern subregion over the last ten years which are identified through the course of this project.

#### 3.4.1 BERRY STREET VICTORIA

From 1982 onwards, Berry Street, at that time called Sutherland Community Resource Centre, created a facilitated support group for women in conjunction with other comprehensive family violence initiatives. In 1991, Berry Street developed the Survival and Standing Tall family violence groups run in Heidelberg. The support group was re-named Breaking Free in 1993.

Many current facilitators in the northern subregion have used the documentation of the Breaking Free group for women as the basis for their work. Particularly useful for other workers have been the Breaking Free contributions to ideas on planning, venues access, advertising, referral and intake processes.<sup>25</sup> The Breaking Free group has run over the last 12 years, evolving as theory has evolved and understandings of family violence have grown. Current Breaking Free group workers particularly note the contribution of trauma, narrative, strength-based and creative theories to their work practices.

From the early 1990s, therapists with qualifications in art, music, dance and creative therapies employed by Berry Street also began to influence the group work of the northern region as they brought complimentary, experiential and creative methods into the family violence groups they co-facilitated. This influence spread as group work partnerships across the northern region allowed a mix of co-facilitation experiences.

In addition, in 1992, Berry Street commenced an evening group to allow women to access support out-of-working hours. In 1994, three evening groups were run regionally over the year. From 2000, Preston Creative Living Centre ran a regional evening group as part of its pioneering men's behaviour change program which saw accountability to women as central to their model of safety for families.

21. Dorothy Ettl (2001), *Community-Based Transformative Learning*, Paper presented at SCUTREA, 31st Annual Conference, 3-5 July 2001, University of East London, available at: [www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002450.htm](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002450.htm). Retrieved March 2008. See also Lisa Young Larence and Maryanne Lane Porter (2004), 'Observations from practise, support group membership as a process of social capital formation among female survivors of domestic violence', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol.19, No.6, pp676-690.

22. Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre DVIRC and Tor Roxburgh (1994), *Empowering Women after Violence: from Survival to Strength*, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne, Victoria.

23. Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Jenni Southwell (2004), *Support Groups for People Affected by Family Violence: a Key Element of a Coordinated Response*, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne, Victoria. See also Moira Finucane and Sue Finucane (2004), *101 Ways Great and Small to Prevent Family Violence - A Victorian Resource Kit Bursting with Community-based Education Projects to End Family Violence*, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne, Victoria.

24. See DVIRC library for an unpublished article by Fagan and Clarke, *Brunswick Neighbourhood House Domestic Violence Support Group, 1994*.

25. Kaz Phillips and Michelle Wright (1996), *Breaking Free. Documentation of the Development of Educative/Supportive Groups for Women Survivors of Violent Relationships*, Berry Street Victoria, Melbourne.

### 3.4.2 ANGLICARE VICTORIA AND THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S WELFARE

In July 1998, Anglicare Plenty Valley Family Support Team, Lalor began its family violence support group and has run these approximately three or four terms a year since then. The group was named Looking Forward by the second group of women in 1999 and has been called this since.

In July 2003, Broadmeadows Anglicare Women's Community House also began to run the Looking Forward group and has run the group each term since. In 2004, the Plenty Valley team began to more fully articulate the links between family support work and domestic violence group work through practitioner research (see Robinson 2005a and 2005b). Also, the narrative theory now inherent in family violence group work within the northern subregion has been pioneered from some of the original work done by Robinson<sup>26</sup> and Castilino.<sup>27</sup>

In 2005, a Looking Forward group run in Turkish was held at Anglicare Broadmeadows Women's House in partnership with the Islamic Women's Welfare Service. 12 women and six children participated in this group and there was strong demand for future groups. Group content and processes were modified for language and cultural sensitivity, but group workers noted that it was interesting to see how consistent both contents and processes were for this group and the English language equivalent.

Anglicare has encouraged staff practice research around family support provision, domestic violence group work and family wellbeing. This practice research has also informed the concurrent running of other groups such as empowerment and self-esteem groups and supported playgroups.

### 3.4.3 DAREBIN COMMUNITY HEALTH

A woman's domestic violence support group called Standing Strong was developed in the mid-1990s based on the Breaking Free documentation. This group has been run two to four times a year since. The Standing Strong group has also tried to address gender power inequalities by running concurrent self-help groups, organising community development and community advocacy around family violence.

The group workers involved in Standing Strong have retained a firm commitment to highlighting the feminist and structural components of violence against women. Sokoloff and Dupont remind us that race, class and gender are 'interlocking social structures that perpetuate inequality' and that the 'pursuit of equality and safety in family violence work are linked to this reality'.<sup>28</sup> The family violence group work within the Darebin team has also incorporated workers further study in Gestalt therapy, narrative theory, group work dynamics and art therapy.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Robinson (2005a), *Enhanced family casework-family support work: identifying and addressing the trauma of intimate partner abuse*, unpublished document, Anglicare Victoria Family Support Team, Plenty Valley, Anglicare Victoria. Kim Robinson (2005 b), *Thinking with the trauma lens*, unpublished document, Anglicare Victoria Family Support Team, Plenty Valley, Anglicare Victoria.

<sup>27</sup> Tracey Castilino and Andrew Compton (2002), *Family Violence: the importance in practice of men's behaviour change programs for women – collaborative practice with partners of men who attend these programs*, available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Conference%20papers/Exp-horiz/Castilino\\_Compton.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Conference%20papers/Exp-horiz/Castilino_Compton.pdf). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Natalie Sokoloff, N.J. and Ida Dupont (2005), 'Domestic violence at the intersections of race, class, and gender; Challenges and contributions to understanding violence against marginalised women in diverse communities', *Violence Against Women*, Vol.11, No.1, January 2005, pp38-64. Available at: [www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335articles/Sokoloff.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335articles/Sokoloff.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, pp 59-60.

### 3.4.4 OTHER WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUPS

As noted above, women's social and cultural groups help reduce women's isolation, assist with settlement, offer a sense of community and offer empowering and educative experiences that are all part of the picture of family violence healing and prevention. While not all funded through the DHS family violence initiatives, these groups are a key source of support for many women experiencing family violence. Some of the women's support groups in the subregion include the:

- Victorian Arabic Social Services Hume Assyrian-Chaldean Women's Group;
- Northern Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre women's groups;
- Islamic Women's Welfare Service women's groups;
- Drummond Street Relationships Centre women's sewing group;
- MAYA indigenous women's groups; and
- Family Outreach Support Services, Disability Client Services Northwest metropolitan Department of Human Services, coordinate Out Of The Mainstream, a parenting group for women with learning disabilities.

Mental health support women's groups are conducted through the:

- Moreland Community Health Service;
- North East Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NEAMI); and
- Finchley Disability Services Broadmeadows.

Women's groups at neighbourhood houses in the north-east and the north-west include the:

- Fawkner Community House - Urdu speaking women's group, Arabic speaking women's group and a Chaldean Assyrian women's group;
- Broadmeadows Women's Community House - Turkish women's group;
- Collingwood Neighbourhood House - Turkish women's group; and
- Banksia Gardens Broadmeadows - Turkish Black Sea women's group, Ibero-American women's group and Turkish women's friendly group.

Family support services in the region that often run women's support groups include:

- Yarra Family Services;
- Darebin Family Services;
- The Children's Protection Society;
- Kildonan;
- Anglicare;
- Berry St;
- The Salvation Army.
- The Brotherhood of St Laurence;
- Merri Outreach Support Service; and
- Melbourne City Mission.

Women's groups are sometimes run within men's behaviour change programs or in close partnership with such programs. Such local initiatives are at the:

- Sunbury Community Health Centre;
- Children's Protection Society; and
- Plenty Valley Community Health.

Women and children's combined support groups occurring within the region include the:

- Royal Children's Hospital groups for mothers and children;
- Elizabeth Hoffman House groups for women and children;
- Berry St – Expressions Group and Expressions Camp;
- Anglicare – Parenting after Family Violence Sessions; and
- Parenting support groups for women run by schools and maternal and child health centre nurses.

## 4.0 THEORY USED IN FAMILY VIOLENCE GROUP WORK IN THE NORTHERN SUBREGION

As noted in the recently published *Practice Guidelines for Family Violence Women's and Children's Counselling and Support Programs*,<sup>29</sup> theories of attachment, trauma, systems and ecology, loss, grief and empowerment help to inform family violence counselling and group work. Seeley and Plunkett also note the significance of feminist post-structural approaches to supporting women facing family violence.<sup>30</sup> In the northern region of Melbourne, a range of theory is used to support family violence group work practice and these theories for practice will be noted below, and their contribution to group work outlined.

Vital to family violence group work is feminist theory that centres gender firmly at the heart of understandings of family violence. Feminist theory offers a gendered analysis of power and of how power operates in discriminatory and marginalising ways for women, resulting in inequality and compounded vulnerability.

### 4.1 STRUCTURALISM AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

Structural and post-structural theories address how structures, systems and relationships in society powerfully enable or hinder individuals, groups and communities in achieving social justice and equality.

Post-structuralist analyses of violence suggest that 'power is not located in any one group but exists in all social relationships (and) those with power determine the truth'.<sup>31</sup> Post-structuralism suggests that power is complex, shifting and takes many forms. Women experiencing family violence often mention the clever, changeable and stealthy faces of the power that their partners exert over them.

While it is true that power is complex and can be subtle, there are interconnections of very real structures such as race, class, and gender that increase women's vulnerability in situations of family violence in culturally diverse communities. Sokoloff and Dupont challenge the post-structural idea that everyone has their own fluid and powerful unique position in society. They note that women's heightened vulnerability in situations of family violence is deeply connected to their social, cultural and class positions, options and choices.<sup>32</sup>

Group workers informed by structural approaches explore human rights and discuss in groups what structures shape, contain and enable women's lives. When informed by structuralism, group workers often create new structures such as follow-up or second-phase groups, advocacy groups and ongoing community connections which aim to strengthen women's support networks.

### 4.2 FEMINIST POST-STRUCTURALISM

Feminist post-structuralism looks at the relationship between language, power and the body and, being a post-structural theory, it also notes the multiple ways in which gendered social and personal power can operate. Unlike structuralism, it sees power as operating in many gendered places, things and relationships and not just within social structures. 'We don't just absorb the ideologies of patriarchy through our minds; these (ideologies) are inscribed into our very being in the world through our relationships with our bodies.'<sup>33</sup>

Feminist post-structuralism informs aspects of family violence group work practice by encouraging group workers to explore how women affected by violence can reclaim autonomy, agency, bodily integrity, freedom of movement and social connections. Feminist post-structuralism also encourages the use of expressive and non-verbal languages in group work and the 'pulling apart' of taken-for-granted assumptions women may hold about their lives. It stresses the importance of not dictating knowledge to women, but of sharing knowledge equally.

29. Claire Grealy, Cathy Humphreys, Milward, K. and Power, J. (2008). *Urbis, Practice Guidelines: Women and Children's Family Violence Counselling and Support Program*, Department of Human Services, Victoria. Available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/168970/fvsa\\_dha\\_counseling\\_support\\_2008.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/168970/fvsa_dha_counseling_support_2008.pdf). Retrieved May 2008.

30. Jan Seeley and Catherine Plunkett (2002). *Women and Domestic Violence, Standards for Counselling Practice*. The Salvation Army Crisis Service Inner South Domestic Violence Service St Kilda, available at: [www.salvationarmy.com.au/salvwr/\\_assets/main/documents/reports/women&domestic\\_violence\\_counselling\\_standards.pdf](http://www.salvationarmy.com.au/salvwr/_assets/main/documents/reports/women&domestic_violence_counselling_standards.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p10.

31. Jan Seeley and Catherine Plunkett (2002). *Women and Domestic Violence, Standards for Counselling Practice*. The Salvation Army Crisis Service Inner South Domestic Violence Service St Kilda, available at: [www.salvationarmy.com.au/salvwr/\\_assets/main/documents/reports/women&domestic\\_violence\\_counselling\\_standards.pdf](http://www.salvationarmy.com.au/salvwr/_assets/main/documents/reports/women&domestic_violence_counselling_standards.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p10.

32. Natalie Sokoloff and Ida Dupont (2005). 'Domestic violence at the intersections of race, class, and gender: Challenges and contributions to understanding violence against marginalized women in diverse communities', *Violence Against Women*, Vol.11, No.1, January 2005, available at: [www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335articles/Sokoloff.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335articles/Sokoloff.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, pp 59-60.

33. Beth Spencer (2006). 'Post-structuralist feminism and the body', *The Body as Fiction / Fiction as a Way of Thinking*. Phd thesis, University of Ballarat, Australia. Available at: [www.bethspencer.com/body-as-fiction.html](http://www.bethspencer.com/body-as-fiction.html). Retrieved May 2008, p22.

### 4.3 NARRATIVE AND STRENGTH-BASED THEORIES

Narrative and strength-based theories shape our understandings of how groups can help women reclaim authorship and ownership of their lives. Both theories address women as experts in their own lives and enhance women's ability to take up empowered readings of their own life stories.

These theories also encourage group workers to see the power of narrative processes in both their own group work and in their own professional supervision and learning. Respecting differences in how women see meaning and encompassing multiple ways of considering the world are vital to effective group work. Narrative and strength-based theories have offered a reminder for group workers of the centrality of groups being principled around inclusivity and diversity.<sup>34</sup>

Drawing on narrative and strength-based theory, family violence group work can offer respectful audiences of support for women. Through the use of these theories, facilitators offer women in groups powerful chances for growth through joint collaborative creations of group meaning such as activities defining 'What Is Family Violence?', and activities that allow women to try out newly empowered positions to old topics.

### 4.4 TRAUMA THEORIES

Trauma theories explore how women can respond to the complex ordeal of family violence and how workers can assist traumatised women. Feeling edgy and hyper-aroused, or detached, numbed, disconnected and dissociated are all common physiological responses to trauma and to subsequent heightened stress.<sup>35</sup> Women's feelings and sensations connected to trauma may not be readily described by them in words. Knowing this can help group workers minimise the chances of unintentionally heightening stress within group sessions and helps them prepare some group work strategies should women begin to experience extreme stress in the group. Group workers can ensure that safety in the group is always made explicit and that they use expressive and creative therapies in their group work sessions as a significant way to allow a non-verbal language for women's feelings.

Thorough pre-group assessments help to capture women's experiences of trauma, particularly when the content of assessments intentionally covers historical experiences of trauma. During pre-group assessments, women can be reassured that the content and processes of group sessions will be fundamentally safe as the highest priority.

The 'sanctuary' response to trauma informs group workers with understandings of the links between trauma and women's well-intended, but misplaced, attempts at self-care through self-soothing addictions and self-abuse.<sup>36</sup> It also highlights the importance of safe group work practices and creating calming group work environments that provide a sense of refuge or sanctuary for women.

Chronic trauma has a major impact on compromising parenting and attachment difficulties are a common experience for women and children exposed to family violence. Attachment theory, in relation to therapeutic practice:

*...rests on the assumption that humans have a basic need to form attachments to people throughout their life. If people are unable to form these attachments, for whatever reason, their longer-term emotional and social wellbeing will be compromised... Violence within the family can impact upon the relationship between a child and their mother.<sup>37</sup>*

Reforming safe and affirming attachments with other group work members can be a valuable part of healing from family violence trauma for women.

*Violence can isolate and degrade people, and the group is central to rebuilding a sense of belonging and affirmation. In other words, attachment has been shown to be an important part of the process of healing from traumatic events, for both adults and children.<sup>38</sup>*

<sup>34</sup> Some examples of narrative and strength-based theory applied to family violence are in articles developed through the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide. Available at: [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/)

<sup>35</sup> For explanations about the effects of family violence trauma on women see the works of John Briere and Carol Jordan (2004), 'Violence against women: Outcome complexity and implications for assessment and treatment', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Beverly Hills, Vol.19, No.11, pp.1252-1276. Available at: [www.johnbriere.com/JIV%20B&J.pdf](http://www.johnbriere.com/JIV%20B&J.pdf). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>36</sup> See for outlines of the sanctuary response to healing trauma see the works of Sandra Bloom (2008), S.E.L.F. *A Nonlinear, Cognitive Behavioural Approach to the Treatment of Complex Personality Disorders*. Available at: [www.sanctuaryweb.com/Main/SELF%20Pages/self.htm](http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/Main/SELF%20Pages/self.htm). Also see Libby Madsen, Lisa Blitz, David McCorkle and Paula Panzer (2003), 'Sanctuary in a domestic violence shelter: a team approach to healing', *Psychiatric Quarterly*, Vol.74, No.2, pp155-171. Available at: [www.sanctuaryweb.com/Services/sanctuary\\_%20shelter.htm](http://www.sanctuaryweb.com/Services/sanctuary_%20shelter.htm). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Claire Grealy, Cathy Humphreys, Karen Milward and Janet Power (2008), Urbis, *Practice Guidelines: Women and Children's Family Violence Counselling and Support Program*, Department of Human Services, Victoria. Available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/168970/fvsa\\_dha\\_counseling\\_support\\_2008.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/168970/fvsa_dha_counseling_support_2008.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p20.

<sup>38</sup> Claire Grealy, Cathy Humphreys, Karen Milward and Janet Power (2008), Urbis, *Practice Guidelines: Women and Children's Family Violence Counselling and Support Program*, Department of Human Services, Victoria. Available at: [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/168970/fvsa\\_dha\\_counseling\\_support\\_2008.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/168970/fvsa_dha_counseling_support_2008.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, pp20-21.

#### 4.5 LEARNING THEORY

Adult learning theory shapes our understanding of being women and working with adult women. It can inform session planning, raise the importance of group pace, and address different learning and facilitation styles. Learning theory can also help group workers understand their co-facilitation relationships and professional development needs. Research on informal and incidental adult learning can help group workers understand the importance of maximising women's chances to discuss less formally and connect authentically via group socialising and coffee breaks. Developmental learning theory also addresses ability differences, communicating how to maximise inclusivity for all women in group experiences.

#### 4.6 CREATIVITY IN VARIOUS THEORIES

Theories within Gestalt, narrative, psychoanalytic, music and arts-based therapies incorporate phenomenology, a commitment to enhancing personal strengths and a belief in the importance of self-discovery and expression through creativity. Creative based theories encourage group workers to be imaginative and increase women's self-awareness, by exploring and discovering, being engaging and active in all their group processes. Creative methods are not in themselves empowering of women but a feminist perspective continues to allow them to be used with women in negotiated and helpful ways. Creative approaches using music, art, dance, movement, and activity also acknowledge different learning styles, expression needs and expression varieties and are inclusive of group member differences.

#### 4.7 RESEARCH ON THE LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

It is not uncommon for women and children to be abused in the same residence by the same abuser and it is therefore important to support both women and children within family violence group work programs.<sup>39</sup> As such, child care is central for children accompanying women in family violence groups, as children are also clients of support services and their needs are important to attend to. Two methods to strengthen this support to children are by providing child care for group members and training child care staff in family violence support.

<sup>39</sup> Cathy Humphreys (2007), *Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Challenging Directions for Practice*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper\\_13.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/IssuesPaper_13.pdf). And Adam Tomison (2000), 'Exploring Family Violence: Links between Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence', No.13, National Child Protection Clearing House, Melbourne. Available at: [www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues13/issues13.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues13/issues13.html). Retrieved March 2008.

Hovane says that 'agencies and service providers need to guard against an increasing organisational reluctance to consider and engage with new ideas and evidence (as they operate) within an ever-narrowing and unchanging circle of self-referential ideas and evidence'.<sup>40</sup> Therefore group workers addressing family violence should begin to engage with theory creation from non-Anglo views and to use terminology and concepts from indigenous and CALD research.

Within the northern subregion there are some areas of current interest in emerging theory and ideas. Family violence group workers have begun to work with the recent evolutions within Islamic feminism and have noted the challenges of advocating for women's rights. Islamic feminists have offered recent rereadings of the Koran that are women respectful, gender equalising and Muslim family harmonious.<sup>41</sup> In addressing family violence for women, group workers are trying to think through whole-of-community approaches that keep gender relevant when balancing human rights with women's rights.

Group workers have begun to look at what different women's groups consider authoritative and respectful within their social settings and who can be powerfully supportive partners in spreading messages of nonviolence. Family violence researchers note the role of religious institutions and faith communities of all denominations in actively taking an authoritative community stand against violence to women.<sup>42</sup> Authors articulating indigenous best practice in family violence also note the role of authoritative, guiding and mentoring elders in family violence program success.<sup>43</sup> These representatives can make effective guest speakers as well as advocates for group work.

Another area of group worker interest in feminism is the work of feminist geographers exploring how studies of geography, space and time are gendered.<sup>44</sup> These studies suggest that power can be exercised through how society allows, or disallows, women to take up spaces or time life events. Women need to feel a sense of entitlement to be in private and public places. These insights can offer group workers new understandings of how abused women can reclaim private and public space, and personal timings. Reflective questions group workers can pose themselves include: how does violence restrict women claiming space and 'taking up more space' in her world?; how can we help women in groups to practise reclaiming space confidently?: who benefits from timings women get told to use?; and how powerful can it be for women to know they can re-attend future groups, go at her own pace, and do things when she is ready?

A further area of exploration for group workers is at the intersection of disability, feminism and group work. Family violence group workers are challenged to address the creation of agency wide responses and infrastructures, which support all women accessing group work services to receive accurate and timely information and support.<sup>45</sup>

In 2011, it is timely to address new technologies and their role in group support (in the design, execution or evaluation of groups). Communicating broadly and inclusively may also mean assessing new technologies strengths in helping some women access group support. The ability to participate in 'real time', visual group work via computer, or to use facebook or tweets to communicate could be explored. A large number of Australian women of all ages and income levels use the internet for health support and information accessing it at libraries, educational institutions and friend's homes more often than men do.<sup>46</sup>

40. Victoria Hovane discusses the work of Dobash and Dobash in (2007), *White Privilege and the Fiction of Colour Blindness: Implications for Best Practice Standards for Aboriginal Victims of Family Violence*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Hovane.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Hovane.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, p32.

41. Asha Bedar and Joumanah El Matrah (2005), *Media guide, Islam and Muslims in Australia*, Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, Melbourne. Available at: [www.home.vicnet.net.au/~iwwc/IWWC\\_media\\_guide.pdf](http://www.home.vicnet.net.au/~iwwc/IWWC_media_guide.pdf). Retrieved May 23rd 2008.

42. Natalie Sokoloff and Ida Dupont (2005), 'Domestic violence at the intersections of race, class, and gender: Challenges and contributions to understanding violence against marginalised women in diverse communities', *Violence Against Women*, Vol.11, No.1, January 2005. Available at: [www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335Articles/Sokoloff.pdf](http://www.sfu.ca/~wchane/sa335Articles/Sokoloff.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, p57.

43. Paul Memmott, Catherine Chambers, Carol Go-Sam & Linda Thomson (2006), *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention - Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs*, Issues paper 11, June 2006, Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper\\_11.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper_11.pdf). Retrieved February 2008, p21.

44. See Christina Hughes (1999), *The Time That Isn't There: Temporal Un/Consciousness In (Feminist) Research*, Paper presented at Standing Conference for University Teaching in the Research of Education for Adults (SCUTERA), 29th Annual Conference, 5-7 July, 1999, Department of Continuing Education, University of Warwick, England, available at: [www.leeds.ac.uk/educoll/documents/000000999.htm](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educoll/documents/000000999.htm). See also Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (1999), *Feminist Theory And The Body: A Reader*, Routledge, New York and also see Julia Clarke (2002), *Taking Flight: Gender And Deterritorialisation: The Altered Spaces Of Lifelong Learning*, Symposium presented at SCUTREA, 32nd Annual Conference, 2-4 July 2002, University of Stirling. Available at: [www.leeds.ac.uk/educoll/documents/00002104.htm](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educoll/documents/00002104.htm). Retrieved May 2008.

45. Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), 2008, *Violence Against Women with Disabilities Resources Manual*, published by WWDA, Tasmania.

46. Household Use of Information Technology Australia 2008-2009, Chapter 2: Household computer p18. or internet access at: [www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8146.02008-09?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8146.02008-09?OpenDocument).

