

Recreational Activities

What are psychosocial recreational activities in GBV interventions? Why are they important? How do these activities connect women and girls to address safety (whether it's as a collective addressing issues in the community as one, or making friends who help you get through a tough day, or providing support if you are experiencing intimate partner violence)?

Recreation refers to the time spent in an activity one loves to engage in. It is a break from monotony and a diversion from the daily routine. They are a source of joy and they provide relaxation to one's mind and body. In our field of humanitarian aid, psychosocial recreational activities are those that promote resilience and wellbeing through activities that support social connections and interactions and reduce stress. For women and girls this means that psychosocial recreational activities are:

- activities that women and girls decide they want to take part in voluntarily
- activities that normalize daily life, meaning activities that women and girls are accustomed to in their culture. This is an important point because while in our work we seek to transform gender norms, recreational activities are meant to normalize daily life and promote relaxation. We want to make sure we offer activities that women and girls are used to engaging in, understanding that those may reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g. sewing, cooking, beauty salon, etc.), but that for this purpose it is acceptable
- activities that foster social connections and interactions between women and girls
- activities that promote a sense of competence and restoration of control over one's own life
- activities that build on and encourage women's and girls' innate resilience to crisis
- activities that provide an entry point for disclosure and referral to higher level support

Women and girls who participate in organized recreational activities in humanitarian settings enjoy better mental health, are more alert, less isolated and more resilient against the stress of displacement and the consequences of violence.

Participation in recreational activities provides opportunities to develop capacities and resources that can help them deal with the emotional, social,



and practical challenges that they may face in their lives. By stimulating the development of specific skills and resources these activities provide safe and supportive opportunities for women and girls to process and learn to manage their experiences.

In GBV programming, recreational activities can serve on the one hand as an essential entry point for survivors to disclose incidents of GBV and be referred to higher level care and on the other as a way to re-integrate survivors into their community through participation in recreational activities alongside other women and girls from their community.

What are examples of psychosocial recreational activities in GBV interventions?

There are a variety of activity types to meet the needs and/or interests of women and girls. All activities should be informed by women and girls and should be age appropriate. Activities can be organized in the following categories:

- **Crafts and visual arts activities** use a variety of materials for women and girls to create art work, which can include sewing, basket weaving, visual arts, drawing, and painting for self and group expression.
- **Drama activities** create space for women and girls to express themselves through role-play and acting.
- **Game activities** are aimed at presenting women and girls with a challenge or exercise to work through. These activities are often, but not always, done in groups or teams.
- **Music activities** are those supporting the expression of emotions through the creation of music or songs by women and girls that often do not require additional musical equipment beyond the sounds they can make with their own voices.
- **Relaxation activities** are those that are intended to calm women and girls and encourage a safe space with the use of breathing, physical stretches, and guided meditation.
- **Sports activities** are aimed at stimulating women and girls physically and can include group sports such as football and volleyball or facilitated exercises in stretching.
- **Beauty activities** are those that allow women and girls to indulge in feeling beautiful through henna or hairdressing sessions.
- **Informal language and literacy activities** are those that support women and girls in acquiring skills in reading or speaking languages relative to their location of displacement, so they may navigate with greater ease access to services.
- **Technology-based activities** are those supporting women and girl's computer literacy.
- **Culinary activities** are those that gather women and girls around recipes and comfort food.

How do you choose which activities to implement and when?

While each recreational activity can be enjoyable, stimulating and beneficial if implemented individually as stand-alone activities, the value of the activities is meant to be enhanced and used in an appropriate context as part of a broader process or series of activities within a GBV intervention. The following should be considered to support your choice:

- Your choice of activity must always be determined by what benefits you think it will bring to the participating women and girls in relation to their psychosocial well-being.
 - Matching the theme of an activity to a topic being currently addressed in a community based or healing education psychosocial support session will enhance its relevance, meaning, and impact for participating women and girls.
 - Alternately, it may also make sense to facilitate several thematically-linked activities in a connected sequence, so that each reinforces, expands and builds on the others that have gone before – consolidating their impact on the participating women and girls.
- Very importantly, you should always consider whether there might be any negative consequences of applying a recreational activity. It is important that you try to anticipate any ways in which their use may result in experiences or outcomes that are unpleasant or harmful for participating women and girls.
 - For example, you should anticipate if there is a woman or girl for whom an activity could unintentionally evoke a recent upsetting memory, or a group activity that could be used by some women and girls in the group to bully or victimize another woman and girl.
 - In such cases, if you believe there is a high likelihood of a negative consequence of carrying out an activity or if you are not confident that your facilitation skills are sufficient to minimize risks associated with the activity, then you should not choose that activity.