## 5.0 FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING GROUP WORK WITH WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

inTouch Inc. (formally known as the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service Victoria) has a long history of supporting both women and children from CALD backgrounds. With its roots in case management and project work, inTouch Inc. has spent the last three years developing counselling and therapeutic group work programs aimed at engaging the specific needs of different CALD communities in Melbourne. Since 2008, 20 groups have been run which have supported a total of 189 women and children. inTouch has also worked in partnership with other Counselling and Support Alliance members.

The following best practise guidelines for group work design and delivery have been adopted:

- Pre-group meetings to seek and develop partnerships;
- Allowing four to six weeks for the advertising, recruitment and engagement of women/children;
- Allowing two weeks for pre-group interviews;
- Allowing eight weeks for group delivery;
- Allowing supervision/debriefing time after each group;
- Allowing two to four weeks for post evaluations with facilitators, partner agencies and women/children;and
- Having an allocated group work coordinator.

### 5.1 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE STARTING A GROUP

#### 5.1.1 CONSIDER THE COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN AND/OR CHILDREN YOU WISH TO ENGAGE:

Consider where the women and/or children will be recruited from (i.e. ethno-specific groups such as Indian, Arabic speaking or Chinese women, or multicultural groups such as women who have immigrated to Australia from different countries) and who has engagement with the women to encourage them to attend. Recruitment partners may include locally based ethno-specific community agencies, religious groups, local AMES centres or mainstream agencies with ethno-specific workers. Recruited women may be from communities that are established or newly-arrived.

#### 5.1.2 CONSIDER TYPE OF GROUP APPROACH

Consultation with community experts and partners can help determine the focus of the group. Women from some cultures are less confident in sharing their experiences of abuse. They may not wish to disclose personal experiences within a group setting for fear of the shame associated if knowledge is spread to the wider community. Some women may feel okay about disclosing personal experiences particularly if they have already been supported for family violence related problems by a professional agency.

The focus of the group may be:

- Counselling and therapeutic groups for those who have experienced family violence and/or who are able to openly disclose their family violence experience;
- Counselling and therapeutic groups for women experiencing a range of issues including difficult relationships – for women who have fear and shame around openly disclosing their experiences of family violence; and
- Women's leadership groups – for women who do not necessarily have experience of family violence but are in a position to help others in their community if they have knowledge of how to identify family violence, Victorian legislation about family violence, and a general understanding of services available.

#### 5.1.3 CONSIDER WHO WILL PARTICIPATE

Consider the participants; are they women, children, and/or mothers with children. What are their literacy levels, age ranges, individual experiences of family violence and experiences of disclosing personal information?

## 5.2 GETTING THE GROUP STARTED

- Share skills and expertise by working in partnership with other agencies – this can be done by identifying the existing skills of each member of the partnership. For example, a partner may have access to ethno-specific childminders and can organise child care; partners can develop session plans/activities if they have this experience; partners with links to local group work settings can book venues; and those who have access and engagement with women can assume recruitment and advertising responsibilities.
- Identify a professional or other community member who has the ability to engage women and encourage their group attendance, e.g. an ethno-specific worker/facilitator within the formed partnership, or within local or mainstream agencies, could have this ability to link to the community.
- Engage bilingual/bicultural facilitators for ethno-specific groups – inTouch Inc. is often able to engage an ethno-specific worker who is bilingual and bicultural and has the family violence experience required to share related information to women. An ethno-specific facilitator may be engaged who does not have experience with family violence. If this is the case it is important that the other facilitator does have family violence experience. This worker, while not having family violence exposure, often has the links to the women to encourage them to engage and attend the group. They will also contribute an understanding of the women's culture, to ensure the topics are culturally relevant and sensitively delivered.
- Engage interpreters and bilingual facilitators for multicultural groups.
- Avoid the use of interpreters wherever possible. However, when interpreters are used, ensure that the women feel safe with the selected person/s.
- Meet with community experts, partners and women where possible to discuss the goals/aims/roles of specific communities. Consider incorporating cultural and religious adaptations into the group design to reflect this required context.
- Be aware and curious of where the women/family has come from and their pre-migration history.
- Consider using flyers to engage women. Ensure that the type of language used will connect with and not deter women.
- Translate materials such as consent forms and resources to facilitate communication.
- Create a delivery timeline and develop a session plan.

### 5.3 DELIVERING THE SESSIONS

- Use pre-screening client interviews – this is an opportunity to provide information about the aims and expectations of the group, assesses the women’s individual experiences, and is an opportunity to ask women to sign consent forms where appropriate.
- Consider pre-evaluation methods. For pre-evaluation purposes, consider face-to-face interviews with participants and facilitators that may incorporate culturally relevant story telling symbols, metaphors, music or stories.
- Modify the sessions if necessary - women may identify an area of interest and wish to focus on this instead of a planned topic. Changing or modifying the groups topic/content to reflect the women’s interests, validates and values their contributions. Some women are not often given the opportunity to make decisions and choices in their lives. This opportunity to offer ideas about the groups direction can increase women’s confidence and self-esteem. It also promotes a woman’s engagement if she is encouraged to choose a topic that interests her. It may become apparent after the commencement of the group that there are additional topics that the facilitators feel would also be beneficial to focus on.
- Review and debrief after each session. For post-evaluation purposes incorporate questionnaires or face-to-face interviews with participants and facilitators.

Topics can be explored through therapeutically focused large and small groups, using different processes including dance, meditation, massage and art. While topics will vary, some of the following can be explored in each group:

- Exploring life in Australia;
- Migration to Australia;
- Healthy relationships;
- Healthy communication – assertiveness;
- Different forms of abuse;
- Anxiety;
- Self-care;
- Social isolation;
- Making decisions;
- The different and/or changing roles of women;
- Travelling independently within the community;
- Keeping women safe;
- Women supporting women;
- Sharing happy times and activities with children;
- Discussing the psychosocial impact of domestic violence on women, children, family and community;
- Share what services are available; and
- Celebrating achievements.

### 5.4 BENEFITS OF CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE GROUP WORK

In many cultures women engage more easily with other women in a group context as opposed to individual counselling with someone they don’t know. Women also engage more quickly with a facilitator who speaks their language and understands their culture.

Ensure the sharing of mutual learnings, understanding and respect of strengths inherent in every culture between facilitators and participants. Understand that culturally-sensitive approaches ensure the avoidance of western assumptions; as facilitators we become aware of our own cultural biases, but a willingness to explore cultural variations in definitions of family violence allows for a culturally-sensitive environment which, in turn, allows women to experiment with new ideas.

Women are safe to travel in the cultural realm and share opinions within the group, therefore facilitating the development of social networks for women isolated from their own or the wider community.

## 6.1 PLANNING GROUP WORK CONTENT AND PROCESSES

Whilst group content and processes are usually negotiated between the women and group workers at their initial couple of meetings, some common family violence group themes are outlined in section six; this is not meant to be prescriptive as each group is unique. Considerable planning skill is required of the group workers, as weeks are organic and planned partly on the basis of what happened the week before. Also, each theme can be covered in a variety of ways depending on the interests and needs of the women in each group.

It is common for groups to go from group creation and formation to building group cohesion over their eight-week life. Chances for personal disclosure or more challenging themes can be brought in as the group gets to know each other better and as cohesion builds. Group workers should take care when introducing themes requiring touch, disclosure and creative processes as it is important to explain these to group members to make sure group members know that these processes are optional.

## 6.2 A COMMON SEQUENCE OF THEMES AND PLANS

Some groups may need to spend two weeks on a theme in order to repeat key thoughts, practise new skills and consolidate ideas. A common sequence of weekly themes for groups includes:

- Pre-group assessing;
- Week one - covering a group agreement, which possible group themes to cover and getting to know you;
- Week two - covering the social context of abuse and the social expectations of men and women;
- Week three - covering what is abuse?
- Weeks four and five - exploring the effects of abuse e.g. loss of self-worth, and managing anger or grief;
- Weeks six and seven - addressing healing from the effects of abuse e.g. self-care or rights; and
- Week eight - concluding and evaluating.

There are many social, economic and experiential barriers that exist for adults when they try to access community services. Women in abusive relationships are often discouraged from attending community activities or groups by their partners, so attending family violence support groups, or assessment interviews, can also become a potentially unsafe activity for these women.

Women trying to approach groups may be halted by the impact of their abusive experiences, or may not enter a connection with a group worker without expecting inequality within that relationship. For many women in situations of emotional or physical abuse, their bodily integrity is affected and they have difficulty moving physically in the world without fear, inferiority and shame. Women may also be victims of financial abuse and therefore not be able to afford to attend group work interviews, or use child care or transport. Approaching and accessing groups can be complex.

Women's access to group assessments, as a lived process, must therefore be explicitly addressed and supported. To share their voice equally, women require a safe, dynamic and negotiated process. Women who have been exposed to domestic violence need to have their rights made clear and their permission for assessment questions respected. They may be accustomed to being compliant, and thus may need to know quite explicitly, the optional nature of participation within assessment processes.

To do the group assessment, potential group members can nominate where and when to meet for their individual interview. Negotiating the power in this way may mean group workers are inconvenienced, challenged and surprised, but these negotiations add to the ambience, content and flow of conversations.<sup>47</sup> It also pre-empts the relationships as ones in which workers are trying to maximise equality. Promoting negotiated access allows each woman to approach the group in a way that feels safest for her, thus encouraging more confident commitments to the group. The assessment interview questions can be asked in a conversational way. This conversational chatting is a part of the process of access negotiation which is deliberate, thorough, purposeful and relevant. The interviewer's focussed structuring from general to more specific questions has an ethical dimension as it doesn't replicate the interrogative questioning often experienced by abuse survivors.<sup>48</sup>

It is worth pre-empting, in the pre-group assessment, the exploration of a woman's broader experiences of trauma, including her experiences as a child. For some women, abusive experiences in their intimate relationships have been on top of difficult or abusive childhoods or other experiences of abuse. By exploring her prior experiences with safety or danger, the group worker can discuss the support groups' security, and the women can be presented with some future calming strategies to use within the group. Using trauma grounding techniques, giving permission to leave the room if needed, acknowledging optional group participation, giving facilitator support and one-on-one counselling are all productive strategies.<sup>49</sup>

Women with a disability may require different types and levels of assessment for group participation. Offering women different methods of communication, such as interpreters or language assistance, during their group assessment is important to maximise clear and mutual connection.

Group workers can carefully explore the existence of family violence for women by being perceptive and progressively using gradations of words. Words a woman may use in describing her relationship such as hurtful, difficult, stressful, sad, depressing or anxious can be followed up with sensitive enquiries such as, 'What has been happening?', 'Tell me more' or 'What do you mean when you say...?'

A group worker being perceptive and sensitive is also encouraged by Cox. She suggests that assessment conversations are best done with indigenous women when professionals first address their own biases and stereotypes. This can include a professional acknowledging that indigenous communities, as with as other CALD communities, are highly diverse. It is important to address the issue of confidentiality to maximise engagement with indigenous women.

*...Another key component of a survivor's engagement is the level of confidentiality within the agency and of the information exchanged with the professional. This includes cultural advice sought by the agency or professional (for example from local community elders or other service providers), which should not take place unless the survivor has given permission for this to take place and feels in control of the process...The provision of information needs to take place at a pace with which the survivor is comfortable. This allows the initial engagement of the survivor and follow-up process to be a smoother and more engaging process for both parties...<sup>50</sup>*

47. This negotiation is discussed by DeLucca in Margot Ely, Margaret Anzul, Teri Friedman and Diane Garner's (1991), *Doing Qualitative Research, Circles Within Circles*. Falmer Press, London, p59.

48. Lesley Laing (2003), *Research And Evaluation Of Interventions With Women Affected By Domestic Violence*. Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse Topic Paper, available at: [www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/evaluation\\_of\\_interventions\\_with\\_women.pdf](http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/evaluation_of_interventions_with_women.pdf). Retrieved April 2008.

49. For discussion on trauma grounding techniques see Elizabeth Vermilyea (2000), *Growing Beyond Survival*, Sidran Press, Baltimore.

50. Dorinda Cox (2008), *Working With Indigenous Survivors Of Sexual Assault*. Australian Institute of Family Studies WRAP No. 5. Available at: [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/wrap/w5.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/wrap/w5.html). Retrieved May 2008, P37.

This section looks at the key themes used within family violence group sessions; the activities in section eight follow this outline.

### 7.1 ENERGY CHANGES

Warm-ups, warm downs and intentional techniques to create a safe group space are all methods of changing group energy within individual sessions. These changes help support women to feel comfortable, welcomed and relaxed or alert, interested and curious. Energy change activities are often done at the beginning of a session to help the group focus on the present, within sessions to enliven, rejuvenate or lift a group's energy, and at the end of a session to summarise, focus, or help apply ideas beyond the session.

### 7.2 JOINING TOGETHER: WHAT WOULD THE GROUP LIKE TO COVER AND HOW WILL WE WORK TOGETHER?

The purpose of helping the group join together is to unify women across the first couple of sessions. This allows women to check their first impressions of each other, and ease their concerns about fitting in. It is a phase where women want to be accepted, find answers, find directions, and find comfort, support and understanding. Women at this group stage are questioning, 'Can I trust this place?', 'Can we clarify what we will do together and how we will do it?'. It is a group stage that helps build rapport between women and ownership by women of the group's content and processes.

During this phase facilitators can focus on women's special needs and their prior knowledge about family violence. Group agreements can be negotiated between group members in order to make overt how the group will enact fairness and sharing, timeliness, non attendance and confidentiality. The group agreement can also cover what is OK to share and how the facilitators will deal with group member crises. Done sensitively, group agreements can form a secure foundation in which group members can build trust with each other.

During the joining together group stages, women with disabilities, indigenous women and CALD women may need to be given hints on what they can ask for. Many women may not be used to being asked for their opinion, having not positioned themselves as being able to have a say, or having experiences of reflecting on themselves or their needs. One way to give women hints of what they can ask for may be to share suggestions of themes that other women have explored in earlier groups.

Women may disclose other forms of abuse, such as childhood abuse, in such a supportive, encouraging and unifying atmosphere. It is helpful if group workers are ready for these occasions with a clear, affirming and validating response for these women, and a safe and respectful means of moving the group forward on the session theme at hand.

### 7.3 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND OF ABUSE

Addressing the theme of gender and abuse being socially constructed sets an important social and political context for the groups and offers consistency and integrity for the facilitator's theory and practice. Family violence is about gendered power and control occurring within societies that construct the relationships, systems and structures that sanction abuse.

The social construction of the gender and abuse theme allows facilitators to highlight that abuse is perpetrated by those in particularly trusted positions within women's lives, and by those who often have privileged access to intimacies about women's lives. Covering this theme permits women to explore the breadth and depth of their abusive experiences and begins the important shift away from self-blame for being abused.

### 7.3.1 WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

For many women accessing support groups, what family violence is, is not self-evident, so this makes it a key theme to explore. Many factors influence a woman's confidence in her judgment as to what she is experiencing. Women who do not know their rights may be accustomed to abuse and so the stress and fatigue of the abuse itself compromises confidence. Some women have a hierarchy of abuse in their minds (physical violence is worse than name calling, which is worse than having your clothing checked for evidence of an affair, or having health information withheld). Some women may believe certain myths about family violence, such as 'it happens to women who are in poor families', or 'it happens to women like me'. Often the beliefs held by women are based on information from violent partners, or from societal or familial messages.

For women with disabilities, indigenous and immigrant women, broader definitions of family violence are required to acknowledge the varied contexts of their lives. For women with disability a definition of abuse needs to be wide enough to include all the relationships a woman may be in, and all the domestic style settings she may experience. These relationships and settings may include:

*...Other residents, co-patients, a relative and/or a carer, whether family member or paid service provider (Frohman 1998, KPMG 2000). Any definition of 'domestic violence' needs to be sufficiently broad to cover spousal relationships, intimate personal relationships (including dating relationships and same sex relationships), family relationships (with a broad definition of relative) and formal and informal care relationships.<sup>51</sup>*

The forms of abuse women with disabilities may experience include the abuse of her trust in, and reliance on, caring acts by others, as well as the omission of vital supports and the commission of violent acts.

For indigenous women, family violence also includes a broad range of relationships that interlink:

*... Including aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and others in the wider community, whereas non-indigenous people may view family violence as only that which occurs within the nuclear family... The Victorian Indigenous and Family Violence Task Force defines violence as 'an issue focussed around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities (Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service 2004). It extends to 'one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers and self-harm, injury and suicide'.<sup>52</sup>*

For CALD women from refugee and recent migrant groups, family violence definitions are often consistent with those definitions used in the broader community, but family violence may have particular impacts not experienced by other women.<sup>53</sup> CALD women identify that financial abuse and social isolation are tactics used by violent partners who exacerbate the existing settlement challenges of limited family finances and limited English language skills.

Significantly, while looking at all these broader definitions, it is important to remember that across ability, culture and religion, it is women and children who experience the burden of family violence and that it is overwhelmingly males known to these women who assault them in private.<sup>54</sup>

### 7.3.2 SOCIAL EXPECTATION AND SOCIAL ROLES

Many group members share that abusive partners use social expectations as a form of justification for their abusive actions - it's because you don't tidy up, it's because you looked provocative, because women should always be there for the kids. As already noted, some migrant and refugee men used the difficult processes of settlement as a backup to their own violent strategies. For example, a recently arrived husband may imply his wife is isolated because she has recently arrived, not because he is holding her at home.

Teasing out the mixed, and often conflicting, social expectation messages women receive is a useful way to address myths and stereotypes about men and women. Through exploring social expectation, women can begin to see how social expectations can be used as a method of control by abusive partners.

The concept of a woman having rights may be a contested idea in an abusive relationship and may result in a woman being in danger or punished if she does express this idea. Some women may have no experience of having her rights articulated or respected in abusive relationships. This may particularly be the case for women with a disability, indigenous women and CALD women. Compliance and cooperativeness are strong socialising forces for all women, as Hastings notes, but particularly for women with a disability.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Saylor notes, that the systemic abuse experienced by indigenous women, in reducing self-worth and self-identity, has often meant a reduction in her sense of relationship rights, entitlement, and confidence for change. '...This is a response to acculturation pressures and (to) historical experiences that interrupted traditional cultural transmission.'<sup>56</sup>

51. Sue Salthouse and Caroline Frohman (2004), Double the Odds - *Domestic Violence and Women With Disabilities*. A paper presented to the Home Truths Conference, Sheraton Towers, Southgate, Melbourne 15-17 September, 2004. Retrieved February 21st 2008. Available at: [www.wda.org.au/odds.htm](http://www.wda.org.au/odds.htm), section 5.

Fadwa Al-Yaman, Mieke Van Doeland and Michelle Wallis (2006), Family Violence Amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra. Available at: [www.aihw.gov.au/publications/ihw/fvaatsip/fvaatsip.pdf](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/ihw/fvaatsip/fvaatsip.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, pp15-16.

52. Stuart Rees and Bob Pease, (2006), *Refugee Settlement, Safety and Wellbeing: Exploring Domestic and Family Violence in Refugee Communities*, Paper Four of the Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Available at: [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/CAS\\_Paper4\\_Refugee.pdf](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/CAS_Paper4_Refugee.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, pp27-28.

53. Keran Howe and Paul Memmot both reiterate this point in their articles on family violence. Howe, 2000, pg10, and Memmot & Chambers, 2006, p7.

54. Gail Hastings, (2000), 'Anger as a Liberating Strength - Please Don't Do That', from *Women and Disability - An Issue. A Collection of Writings by Women with Disabilities*, Women with Disabilities Feminist Collective. Available at: [www.wda.org.au/womdis4.htm](http://www.wda.org.au/womdis4.htm). Retrieved April 2008.

56. Saylor refers to indigenous women in America but the principles are relevant to indigenous experience in Australia. Paul Memmot, Catherine Chambers, Carol Go-Sam and Linda Thomson (2006), *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention - Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs*, Issues paper 11, June 2006. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper\\_11.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper_11.pdf). Retrieved February 2008, p10.

## 7.4 EFFECTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Addressing the effects of family violence in group work is important to help reduce women's sense of self-blame and isolation. It allows group members to share stories, reduce feelings of guilt and shame, and offers women a chance to gain a new sense of themselves. In northern regional family violence group work, the effects of family violence are often explored in a strength-based manner. This means that as well as exploring what has been hurtful, women can explore ideas for healing, and therefore highlighting their resilience and personal power. A strength-based perspective offers women a chance to safely discuss difficult emotions while the group continues to be productive, empowering and hopeful.

Family violence contributes tremendously to health problems for women, especially those in the 15-44 age groups. The known health impacts of violence against women include death, physical injuries, poor mental health (particularly depression and anxiety), chronic pain, substance abuse, and sexual and reproductive health complications.<sup>57</sup> In terms of improving the overall health of women, strategies that seek to eliminate intimate partner violence are as equally relevant, if not more so, than strategies tackling tobacco consumption, high blood pressure and obesity all of which are currently receiving their fair share of resources and 'health dollars'.<sup>58</sup> Family violence group work has a key role to play in this health intervention.

### 7.4.1 GRIEF

Including an exploration of grief as a group work theme, can give women permission to feel the multiple losses associated with family violence. Such losses can include the loss of the affection for, and from, the perpetrator and the loss of broader social connections for her through his actions. The theme of grief is highly significant for women in groups who have experienced multiple traumas, losses and vulnerabilities such as migration, poverty and childhood abuse. Scott and Weisz note losses through family violence can include:

*(The) loss of some aspects of their past, when their own survival prompted them to bury some memories until they were able to deal with them properly; loss of dearly loved members of the perpetrator's family, such as mothers-in-law, or other people with whom they had relationships they treasured; loss of the right to tell their own stories for fear of being shunned or being seen by others as responsible for the abuse they suffered; loss of the dream of being 'properly' loved by someone and being a partner in a respectful relationship; loss of innocence and trust in others; a sense of loss of their own 'good judgement capacities'.<sup>59</sup>*

### 7.4.2 ANGER

Women and anger is an important group theme to cover, giving the go-ahead for women to speak, see their anger as justified, find a voice, be energised to act in the world and to reclaim their personal agency. The subject of anger also allows women to talk about retaliatory or vengeful actions they may have wished for, or committed against, their partner; things for which women may have carried guilt and shame. Women often worry that expressing anger makes them abusive like their abuser, or that they will become mad just like the abuser may have predicted. Group workers say that useful group conversations can include making distinctions between women and men's anger, between anger and abuse, and investigating the differences between anger that is hurtful and anger that is constructive, courageous and energetic.

### 7.4.3 SHAME, GUILT AND CONFUSION

Women often take responsibility for family violence and for the ways it has affected them and their lives. The effects of family violence can confuse how women think, creating shame and a sense of self-blame and culpability. Through investigating group themes on shame and guilt, women find that they can discover why the abuse affects them in confusing ways and how to challenge these effects.

### 7.4.4 BOUNDARY CHANGES

A group theme on boundaries offers women a chance to reconsider what boundaries are in connection to others and how these are part of healthy relationships negotiations. Women often share in groups that a major consequence of family violence is their broken sense of rights to safety, personal space and healthy relationships.

Group workers may need to consider that, depending on their disability, some women may require a sensitive discussion regarding boundaries, as bodily senses are one mediating factor in boundaries definition. For example, a woman with a vision or hearing impairment may require a closer stance to another, or may use other forms of touch for support. Women may like to discuss how to assert their individual needs in these matters. Similarly, women with cognitive disabilities may require group work times for practice and reinforcement of skills in determining who they should allow close to them.

For both indigenous and CALD women the word boundaries may inadvertently be a loaded term which implies that firm individual boundaries are healthiest. Boundaries defined as firm and individual may be an unfamiliar concept in some communities as people's sense of self is fluid and culturally, spiritually and environmentally determined. Therefore, a useful term for group workers to use when referring to personal and social boundaries may be 'healthy connections'.

57. Women's Health In the North, 2005, *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, p126.

58. Women's Health In the North, 2005, *Women in Melbourne's North: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health*, Women's Health In the North, Thornbury, p129.

59. Margot Scott and Silvia Weisz (2003), 'All You do is Look Back and Regret - Disenfranchised Grief as an Obstacle to Recovery from Abuse', *Domestic Violence & Incest Resource Centre Newsletter*, Autumn 2003. Available at: [www.dvirc.org.au/PublicationsHub/Feature%20Grief%20and%20loss.doc](http://www.dvirc.org.au/PublicationsHub/Feature%20Grief%20and%20loss.doc). Retrieved March 2008, p12.

## 7.4.5 ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTING AFTER FAMILY VIOLENCE

Women's decisions to seek assistance for family violence are commonly motivated by safety and health concerns for children. Throughout the northern subregion, a number of groups of three to ten weeks duration have been created to cover the complexities of parenting after family violence. For example, material created by Women's Health West and Berry Street Victoria has formed the basis for mothering after violence groups called Expressions, Parenting After Violence and Shaping a New Future.<sup>60</sup> Royal Children's Hospital staff has also run influential groups for mothers and children through their Peek a Boo, and Parents Accepting Responsibility Kids Are Safe (PARKAS) groups.

Some women's family violence groups, as outlined in this manual, use one session to cover an introduction to parenting after family violence. Single session topics can include: how does abuse affect mothering? how do abusive men parent? and what are some parenting tips for children who have lived with violence? Other topics that may be addressed in a single session include: what are the challenges of parenting after the impact of family violence? what are the strengths of parenting after this impact? how do women do things with children to rebuild relationships with them? and what are some positive mothering messages women can receive via the group process?<sup>61</sup>

Some women attending groups do not have their children currently in their care. If a session is planned around parenting after family violence, women could be encouraged to think through the theme in relation to the contact they hope to soon have with their children.

## 7.5 RESILIENCE AND RECLAMATIONS OF SELF

Across the eight week life of a group, the middle session themes move towards topics that address healing from family violence experiences. These themes offer women methods of integrating their experiences, moving on from them, re-establishing relationships, and safety. The themes at this phase address how women are often resilient in the face of family violence and how they can reclaim a sense of themselves as capable, strong and resourceful.

### 7.5.1 WELLBEING AND SAFETY

Group workers can address wellbeing and safety in the group themes, speaking about how women can be safe in their mind, body and spirit. This theme can cover women's safety planning, what women's rights are and how women can gain information on how to assert their rights. Women can also explore how they have taken stands against the effects of abuse, by rediscovering the deliberate things they have done to stay safe and sane in the face of violence. This rediscovery can be a valuable step towards reducing self-blame. Castalino notes that:

*Although (women) find these gaps in the control and domination they are subjected to, I am not saying that they are in control. They are still being subjected to abuse and violence. However, these responses and little actions, when linked to intentional states, offer opportunity for women to be connected to their values and purposes. Conversations about how, why and in what ways women have responded in the face of violence, reveal their stands for their safety and self-care and their agency.<sup>62</sup>*

### 7.5.2 SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-PROTECTION

The skills of, and the value placed on, self-esteem are often eroded through women's experiences of family violence, humiliation and compromise. A group work theme of self-esteem can incorporate topics of how to go about building a relationship with yourself by addressing self-worth, self-esteem, self-care, self-protection and self-acceptance. Exploring these topics offers women tools to assist them in relaxation and enables them to reflect on their own self-concept.

Women in the group can discover the influence of societal 'training' in shaping their understandings of selflessness and selfishness, and look forward to how they would like to effect self-care changes in their lives. Again a social dimension to the theme asks group workers to consider what is enabling/hampering self-care in women's environments?

<sup>60</sup> Women's Health West and Berry Street, Victoria (2003), *Choosing Positive Paths, a Resource Kit for Parents Concerned About their Children*. Available at: [www.whwest.org.au/info/pkindex.php](http://www.whwest.org.au/info/pkindex.php). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>61</sup> See possible topics at Linda Baker and Alison Cunningham (2004), *Helping Children Thrive - Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors as Mothers: a Resource to Support Parenting*. Available at: [www.ifcc.on.ca/HCT\\_SWASM.pdf](http://www.ifcc.on.ca/HCT_SWASM.pdf). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Tracey Castilino and Andrew Compton (2002), *Family Violence: the Importance in Practice of Men's Behaviour Change Programs for Women - Collaborative Practice with Partners of Men who Attend These Programs*. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Conference%20papers/Exp-horiz/Castilino\\_Compton.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/Conference%20papers/Exp-horiz/Castilino_Compton.pdf). Retrieved March 2008, p8.

### 7.5.3 HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Looking at healthy relationships in family violence group work, supports women in making judgements about relationships, weighing their value to her and trusting her conclusions and interpretations of them. Women often fear they 'attract' abuse through their personality or poor choices. Women are interested to address what are the qualities that are important to a healthy relationship? If these qualities were present in a relationship (of any kind) how would this impact on a woman's ability to be relaxed and real?

Group workers can be sensitive to the fact that women in CALD and indigenous communities can have complex networks. Family relationships may include those who are socially close or emotionally close and roles may differ in relation to others. Biological and non-biological family may require particular links, duties and responsibilities, and migration, resettlement or separation may reconfigure these families and responsibilities.

Cross-culturally, healthy relationships do have similar qualities however and issues of peace, valuing healthy women and family harmony are crucial links for all healthy communities.

## 7.6 CONCLUSIONS OR EVOLUTIONS

Ending the group experience, or even concluding this part of the journey for women, can be difficult. The group may be a space in which a woman has, for the first time, been offered attention, respect and safety. Offering time over one or two sessions to end the group acknowledges this loss and can help women seek similar group experiences again with confidence.

The final group work session covers an evaluation of the group experience for the women and of their personal achievements. It can be a place for facilitators to receive feedback as to the program's pros and cons regarding group processes, planning and content. Facilitators may plan for follow-up conversations with group members in one or two months time to see what ideas have remained resilient for them.

Evaluating that the group contents and processes are on track is not just an activity to do at the end of the group series, it is something that can be done throughout the group as a process of questioning, 'how are we going?' Holding a mid-group check-in or asking women reflective questions about the session at session ends, are two methods of doing a process evaluation.

## 8.1 PRE-PLANNING

## 8.1.1 SAFETY

Group workers can give consideration to what organisational protocols are in place for family violence group work safety. Group workers can develop a check list to answer safety questions such as:

- What will be the processes followed if partners come to a venue or follow women to a venue? Clear processes with defined lines of action and accountability are crucial, as is the timely availability of those designated to act. Locking venue doors or alerting police to group times can be a precautionary and routine action.
- Are children in child care safe? If the child care being used during the group is off-site, women need to have in place processes for not allowing others to collect their child at that particular centre. This is usually covered upon enrolment in most child care centres including occasional care. If the child care service is on-site, check that they have all the security processes of the main group and that child care staff are clear on what to do if necessary. Child care staff having mobile phones can be very helpful for added safety and security.
- What will be the approach to whether we give out facilitator names and venues to women? Workers can advertise groups with facilitator's first names and offer venues advertised as 'a safe location in Reservoir', rather than a set address. Women can be given venue details upon confirming her attendance and she can be encouraged not to share this with others for the safety of all.
- How do we ensure the safety of women attending the group and the safety of facilitators? Is the venue safe at all times? These safety factors can include critical incident processes, occupational health and safety and security matters.
- How will we support women to tell others what the group is for? Some women suggest giving an alternative to tell partners or others, such telling them it is a women's health group or a parenting group.

Safety is not a place but a complex process. The ebb and flow and reassessment by group workers of women's wellbeing is important, especially should a woman's circumstances alter during the life of the group.

## 8.1.2 CHILD CARE, TRANSPORT AND VENUES

Groups are commonly held in community spaces, such as discussion rooms in libraries, community agencies, maternal and child health and playgroup spaces, family support and community health rooms. These spaces offer scope for the groups to be authentic, collective and mutual because they are relaxed, private and informal learning sites for women. Planning is needed to make group work venues and sites more inclusive for learners with disabilities. A disability action plan can help in complying with the education standards under the Disability Discrimination Act and there are examples of disability action plans available at the Human Rights website which cut across a number of possible group work sites.<sup>63</sup>

Child care is central to women accessing family violence groups and is a key part of planning group work. Options for child care used by existing group workers include booking occasional care at neighbourhood houses or occasional care at other venues and using agency brokerage funds from case managers to pay for child care. Other child care options can include supporting women to access family day care, paying staff to mind children while the group runs or using volunteers.

Mothers say it can be really hard to use child care at a family violence group for the first time. It can be very stressful to consider someone else looking after her child when her trust in others, herself and her judgment has been hurt. Women may feel scared, anxious, fearful and edgy, over-protective and wary of anyone else looking after their child. A woman may not have the energy to establish children in a new routine of child care and her child may be very clingy. She may also feel guilty about having time for herself if her partner tells her that a 'real mum' does all the child care. A woman may have been busy surviving and not have had the time to seek out any support options, had no contact with supportive family or friends, or have not known where to start.

Tips and encouragement may help move women towards using child care. Women can be encouraged to visit and check out the child care being used, asking how child carers deal with behaviour problems and being reassured about the discipline methods used in the child care setting. A mother can also tell child care staff under what circumstances she wishes to be contacted, any special needs her child has, or any special tricks she uses to help them feel settled and safe. She could also take a special item from home for her child to play with as a form of security in her absence.

It is also useful for group workers to offer support for the child carers, such as specific information on individual children's needs and written information on how to support children exposed to family violence.<sup>64</sup>

Women suffering financial abuse may also be experiencing poverty and group workers can consider providing food for group meetings and simple snacks for children. Women subject to abusive monitoring and controlling behaviours by violent partners may be assisted by provision of petrol money, child care and transport funding.

Transport is a key access issue for women coming to family violence groups and may be addressed by contributing agency taxi vouchers or offering to pick women up at a safe location such as from the bus, train or other point, in an agency car. In some areas, another option is hiring council buses with child seats and picking women up; often child seats for short-term hire are free and available from many community houses or family support agencies.

63. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008, *Disability Action Plans*. Available at: [www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/action\\_plans/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/action_plans/index.html). Retrieved May 2008.

64. This could be done using the documents already cited from Women's Health West Women's Health West and Berry Street Victoria (2003), *Choosing Positive Paths*, a Resource Kit for Parents Concerned About their Children. Available at: [www.whwest.org.au/info/pkindex.php](http://www.whwest.org.au/info/pkindex.php). Retrieved March 2008.

### 8.1.3 ADVERTISING AND RECRUITMENT

Group workers often use local avenues such as community newspapers, radio and networks to advertise their groups. Different language styles can be useful to recruit women, as this provides an opportune space for women who may not classify themselves as a victim of family violence to access support. Similarly, Flyers advertising the groups offered in the subregion often do not use the words 'family violence', but instead talk of 'abusive or hurtful' relationships.<sup>65</sup>

Other Melbourne-based groups have noted the value of a general name in advertising that is clarified upon enquiry in a more private fashion. One Vietnamese group used the term Women's Support group,<sup>66</sup> Gordon and Adam note local Eritrean and Somali women in Melbourne's western region may be more likely to identify with the concept of family harmony than family or domestic violence,<sup>67</sup> and a Turkish group in Broadmeadows used the Turkish terms meaning healthy and unhealthy relationships.<sup>68</sup>

## 8.2 SESSION PLANNING

Family violence group work sessions are often run over two to three hours, and planning each session offers a framework for co-facilitators to proceed with both confidence and cooperation. A typical structure for a session covers a warm-up and introductions, chosen content discussed until a short break, resumption from the break and session content, a warm down, then an ending and closure. Reflective questions to answer in planning can include:

- How much time will the activity take at each point?
- What are the goals for the session and what do we hope the group members will discover, learn, and be able to do differently? How will we know this has been achieved?
- How will we describe what we are planning? Group workers can try to not use single words, such as relaxation in their planning, but instead try to include a clear outline of how every piece of content and process links to the objectives. Why do relaxation at all, why this one and why at this point in this group and this session?
- What are our contingency plans? Backup options of different ways to do an activity, or explore a theme are useful to have available in case groups do not get the number, or mix, required for a particular activity. For example an activity based on small groups may not be possible if only four women attend in one week.
- How do we pace the session so that there is time to do the material, to process it together and not do too much? A variety of learning methods and tools offers a more stimulating experience and offers women a chance to experience the material in their own way and to take in the information differently.
- How will we use content and processes? At the start of each session, group workers can use warm-ups as these offer an introduction to the session and a chance to focus, reduce anxiety and be more present for the learning ahead.
- Who will do what? What role will co-facilitators have at each point that is complementary and consistent?
- What resources will be required to be prepared, accessible, and ready at each point and who will get these ready?

Facilitators have a valuable role in collating wisdom shared by the group and sharing this out amongst group members. This may take the form of a journal for each women or a plastic sleeved folder for her to collect all the handouts created by the group each week. Facilitators could offer to mind the folder at the centre if it is not safe for her to take it home, or encourage her to leave it at a trustworthy friend's house. Women can use the bits and pieces to consolidate their learning. They can go over the material, share it with trusted others or revisit the material at future points. The facilitator can... 'be a story maker to trace and meaningfully record the interactions of the actors and objects in expanding space'.<sup>69</sup> Groups who are sharing leisure activities as a form of conversation facilitation may have the recipes, patterns or outing details collated, photographed or photocopied so women can own them, look back on them, consolidate their ideas or use them again with family and friends.

<sup>65</sup> Lesley Laing discusses this further in her 2001 article. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues\\_paper\\_4.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues_paper_4.pdf). Retrieved March 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Tor Roxburgh (1994), *Empowering Women after Violence: from Survival to Strength*, Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne, Victoria. p87.

<sup>67</sup> Ruth Gordon and Munira Adam (2005), *Family Harmony - Understanding Family Violence in Somali and Eritrean Communities in the Western Region of Melbourne*, Women's Health West. Available at: [www.whwest.org.au/docs/familyharmony05.pdf](http://www.whwest.org.au/docs/familyharmony05.pdf). Retrieved May 2008, p14.

<sup>68</sup> Personal Communication with Keklik Aydin, Broadmeadows Women's Community House, February 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Tara Fenwick (2000), 'Expanding conceptions of experiential learning', *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 4. Available at: [www.ualberta.ca/~tfenwick/publications/PDF/21Experiential%20Learning%20in%20Adult%20Education%20A%20Comparative%20Framework.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/~tfenwick/publications/PDF/21Experiential%20Learning%20in%20Adult%20Education%20A%20Comparative%20Framework.htm). Retrieved March 2008, p263.

## SESSION PLANNING SHEET - EXAMPLE 1

The topic or subject to be covered:		
The time available for the session:		
Room arrangements:		
Particular needs of the individual:		
The objectives of the session:		
The hoped for outcomes of the session:		
TIME	LEARNING ACTIVITIES & FACILITATION METHODS	RESOURCES
<b>Introduction</b> 10% of the time available	Warm-up Introductions Welcomes Topic for today	
<b>Development:</b> 70-80% of the overall time  Often with a 10-15 minutes break for refreshments, stretches and informal support for women with each other	Exploration of activity 1  Break  Exploration activity continued or supplemented with another activity, i.e. activity 2	
<b>Conclusion:</b> 10-20% of the overall time	Warm down, ending, summary and evaluation	



## SESSION PLANNING SHEET – EXAMPLE 2

Group: Title of group

Session: session number, name

Date:

Objectives: What are the goals for the session? What do you hope the group members will discover, learn, and be able to do differently? How will you know this is achieved? Try to include a clear outline of how every piece of content and process links to the objectives. Try not to use just a word, such as relaxation. Instead, try saying, “Why do relaxation at all?”, “Why this one?” and “Why at this point in this group and in this session?”

TIME	CONTENT AND PROCESS	WHO WILL DO WHAT?	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Time the activity may take at each point	<p>Warm-ups offer an introduction to the session, a chance to focus, reduce anxiety and be more present for the learning and sharing ahead.</p> <p>Contingency plans (backup options of different ways to do an activity or explore a theme) are useful to have available in case you do not get the number, or mix, required for a particular activity. For example, an activity based on small groups may not be possible if only four women attend in one week.</p> <p>Pace the session so that there is time to do the material, to process it together and to not do too much. A variety of learning methods and tools offers a more stimulating experience and offers women who take in information differently a chance to experience the material in their own way.</p>	What role will co-facilitators have at each point which is complementary and consistent?	What resources will be required to be prepared, accessible, and ready at each point? Who will get these ready?

## 8.2.1 USING DIFFERENT MEDIA, PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES

Group workers suggest that different media, structuring and energy can be brought to any of the outlined themes for a varieties of group work activities. Group workers encourage the utilisation of different media and structure in the design of programs and sessions, as each media option has its own rationale and strengths as well as its limits and considerations. A useful reflective question for group workers to pose is “What qualities of this medium support the theme, the processes being used and the objectives of today’s group?” Group workers also suggest using media you are comfortable with or that one facilitator has confidence in using. Drawn forms, set templates, pre-drawn outlines or shapes, painted or magazine cut collages and joint activities are often easier for group workers to start with.

Different media incorporates:

- Using clay for its softness, warmth or firmness and because it is soothing and relaxing when held;
- Painting, for its many faces, its bold big brushes, little fine brushes, daring colours and soft pastels;
- Drawing different lines with fine pens, thicker pens or coloured pencils. Groups can draw on different surfaces, papers and fabrics, using templates or free hand;
- Murals and collages done as a large group or done individually then shared. These can be drawn, created or sewn on large sheets or contained onto postcard sized shapes;
- Finding objects that are three dimensional and playing with these for their touch, smell and sound. Are they smooth, rough, textured, hairy, sweet-smelling, soft or squeaky?
- Exploring the environment as a group tool, using meditation in nature, walking and touching, sensing items from nature, using water or water features in the background;
- Being humorous and dramatic using all five senses. Women can share not just visions when storytelling but also the sounds that go with healing, the touches of safe relationships, the smells of their new house;
- Moving in the group through games, dancing and activity;
- Using images such as photographs taken by others or taken and valued by the women themselves, and brought in to share;
- Creating a group song to perform together or sharing music from others that is meaningful in recapturing an important time, hope or plan;
- Touching of textures that are fun, hopeful, soothing or indulgent; and
- Eating food and being generous with nice tastes, nurturing with flavours and respecting of dietary needs.

For indigenous women, as with non-indigenous women, successful program outcomes support individuals to heal, gain newly-acquired skills, and feel self-sufficient, well and happy. These outcomes are contributed to by family violence programs that use reclamations of traditional ways: storytelling, artistic and cultural expression. An emphasis on prevention and hope is also highlighted as central to any successful program.<sup>70</sup>

## 8.2.2 GROUP STRUCTURING

Group workers suggest thinking about how particular group structures support the group session objectives and the overall group principles and values. Some groups may require more active facilitator involvement and direction to help members learn. Group structuring variation can include:

- Dividing large groups into multiple pairs, trios or quads;
- Using different structuring of roles in the group. Group members can watch co facilitators interview each other, watch a role play by facilitators or watch a video. In response to conversations, group members can draw or scribe jointly onto a shared board in front of the room or in the middle of the group on a papered table surface. Women can be asked to record the shared group contribution and facilitators can hand over this role;
- Using different positions within the group room to alter structure. Women can feedback their thoughts on an activity from their own seats or by standing out the front and sharing; and
- Using different positioning to the theme to alter the structure in a group. Women don’t have to always discuss their own experiences, but instead can talk about women more generally. Women often find this safer as it requires less personal disclosure. They could write about women in general, share thoughts from women they have met or known, investigate a planned case study, or share their ideas of what they want daughters or friends to know. A recent kit developed in NSW for bilingual community educators uses a culturally appropriate ‘case study’ to explore issues of what is violence and what are the common beliefs about it.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup>. Jamieson Hart Graves Consulting in Paul Memmott, Catherine Chambers, Carol Go-Sam and Linda Thomson (2006), *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention - Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs*. Issues paper 11, June 2006, Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse. Available at: [www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper\\_11.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issuespaper_11.pdf). Retrieved February 2008, p11.

<sup>71</sup>. New South Wales Health Department (2008), *Bilingual Community Educators*, Education Centre Against Violence. Available at: [www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au/ecav/index.asp?pg=21&s=PJ](http://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au/ecav/index.asp?pg=21&s=PJ). Retrieved May 2008.

Numbers fluctuate in groups and Phillips and Wright note that a minimum of six and maximum of ten offered the most flexibility in the family violence groups they ran in Heidelberg.<sup>72</sup> Their group needed to remain viable in case of women leaving the group before its weeks were concluded and yet small enough to offer time and space to talk and offer a sense of safety. Anecdotal information from other group workers indicates that up to 14 group members can be feasible if spaces are large enough and the women have a sense of knowing each other before group commencement.

Group workers also note that whilst the number of women contacted and assessed for groups remains roughly the same from year to year, the number able to take up the group work option has reduced slightly and that attendance has been quite varied. For example, numbers in groups in 1996 were an average of eight and in 2007, anecdotally, an average of six. Across the northern subregion in recent years, a few groups have been shortened, and even cancelled, to accommodate this variation in numbers.

There may be many reasons behind the group numbers fluctuations, including issues of quality control for group workers to discuss in supervision. However, other structural dimensions may also be pertinent. Family violence group work clientele are in increasingly complex situations with many involuntary requirements that increasingly preclude voluntary attendance at groups. Some of these requirements include possible child protection, Child FIRST and family support contacts and visits, appointments and follow-ups, as well as visits and paperwork for both private and public housing.

Women may need to attend legal appointments for intervention orders, child custody arrangements, divorce proceedings and access visits, as well as managing breaches to intervention orders and police involvement. They may have employment and job search appointments, compulsory employment interviews and Centrelink appointments. In addition, a woman may have appointments organised for her by any of these agencies including medical, psychological and psychiatric obligations, adult and child counselling appointments, as well as employment visits and case-work visits. Finally, a woman may have 15 hours of compulsory employment to maintain her pension, meaning that her causal work commitments may preclude her regular group work attendance.

Anecdotally, one woman in a family violence group, the carer of her granddaughter, was involved in numerous appointments including child protection visits and meetings, court and Centrelink appointments, paediatrician visits for her granddaughter, psychologist sessions for herself and her daughter, case worker meetings and dental hospital visits.

Whilst these community appointments have always been a feature of the crises of family violence, recent additional governmental policy shifts such as welfare to work policies, industrial relations changes, child protection legislation and intensive family support programs, have meant that women are increasingly tied to the reporting, monitoring and accountability of systems that can be involuntary. The reprioritising of her own wellbeing and health is increasingly difficult.

Group workers may need to remove both the pressure from women that this is just 'another requirement' and remove from themselves the notion that a good group must run for eight weeks with the same regular attendees. Feedback from women is that often the group work sessions they do attend are crucial sanctuaries amidst a regulated life and they often maximise their attendance because of this.

<sup>72</sup> Kaz Phillips and Michelle Wright address common group numbers in (1996), *Breaking Free, Documentation of the Development of Educative/Supportive Groups for Women Survivors of Violent Relationships*, Berry Street Victoria.

It is helpful for facilitators to work out how they will get ready for co-facilitation and how they will sustain the partnerships involved. Co-facilitation is the preferred practice standard for group facilitation as it offers maximised group facilitation, attends to all complex group tasks and functions, and models respectful relationships to the group and allows for a peer support function for facilitators. Lancaster suggests a reflective method of co-facilitator interactive questioning to help think through some dimensions of this relationship as it commences and proceeds. The questioning asks:

- How are contemporary critical feminist theories used to shape what content, processes and tools get used within the group?
- How are multidisciplinary resources drawn on in the research of the group? What definition of multidisciplinary is used? Facilitators may be encouraged to read a wider range of adult learning theory and to look into pedagogy used in facilitated family violence groups;
- In domestic violence support groups, the group is often balancing a range of positional tensions such as, women with different experiences of abuse including those with chronic experiences, women with past abuse and present abuse, younger and older women of varied backgrounds and women in abusive situations and those out of situations. How will certain tensions be planned for, acknowledged and addressed at this time, for this group? What is the rationale for the decision?
- How will two facilitators work in a complimentary manner, not just modelling a respectful equal relationship in front of the women, but also in offering verbal and non-verbal consistency?
- How and when are the nature of the group and role of facilitators made clear? Facilitators may consider talking with women at different intervals about the group, its values, history and the facilitator's roles: and
- What opportunities are there for co-facilitator reflection on group content and processes?