The following questions can be used to guide your choice of activities:

- Does the activity support the expression of women's and girls' emotions? What are the ways in which it does this?
- Does the activity help develop women's and girls' interpersonal and social skills, or strengthen her social supports? What are the ways in which it does this?
- Does the activity help build capacity to understand and engage with problems in the woman and girl's community? What are the ways in which it does this?

What are beneficial or harmful strategies or approaches (dos and don'ts)?

1. **Do No Harm.** Your first responsibility as a facilitator is to ensure that women and girls do not experience any negative consequences of participating in the activity. This involves:
 - Women and girls should decide and inform which activities are offered.
 - Exercise your own judgment as facilitators when choosing and designing activities based on women's and girls' feedback evaluating risks prior to selecting recreational activities, taking measures to avoid anticipated risks, and being alert and ready to respond to any unexpected problems that may arise.
 - As a facilitator, you should not place women and girls in a situation where they must take part in an activity that could cause them to experience psychological stress or social difficulties.
 - In addition, to further ensure activities do no harm, you should make sure women and girls' participation in all chosen recreational activities is voluntary.
 - Women and girls should be informed in advance about the objective and process of the activity, and they should be provided some flexibility so that those who are uncomfortable are either able to participate in a way that makes them feel safe or are given a way of 'sitting-out' of a specific activity without being stigmatized.
2. **Pay attention to the facilitation.** As facilitators, how you behave has a direct impact on the success of the recreational activities carried out.
 - It is ideal to fully support the resilience and psychosocial wellbeing of women and girls to have recreational activities led by the facilitation of women and girls from the community and have the facilitation rotate on a regular basis. By having women and girls lead others into activities it supports their self-worth and recognizes their ability to lead, teach and support each other.
 - How women and girls respond to the activities will be strongly influenced by the clarity and enthusiasm with which you introduce and facilitate every aspect of an activity. If you are not able to give instructions that are easy to understand and follow, then women and girls will be confused and will not be engaged in the activity. If you do not seem genuinely interested in and motivated by the activity, it is unlikely that they will be either.
3. **Model the norms that you want participants to follow in their group interactions.** Remember that participants' will often follow their facilitator's example of behavior within the activity or session.
 - It is very important that your own behavior as the facilitator demonstrates respect, tolerance, fairness, empathy, care, focus, openness, and other characteristics that women and girls will hopefully demonstrate in the way they interact with one another.

- It is also important that as facilitators, you try to focus on and recognize the positive actions. Being sincere and specific about why you are praising will help them to know that you are paying attention to them personally and will reinforce and build on their strengths.
 - It is important that you give attention to all participants and demonstrate your interest and respect for them through inviting them to speak, paying attention to them when they speak, and responding sincerely to their ideas. It is also beneficial to involve women and girls in discussing and establishing group norms about how they are to treat each other.
4. **Act on behalf of women and girls at risk.** As these activities are part of a broader GBV intervention, you must act to safeguard women and girls if you learn during your work that they are experiencing serious psychosocial problems or are at risk of harm.
- For example, you must respond appropriately to stop incidents of bullying or mistreatment of women and girls within the group or help women and girls with psychosocial problems or other vulnerabilities. This may involve seeking skilled help from GBV caseworkers and their supervisors.
 - If you are not trained or equipped to deal with serious individual or social problems that women and girls face, you should not try to solve these by yourself. However, as a trusted facilitator, you still have a responsibility to provide the woman or girl with general support and ensure they are referred to someone who is better able to help.

Interactive Game

Match the psychosocial recreational activity definition with the description:

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