Facilitators can consider planning for reflection/creation times:

- What minimum/maximum group member numbers support a safer experience (as too few group members may not generate enough ideas or may manufacture intimacy)?
- How are creative processes, such as using music, games, artwork and other media negotiated? What levels of participation are required or are negotiable?
- What opportunities are created for incidental learning? Facilitators can consider having breaks in learning, different group learning structures, and some less planned talk time to encourage communication;
- What will be the creative processes that incorporate humour, fun, and play? Facilitators may also consider processes for group anxiety reduction. Personal processing of learning in environments of reduced anxiety can be clearer, more effective, and more memorable. If physiological processes are calmer, group members may feel more comfortable and be able to pay more attention;
- How are processes of seating, standing and moving around done in ways which do not replicate women's abusive experiences?
- How are others kept present in their absence? Facilitators can refer to absent women, the comments they made last week, the handouts we will keep for them, and the follow-up we will do to check on their safety;
- Are there safe, timely opportunities for women to move and feel their bodies and practise a sense of bodily integrity that is respected by others? Refuge can be less a place but more a complex process of safety. Body integrity is more than body image;
- How are personal timings addressed in respectful and flexible ways? and
- How explicitly is timeliness incorporated into the group's processes and language? How can the concept of timing be explicitly negotiated within the group? Facilitators can respect a person's readiness for a group by offering the flexible timing of their understandings and offering the option for them to leave or stay, or to do the group again.<sup>73</sup>

73. Cathy Lancaster (2006) 'Learning in domestic violence support groups', unpublished Master Thesis, University of New England, Armidale, pp111-113.

## 8.4 CO-FACILITATION CONTINUED

Donne offers a method of reflective co-facilitator shared questioning as a means of post group de-briefing and planning for the next session. She encourages an approach of mutual curiosity, respect for difference, welcoming and appreciation.<sup>74</sup> The co-facilitator conversation mutually asks:

- What stood out the most for you from our session today?
- What aspects of the session did you feel helped create a move towards the shift in the topic?
- What did you notice in particular?
- What do you think we both did right that might have enabled the women to see the topic differently?
- What did you notice that gave you this impression?
- What do you think you did differently today?
- Is there anything you think I did that surprised you?
- What effect do you think this had on our facilitation?
- Was there anything you did that surprised yourself?
- What did the session leave you with today?
- Was there one thing the co-facilitator did differently that struck me?
- What is one thing I learned or took away with me from observing the way she facilitated the session?
- What has our conversation today given you regarding how we work together? and
- What will it leave you with?

Cross-cultural and power issues within the co-facilitator relationship also need to be discussed. As well as peer support, debriefing and mutual supervision or external supervision with a consultant or supervisor is often used. External supervision for family violence group work often takes the form of a supervision session prior to the group series' commencement, with up to three supervision sessions during the group and one post group. These timings are negotiated between the supervisor, the agencies involved and the facilitators.

## 8.5 LINKS TO OTHER SERVICES AND MAKING REFERRALS

Clear referral pathways to counselling, case workers, family support workers and crisis services are useful resources for group workers to have. The issue of referral is not a linear one of counselling and then referring to a group or visa versa. As women find their own pathway at different times, having a range of referral options that compliment each other can maximise women's choices and safety.

## 8.6 RESOURCES

### 8.6.1 TRAINING

A number of services have been used by group workers to further their education. These include:

- The Group Work Institute, Thornbury;
- The Melbourne Institute for Experiential and Creative Arts Therapy;
- Latrobe University Arts Therapy courses and extension programs;
- Latrobe University and the Bouverie Centre family therapy courses;
- University-based courses such as social work, family therapy specific, adult education and learning;
- Courses and training at DVIRC and the Centre for Excellence for Child and Family Welfare; and
- Self-directed learning, particularly through the use of the key clearinghouses such as the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse or the Bibliography of Clearinghouses in the Social Sciences in Australia compiled by Anne Hugo, Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

<sup>74</sup> Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Joanne Donne (1998), 'Creating a post group narrative', Paper at Victorian Women's Health Conference, unpublished document, Melbourne, pp1-5.

## 8.6.2 OTHER RESOURCES

Often, printed resources for group work can be translated, modified, made into a visual form or an auditory form, fonts made larger, and wording made clearer. Some of the resources mentioned by group workers have included:

- St Lukes Innovative Resources available from: [www.innovativeresources.org/](http://www.innovativeresources.org/);
- Duluth Model Wheel gallery available at: [www.duluth-model.org/documents/wheelshandout.pdf](http://www.duluth-model.org/documents/wheelshandout.pdf);
- Affirmation cards available from: [thehealinglatte.com.au/dogmalittleaffirmationscards-p-262.html](http://thehealinglatte.com.au/dogmalittleaffirmationscards-p-262.html);
- Online ice breakers and games such as those available at: [improvencyclopedia.org/games//](http://improvencyclopedia.org/games//);
- Music for relaxation, yoga, sleep and meditation available at: [www.therelaxationcompany.com/](http://www.therelaxationcompany.com/);
- Hot Peach Pages family violence information in seventy five languages available at: [www.hotpeachpages.net/lang/langdoc.html#safetyCan](http://www.hotpeachpages.net/lang/langdoc.html#safetyCan);
- Women focussed book shops online such as Open Leaves Bookshop Carlton and the Feminist Bookshop Sydney available at: [www.openleaves.com.au/](http://www.openleaves.com.au/) and [www.feministbookshop.com/](http://www.feministbookshop.com/)
- Online human rights declarations available at [www.unifem.org.au/node/144](http://www.unifem.org.au/node/144).
- Disability specific models, dolls, family set, films and books available at: [web.seru.sa.edu.au](http://web.seru.sa.edu.au) and at: [www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ontheSameBasisSectionThre.pdf](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ontheSameBasisSectionThre.pdf);
- Videos and DVDs such as Gippsland Women's Health Service, 2000, *Stepping Stones Women Taking Positive Steps After Domestic Violence*; Hunter Valley Domestic Violence Committee, 2002, *Through New Eyes: Exploring the Hidden Dynamics of Domestic Violence*; New South Wales Health Department, 2008, *Education Centre Against Violence*. Available at: [www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au/ecav/index.asp?pg=21&s=PJ](http://www.ecav.health.nsw.gov.au/ecav/index.asp?pg=21&s=PJ);
- Best practice research through Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Available at: [adfvnew.arts.unsw.edu.au/Default.htm](http://adfvnew.arts.unsw.edu.au/Default.htm); and
- Bibliography of Clearinghouses In The Social Sciences In Australia compiled by Anne Hugo, Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies. Available at: [www.acys.info/resources/biblio/clearinghouses#examples](http://www.acys.info/resources/biblio/clearinghouses#examples).

## 8.7 PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluating the group experience and its outcomes for women is a key part of group work. Hence session evaluation methods are addressed in the activities section of this manual. Women's gains through the group experience could also be appraised through pre and post group questions based on health scales and inclusive of broader assessment criteria addressing social connectedness, emotional health, changes to self-confidence, self-esteem and relationships improvement. Knowledge improvement, values change and skills improvement are other dimensions of possible enquiry on this evaluation dimension. To determine the resilience of changes experienced, or gains made by women, a safe follow-up three or six month contact by the agency could be incorporated.

Whole of program evaluation addresses a number of dimensions of activity, such as program reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance, which are broader than just group member reported benefits. Program evaluation also looks at both worker and organisation contributions to enhancing and hindering program success. Within the northern region, different organisational cultures and beliefs about what constitutes effective measures of evaluation are challenges for partner agencies to address collaboratively. Good practice models of human services and health and community based program evaluation include the Re-aim Framework, People Centred Evaluation and the Empowerment Evaluation.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> For some evaluation model outlines see the *Bibliography of Evaluation*, Australian Institute of Family Studies website. Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/info/bib/evaluation-methodologies.html>. Retrieved May 2008.

## 8.8 FURTHER READING

Withih this section are further readings on family violence policy, legislation, theory and practice for readers to pursue.

### 8.8.1 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

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# ACTIVITIES



# ENERGY CHANGES



## 9.0 USEFUL ACTIVITIES

This section of the manual outlines activities that can be used in groups. They are collected around the common themes in family violence groups as identified in section six of this manual. As previously noted, a common sequence of group sessions moves from joining together themes to exploring social constructions and definitions of family violence, and then towards sharing effects and recovery and finishing with group conclusions.

### 9.1 ENERGY CHANGES

These activities offer to alter the energy levels in the group, support women to feel comfortable, relaxed, alert, interested and curious. The times suggested for these warm ups presume a group size of six to eight women.

#### 9.1.1 WARM-UPS IN 5-10 MINUTES

Typical warm-ups for 5-10 minute time frames can be:

- Physical activities (stand up or jump up);
- Throwing a ball around and say a word about today, then passing it onto another woman;
- Standing in a circle and putting out your left palm then placing your right index finger into the palm of the person to your right. Then count to three and try to grab the finger in your palm and at the same time, remove your finger so as not to be caught;
- Dancing to music;
- Playing favourite music during quiet times;
- Ritual welcomes; and
- Walking leisurely around the room. When you say `three knees` the women form little groups, each group consisting of three touching knees. Using your imagination, you can ask for seven left big toes, two earlobes, nine fingers, four shoulders, etc.

#### 9.1.2 WARM-UPS IN 10-15 MINUTES

Warm-ups for a 10-15 minute time frame can include:

- Sharing your mother's name, its meaning and history. Alternatively use your grandmother's name, or an older woman who is special to you;
- Milling about the room to greet each other, perhaps just by shaking hands. Shake hands, move on, and greet the next person you meet. Then greet each other in a more specific way. Possibilities are: greet each other like you greet a long-lost friend; greet someone you don't really trust; greet someone you really didn't want to bump into; greet your dog or cat; greet someone you had a secret crush on as a teenager; greet someone as if you are a famous character (for example: female super heroes, sports stars, favourite actors);
- Decorating a brown paper shopping bag with handles. The outside displays the things women show about themselves and are happy to share (for example: things I love to do, my hobbies, where I live now, and my name). Inside the bag are things closer to the women that they may share later with the group (such as hopes and personal goals). Share the outside bag and bits in the bag if wished;
- Creating a name tag, draw a symbol for yourself, your name, a hobby and something extra. Have fun and chatter. After drawing it, mingle and discover about each other. Alternatively make badges and pin or clip them on;
- Handing around a range of items in a basket (for example: found small household objects, items from nature, small toys, or souvenirs) Hand the basket around taking turns to pick out one item and say why you like it and what it says about you that you picked it;
- Lining up alphabetically, share your name with the group. Discuss who named you, what it means and whether you have any pet or nicknames;
- Lining up without words in birth order (use hand signals, fingers to count or facial expressions). If women don't know their birth date they may know their approximate age. Line up without words in order of age, shoe size, height, amount of blue being worn today, light to dark hair colour or by how I feel today (for example: stressed, happy or energetic);
- Sharing where you were born and some information about the area and its history. The next group member stands in the room using your 'place' as a geographical reference point and then stands where she was born in relation to your place (for example: north of it, near it, far away from it) and shares a bit of her own information;
- Telling either one good or bad experience you had at school;

- Naming a woman whom you admire and briefly explain why;
- Choosing something from your handbag, wallet or key ring which says something you value about yourself;
- Collecting caring wisdom: if you know before the group starts that all women are parents, aunties or carers, in some way add up the ages of the children/others they have/are caring for. This may be a big number and shows the collected experience into the room. Encourage the women to pick one of the people they care about and introduce them to the group (for example, my daughter's name is Tania, she is cheeky and loves dressing up... or my mother's name is Emme, she is 75...). Alternatively use other collected wisdom categories, such as time spent in paid work, unpaid work or being a good friend;
- Imagining names: share your name and then think of a name you'd like to have, such as a fantasy name or movie star name. Tell us about that name too;
- Choosing one of the prepared photo cards that means something for you and share your thoughts with the group;
- Locating and relocating on an imaginary line on the ground in answer to the following situations:  
Women who have spent time living in the country/city  
Women who dabble with the internet - women who are yet to try this  
Women who have a hidden talent - women who have not yet had the opportunity to express it. Ask the women what their talent is  
Women who love to travel (even in your dreams) - women who prefer to stay at home  
Women who like to listen to popular music - women who have some other music taste  
Women who have never dyed their hair - women who do and have dyed their hair  
Women who have a second language - women who don't (yet)
- Breathing musically: use a musical instrument that has a vibration such as a drum or guitar, or one that uses breath, such as wind instruments. Give everyone a turn to make some sounds to start the group;
- Scavenger hunting: move around the room finding others who fit ten categories written on a pre-planned sheet (For example, who has green eyes, lives in the area, can sing or enjoys cooking) A variation can be done where all women are in a circle, holding all ten fingers up in the air. One person at a time starts asking questions that take yes or no answers. Whoever cannot answer yes to a question drops a finger. The last person with a finger left wins. Good questions are things like, "Do you have a cat?", "Have you ever gone to Tasmania?" etc.; and
- Sharing something that says something about you from your wallet. Remember not everyone has a wallet or even things in it, so discretion with this is required.

## 9.1.3 MID-GROUP WARM-UPS

As women get to know each other, warm-ups may include:

- Moving on an imaginary line, to share my progress so far. How have I made this movement? How have I not gone backwards? Or, how have I not gone back even further if I have gone backwards a bit?
- Massaging: everyone puts their hands on their right neighbour's shoulders and give them a shoulder massage. Change directions after a minute or so;
- Listening to who has been paying attention as we have shared? Share three things about yourself, one of them being false. One of the facilitators may need to model this first; and
- Knotting: a fun game where a circle of women holding hands, move and step over hands to 'knot themselves up' without dropping any held hand. One member, who has not watched the 'knotting up', tries to unknot the group back to the original circle via verbal instructions.

Returning to the group warm-ups after a week break, a week off or a more stressful week might include:

- Choosing a St Luke's bear card showing facial expressions, to say what it was like to come back to the group, or to be new to the group today;
- Asking what is something you did or would like to have done during the week that linked with last week's exercise, or made you feel good; and
- Pondering what strength you drew on to get here today, be here today, rediscover today.

Later warm-up sessions in group might involve asking, "What makes a good ending? What is a good end to a movie, a day, or a goodbye?"

#### 9.1.4 WARM-UPS IN 20-30 MINUTES

Building group cohesion, safety and a sense of affirmation may mean warm ups become longer. Some of the warm-ups that are activities in their own right include:

- Having a world map and sharing where my heritage is. Pin a coloured ribbon of your journey, or heritage of family, prior to Australia;
- Having an Australian map and asking members to talk about the areas special to them; and
- Regularly using a small item to denote turn taking such as a shell, smooth stone or cultural item. Hand this around with a time limit for each woman to offer updating, current issues, to get things off her chest, share successes or applications of new insights since the last group session. Such group catch-ups provide a space for women to talk about what is happening for them at the moment and how the conversations and activities in the group are influencing their thinking in relation to current circumstances. It also offers a structure to keep the item moving, thus offering a chance for all to speak without one person dominating the chance.

#### 9.1.5 WARM DOWNS AND ENERGY CHANGES

Warm downs are useful for concluding a group session, refocussing on life outside the group and integrating experiences from the session. Warm downs can include:

- Asking the group, “What is something that you have learned today that will make a difference in your life? Or, “What strength do you think you have drawn on to undermine the effects of abuse in your life? Or, “What is one thing you can do, or can begin planning to do, that would be putting eggs into your own basket?”;
- Finishing the session with ‘my hope for the next person’ gift. If this were a gift (use a small box with bow to denote the gift) I would give you...;
- Naming one thing that you know you do, say or think when you are being yourself;
- Picking a card or photo that says something about how it was to share your story or about how it was hear others speak about their story;
- Go around the group and share one thing you have noticed that is different (in a positive way) about yourself since beginning the group;
- Relaxing through a relaxation. Workers suggest maximising choice in any relaxation or meditation to allow women to decide where her relaxation is best conducted for her at this time. For example, rather than make the guided meditation to a set place and having set methods of travel, allow the women in the group to decide where they will go and how they will get there. Get them to think of something that is specifically special to them, rather than having one proscriptive scenario for everyone. Give the option of down cast eyes rather than closed if the women choose;
- Lighting or extinguishing candles, passing on a special gift box, passing around a unique object or playing some meaningful music to commence and end a session;
- Having a variety of objects as symbols and choosing one that you wish to speak about;
- Sharing a time when I had a real belly laugh;
- Sharing a time when I was embarrassed but that I look back on now and laugh about, or share funny things that I have heard kids say;
- Sending each other off with messages for the future. Tape A4 sheet to each person’s back and mill around and write a message on each person’s sheet about something you hope for each particular person. You can read your sheet now or save it to read at home; and
- Choosing a photo, card or picture which represents something about your hopes for the future.

#### 9.1.6 CREATING A GROUP SPACE

Creating a group space helps the environment feel safely owned by the women. This creation can be done when group workers:

- Show women the future group work space before the group starts, either in person or in photos;
- Decorate the space or show new women the way other women have decorated the space in the past;
- Use movement such as dancing, music, drumming, or sing-a-longs;
- Use touch such as soft fabrics to hold and have draped on chairs;
- Use things created by past groups, such as a multilingual quilt, to show new women this can be their space too;
- Choose a fragrance to burn in an oil burner; and
- Have a ritual to create the space via words and actions.

## GETTING READY ACTIVITIES



## ACTIVITY 1: HOW TO READ THE ACTIVITIES IDEAS

This sheet shares the outline that all the cited activities follow within this manual. Group sessions can be constructed from one or two of the activities, plus any of the required energy change activities.

### OBJECTIVES

The rationale behind the activity, and its purpose and goals.

### TIMING

An estimation on the time the activity may take. This will depend on group numbers and the amount of time devoted to discussion and processing issues that arise. It will also depend on the group's need to slow down the sessions to allow for both consideration of feelings that arise, and for the consolidation of ideas covered.

### RESOURCES

What resources may be prepared and readied before the group commences.

### VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Tips on other ways the activity could precede which is consistent with the activity's objective.

### TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Additional insights from facilitators who have run this activity before.

### STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

A suggested way of conducting the activity which includes the main methods used.

### WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

Comments shared by group participants about this activity.

### SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Samples of the types of sheets, with the examples filled in, that may complement the activity. These are not prescriptive for reproduction, but are illustrative of how previous women's groups have tackled the theme.

## OBJECTIVES

- To provide a shared understanding of what the group will entail.
- To assess a woman's current safety and referral needs regarding group membership.
- To offer a mutual introduction to the group facilitators, their roles and possibly the group environment.
- To discuss the part group support can play in a broader picture of support.

## TIMING

Up to one hour.

## RESOURCES

- Assessment formats for the agency conducting the group.
- Data collection formats for the agency conducting the group.
- Risk assessment pro forma sheets from the Family Violence Risk Assessment Manual.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Can be conducted at the site of the group meeting to allow the woman to see the venue, or show her photos of the venue at the meeting.
- Can be conducted at any mutually convenient and safe site.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

If the client is not being referred by a specialist family violence service it will be necessary to do a comprehensive risk assessment. If possible, request permission to fill in forms as you speak together or wait and summarise in writing aspects of her story after she has left. Referrals to other support services may be necessary.

Example for an introduction assessment conversation: "Hello and thanks for chatting to us about the group. Coming to groups can be challenging, especially when you speak about relationships. We'd like to help you work out if this group is the best one for you to be coming to. Would you like to tell us a little about your circumstances?" Mention that if information comes to light regarding concerns about their safety, that you would need to act on that and that we then can not be confidential.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS OR SHEETS

Assessment for family violence group	Agency code number	Date of assessment:
Name:		
Address:		
Phone:	Mobile:	
Date of Birth: / /	Please note that the details requested on this enrolment form are for the purposes of agency and government data collection requirements. This information will remain confidential; however it is your choice to complete either all or only part of this information.	
Is child care required?	Child's name:	
YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>	Child's age:	
Do you require transport/access support?		
YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>	If yes, please specify your needs:	

Fill in agency data forms from this information so the woman doesn't have to repeat it.

## HER STORY

What is her story of the abuse in the relationship and how does she understand it? Explore each woman's hopes and thoughts about the group and how she found out about it. Does she have any past experience of groups? How does she think it will be to speak about her experiences with other women? How will it be for her to listen to other women's experiences of abuse?

## EXPLORE HER EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND HOW SHE HAS SURVIVED

Enquire: How have you coped or survived the effects of trauma in your life?

Does the woman have a psychiatric diagnosis, use medication or self-medicate? Does she have other survival strategies such as gambling or self-harm? What have been her practices of care? Can we get the name of her psychiatrist or local doctor?

## EXPLORE EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA MORE BROADLY, INCLUDING EXPERIENCES AS A CHILD

For some women abusive experiences in their intimate relationship has been on top of difficult or abusive childhoods or other experiences of abuse. Has this been something she has also had to cope with at any time? Discuss group safety and grounding techniques around using her five senses. Let her know that she can leave the room, choose to participate or not, access facilitators or access one-on-one counselling.

## EXPLORE THE WOMAN'S PERCEPTION OF THE HELPFULNESS OF CURRENT SUPPORTS AND OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING THESE IF NEEDED

Is there anyone that the woman talk about these issues with (for example: friends, family, counsellors)?

Other women have told us that hearing stories of abuse can bring up painful memories of their own and leave them feeling overwhelmed. What are her ideas about managing this?

EXPLORE ANY THOUGHTS OF HARMING HERSELF OR TAKING HER OWN LIFE?

What are her levels of depression? Is she suicidal with a plan or means? Has she talked to anyone else?

FOR THOSE WOMEN WHO HAVE CHILDREN, EXPLORE THE CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE CHILDREN

What are the current issues for your children?

Has she used child care before and does she have ideas about how we can help her with it? Suggest coming and visiting the child care workers, address trust and safety issues and explore anxiety issues.

SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GROUP

Does the woman have any particular questions about the group?

How does she think it will be for her come the morning of the group? What are her concerns?

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO GROUP ATTENDANCE

1. Has your partner ever made threats to harm you or your children?	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
2. Have the police ever been called as a result of abusive behaviour by your partner?	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
3. Do you have a current intervention order against your partner/husband or ex-partner/ex-husband?	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
Please specify:	
What will you tell your partner about your attendance at the group?	
Please specify:	
4. Is your partner/husband or ex-partner/ex-husband likely to try to follow you or locate you at this group?	
NOT AT ALL <input type="radio"/> UNLIKELY <input type="radio"/> MAYBE <input type="radio"/> VERY LIKELY <input type="radio"/>	
5. For any future communication is it safe for you to receive mail at the address you have given?	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
If no, is there an alternative way to contact you? Please specify:	
7. As a result of you attending this group, do you believe this places any risk to you or your children's safety?	YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/>
If yes, please comment further:	
8. Given that this conversation is happening now, how will you let me know if your circumstances change?	

Women attending these groups can be in stressful, traumatic or dangerous circumstances. From both a duty-of-care perspective, for her and her children, and to ensure safety for other group members and workers, this assessment allows us to support the woman to determine that her needs will be best met by the group at this time.

Significant amounts of research indicate the importance of both identifying a possible concurrence of child abuse and domestic violence, and identifying a women's own potential use of abuse and violence in her relationships. The systematic use of abusive tactics within a relationship is not the same as women having problems expressing anger.

Primarily, the groups are not suitable for those with critical substance rehabilitation needs, for suicide prevention, for the treatment of acute psychiatric difficulties, for women who are abusing their children and not taking some responsibility for this, or for women who are being actively stalked by abusive partners/ex-partners

It is assumed that these priority needs will be addressed by case workers, or a referral will be made for this to occur. Of course many adult women have had these experiences in their lives and such an experience does not exclude her attendance. It is just that focus on these matters is not the group's primary aim. However, workers know, and are prepared for the fact, that it may shape the context of some women's access and ability to keep attending and learning.

# JOINING TOGETHER ACTIVITIES



OBJECTIVES

- To create a sense of welcome and safety for women.
- To build group cohesion and begin the process of women getting to meet each other.
- To get to know each other and cover practical matters pertinent to the auspicing organisation, house-keeping, breaks, toilets, today’s program and relevant occupational health and safety procedures.

TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

RESOURCES

Any range of art materials can accompany this activity.

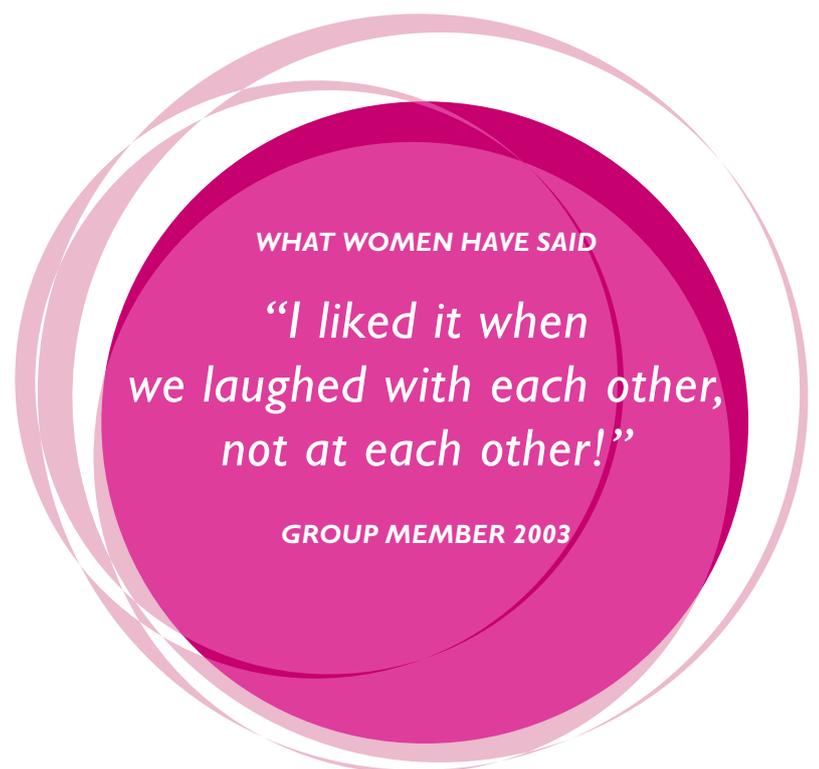
VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- This activity can be done as a large group or in small groups or pairs which report back to the larger group.
- All the activities outlined in the previous section on warm-ups can be used as getting to know each other activities

TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

As part of an introduction it can be important to cover why this program is run and why these particular facilitators are running it. For example, facilitators may share a personal commitment to human rights or a long standing interest in women’s groups.

Invite the group to divide into pairs and then to speak to the women next to them. Get them to talk about three safe and non-revealing things about themselves. For example, hobbies, household, favourite foods or where they grew up? The facilitator may ask the group for some categories. Participants will talk to their partner for 5-10 minutes then swap over. Then they try to remember what they were told. The partner then introduces them to the larger group and they, in turn, introduce their partner.



## OBJECTIVES

- To join women who may have commenced with the group at a different week to the others.
- To create a safe sense of connection, shared experience and welcome for women.
- To build group cohesion and begin the process of newer women getting to know existing members.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

Five different balls of wool of different colours and textures.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Use the 'wool network' as an opening ritual for each session.
- Use the wool ball web activity to include new women who begin in week three.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

To allow women time to start a group, facilitators may have to do joining activities over a few weeks. This activity can be good to introduce new members joining in week two to existing members who would have started in week one. Have different coloured balls of wool - red, green, cream, brown and yellow - with each ball representing life experiences. Red can represent sad or grief times, green growth times, cream confident times, brown dark times and yellow 'bounce back' times. Ask each woman to take a length of each ball that represents memories of these things in her recent life. There is not a need to share what these things are. Just pull out a length as memories come to mind. Each woman ties her lengths together, end to end, to form one long length. Each of the lengths is tied together to form one group length of wool.

The facilitator rolls the length up and discusses this as 'our special ball of connected women's experiences'. The wool end is then held and the ball tossed gently to one of the women saying her name as this is done. She then holds a bit of the wool and gently tosses to another woman saying her name. Gradually the lengths crisscross over each other as the ball unravels and forms a web of connection. Keep going until the women are confidently saying each others names. Ask the women for a comment on the colourful connected web. What does it say about their experiences? What is it like to know how connected we all are, or how similar our experiences as women are? Is there a word to share how you feel looking at the network or the wool and wool ball?

## OBJECTIVES

- To enhance the sense of welcome and safety for women already offered and to continue to build group cohesion, mutual confidence and a collective commitment to how the group will run.
- To begin the process of women getting to know how the group will run.
- To explore a group agreement and discuss how the group will be in a safe, comfortable venue and a productive context for discussion and sharing. Importantly, the group will not be replicating of the styles of communication experienced by women in abusive relationships.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

A whiteboard or paper to record contributions onto.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- This activity can be done as a large group or in small groups or pairs which report back to the larger group. Asking women to share their ideas are as to some important ways of creating a comfortable and safe group environment. Give some tips to start. The facilitator can record comments for later reference and for women to refer to in other weeks or to modify.
- Ask the women to remember and share a previous group situation where they didn't fit in, for example at school, a social group or leisure group. Drawing on this experience, what will have to happen to make sure this group time together is very positive?

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

A group agreement may cover:

- Safe disclosure and enacting safe communication within the group and confidentiality, how will we enact this? Will we identify each other outside of the group?
- The roles of co-facilitators and of women speaking from a position of 'I'.
- Whether mobile phones will be off or on vibrate? Whether it is OK to have any swearing? If so, in what context is it ok?
- Holding a non-judgmental atmosphere and mutual respect. How will we see these happening?
- Timeliness and attendance? Clarity around any non-negotiables such as the facilitator's role in relation to child protection, women's use of alcohol and other drugs, mental health crises or abuse to others.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To build on a sense of welcome, safety and cohesion for women.
- To discuss what women are expecting and wanting from their group experience and match this to what is possible, modelling respect for varied voices and choices of group participants.

**TIMING**

Up to half-an-hour.

**RESOURCES**

A whiteboard or paper for recording contributions onto.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Women can also have a personal envelope. On a slip of paper they write down any additional hopes and dreams for the group and this is kept for them to revisit privately at the group's half-way point.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

- Be overt about processes you will use in the group discussion such as collages and relaxation and be open to negotiate these where possible.
- Give permission for women to choose not to do a particular activity.
- Have written support material and brochures available at most sessions for women to pick up and look over. Whilst it may not always be possible to do practical sessions, for example one on legal rights, it may be possible to provide this information in other forms. Have pamphlets in varied languages available or order these prior to the group meeting.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Pose questions such as: “What are the challenges you are currently having?, What are the issues you'd like the group to cover?, What would you find useful for the group to discuss?, When you were invited, what did you hope would be covered?, When you heard about the group, was there a main issue you hoped we'd discuss?, How would you like to cover this issue?” In this group we use a variety of methods because some people learn and think differently to others. Are there ways you like to do things? For example, ‘ I like to write’, ‘I am crafty’, and ‘I like music or poetry’.

Record these themes and write up before next week into a series of sessions to be covered over the weeks together.

# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE: WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?



## OBJECTIVES

- Exploring ‘what is family violence?’ sets an important context for the remaining weeks.
- This activity offers an introduction to the breadth of types of abuse and the shared group experience of abuse, as well as a means to address common concerns that some types of abuse are worse than others.
- The anonymity of this activity, its pre-written categories and examples offers women a potentially safe means of sharing their experiences of abuse. In having prepared categories this can be an instructive and educative way to look at ‘what is family violence?’

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes including a break for coffee. Maybe team this activity with a follow-up of ‘creating a group definition’.

## RESOURCES

- Pens.
- Pre-written or typed created checklists and a whiteboard or white paper to collate shared material and to write definitions onto.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Use different visual representations for your checklist such as asking women to circle experiences or to register their degrees by one, two or three plus signs.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Women note that a category of ‘other’ is helpful for them to personalise their response. Also, women note that some categories don’t do justice to the totality and depth of their experience, thus other names or spaces to identify meanings are important. This activity presumes some written literacy but could be done in pairs with facilitators assisting anyone with words or meanings.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Create a handout with headings of some common types of abuse on it and ask women to tick those items that are familiar to them. Encourage them to add any of their examples if they wish. These can be handed back to the facilitator anonymously just prior to group break. The facilitator can then collate the common types of experiences women in the group have had, writing them on the whiteboard. Re-group after the break.

The facilitator may say: “In our group today, women mentioned the following examples” then read out the collated list on the whiteboard. During this presentation women can just listen or identify an item as their own if they wish to expand on it.

The facilitator can draw a small graph (example below) on the board, numerically collating the numbers of items checked by the group. This represents the range of experiences and the facilitator can then discuss that one is not worth more than another, as they are all not ok.

EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL	FINANCIAL	VERBAL	SOCIAL	SPIRITUAL	OTHER
28	16	8	12	21	13	18	10

The group can be asked: “What are some things you think about when you see this? What would you like to add to this conversation? How do we define family violence together to take account of the breadth of experiences?”

From this we can begin to create a group definition of what we think family violence is. Ask the women to help shape a unique definition with shared understanding.

**SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS**

Experiences of violence activity handout for women to fill in;

	EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL	FINANCIAL	VERBAL	SOCIAL	SPIRITUAL	OTHER
	He calls you names...	He breaks things special to you  ----- He hits you	Demands sex when you feel unwell  ----- Flirts in front of you  ----- Has other partners	He asks you for money for his drinking	He calls you names	He won't let you see your parents	Experience of being held and tormented	
<b>MY EXAMPLES</b>								
	EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL	FINANCIAL	VERBAL	SOCIAL	SPIRITUAL	OTHER
1				He gave me \$40 for all the food			Not allowed to go to church	
2								
3								

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*“We were teasing out, what is family violence? There were a couple of examples in the little check box and we had a bit of time to look at that and say if you could relate to any of these.[We were asked to] just tick them and we will have a bit of a discussion. That was the hugest point; it was like a turning point for me because I ticked every box! It was like awareness that, all of a sudden, I went ‘wow’ and I got the full brunt of what had happened and realised that I couldn’t deny it had happened any more”.*

**GROUP MEMBER 2001**

**OBJECTIVES**

- As with all these activities, exploring ‘what is family violence’ sets an important context for the remaining weeks.
- This activity offers an introduction to the breadth of types of family violence, the shared group experience of abuse and a means to reframe the abusive behaviours as unacceptable breaches of rights.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

- Handouts.
- Pens for recording.
- A whiteboard or paper for recording large group responses.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Some actions on their own, or in a different context, would not be seen as abusive. It is the intent to control and misuse power which underpins violent or abusive behaviour. For example, reading the odometer in a car in one context may not be abusive, but systematic odometer reading, controlling comments and withdrawal of money for petrol are an abuse of power.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

In small groups of two, three or four (depending on group size), brainstorm and discuss some of the sorts of behaviors that women no longer want to consider acceptable, and which are abusive or disrespecting of their rights. Possible headings may include all nine of the following: physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, psychological, sexual, verbal, social and institutional rights. Join into a large group again and share what has been discussed within the small groups.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

In small groups, brainstorm/discuss some of the sorts of behaviours that you no longer want to consider acceptable and which are abusive or disrespecting of your rights.

Possible headings:

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Emotional</b>
<b>Financial</b>	<b>Spiritual</b>
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>Sexual</b>
<b>Verbal</b>	<b>Social</b>
<b>Institutional</b>	

Note to facilitators: Some actions on their own, or in a different context, would not be seen as abusive. It is the *intent to control and misuse power* which underpins violent or abusive behaviour.

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“...The feeling that we are not alone in our experiences... We are not the only ones, there are others. Physical violence isn’t the most damaging form of violence to our inner selves. Other forms shouldn’t be minimised.”*

GROUP MEMBER 2004

## OBJECTIVES

- Creating a shared understanding of ‘what is family violence?’ personalises each group’s experience, clarifies for women the breadth of abuse and begins to normalise her experiences.
- It offers a way for women to begin to reduce their isolation regarding their experiences in a way that is safe; women share what they feel comfortable sharing.

## TIMING

Up to 30 minutes.

## RESOURCES

A means to record contributions.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Art materials, magazines and written words could be used to create a collage of shared meaning.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Link this activity to one of the other ‘what is family violence?’ activities. Encourage women to be respectful of each other in regards to hearing details of stories, staying attentive to those who may need to share every detail quickly. This may be pre-empted by explaining that often, when women have been starved of support, they may feel the need to ‘fill up’ quickly, fearful that the support, as before, may go away. This can mean they share a lot of intimate details very quickly, at times later regretting that this disclosure was not taken more carefully. Encourage women to begin to trust that the group will be here over the weeks and that there is no need to tell everything at once.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

In groups of three or four women, come up with a definition of hurtful or abusive behaviours that fits as family violence. It may be things women have experienced or things they know happen to women in abusive relationships. What words spring to mind? How would you start this? How would you name these acts of control and abuse? Family violence is... The effects of violence are... and it is perpetrated by... and sustained by... Each group then reads out what they have done and speaks about their reasons for choosing the words they have. The facilitator asks women if they want to leave the definitions as they are, or to try and combine them.

What Women Have Said About Family Violence In Past Groups:

Family violence is...

"Emotional, mental, verbal, financial, social, physical and sexual abuse. It includes jealousy, undermining, put-downs, name-calling, alienation, disrespectfulness and not acknowledging your opinion or what you have to say."

The effects of family violence are...

"Fear, believing he is right (e.g. I am a bad mother), questioning yourself, low self-esteem, low confidence, negative effects on the children, not able to express yourself fully, anger and loss of control."

Family violence is perpetrated by...

"Mostly men, by someone who you thought you could trust, by someone who wants to have power and control over someone else."

Family violence is sustained by...

"Pressure from others (to stay in the relationship), workplace practices that don't consider women's experience, discrimination, men not taking responsibility, the legal system (e.g. the law of provocation), excuses and minimisation of the abuse."

"... Is abuse of many types, including conniving, snaky and manipulative types. It is done by someone you should be able to trust. It is planned, done in an unequal fashion and by the abuser trying to stay one step ahead. The abuser puts blame on the partner and it is conveyed verbally, non-verbally and can be traumatising. It implies that love is just 'lucky to not be hit'. It is soul-destroying, confusing and plays on your sense of reality. It is a crime, can be fatal and lead to suicidal thoughts and acts. You get the shit end of everything and it makes you see a shark in every wave."

"Family violence has many types and is not always visible. It is in many cultures and is not always challenged. It can be soul-destroying, wrong and result in having your self-esteem taken away. It can affect the humanity of all involved and trigger vulnerability from past abuse for the one being abused. It can leave you feeling lost. Someone you trust and love, or may have once loved, commits it."

"Abuse in the home can take the form of physical abuse such as being hit or pushed around; being verbally put down; being emotionally blackmailed; not being able to have access to the finances or having the other person use all the money for gambling. It can also include sexual abuse and adultery. Such behaviours can leave the victim/survivor living with a damaged sense of self. It can also sometimes cause the victim/survivor to become abusive themselves and then to experience guilt and self-blame. Through experiencing abuse, the children's needs may be ignored and often they themselves experience significant effects from witnessing the abuse. In general, it is any behaviour which causes a woman and her children to live in fear."

"... Leaves a woman feeling suicidal, overwhelmed, doubtful of her own judgment and in despair. It has long-lasting effects and leads to psychological scarring. Domestic violence takes many forms of control (over whom she sees, where she goes, her body, her mind). It can be control and abuse of physical, sexual, financial and social aspects of a woman's' life. It can be threats to kill, intimidation and a total locking in of her freedoms and rights. It is done by someone intimate who she trusts, who takes advantage of her vulnerability and hopes. It is criminal and difficult to heal from without help."

## OBJECTIVES

- To reframe the family violence that happened from the perspective of a woman's strengths.
- To reaffirm her continuing commitment to relationship health despite her partner's behaviour. As such, it is not just her recounting abusive events in a purely descriptive fashion (which may potentially feel quite painful for her or listeners), but is intentionally focussed on confirming her perceptions and judgments.
- To explore what is family violence in a conversational way that doesn't presume women already have a clear idea of this.

## TIMING

Up to one hour often followed with Activity 9: Creating A Group Definition.

## RESOURCES

- A room with sufficient space for chairs to be comfortably structured.
- A prepared sheet for the outside listening group.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

This activity can be reframed as safe storytelling and sharing.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

There no expectation that everyone has to share their story.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

From talking with other women we have come to understand that the abusive man's description of what has happened constantly clouds what really happened. He will attempt to shift responsibility, or minimise the behaviour or just lie about it. So in thinking about describing or naming abuse, it is difficult to step aside from the influence of his descriptions of it.

To help to do this workers explain to women that they are going to have a chat about three things:

- What is important to you in relationships?
- What kind of relationship were you hoping for?
- What do you know about abuse and hurt in relationships?

The group is going to have this chat in a different way. It will split into two groups, an inner and an outer group. The outer group will be invited to just listen and write down any comments and the inner group starts off the chat with facilitator one. Then the groups will switch and the outer group will move into the centre and have a conversation with facilitator two.

For the listening women this gives them an opportunity to sit back without expectations of having to speak. However, if there are things that women connect with, they should make a note of this for themselves. Then the facilitator might ask women to comment on some of the connections they made in the first discussion when it's their turn to be in the inner group.

For the women in the centre, the facilitator will be asking some questions about what they hoped for in their relationship and when they noticed things had gone of the rails? Some women will end up speaking more than others and that is ok.

#### QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN

- What sort of things were you hoping for in your relationship?
- When did you begin to think that your relationship didn't fit with what you were expecting or hoping for?
- What name could you give to what was happening?
- When did you realise that what was happening was abusive or violent?
- Is it easier to name it this way now or is it still a question in your mind?
- Why did you question this at this time?
- Given this, what were your hopes for the relationship?
- What values do you hold about relationships that were violated by the abuse?
- What things do you think helped you know that some things were not OK?
- What effect did it have on you to begin to see his behaviour as abusive rather than some other explanation?

#### SWAP OVER THE TWO GROUPS, SO THE INNER CIRCLE IS NOW SITTING OUTSIDE AND THE OUTER CIRCLE IS NOW INSIDE

Facilitator two asks this group:

- What did you hear from... which really caught your attention?
- What captured your imagination?
- What was it she said which provided you with a sense of what it was that she places value in?
- What did it say about what might be important to her?
- In hearing that, what do you think it perhaps says about what she stands for in life?
- Why were you drawn to these areas of .....’s story? What was it about this story which struck a chord within your own personal history?

Regroup as one group and discuss what it was like to do the discussion in this way. What have you learned?

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Sample sheet for group two to record their thoughts.

<p><b>What you expected/hoped your relationship would be like? (Note women's names against their comment.)</b></p>	<p><b>Things you noticed that didn't fit with your idea of relationships.</b>  (Include women's names.)</p>	<p><b>What names/phrases did women use to describe what was happening in their relationship?</b></p>
<p>Carol said she hoped for fun and companionship.</p>	<p>She said when he became ruder and jealous ... I really identify with this one.</p>	<p>She felt it was 'a bit off' but wondered if it was a 'strong love'. I believed my partner loved me so much that he got angry because he couldn't express it.</p>
<p>Emme mentioned she was after happiness and growing old together. This is what I thought we would have too.</p>	<p>Her partner changed when he asked her to move in and he became moody. He started questioning why she needed to see her sister and being judgemental of her way of dressing.</p> <p>My partner was always telling me that I dressed like a teenager and after I moved in, he tore my favourite shirt because he said I wasn't listening to him anymore. The first time he hit me, I was numb with shock.</p>	<p>Emme wondered if her partner was stressed by the new relationship and whether she was putting too much pressure on him to get close.</p>

OBJECTIVES

- To watch a short video scenario of a woman who has a controlling partner.
- To offer a chance for women to position themselves differently to their experience of abuse by watching a video of another woman’s experience.
- To discuss that the range of family violence includes emotional abuse and other types of abuse.

TIMING

Up to half-an-hour. Follow up with Activity 9: Creating A Group Definition Activity.

RESOURCES

- Video called *Love Control* available at [www.nifvs.org.au/Love-Control](http://www.nifvs.org.au/Love-Control)
- Review and use other DVD and video resources which are listed in Resources section of the manual.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

This activity can be reframed as safe storytelling and sharing.

TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

- Emotional abuse and its confusing and controlling effects can be difficult to describe.
- Watching a video positions women in a new place to the experience and can allow her to ‘watch on’ the experience of another woman. This can be enlightening as she sees violence differently and at times more clearly because of this. Facilitators may say: “Today the group will have a discussion about defining abusive behaviour within close relationships. What does it mean when we say that? How can the group come to a shared understanding of what this means? This is your space to voice a description of what is happening. The following video is dramatisation of an abusive relationship. When watching this video, stay focussed on all the different ways he attempts to control her, put her down, scare and intimidate her.” Afterwards, divide into small groups and discuss what was seen. Discuss in a larger group what the women saw and the variety of abuse that is considered as violence.

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“...The video... Well, with the videos, being an on-looker you could look into it. Because most of the people who come from violence, when they see violence, they back off from it because it is pretty scary. But to feel safe in a room and to have a video to show you and then to ask the questions of what is it you saw, you’ve got to throw your brain into action.”*

GROUP MEMBER 2001

**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore the commonly shared experiences of family violence across a woman’s life cycle.
- To use commonly known proverbs and sayings to begin discussions about the different ways women and men are ‘supposed to behave’.
- To highlight the particular social, cultural and religious context of women’s experiences of hurt and abuse. Often women discover that one important site of women’s abuse is the home and domestic environment.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Markers and paper to record observations and thoughts.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

- In small groups, ask the women to jot down under the headings of ‘0-5 Years’, ‘6-16 Years’ and ‘Adult Years’ what some of the common experiences of abuse and hurt that girls and women face are.
- This may be things you have experienced or things they know of other women experiencing.
- Women often use cultural or religious proverbs and sayings to highlight the belief behind the hurt. Ask the group what sayings or proverbs they know that tell us about women and girls’ lives in relation to men and/or in relation to abuse.
- What are some of the abuses boys and men face?
- How do the group members understand any differences?
- Discuss these issues as a larger group.

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*“...We looked at sayings ‘I can love her and beat her’, ‘Hitting comes from heaven’, ‘Barefoot and pregnant’, ‘Long hair, short brain’, ‘A woman’s place is in the home with her husband’, ‘A man makes the home’ and how these sayings hurt women and are used by him to justify himself and his actions.”*

**GROUP MEMBER 2006**

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*“...We have to avoid stereotypes like ‘all men are barbarians’ or ‘all women are downtrodden’. When a woman tries to be herself there is social pressure that says no. It is hard for women who are brought up by conservative parents ...I mean women who are in their 30s or 40s now, have been brought up by parents who are more conservative like those back in their home country.”*

**GROUP MEMBER 2006**

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore women's knowledge, hopes and expectations of relationships.
- The structure of this activity offers a reframing of women's experiences to highlight that she deserves respect and health in relationships, even if she was not receiving this. It also highlights how abusive partners can mirror back abusive interpretations of qualities that women like about themselves. In addition, abusers themselves can put on a socially respectable face which further confuses women.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

Create a picture of woman with a wiggly line down her middle for women to write on in subgroups.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Conduct as a large group activity with the figure of a woman drawn onto a whiteboard.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Some women may not feel the abuse they received is in fact undeserved, saying 'but I was annoying or hard on him'. It is important for the facilitator to take time to discuss these concerns and to highlight that no family violence is deserved or provoked by a woman's actions.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

In small groups, ask women to discuss the following statements:

- In relationships I expect...
- I am entitled to...
- In the relationship I noticed things weren't fitting with what I deserved...
- I noticed that qualities I liked about myself could be made out to be negative by him...
- He showed different faces to different people by...

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...The most life-changing moment was about the good person, bad person description of abusers. This helped to make sense of why we don't leave them when we know we should."*

**GROUP MEMBER 2003**

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

I noticed that things didn't fit what I deserved...	Things were twisted around	He showed a different face by...
I felt like something was wrong from the start – but talked myself out of it	I think I am friendly, he said I was flirting	Being loving to other people's kids at the soccer club but not his own
Increasing self-doubt about the relationship	I think I am funny, he said I was stupid	Buying gifts for women at work
Fear – my voice got lost	Thoughtful/dumb	Offering to do the fence for our neighbour
He was demanding	Kind/a pushover	Being Mr Nice to everyone including my friends
Lack of loyalty		
I felt a lot of pressure		
My heart and mind was telling me that things were not right		
I was plodding along – managing as best I could		
My own inner self was saying this is not right!		
I felt like I was on tenterhooks all the time – I was walking on eggshells		
I needed strategies to cope with everyday things		
I thought I deserve better		
I wanted to be able to be myself		
I was disillusioned		

# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE: ROLES IN SOCIETY



**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore the common social explanations of why family violence occurs.
- To tease out how abusive partners often draw on these to justify their abuse.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

A pre-drawn sheet with categories, or a pre-drawn table on a whiteboard.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

- Other common social explanations pertinent to particular groups can be included.
- Myths and beliefs as to why abuse occurs is a similar activity that can be done.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

In pairs, or small groups, the facilitator asks the women to explore ‘what are the common social explanations for why abuse occurs?’ Invite the women to write common explanations under the headings ‘Family and Culture’, ‘Drug and Alcohol Use’, ‘Health’, ‘Society’, ‘To Do With Women’, ‘Other’ (such as work stress).

Facilitators question: “What do group members notice about these explanations? Who do they hold responsible for family violence?”

If these explanations are society’s explanation for abuse, what impact does this have on women in abusive relationships? Results in guilt, self-blame, feeling different and wondering ‘is there is something different about me?’.

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Family/Culture	Drug And Alcohol Use	Health
<p>Because he has family issues</p> <p>Because she is not of his culture</p> <p>Because he is Moroccan/ Indian/Aussie</p> <p>Because he is a man and entitled to</p>	<p>Because he was drunk</p> <p>Because he was on drugs</p> <p>He drinks because he has a had a bad back and the pain makes him edgy</p>	<p>Because he's sick</p> <p>Because he's depressed</p> <p>Because he's got schizophrenia</p> <p>Because he has a bad back</p> <p>Because research says men can not empathise due to a chemical in their brain</p>
Attributes Of Women	Other Explanations	Attributes Of Men
<p>Because you nagged me</p> <p>Because you are not like my mum</p> <p>Because you are just like my mum</p> <p>Because women need putting into their place</p> <p>Because you are hard to look after</p> <p>Because women are uncontrollable and uncivilised</p> <p>Because I love you</p> <p>Because women should be on the job 24/7</p>	<p>Because you visit others</p> <p>Because you shouldn't need anyone but me</p>	<p>Because men can not handle stress</p> <p>Because his mum told him what to do</p> <p>Because he lost a job</p>

FACILITATOR QUESTIONS

**What is it about all of these?**

They are excuses; not truths.  
 None of them hold the man responsible.  
 If men hold onto these beliefs, they don't have to change.

**So why does abuse occur?**

Men make the choices  
 Male privilege.  
 Because it works for them  
 Because society allows it to continue.



**OBJECTIVES**

- To vary Activity 14, include a space for women to discuss both the ways they have been affected by community attitudes about family violence, and ways that they have challenged community attitudes about family violence.
- To explore women's resistance to unfair social explanations about family violence.
- To see women as actively engaged in resistance to attitudes, and strongly working to oppose the effects of abuse upon herself.

**TIMING**

Up to an additional 30 minutes with Activity 14.

**RESOURCES**

Pre-drawn sheets.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Use magazines articles about abuse that can be a focus for discussion.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Write in some examples to help get the conversation going.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Note that the group has already looked at what some of the common ideas about abuse are. Refer to the already completed table. What steps of resistance have women been able to take to these? As women offer ideas, facilitators can add two columns to the table to collate 'how have women been influenced by these attitudes?' and 'how do women hold onto their own thoughts about family violence?'

Discussion may include questions like:

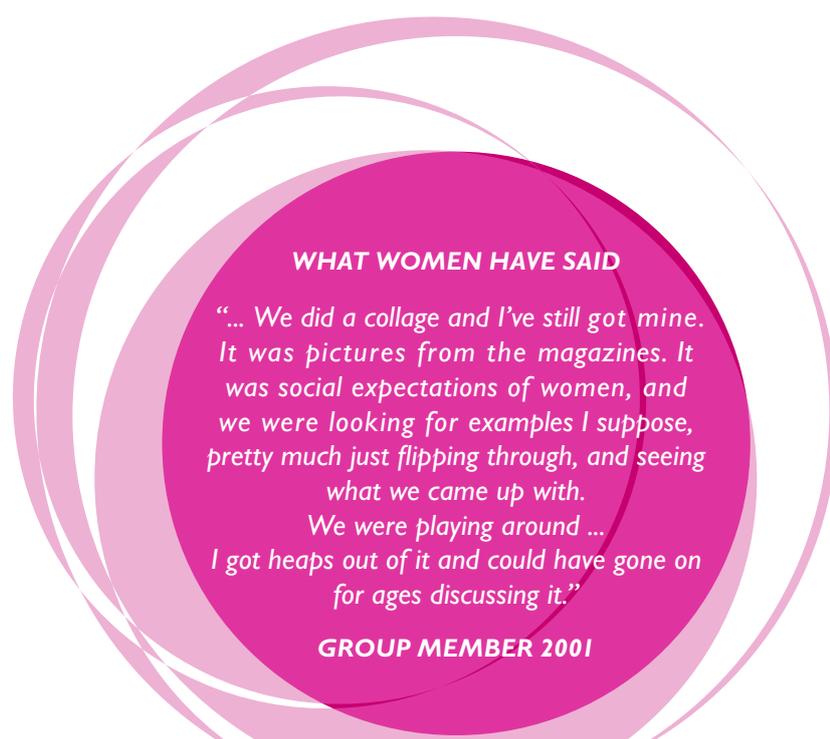
- What have women done to resist the pull of these beliefs and how have they stood up?
- How were they able to do that at that particular time?
- What difference does knowing that they stood their ground make to how they feel about themselves?
- What does it say about them that they were able to do that?

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

An additional two areas are added (see arrows) to the conversation in Activity 14. This can further enrich discussion.

Attributes of men	Attributes of women	How do these beliefs influence women?	How do women hold onto their own thoughts about abuse?
<p>He was drinking/ on drugs</p> <p>He was stressed</p> <p>He comes from that culture or an abusive family</p> <p>He was abused as a child</p> <p>He was unemployed</p> <p>He was being a bloke:strong/proud/physical</p> <p>He is entitled to his property/his house</p> <p>He can do what he wants</p> <p>He just got out of jail</p>	<p>Why did she stay?</p> <p>She is crazy</p> <p>She sought him out</p> <p>She did not tell him to stop</p> <p>She is hormonal</p> <p>We could see it, why couldn't you?</p> <p>What did you do to provoke it?</p> <p>Sexist views of women</p> <p>Why did you keep it quiet?</p> <p>Women abuse too</p>	<p>All the ones for the man say he is not responsible for his behaviour</p> <p>They are excuses</p> <p>They allow the broader community (by not seeing it as a social problem), to believe that it will never happen to them and that they are not responsible for noticing that it is occurring</p> <p>All the ones under the woman hold her to blame for his behaviour, and then she is full of guilt and self-blame</p>	<p>I held on</p> <p>I believed my kids deserved better</p> <p>Women deserve freedom</p> <p>Women deserve to be real and not affected by this</p> <p>I believed I could do it</p> <p>I stayed safe for a long time until it was OK to carefully begin to trust</p> <p>I changed the tape in my head</p>

OBJECTIVES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explore how social expectations have influenced women’s lives.</li> <li>To explore the ways in which women have attempted to carve out their own identities, and ways of being the person they want to be.</li> </ul>	
TIMING	RESOURCES
Up to one hour: half-an-hour for collage creation and half-an-hour for stories from collages.	Magazines, scissors, paste, glue, stickers, markers, pens and tables to lean on.
VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY	
Play music in the background. Allow women to read or keep items they find that interest them.	
TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS	
<p>Magazines from a wide variety of sources may contain more images of a greater variety of women. Women may read and take their time.</p> <p>Invite the women to divide their A3 paper into two. On one side get them to represent the social pressures that have been heavily influential on them. On the other side, represent the ways in which they have held on to, or acted on, her own hopes and intensions in spite of social expectations or pressures.</p> <p>Ask women to find pictures, images and words from the magazines which represent ‘A’ and ‘B’ as below.</p>	
A.	B.
Some of the messages about being a woman that have been particularly influential in their life.	Some of the ways in which they have pursued their own hopes and intentions for their life (despite these messages).
<p>Get the women’s feedback about their collages.</p> <p>What stood out for you?</p> <p>Have a general discussion about the thoughts women have had as a result of thinking about the roles that men and women play in society.</p>	



## OBJECTIVES

- To explore the blue prints in a society that shape women's lives and contributes to them feeling less worthy, unsuccessful or different.
- To explore the status of different women's positions in diverse social, cultural, religious and age groupings.

## TIMING

Up to 40 minutes

## RESOURCES

Paper to write on.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Conduct in small groups of two or three.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

The group discusses some questions:

“What are the blueprints for men and women in our community or society?” For example, men are the hunter gatherers and women are expected to look after children, keep the house clean, shop, pay bills and cook.

“Where do these ideas come from?” For example, is it from family, culture, legal systems, work roles and prescriptions, media such as magazines, radio, TV, and government policies?

What are the consequences of turning your back on social expectations?

**Negative consequences:**

The truth can get lost

You can get blamed

You can get ostracised by your family, friends or community

You can struggle to find new friends

What are your thoughts on these?

**Positive consequences:**

You feel stronger

You value yourself more

You can have an influence on challenging the negatives

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“...Society sends such conflicting messages about women's roles.”*

GROUP MEMBER 2004

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

What is the blueprint of social expectations?

	Blueprint	Where does it come from?
<b>Men</b>	<p>Can mow lawns</p> <p>Can be sportsman</p> <p>Don't get postnatal depression</p> <p>Are the breadwinners</p> <p>Should try to be strong</p> <p>Not show feelings</p> <p>Should not be afraid</p> <p>Don't cook</p> <p>Can be cross and angry</p>	<p>Comes from others in community/older generation</p> <p>Men/boyfriends</p> <p>Media</p> <p>Family</p> <p>Ads on TV</p> <p>Pills and doctors</p>
<b>Women</b>	<p>Shouldn't be feminist</p> <p>Should be loyal</p> <p>Should be happy</p> <p>Should be mothers and carers</p> <p>Don't handle heavy machinery</p> <p>Should be skinny, but not too skinny</p> <p>Should cook and clean, and grin and bear it</p> <p>Shouldn't have an arse like my auntie</p> <p>Should be gentle and not demanding or forthright</p>	<p>As above</p>

FACILITATORS ASK GROUP MEMBERS WHAT THEIR THOUGHTS ON THESE ARE

**Possible responses can be:**

- The consequences of not living up to these can be severe and the women's list is longer.
- Men have more choices and men can choose or determine their roles.
- These ideas should not be used to justify abuse by an abusive partner.

**Expectations can be totally contradictory, and impossible to do both at once. For example**

- Sex is OK and good, but sex is not OK for a woman.
- It's good for a woman to be nice, but not too nice.
- It's good to be a mother and round and nurturing in your body, but at the same time you have to be sexy, slim and small.
- It is good to be blonde, but being a blonde means you are dumb.
- Women should be demure and not be a 'know it all', but at the same time a woman can be called names because she knows nothing.

# EFFECTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE



## OBJECTIVES

- To discuss the link between abusive behaviour and its effects on women's lives.
- To hear other women's' stories and begin to reduce isolation (isolation operates as an effect of abuse).
- To raise awareness of how effects are cultivated, maintained and reinforced at various levels in society (who benefits from women being thus affected?).

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes, often followed by Activity 19: Stands Against The Effects.

## RESOURCES

Pre-planned examples to share.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Add a column focussing on her relationship to her community.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

The starting point is to take several examples of controlling and abusive behaviour from previous groups, then explore how this affects different aspects of women's lives. In pairs, or small groups, take several examples of controlling and abusive behaviour from previous groups.

**Example:** Your partner tells you what to wear and when.

**Example:** Your partner put his hand across the doorway as you are about to leave the house. The children are already waiting outside.

Then explore how this affects different aspects of women's lives. Columns can be titled 'Her Relationship With Herself', 'Her Relationship With Her Children' and 'Her Relationship With Her Partner'.

Groups can consider what the effects of abuse are on a woman's sense of self; what the abuse does to trick women into believing about themselves; and what this can talk women into doing or believing.

Feedback to the larger group and discuss using the following discussion starters:

- How is it to know that his actions of control and abuse have these consequences?
- How do you feel looking at all these effects on your life which have arisen because of his actions?
- In what ways has he, or those around you, minimised the effects of these behaviours on your life?
- Can anyone think of an example where they have been able to lessen the strength of one or more of these effects?

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Look at the effects of the violence and control using the example, 'He tells you what to wear, when you go out'. How does this affect you:

Relationship To Yourself	Relationship To Others	Relationship To Partner
<p><b>Confusing - if you look good, they make you feel like shit</b></p> <p><b>I don't buy clothes for myself</b></p> <p><b>I become more conservative - wear clothing that is not too revealing</b></p> <p><b>Him looking through me makes me feel uncomfortable</b></p> <p><b>I become self-conscious about other people looking at me</b></p> <p><b>The way he looks at me makes me feel dirty</b></p> <p><b>Now I wear a nightie to bed, I can't be naked</b></p>	<p><b>I don't buy clothes for my daughter in order to avoid the criticism</b></p> <p><b>My son has started to make negative comments whenever he looks at women</b></p> <p><b>I felt like I have to repair the damage when he criticises her clothing</b></p> <p><b>My daughter has started to repeat what he says to me</b></p> <p><b>My work colleagues feel uncomfortable when he is around</b></p>	<p><b>I become secretive about my clothes/appearance</b></p> <p><b>I become self-conscious about my clothes/appearance when I'm with my partner</b></p> <p><b>I have to justify what I buy/spend</b></p> <p><b>I feel like he sees me as a possession, rather than seeing me for me</b></p> <p><b>At social functions he stops me from talking with friends/colleagues</b></p> <p><b>Work colleagues feel uncomfortable when he is around</b></p> <p><b>I can't let other men be near me</b></p> <p><b>Him cutting up my clothes gives me the message that he is in control</b></p>

**OBJECTIVES**

- A focussed discussion on stands invites women to remember the stands they have taken, no matter what they are, to the effects of abuse upon their relationships and their health.
- To highlight that there is a direct relationship between the abuse, and how women feel and are affected now.
- To let women know that they are not crazy, sick, mad, weak or stupid as may have been suggested by abusive partners.

**TIMING**

Up to half-an-hour, often following from Activity 18.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Women share a particular story about a stand that they have taken/made.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

These are stands against the effects and not against the abuser. Women should be careful not to jeopardise their own or their children's safety.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

This activity is well linked to Activity 18. In a large group, discuss the stands against the effects of the abusive/controlling behaviour. An example of a stand may be that a partner does not allow a woman to see her family which has the effect of social isolation. But the woman uses the telephone to maintain connection with her family and friends. She says to herself, he can't stop me talking, they are my family.

What do women say to themselves, or what did they decide in order to take that stand?

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

**Stands Against Effects On My Relationships And My Health**

**I'm listening to music that motivates me**

**I don't share everything**

**I protect my privacy as best I can**

**I will take my keys back**

**You are not going to stop me**

**I will be prepared**

**I will do what I want to do**

**I have rights**

**I will wear what I want**

**They can think what they like**

**So, am I wearing something of yours?**

**I deserve to be around people who treat me with respect**

**I've talked a lot with my daughter and shared that we all have rights within any family**

**I model good relationships to my kids**

**There is no more hiding – the truth is out there – I have talked about it at work**

**I accepted that this is really happening**

**I felt better/felt less guilty**

**I am starting to think 'I haven't done anything to create this situation'**

**I have held onto my belief in my right to stay alive for my kids**

**I have to play my own 'game' to survive and I have realised that I don't deserve to be treated in this way**

## OBJECTIVES

- To discuss the link between abusive behaviour and the effects on women's lives.
- The starting point is to take some prepared 'effects of abuse' categories and then explore how these affect different aspects of women's lives. Then women pick from some categories that show how they can, or could begin to, refuse to go along with the effects in their lives.
- The pre-written aspect of this activity can be educative and instructive. It is modified from original work done by Cate Dwyer of the Lower Mountains Family Support Service, NSW.

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes.

## RESOURCES

- Have pre-planned examples to share. On prepared white cards, write some common thoughts, feelings and actions that can result from women experiencing family violence. Put these into piles titled 'Actions', 'Thinking' and 'Feelings'. Write on another set of cards (perhaps a different colour card) the 'Actions', 'Thinking' and 'Feelings' that can begin to resist the effects.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- On the cards, use pictures instead of words, for example: faces for expressions, thought bubbles for thoughts and drawn figures for actions.
- Use partnered pairs instead of groups of three.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Show the group the small piles of the 'Thinking', 'Feeling' and 'Actions' cards. Encourage the women to look at and read these cards and then to pick a few from each pile and discuss these in their group.

**Discuss:**

How are you/did you experience the relationship?

How these may get in the way of being content with life.

Are there some common experiences in your pair?

From the other pile women pick a few of the 'Thinking', 'Feeling' and 'Actions' cards that they may be able to, or may have already begun to, bring into their lives. Discuss this as a group.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

## Sample cards for Thinking, Feeling and Actions

<p><b>THINKING I CAN'T GET ANYTHING RIGHT</b></p>	<p><b>THINKING I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR EVERYTHING GOING WRONG</b></p>	<p><b>THINKING I CAN'T TRUST MYSELF</b></p>	<p><b>THINKING I AM A FAKE</b></p>
<p><b>FEELING HOPELESS</b></p>	<p><b>FEELING PANICKY</b></p>	<p><b>FEELING ANXIOUS WHEN I CAN'T CONTROL THINGS</b></p>	<p><b>FEELING GUILTY</b></p>
<p><b>GIVING TO EVERYONE BUT MYSELF</b></p>	<p><b>HAVING FREQUENT BAD MEMORIES</b></p>	<p><b>FINDING MYSELF IN UNSAFE RELATIONSHIPS</b></p>	<p><b>USING DRUGS, ALCOHOL OR FOOD TOO MUCH</b></p>

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

**THINKING**  
I CAN START  
TO GET THINGS  
RIGHT

**THINKING**  
I AM NOT  
RESPONSIBLE  
FOR THE ABUSE

**THINKING**  
I CAN TRUST  
MY JUDGMENT  
BECAUSE I TELL  
MYSELF OF  
THE THINGS I  
DO WELL

**THINKING**  
I AM A REAL  
AND UNIQUE  
BECAUSE OF  
MY SPECIAL  
HOBBIES

**FEELING**  
HOPEFUL  
BECAUSE OF  
THE PEOPLE  
WHO BELIEVE  
IN ME

**FEELING**  
RELAXED  
BECAUSE  
I BREATHE  
SLOWLY

**FEELING**  
PEACEFUL  
BECAUSE  
THE KIDS ARE  
FINALLY BACK  
AT SCHOOL

**FEELING**  
PROUD  
BECAUSE  
I STILL GO TO  
MY COURSE  
DESPITE HIM

**GIVING**  
TIME TO  
MYSELF

**HAVING**  
A CALM BODY  
AND SENSE  
OF PEACE BY  
RELAXING

**FINDING**  
MYSELF IN SAFE  
RELATIONSHIPS  
BECAUSE I  
STAND UP FOR  
MY NEEDS  
WITH FRIENDS

**PUTTING**  
GOOD FOOD  
INTO  
MY BODY

**OBJECTIVES**

- Informed by trauma theories and women’s common eagerness to know what they are experiencing, this session offers women some clear information on trauma. It is ‘present focussed’.
- To link trauma reactions to women’s experiences.
- To both normalise and validate her understandings and remove these from the negative labels used by the abuser. The body’s reaction to heightened levels of stress works to keep women safe in the short term.
- To use a story metaphor in order to aid the exploration of the effects of heightened stress and trauma.

**TIMING**

Up to 30 minutes. Link to one of the other activities on effects, or healing from effects.

**RESOURCES**

Up to 30 minutes. Link to one of the other activities on effects, or healing from effects.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

- Use a visual symbol or object such as a flower, a car battery or other inanimate item to discuss what research tells us about the effects of trauma. Encourage women to offer their own metaphors. They don’t have to have access to complicated ways of expressing themselves.
- After a shorter discussion, do a practical activity, such as making a stress ball.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Women sometimes use this opportunity to blame themselves for staying with a partner (e.g. my child is traumatised because it took me too long to leave). It is important to explore that the very effects of fatigue, numbness, panic and indecision themselves, can render women less able to act. It is not her own lack of care for her children. Have ready referral avenues for women who wish to use follow-up support, counselling or more specific aid related to their experiences of stress or trauma.

Use the metaphor of a fish being exposed to daily raids by a kookaburra, what happens over time to the fish emotionally, physically and mentally and how other fish begin to feel and act within the family. On a white board, link this to what the common experiences of trauma are on women’s bodies, minds, hearts and thoughts. Discuss the common experiences of those exposed to trauma. Outline what we know of brain development in children with trauma, and why this knowledge is so important. Discuss trauma and its link to family violence. What practical strategies do other women use to stabilise themselves that have proved helpful? This may be an opportunity to reiterate techniques for staying centred and self-soothing in healthy ways, such as the grounding techniques around using the five senses.

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore grief as a natural part of relationship changes and trust betrayal.
- The loss of the hoped for relationship is only part of many other losses for women and this activity offers a chance to normalise grief and grieving.

## TIMING

Up to 30 minutes.

## RESOURCES

A3 paper with a circle and 'What are you grieving about?' written on it.

Markers to record contributions with.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- At the end ask, "What is good grief? What is your story or experience of this? What helps grief journeys?"

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

- Sitting together in a circle may symbolically honour the grief shared more than a group structure where the facilitator writes on a white board in front of the group.
- Sometimes the theme of 'forgiveness' arises and requires careful processing.
- Have ready some referral avenues and phone supports regarding grief and some grief support literature in case they are requested.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Sit together with the paper in the middle of the group on a table, floor or low table between all participants. Encourage the women to share items that contribute to the arrows from the circle in response to 'What are you grieving about?' Women may share the story that goes with the contribution.

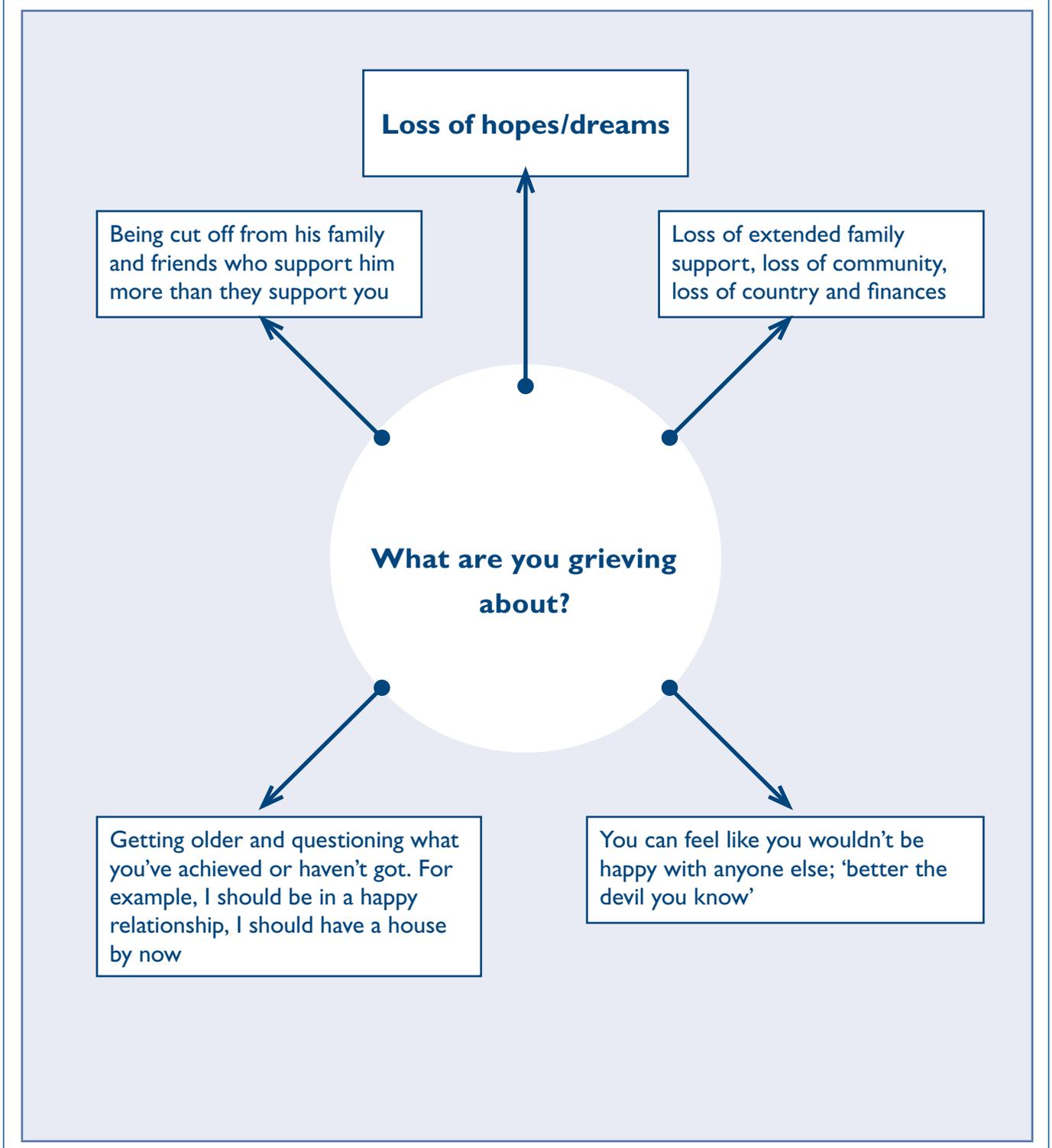
Later, discuss how women find their way through grief. What journeys and tips can women share about this?

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...I believe grief is one of the hardest things to deal with. It is there every day and you have to know how to deal with it, otherwise it can take you down. It was good to learn the stages of grief, understanding the changes and emotions I am feeling helped me understand why it has taken so long."*

GROUP MEMBER 2004

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS



OBJECTIVES

- To give permission for mixed feelings without judgement or self-judgment.
- For women to see that feeling both 'one thing' and 'another thing' are normal experiences.

TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

RESOURCES

A means to record the contributions.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Do this as an art activity, drawing or using paint or markers to convey the reality of mixed feelings.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Women can be very judgmental of themselves for not being clear about their feelings.

STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

In pairs, get the women to discuss what is it that others don't understand about their feelings. What do the women wish others understood?

For example, "I wish others understood that I can hate him and love him, I can feel despair and want to return to him, and yet I know I did the best thing in leaving".

For example, "Grief is like a roller coaster that I am on".

How do you give yourself permission for mixed feelings?

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...I felt like I had done one hurdle at least, and you lived through that part and I can sit there and understand, as much as you would love to say 'just leave him', you know that you can't do that. You do it when you don't have to feel bad about not doing it."*

GROUP MEMBER 2001

**OBJECTIVES**

- To understand that the loss of the hoped for relationship is only part of many other losses for women.
- This activity offers a chance to normalise feeling lonely or isolated.
- To explore how to begin to be able to be alone, and not necessarily lonely.

**TIMING**

Up to 30 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Poems about solitude that are gentle and peaceful.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Do the activity in pairs, or small groups, and then report back to the larger group.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Be sensitive to the cultural and religious implications of being alone for women. Women can be in a relationship yet feel very alone and lonely.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Discuss what are the words the community identifies with women on their own? What assumptions are made in various places about women who are alone? What are the feelings that go with being alone for you? Is loneliness one of them? What could help you feel safe and alone but not lonely?

Read a brief bit of a poem about solitude or being alone and thinking peacefully.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To discuss what forgiveness may mean for women rather than what it may mean to an abusive partner. If someone has hurt trust badly it is normal to not trust them.
- This activity can begin to reframe what happened from a perspective of a woman's strengths, and reaffirms her trust in her own judgement despite her partner's behaviour.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Paper for collating the contributions.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Women can offer words, terms or sentences. Have one person write these instead of all women writing their own items.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

- Women share an understanding that the abusive man's description of what has happened constantly clouds what really happened. Forgiveness is a complex term, what or who or how is forgiveness within family violence?
- There is no expectation that everyone has to share some of their story, or their entire story.
- Abusive partners may be seductive with the term forgiveness and may say "If you forgive me, we can move on or we can reunite our family". Women become confused as to why they can't do this, thus they feel they are the bad ones or the ones keeping the family apart. Women may then give in to a remorseful or persistent partner, but then feel that nothing has changed and that she is still in an unhappy, unsafe violent relationship. A person earns trust over time; it does not happen instantly.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Place the word forgiveness on a sheet in the middle of the group. Ask women to write what other words come to mind from that word. Jot down questions that the term raises for them. Hold a discussion of the dilemmas posed by the term, such as those addressed in an accompanying sheet called 'Thoughts On Forgiveness'.

Only the women themselves can decide when, or if, to put the past behind them. That is their right.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Some friends/family say, “Oh, you can move forward if you forgive”. What are they saying? What do you think they mean? For many women, forgiveness is a scary term because it is associated with letting him back in, pretending it didn’t happen, saying he isn’t responsible or the possibility of more hurt. So they say I can’t forgive him ever.

For some women forgiving feels like giving up rights-based anger. They believe that some things are unforgivable and so they never will. They believe that not forgiving will not stop them from moving on in their lives.

Some women have religious views on forgiveness. Some women see forgiveness as their duty.

Some say, “I have to forgive him, he is my carer”.

Some women see forgiveness as the only way to make the relationship work.

“If I keep holding a grudge, he says we can never go forward together.” She thinks maybe he is right.

This ignores that it is not her capacity to forgive that will heal the relationship, but changed behaviours on his part. Forgiving, when it means reconciling without any change, leads to a circular relationship.

For some women forgiveness means letting go of a deep pain, or of his hold over her.

Only you can decide when or if to put the past behind you. That is your right.

You may decide to let go of any punishment or revenge (and be in or out of the relationship) - but, you may need to set boundaries and be cautious because:

- They can no longer be trusted with confidences
- They are not empathic and tend to be harsh when you divulge a weakness about yourself
- They are not responsible in keeping their commitments
- They may continue to abuse and disrespect you

Therefore, you may choose to forgive them (what ever that means for you), but, may no longer:

- Share your mistakes
- Share your problems
- Rely on, or ask, them to do a project with you, etc.
- Stay in relationship with him because he is disrespectful or abusive

There are lots of types of moving forward and these are given lots of terms.

Whatever you call it, is OK.<sup>79</sup>

79. See references to this at Counsel Care Connection, Does Forgiveness = No Consequences? Available at: [www.counselcareconnection.org/forgive.asp](http://www.counselcareconnection.org/forgive.asp). Retrieved May 2008, P3.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore how women are dealing with strong emotions such as anger. Anger is an OK emotion, it is how we deal with it that is important and can impact on our sense of self and our relationships with others.
- To give permission to discuss behaviours women may be feeling ashamed of such as coping via drinking, scratching an ex’s car or wishing him to be hurt.
- To offer a way for women to understand their embodied rage at the abuser and ways of dealing with those feelings.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Markers and a whiteboard or paper to discuss contributions.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Use pictures of woman only and discuss issues verbally.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Women often worry that they are being ‘just like him’ if angry or showing retaliation to his abuse. It is important to discuss the differences between anger and abuse: one is a valid feeling; the other is a systematic effort to control. Anger is a feeling, it is not in itself abuse, nor is it an excuse for abusive and aggressive behaviour. It is important that women do not jeopardise their safety or health by being vengeful.

The facilitator draws a picture of a woman on the white board and introduces the idea of anger that is ‘out there’ and anger that is ‘pushed down and inwards’. In a large group, explore what happens with each of these types of anger and the effects they have on women and others close to them. Negative ways of expressing anger come back to bite the women, often in the forms of shame and guilt. Explore constructive expressions of anger. What they are and what difference it would make if women were able to express their anger in a safe way. What gets in the way of expressing anger in this way?

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*“...The effects of anger and stress to the body and mind... I was not really aware of the effects... it allowed me to speak up and get involved in the group and I have never done that. I was always told to shut up.”*

**GROUP MEMBER 2005**

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Anger that goes “out there”



Anger that is “pushed down”

Anger That Goes ‘Out There’:

- Behaving in an impulsive, angry way: ‘I damaged his property and wanted to shoot him’.
- Behaving out of character.
- Saying nasty things.
- Raising my voice at the kids.
- Being short or snappy.
- Feeling like I’m out of control.
- Feeling scared, guilty, lonely, ashamed at my negative actions.
- Feeling frustration or desperation.
- Anger that goes over the top comes back as shame and guilt and doesn’t go away.
- Anger is a feeling, it is not in itself abuse and it is not an excuse for abusive behaviour.

Safe And Healthy Anger:

- Stop now and walk away: I do this when I notice I’m stressed.
- Come back calmed down and speak evenly.
- Think to myself, ‘don’t take this on.’
- Ignore some things - think ‘this is not worth my attention’.
- Speak and say, “I won’t talk to you now, but later”.
- Say, ”That’s okay, we may differ and that’s fine”.
- Start sentences with ‘I’.
- Keeping calm and taking time to think things through results in no guilt and feeling dignified and proud, and still being able to say what I feel.
- Assertion and healthy anger can be directed to change and social action.
- Choose a physical expression that doesn’t hurt anyone, such as art and activity.

Anger That Is ‘Pushed Down’:

- Can result in a lose of appetite.
- Can result in stomach aches, headaches and tension.
- Can result in becoming withdrawn, feeling depressed and not doing as much as you might want to.
- See people just to escape and then lie about it afterwards.
- Can result in self-loathing and thinking, ‘I’m not worth nurturing’.
- Soothe myself with food, alcohol, drugs, other partners or self-harm.
- May make me feel vulnerable which may lead to being taken advantage of.
- Anger pushed down comes back as shame and guilt. It doesn’t go away.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore how women are dealing with strong emotions such as anger, shame and guilt.
- To offer an opportunity to reframe women’s emotions as honourable survival skills.
- To offer women chances to choose to do things differently than in the past.

**TIMING**

Up to 30 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Coloured A4 paper.  
Markers and a whiteboard or paper to discuss contributions.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Women may not have a clear name for the emotion, but may wish to call it something else. For example, she may like to call it ‘the heavy cloud’.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Come together in a large group to brainstorm what emotions have been affecting you in ways which make you uncomfortable. Get the women to write these down on their A4 sheets using one word per sheet. For example, ‘shame’.

Get each woman to pick one of these sheets and speak to that emotion in a couple of sentences. Everyone will do this at once. Women may want to say how they feel about it hanging around them and/or other women. For example, ‘Shame, you are in my head all the time, you stop me from being myself and from feeling as worthy as everyone else. I am sick of it. I want you to piss off out of my life’.

Regroup and relax for a moment.

Explore with women where does the shame, etc. come from and whose shame is it really?

Who has benefited from the women holding and carrying the strong emotion? If the strong emotion has been helpful, this needs to be honoured. Often abusive partners benefit from women carrying the emotion.

Women can leave the challenging emotion behind when they leave at the end of the session.

To finish, write down some validating statements about the opposites of these emotions, for example, pride, innocence and calmness. Pick one that has helped the women survive?

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore how women are dealing with strong emotions such as anger and how her manner of managing anger is mediated by family violence, society and societal expectations.
- To offer a way for women to understand their embodied rage at their abuser, and of ways of dealing with those feelings.
- Through initially discussing anger expressed by other women, group members can become reassured of the legitimate and common problems most women have with communicating anger, especially in situations of violence and fear. This may encourage their openness in sharing their own experiences around a theme that has been very complex, dangerous and frightening for them.

## TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

## RESOURCES

Markers and a whiteboard or paper to discuss contributions.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Use photographs of famous women who are known to the group.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

This can be a good activity for groups where some women have never heard of an angry woman, and who may benefit from hearing positive stories from others.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Large group discussion starters: What happens when women are implicated in a violent crime or when strong women express themselves in society? Use examples of famous women, and women known to the individual group members. What are some of the words used? How may this influence how women see their own anger?

Feeling silenced and inactive is common for women. This is made much worse by situations of family violence. If feeling silenced and unable to express anger, where does anger go in a woman's life? How has anger been useful in women's lives, and in what ways have women expressed it effectively? Who are some women you know of who have spoken up?

## OBJECTIVES

- To offer ways for the women to understand their embodied rage at their abuser.
- To offer a gentle way of dealing with those feelings.

## TIMING

Up to 15 minutes.

## RESOURCES

Markers and a whiteboard or paper to discuss contributions with.

Bubble mix in small individual bottles.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Any strong emotion raised by the group may be released through the bubbles.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Party supply stores often have bubbles in small individual bottles.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Large group activity discussion starter: The facilitator hands out bottles of bubble solution. Each woman gets comfortable and relaxed and the facilitator instructs the women to imagine blowing out any uncomfortable emotions through the bubbles. The emotions are released into the bubbles, and then the women watch the bubbles float, sail and pop. Get the women to breathe slowly as this is done.

## OBJECTIVES

- To share with the women a story about the ups and downs of change and healing.
- To normalise bad days and explore the link between guilt and holding yourself responsible for the abuse.
- To explore measuring recovery in ways that are self-encouraging using the vehicle of a generic woman called Maria.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

A prepared sheet to draw on or a whiteboard.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Change the name of the woman. Ask the group to offer a name for 'our woman'. Use humour.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Draw a graph on the board and tell a story of a woman who has been in an abusive relationship. She begins to move away from self-doubt and self-blame and then goes to a party where she is told what a great guy he is. Demonstrate a dip in the graph as she is pulled back towards self-doubt again. She stays in the dip for a while. Invite the women to share what the dips are like. Discuss how long do you stay there and what you are thinking.

Remember to highlight that women get invited into the dips, and that the dips are normal and to be expected. These dips are inviting women back to self-doubt by, for example, relatives' comments like 'he is a great guy that ex of yours'. Women end up feeling guilty about these 'pulls'.

Next, resume the story. Maria does something to get out of the dip. Get the group to offer suggestions as to what that could be. Maria then begins to move forward again, as she goes back to her support group and hears positive things, she moves away from self-doubt. Her son then comes home from an access visit and tells her that his dad has a new girlfriend who is gorgeous. Maria has another dip. This time she may not go down as far or stay in the dip for as long. How does she do this? What is she telling herself in order to get out of the dip a bit quicker? The shape/size/colour of the dips can tell you something about your journey.

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

Surviving Future Dips And Moving Towards Relating In A Healthy Way

100% sure responsibility for abuse is not mine. Healthy way



**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*"...A lot of the things were relevant, especially the thing that you move five steps forward and it's all right to go two steps back. That was really interesting because I didn't realise that before. I thought that, ok, I'm moving forward and I didn't think that you were able to go back. In the group it was made clear that it's OK to go back, it's just normal and you will come back."*

**GROUP MEMBER 2001**

OBJECTIVES

- Drawing from narrative theory, the conversation with guilt offers women a chance to position themselves differently in regards to the theme of guilt.
- Women have found this a humorous and enlightening way of exploring guilt, its connections to feeling responsible for the abuse, and how guilt may be reduced as women begin to see where the responsibility actually lies.

TIMING

Up to 20 minutes for an interview and discussion.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

A similar approach could be taken with a number of the challenging emotions that women experience as a result of family violence. Emotions such as worry, fear and jealousy. For example, the group could have conversations with fear or worry, or conversations with mixed emotions.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Using humour to explore serious themes can have great impact.

STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

One facilitator interviews the other facilitator, with one playing the role of a character called Guilt. The interviewer faces the interviewee at the front of the group, as if on a chat show or interviewing a rock star. Questions can include:

- How do you enter her day? What do you whisper to her? What strengthens you?
- How do you attract a woman into your clutches? What do you get her thinking about herself? How do you take over her feelings in such a strong way?
- When did you start to notice this way of being able to unsettle women? What sequence of events took place?
- So what diminishes you? What would you do then?
- If a woman does not want you in her life, what else could she have instead?
- What would it look like if there was more of this thing in her life? What skills could she use to get you out of her life? Who will you bother when she won't have you anymore?

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*The interview with guilt*

*...I laughed at it, but it was serious and it was relevant ...It was easy to understand, you were just watching it, the power of it... Yeah, yeah, I could really relate to that!"*

**GROUP MEMBER 2002**

## OBJECTIVES

- One of the effects of abuse is a shattered sense of one's self as having integrity, or rights to assert one's worthiness.
- Visually exploring self-protection can encourage women to see that personal space boundaries are a normal part of relating, and that in healthy relating they are respectfully constructed and valued.
- This activity also looks at a 'sense of self' as a broad and complex construction.

## TIMING

Up to 30 minutes for drawing and discussion.

## RESOURCES

Prepared handouts on boundaries.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Use a number of small women figurines and varied coloured wools to do the boundaries circles.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

- Ask women to use her 'safe colours'. Many women feel comfortable with certain colours and uncomfortable with others which may have difficult memories or connotations.
- Women may also be reassured to find out that 'hurt boundaries' commonly compromise parenting, friendships and the ability to work. This is because women do not have a sense of entitlement to rights, nor the energy to negotiate. Often during family violence, women become accustomed to having her boundaries disregarded, dishonoured and violated.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Get the women to draw a quick picture of themselves. They draw coloured lines around the picture of themselves and show those people that they keep outside the line and those that they feel safe to allow inside the lines. Who do they like, or would like to, have inside and why? Who is outside and why?

Sometimes people are socially close because they have to be, but they may not be emotionally close. What is the coloured line made of? What does the woman do if someone wants to cross the coloured line and get closer than the woman wishes them to? To stay emotionally safe, many women close off and build a solid wall of protection. This can help her survive and be secure in the medium term.

Self-protection can be useful in life to stay safe, to share yourself at your own pace, to share yourself only with those you choose and to a degree to which you choose. Activity 43 explores renegotiating and constructing healthy boundaries and can be a complementary activity to this one.

OBJECTIVES

- To support women to explore some issues to do with parenting when violence is experienced.
- To offer ways to reconnect with their children.
- To reduce a woman’s self-doubt about her parenting skills and to help her reposition herself as a knowing expert in her children’s lives.

TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

RESOURCES

- Photo cards.
- Handouts and website information on supporting children.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

A single session on mothering may be supported by any of the material noted in the references relating to parenting through family violence. A series of whole group sessions just addressing the themes of mothering and family violence can also be constructed.

STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Some women do not have their children in their care and should be encouraged to think through these ideas in relation to the contact they do have or hope to have soon.

Encourage the women to pick out a photo card that depicts where they see their children at this point in time. Get her to share these insights.

In a larger group, discuss what are the challenges of parenting after the impact of family violence, and what the strengths of parenting are after this impact? Questions to ask in discussion may include:

- Share one or two things you could do with your children to rebuild your relationship with them?
- What are the things we can help our children learn?

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“...It’s good to learn about the effects that abuse has on children. The warning signs that you must look for. It’s not only hard on yourself but more so on the children. It is hard with kids because you worry what is going to happen to them. It hurts when they get aggressive. It’s good to learn how to deal with children who have been exposed to violence; how to nurture them and make them feel safe and loved.”*

GROUP MEMBER 2004

# RESILIENCE AND RECLAMATIONS OF SELF: WELLBEING AND SAFETY



## OBJECTIVES

- Every aspect of women is a potential resource and a potential site to be effected by abuse. It is the effects that create the confusion, fog or craziness in thinking within a woman.
- This activity is another opportunity for the women to discover their active participation in resisting the effects on their lives. Through its non-verbal images, this activity can offer a voice for complex emotions that may otherwise remain unexpressed.

## TIMING

Up to one hour: half-an-hour of creation, then a break, then another half-an-hour for discussion.

## RESOURCES

- A large sheet of paper with a woman's outline drawn on it.
- Craft materials such as stickers, feathers, cotton wool, markers and glue.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Facilitators prepare a woman shape with things already on it to help tell a story about effects. A discussion then focuses on each woman re-writing her story and sharing her attempts to heal on the second image.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

A drawn woman body shape (a bit smaller than real life) sits between the women on a low table top. This can be less overwhelming and more manageable than a big woman outline at the front of the room. This activity speaks of resistance to the effects, not to the unsafe resistance to the abuser, which may jeopardise a woman's safety.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Ask the women to put down on the drawn body shape what the possible effects of family violence on her have been, and where it happened in her. If she can't find words, she can stick something onto the woman shape instead, such as cotton wool on the head or mouth for silence, numbness or loss of identity, or a cross on her arms which may represent feeling stuck.

Questions to guide the group discussions include: "Can you think of a time when you first resisted these beliefs about yourself?" and "What strength do you think you have drawn on to undermine the effects of abuse in your life?"

Do the second body shape highlighting where and how the resistance came to be. What words, stands or ideas did she use? And what strengths within herself did she use? Some methods to demonstrate this are to use a red marker to mark on the head to indicate her critical questioning and thinking, or use a blob of glitter on her heart to indicate that she drew on her friendships for strength. The group can share how they feel to see the collected strengths on the second woman, and decide what they wish to do with her while the group continues?

## OBJECTIVES

- To look at the sort of rights that would be important in a relationship.

## TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

## RESOURCES

- Handouts of Rights
- DVIRC resources from the website *Bursting the Bubble*
- A handout of the World Health Organisation human rights bill or a bill of emotional rights.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Stress the importance of rights in all relationships, not just intimate relationships, these include those with siblings, other family, friends, parents and children.

In two groups, look at rights in relation to following areas: physical, emotional, sexual, financial, verbal, spiritual, social, institutional and other rights. What rights can you write under each heading?

Coming back into one large group, the facilitator asks questions such as: “What was it like to be thinking about rights in this way?”

Discuss in a larger group under each area: “How would I know my rights were being respected in these areas?” Phrase this as... If my financial rights are being respected..., If my social rights are being respected..., If my spiritual rights are being respected... Example answers could be: ...I'd have equal access to family income, be able to visit friends, be an equal partner in the making decisions, be able to express my views, be able to practice my religion, be able to wear what I like and to feel safe from harm.

Discuss how you can safely use this knowledge about rights in your daily life.

As one large group, have a general discussion about the expectations of women's rights such as being respected, being equal, sharing responsibility, negotiation and fairness, economic partnership, honesty and accountability, and trust and support.

## OBJECTIVES

- To begin to feel a sense of entitlement to rights.
- To do this via a movement activity that offers women a chance to rehearse moving with freedom and integrity.

## TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

## RESOURCES

Web-based human rights declarations.  
The wheel of healthy relationships.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Facilitators model a possible body position for position one and encourage the women to adopt positions for positions two and three.
- Any movement-based, or outdoor, activity that allows women to re-experience their bodies as an able, strong, helpful collaborator to the rest of her.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Movement and action offer a fresh energy for groups, but they can also be powerful memory-creating activities. This activity may be good for a group which have gotten to know each other over some weeks, and where trauma is not a current challenge for the participants.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Offer the women the chance to adopt a body position in relation to the following:

- How you were in your relationship?
- How you are now?
- How are you with your ideal sense of entitlement?

Discussions with the large group can cover: What can get in the way of a woman feeling entitled to her rights? What can enhance her sense of entitlement?

OBJECTIVES

- To begin to feel a sense of entitlement to rights.
- To explore the reduction of isolation and the gaining of information as powerful sources of rights attainment.

TIMING

Up to 60 minutes.

RESOURCES

Guest speakers.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Health, welfare or religious representatives may be able to offer some free information for your group.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

- Planning ahead is important for presenters, as they may need to be booked sometime before the required session. Agency based colleagues may be available at shorter notice.
- Briefing the presenter about the women’s areas of interest beforehand and offering time for a presentation, interactive questions and answers, and referral information is also useful. Check that the presenter has the same values and principles about family violence before they attend.

STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Address any information gaps, concerns, or misinformation that the women may have raised about an issue or theme that is relevant to them asserting and accessing their rights. For example, financial rights upon leaving a relationship, visa and deportation fears, or the chances of catching STDs from unfaithful partners. Other themes could be racism, finances, housing or policing support.



## OBJECTIVES

1. Women within abusive situations, have often not been able to move beyond survival. This activity helps them explore the idea of self-care, their hopes for it in their lives, or their wishes to reclaim the self-care skills they once had.
2. It can also generate conversations about what gets in the way of self-care, fears about appearing selfish to care for oneself, and how replenishing one's self is a means of sustaining living and giving.

## TIMING

Up to one hour.

## RESOURCES

A worksheet with four baskets drawn on it across the page. Repeat these four baskets in five rows down the page. Also have coloured markers for women.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Jelly beans in small cupcake papers.
- Clay balls in the cake holders - moulding clay in hands is quiet and soothing.
- Any culturally appropriate metaphor could be used. Make up the names of the baskets at each life phase.

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...Social expectations are that women should nurture others and not themselves. If we believed that we are entitled to self-care and self-nurturing, then we could act more confidently in doing just that, rather than putting our needs last."*

**GROUP MEMBER 2005**

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Using the worksheet, ask the women to think about the following five different phases of their lives:

1. Early childhood.
2. Adolescence, or before their first significant relationship.
3. Their abusive or hurtful relationship.
4. How it is now?
5. How they would like to balance their energy (eggs)?

For each life phase, the women have a basket to represent where their energy (the eggs) went. These baskets can be titled: 'Family and Friends', 'School and Work', 'Yourself' (self-care), and 'Partners'. For each of these life phases women have a set 20 eggs to distribute into the baskets. For example, for the phase of early childhood, I may distribute my eggs as 10 in my 'Yourself' and 10 in my 'Family and Friends' basket, with none elsewhere because I didn't get to go to school in my country of birth. During adolescence I had 13 in my 'Family and Friends' basket because I looked after everyone, and five in my 'School and Work' basket and three in my 'Yourself' basket.

Get the women to take the time to think about, and draw, how their eggs were placed over these phases. The facilitator can then ask the women to share their 'egg story' individually. What stood out for women in doing this worksheet? Were there any surprises?

Judging by how many eggs are in which baskets, what conclusions did the women draw about self-care in their lives? Are they happy with this or not? What do the eggs represent?

Was it a surprise to find that self-care or giving to themselves has a history? For example, a connection to their childhood or adolescent eggs.

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...If I was still in the relationship I would have had one big heavy egg in his basket."*

GROUP MEMBER 2005

**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore self-care and its differences to selfless and selfish ways of being.
- To discuss ways of incorporating self-care into women’s lives.

**TIMING**

Up to one hour depending on the variation chosen

**RESOURCES**

Any art materials or opportunities for self-care activities.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

- A full session on a fun, nurturing or relaxation theme could be used. Consider ideas such as an outing or some time to pamper each other.
- Visual representations of self-care can be helpful. Draw a battery that gives out energy to ‘plugged in’ children, family, community, etc. but is itself not plugged into anything. What can the battery get plugged into? Or use a jug of water to tell a story of giving out water to others but which by day’s end is empty. What happens then?

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Often the women will discuss self-care as a selfish act so it may be useful to discuss the differences between selfless, selfish and self-care with the group. Some women who have experienced abusive or traumatic life experiences may never have been in the position to self-care and may be unsure of what it is. Other terms such as relaxing, having fun, smiling, and feeling like you are being filled up with something good, may help them gauge if something is self-caring. The idea of what being self-caring can be very different or personal to different people.

Write down some shared contributions from the women in a large group discussion. Ask: “What is self-care? Why is it important? Why do some women struggle with it? What are some of the steps towards claiming more of it in their lives? What can be one self-caring activity that each woman will do in the next two weeks?”

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*“...I learned the importance of feeling good about yourself ... the realisation of the things that weaken your sense of self. We need to be aware of it and the importance of having time for yourself.”*

**GROUP MEMBER 2004**

## OBJECTIVES

- To offer a practical, hands-on opportunity to explore self-care and its meaning.
- To see self-care as thoughts and actions that encompasses all of our senses.
- To create a reminding prompt for women to use outside of group time.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

- Small tulle drawstring bags from craft shops. Have at least twice as many as the number of women in the group.
- Small items such as novelty erasers, 5 cent coins, hearts, rubber bands, coloured paper, pens, lollies and decorative rubber stamps.
- Any symbols that are small and culturally or religiously relevant.
- Coloured ribbons to tie up the end of the bags.
- A hole punch.
- Small pieces of coloured paper that explains the bag's contents. This is then tied to the bag top with ribbon.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

- The women may like to keep these and make another one for a daughter, relative or friend.
- If it is not safe to take her self-care bag home or to keep in her handbag, the woman can leave her bag with a trusted other.
- Support women to think of what the supplied items mean to them. There is no wrong way for a thing to be meaningful.

Ask the women to sit around a large table which holds all of the items needed for the self-care bags. Ask the women, "What are some ways you can encourage yourself towards self-care?" Write these ideas on a whiteboard. Then get the women to look around the table and collect those items that have some meaning for them about self-care. Ask the women to share their reasoning for their chosen items before they pop them into their bags. Staying flexible may be represented by an elastic band, a heart may show that they are cared about, a coin may represent the desire or aim to get a job. Each woman then fills her bag up with her items and writes the contents of her bag, and what they represent, on the coloured paper. She then attaches this to the neck of the bag with ribbons. For example, 'a heart to know that I am always loved, an eraser to forgive myself any mistakes I have made, a lolly because I deserve some sweet times'.

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore self-assertion within the contexts of social expectations and abusive relationships.
- To discuss ways of incorporating self-assertion and finding a voice into women's lives.

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- A full session on focusing on encouragement, comfort being vibrant or having fun could be used. Create this by having a sing-a-long to traditional songs of culture or bringing your favourite inspiring woman's song.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

- A woman's assertion, or lack of it, is not a reason for her experience of abuse. Nor is assertion training alone an appropriate response to family violence. It is important that the women don't see themselves as responsible for the abuse because they were not assertive enough.
- If a woman has no memories of a family as a child, encourage her to think of a time in her youth when she was in a group of other young people. Similar to the first point, a woman's family of origin patterns are not a cause of her abuse (because I was a quiet child, it is my fault I was abused so long by my partner).

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

In pairs, ask women to discuss two things;

- Who in your family did you learn to have a voice from? Did you butt into conversations, wait your turn or get talked over the top of at meal time? If you can't remember your family, think about your time as a young adult at school.
- Which women have you known during your lifetime that have been, or are, assertive? How can you tell? What does it mean to be assertive? How is this different to aggressive or selfless?

Rejoin into a larger group and share some of these. Ask 'What have you noticed about yourself and the assertiveness in your life now? How can you find a voice you are comfortable with? When you find your voice what are you going to say?'

Discuss how many women in abusive relationships become trained to lose, hide, minimise or change their voice to survive. Discuss that in a violent relationship it can be good judgment to stay safe by being quiet or not noticing things to keep the peace, but that it can be equally good, in some circumstances to yell, lash out and swear.

# RESILIENCE AND RECLAMATIONS OF SELF: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



**OBJECTIVES**

- To explore what a healthy relationship is.
- To check how do I know one if I see one.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

- Wheels of ‘power and control in relationships’ and ‘healthy relationships’ which are available from the Duluth wheel gallery as noted in the resources section.
- Art materials.
- Handouts of the warning signs of abusive relationships such as DVIRC’s Bursting the Bubble as noted in the resources section.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

- Ask the group to create its own wheel of healthy relationships or to create another metaphor.
- Ask the group to create a wheel with themselves at the centre. Ask what a healthy relationship with myself would look like?
- There are a variety of wheels created from the Duluth model. Some are indigenous specific or religion specific. See the resources section of this manual.

**TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Some women find this difficult, as they see healthy relationships as, in their experience, they have been unrealistic or out of reach for them, even if realistic. Discuss that women are usually at different stages of developing trust in others, and that these hallmarks are for all types of relationship (not just partnerships).

Divide the group into smaller groups and encourage a discussion on the hallmarks of a healthy relationship across different areas. Use the Duluth wheels of power and control and healthy relating as a basis for the categories. Each sub-group can write what they think their hallmarks are under a number of the categories. Get each sub-group to stand up and share what they have written. Each subsequent group adds any new information not already covered, as the co-facilitator collates the contributions onto one big picture in the shape of a pie-chart or wheel.



## OBJECTIVES

- To explore what self-protection can mean in relationships. That boundaries can be eroded by abuse and then disregarded by the abuser, and then be difficult to redefine by yourself later.
- To discuss what might it might be like to be in a relationship (of any kind) where boundaries were respected. How may this feel?

## TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

## RESOURCES

- Materials for drawing.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Use Activity 34 to explore this theme with the group.

## TIPS AND STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Share some information about the common experiences of women who have been, or are in, abusive relationships and finding boundaries problematic. Everyone needs some private space. Use the example of how, when in a lift, if others crowd in we may feel odd and uncomfortable. Discuss how this need for space is actively disregarded by abusive partners and can make a woman feel she has no rights and that he can 'flood' in and out of her being at will.

As a consequence women may not feel safe around others, may not trust others or become distant as if 'behind a brick wall'. She may not trust herself, or tell everyone everything too soon, want to become very close to someone very fast, or share a lot then quickly and then get hurt. Discuss who, if anyone, has done any of these things? Do you know any other women who have? Facilitators can offer some 'storyline' examples shared by other women on this issue.

Ask the women to draw themselves in a healthy relationship either real, current, past or imagined. What are its qualities? What shape, colour and substance does healthy self-protection have?

Divide the group into smaller groups and discuss their ideas.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

**Sharing on self-protection:****How do you know boundaries are respected? :**

- You just know - you use your perceptiveness and intuition.
- Communication is good - when sharing feelings in a safe and comfortable way, there is real exchange, respect and listening.
- There is respect and honesty.
- Respect is mutual and earned and attentive. Others look you in the eye and the non-verbal communication matches the verbal.
- There is a sense of equality and respect for others and for diversity. There can be a valuing of differences as long as this does not hurt you.
- There is laughter and humour; it's a good feeling released safely.
- You feel able to play and be a kid.
- There is a sense of being comfortable, safe and intimate.
- There is compatibility.

**Self-protection can be:**

- Your choice of what the shape of the relationship can be and how close others are to you.
- Flexibility of your self-protection allows some to be closer than others.
- Self-protection is you keeping boundaries around you as you choose.
- Assertiveness can be a tool in self-protection.
- Culture, religion, society and health can determine some aspects of boundaries.

**Some things to keep in mind:**

Someone's inability to compromise or accept other beliefs is problematic within relationships.

Remember the influence of social expectation, social pressures and personal timing, as these relate to our ability to remain perceptive and look after ourselves.

**WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID**

*"...One thing we learned in the group was about refining our antennae and learning to trust our intuition. Learning to see the warning signs... there was a great picture of the tyre floaties (around your middle), and you let a bit of air out and put some back in to protect yourself in life. Well I really related to that. It was really important thing for me to realise that, first of all I could realise what was happening, and second actually stop it before it got to a point which was going to be really difficult."*

**GROUP MEMBER 2000**

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

**Draw what healthy self-protection may mean for you. What metaphor works best?****Self-protection can be like being behind a 'brick wall' as a survival tactic:**

- Inside the brick wall is quiet, safe, controllable, and predictable.
- It can be lonely, isolated and sad.
- Too quiet and empty.
- It can leave you thinking that the only other option is to have no wall at all.

**Self protection can be like no wall at all?:**

- Like a scared jellyfish or a crab with no shell.
- Makes you want to jump back into the brick wall, prison, psych ward or hospital to recover.

**Self-protection can be like flimsy tissue paper?:**

- Feel scared and touchy.
- Makes you scared to be close to anyone.
- Makes you use alcohol, drugs or other addictions to 'fake it'.

**Self-protection as thriving:**

- As mobile, like an inflatable floatie you swim with!
- As portable.
- You make the choices to go closer or not, you inflate or deflate your floatie as you want.
- More in your control.
- Flexible to allow others in and out.
- More choices.
- Different for different people.
- Part of your self-care.
- It is your right to be safe and be yourself.

**Self-protection as a mixed and fairly healthy community of people around me:**

- Some choices to go closer or not.
- A bit more in your control.
- Some flexibility to allow others in and out and I feel happy and healthy.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore that a consequence of abuse is often a shift, change, split or suppression of one’s identity.
- Reclaiming our uniqueness, and our place in the world with pride, is a part of healing from such hurt.

TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Reframe the activity as ‘What does it mean to find your place again in the world with pride?’ This may assist to define a broad definition of ‘self’.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

- The ‘self’ is a socially constructed entity and cross-culturally, the idea of a knowable single self is not common. In collectivist communities the ‘self’ is intimately constructed through relationships with others and the environment. This diverse reality is important to keep in mind when doing activities such as this. Using a phrase such as, ‘What does it mean to find your place again in the world with pride?’ may assist to define a broad definition of ‘self’.

STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity starts with a large group discussion. Discussion starter questions include:

- What does ‘being yourself’ mean?
- What does it look like?
- Have you ever been somewhere and felt you were not ‘being real’?
- Have you ever been at a party or with a group of people and felt ‘I don’t belong here?’
- How do you know when you are ‘being yourself’?
- What messages might you need to give yourself in order to be able to be yourself?
- What do you notice happening when you are not being yourself?

In pairs, share an experience of a friendship, relationship, community group that you have experienced as healthy: one that encouraged you to be yourself. Try and name two qualities within this relationship that says it was/ is healthy.



## OBJECTIVES

- To encourage women to think about their needs, particularly their emotional needs.
- To think about the needs of ourselves for a short while, not of our partners, our children, parents, our extended families, or our colleagues.
- To refine women's awareness of the physiological and emotional signals of needs.

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes.

## RESOURCES

Pre-planned sheets with questions.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Use a pre-drawn body shape to help women identify the 'where' the need is located and felt.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

When we have a so called biological need, what we do is listen to our bodies, for example, when we are hungry we eat, when we're thirsty we drink, when we are hot we remove some of our clothing, when we need to pee, we go to the toilet. All of these things are messages from our bodies to our minds that we have needs that have to be met. We can become adults in the world without knowing that we have needs.

In addition, women may have become numb during abusive experiences and cut off from listening to her natural signals.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

Breaking into two small groups, ask the women to think about a particular need that is important to them, such as love, security, safety, belongingness or friendship. Questions to guide the discussion may include:

- How might you notice your needs/first thing that tells you that you have a need? (i.e. feeling lonely)
- How might you begin to identify your own need/s? One answer may be listening to your self and reflection.
- How might you begin to respond to your needs? One answer may be to do something or investigate options.
- Who might support you to respond to your need/s? One answer may be friends, family or a counsellor.
- Who would notice?

## WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*"...When my self-doubt is high, I think 'I'm not OK, I can't compete', I feel second rate and insecure. But when I am connecting with what feels 'natural', I am powerful, in my own skin and connecting to others who are OK to be around."*

GROUP MEMBER 2005

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

**Needs:**

- Break into two smaller groups, think about a particular need that you think is important to you. For example, love, security, safety, belongingness, friendship.

**Discuss:**

- How might you notice your needs/first thing that tells you that you have a need? (i.e. feeling lonely)
- How might you begin to identify your own need/s? (listen to self, reflection)
- How might you begin to respond to your needs? (Do something or investigate options. It may not always be about meeting needs. What can you do when this isn't possible?)
- Who might support you to respond to your need/s? (Friends, family, a counsellor)
- Who might notice that you are listening to your needs? (Yourself, family, others who care about you)

**Coming back into the larger group and discuss:**

- What was it like to do that exercise?
- What is it like to be thinking about your needs?
- What stops us from identifying or pursuing own needs?

**OBJECTIVES**

This is a reflective process where women practice noticing and identifying their strengths.

**TIMING**

Up to 30 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

A handout of a body outline, blank paper and a circle mandala to draw on.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Women may struggle to name strengths. Using tools and resources such as Strength Cards may assist as a first step in this activity. Pick a strength you are discovering, or already have, in yourself.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

This activity is about affirming women's best qualities and strengths. Discussion guides may include:

- Reflect on your best quality. When you find where this quality is, then draw it on to the body outline.
- What would this quality look like if you could draw a picture of it? Invite the women to use crayons and draw colours, lines and shapes that go with the quality they have found in the next segment of the worksheet.
- Ask, 'what words would be said, phrases, statements if this quality could talk?' Write these words/phrases in the next segment.
- Take time to draw a mandala in the circle, expressing how you feel inside now.

Discuss with the group how they felt during this exercise.

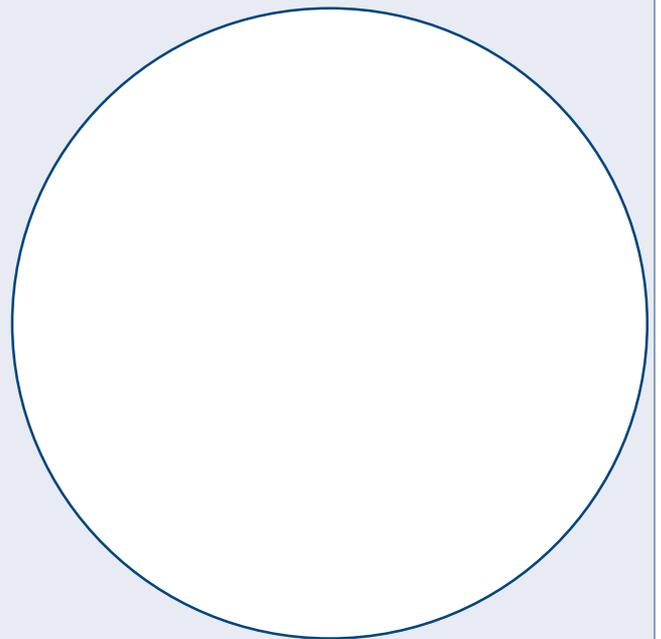
- What stands out for you from this exercise?
- What would this quality do in your life?
- What are your ideas about the history of this quality?
- Who in your life appreciates this quality?

SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS



Shapes colours

Words



## OBJECTIVES

- This is a fun activity that allows women to share their hopes for personal and collective power in a supportive environment.
- It allows women to practice, in a trusted group environment, feeling proud, allied to others and affirmed.

## TIMING

Up to 45 minutes.

## RESOURCES

Art materials such as silk and silk paints or white cotton t-shirts, calico bags and fabric paint. Obtain these from art or craft stores.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

Any celebratory joint activity is a good variation of this.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Emphasise that this is not about being an artist but about sharing time, colour and safety. Have some templates for the women to copy from such as a heart or a sun shape. Encourage the women to use personal meanings such as symbols of things that matter, such as faces.

## STEPS FOR FACILITATORS

This activity is about affirming what is great about being a woman.

Ask the women to base their art around the statement 'I love being a woman because...'

Reflect on the women's best qualities. When they find where this quality is, then get them to draw it on to their art work. Get them to draw colours, lines and shapes that go with the qualities. Get them to write down words, phrases and statements, as well as feelings.

Discuss with group how they felt during exercise. What stands out for them from this exercise? What do these qualities do in their life or in the life of their family and community?

Is there a story that goes along with your art work that you can share?

## CONCLUSIONS OR EVOLUTIONS



## OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate personal progress in the group experience and reflect on what enhanced this.
- To conclude this part of the women's journey together.

## TIMING

Up to half-an-hour.

## RESOURCES

A pre-written feedback sheet for some questions.

## VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Ask the women to stand in four room corners: these indicate unsure, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Pose closed-ended questions about the group and encourage the women to mill into their opinion corner. Closed questions may include aspects of group access, content, processes, gains, facilitation and recommendations for improvement.
- Create a visual field of evaluation words on a sheet and ask the women to circle the ones they identify with, and then discuss these.

## TIPS AND STEPS FACILITATORS

Ask the group for feedback and write these down on a sheet of paper.

Questions can include:

As a group what did you enjoy and what was helpful about the group?

What wasn't so helpful or what things weren't liked?

What are your suggestions for the next group?

What will help you finish your journey in the group?

Are there things you would like to say, something you need to do?

What's it like to be completing this journey today?

What will you leave behind in the group?

What will you take with you from the group?

Go around the group and share the things that have been noticed that are now different in a positive way since beginning the group?

OBJECTIVES

- For women to reflect on their learning from the group experience and to feedback to the facilitators the things that helped them achieve these learnings.

TIMING

Up to 40 minutes.

RESOURCES

Creative art materials.

VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY

- Ask the women to draw a road that represents their first steps to the group experience, this may have been years or months before they eventually came. Draw the group experience as a journey and then get the women to locate themselves on the road in regards to ‘where they are aiming to get to’. Discuss this.
- Have a large piece of coloured paper to represent a pond. Large and small pieces of paper are cut out to represent ripples. Get the women to hold these, then go through each week’s topic as a pebble being thrown in the pond. Get the women to write on their ‘ripples’ and place them somewhere on the pond near each pebble topic. A big outer ripple means that it had a greater, more lasting impact, whether for good or bad, or it made a lot of sense, or it was something new that they would like to teach to someone else. A small ripple means that it was not really for them, or that things were useful while in the group, but that they would not use them at home.
- Bring in a symbol from home of what the group has meant.

TIPS AND STEPS FACILITATORS

This is a quiet activity. This activity is about the women expressing themselves, not about being an artist. There is no right or wrong; no good or bad. If the women feel comfortable they can close their eyes.

Use a guided imagery such as the following: I would like you to take a moment to stop and reflect quietly on your life journey and what has brought you to this group. What images stand out to represent this? What colours, shapes or images speak to your feelings about beginning this group? Takes some time to reflect on how you are feeling today. What colours, shapes or patterns reflect your state of mind today and your hopes for the future? How do your hopes for the future express themselves? How do these feelings and thoughts express themselves? Is it as something from nature, a landscape, a colour or as a pathway?

When ready, begin the art work. After finishing, the women will be asked to speak about their work, but only what they feel comfortable to share.

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“...One participant brought in a piece of shrapnel that belonged to her grandfather in the war. It symbolised survival and had saved his life, the bullet having lodged itself in his wallet. She noted that the group had her remember that, ‘it is the friendly fire that does the most damage.’”*

GROUP MEMBER 2006

WHAT WOMEN HAVE SAID

*“This is a picture of my child who died, I don’t show this to just anyone.”*

GROUP MEMBER 2006

**OBJECTIVES**

- To provide an opportunity for the women to evaluate their group experience in a rich and in-depth way.
- To complete and terminate the group in a safe and supportive manner.

**TIMING**

Up to 40 minutes.

**RESOURCES**

Five different coloured A4 paper cut into eighths (at least) and some Blu Tac.

**VARIATIONS OF ACTIVITY**

Have different shapes, as well as colours, to choose from.

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

Encourage the women to move around and read the slips of paper during a coffee break. Resume the discussion after this time.

Write and capture the rich feedback descriptions which come from this activity as another co-facilitator processes the paper slips.

**STEPS FOR FACILITATORS**

This activity will be to focus on how it's been for the women to be in this group.

Hand out small slips of varied coloured paper to the women (about 10 each). Invite them to write one comment per sheet about a group positive or negative. Inform the women that this will not be confidential and that they will have an opportunity to discuss these points further.

When the women have finished, stick these slips of paper to the wall with Blu Tac.

Everybody gets a chance to get up and read them. When they have finished they can to their seats.

Go through these comments to further identify the meaning behind the comments. The comments are then grouped into themes and each theme is named by the group. Often the result is a colourful paper picture that sums up the group's experience together. The women may wish to have a copy of this summary sent to them in a similarly colourful form to keep.

## SAMPLE FORMS, HANDOUTS AND SHEETS

The common themes from the feedback raised by the group are clustered together and then named by the group

**Being special:**

- I loved the fresh fruit
- I felt special being told I looked pretty
- Honeydew, I can't afford it
- I realised things about myself

**New ideas and opened eyes:**

- I achieved what I came here for and received a bigger outlook on things; all good
- I don't want the group to end
- I liked the way we did things on paper
- Exciting
- No more depression

**Woman power:**

- Other women struggle with the same things
- I learned that women understand women and it makes us one
- Women always have a bond between them
- I don't feel guilty for my drinking anymore, so I can get help now

**Group environment:**

- Comfy chairs
- I liked the home atmosphere, coffee, food, etc.
- Relaxing
- Non attendance it can't be helped, but it puts a spanner in the works

**Self-realisation:**

- Thank you for being caring and loving teachers, I've understood life better from your teachings
- I understand that I have rights
- You have been so great to this group

**The next stage:**

- I do understand that the old ways are wrong
- I would have liked to talk about why men pretend or lie
- There definitely is another kind of life
- My kids and I will try never to go through this again