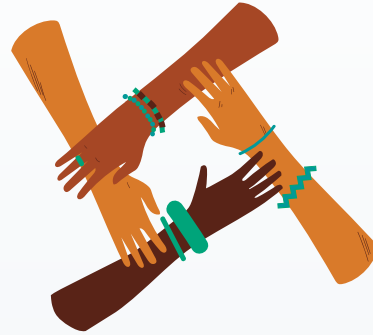




# INTEGRATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH INTO HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION WORK THAT ADDRESSES GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



This good practice was developed in partnership with **Tusonge Community Development Organization** in **Tanzania** for the **Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education** project. The good practices featured in this series are ‘living practices,’ meaning that they are continuously evolving and adapting.

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A **trauma-informed approach** allows human rights educators to carry out their activities, particularly activities related to sensitive topics (Such as gender-based violence, racial injustices, torture, etc.), in a manner that mitigates the risk of reproducing harm. Given the sensitive subjects that human rights education tackles and the participatory nature of human rights education activities, this practice allows educators to prevent and respond to trauma in their work (BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council, 2013). The following examples of how to integrate a trauma-informed approach are drawn from human rights education activities that aim to address gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence. Strategies may differ for activities that address different human rights violations.





## Here are some tips for applying a trauma-informed approach throughout human rights education activities that address gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence:



### Considerations before the human rights education activity:

- Doing a risk assessment of how activities and content in your human rights education work could impact diverse individuals is important. Specifically, a **gender risk assessment** helps provide a better understanding of the ways that different genders might be affected by your activity (e.g., identifying potential harm a human rights education activity might bring to women and non-binary people, understanding how women, men, and non-binary people are affected differently by the issue you are aiming to address).
- When working in partnership with other organizations, **co-construct** a plan.
- Have **discussions with partners about decision-making** regarding how to best respond when content in a human rights education activity may trigger trauma and disclosures may occur related to an experience/incident of gender-based violence or other human rights violations during a human rights education activity.
- Review existing **safeguarding policies/guidelines** and agree on the **reporting process** prior to the activity to respond to any disclosures of gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, and other human rights violations that may happen during the event. Some questions that can help you to prepare before your human rights education activities:
  - Who needs to be aware of the situation?
  - What immediate measures can be taken to support the survivor/victim in case of a disclosure of an incident?
  - What does follow up look like?
  - How will you ensure confidentiality, non-discrimination, and respect of the survivor/victim throughout the process? If it does not already exist, safeguarding policies/guidelines should be established.
- Policies/guidelines help ensure that when cases of trauma and disclosures, such as a disclosure from a trauma survivor/victim of gender-based violence, occur during your activity, measures and mechanisms are in place to support the survivor/victim.
- **Develop and establish clear expectations** to communicate to participants during your human rights education activity about how the activity aims to be a safe and inclusive space for all participants. Including trigger warnings of content, sharing safeguarding policies/guidelines, mechanisms, and measures in place to support survivors/victims of gender-based violence or other human rights violations.

- **Strengthen the capacity of the team.** Team members need to have the knowledge and skills to apply a trauma-informed approach, and to be clear about their limits and knowledge gaps (e.g., when teams are not experts on gender-based violence and supporting survivors/victims, it is preferred to redirect survivors/victims to appropriate and specialized services to avoid causing more harm).
- **Budget for a counselor/focal point** that specializes in supporting survivors/victims of gender-based violence, particularly of sexual violence. This counselor/focal point can support both activity organizers and activity participants during and following the human rights education activity. It is also important to budget for safe space posters, inclusive venues, and other appropriate resources related to the activity.
- **Prepare a list of essential service providers (legal and non-legal)** at the community, regional and national level to support survivors/victims of gender-based violence, particularly of sexual violence.
- **Review educational materials and facilitator guidelines to ensure that a trauma-informed approach is integrated.** For example, this could include asking more general questions about gender-based violence, as opposed to personal questions, and providing trigger warnings to participants when discussions may surface trauma.



### **Considerations during the human rights education activity:**

- On the first day, **establish clear guidelines and clearly communicate expectations** regarding how the activity aims to be a safe and inclusive space for all participants, and that gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, and discrimination would not be tolerated. Also take time to introduce the counselor/focal points to the participants.
- **Create safe and inclusive spaces** for women, LGBTQI+ people, and otherwise marginalized participants to share their views without fear of repercussion.
- **When facilitating activities that encourage sharing of experiences, never pressure participants to share** if they are not comfortable doing so and avoid asking personal lived experience on gender-based violence or any other human rights violations. Remember to acknowledge sensitive subject matter in advance, **providing content warnings** for participants. Also be mindful of the way you ask your questions. For example, what are the challenges that women experience regarding gender-based violence in your community (general question)? Versus what challenges do you experience regarding gender-based violence as a woman in your community (personal question)?
- **Provide a mental health/wellness space** for participants who might want to take a break from the main activity. The counselor/focal point person could be in this space to support participants.



- In a trauma-informed approach, one needs to **be prepared to support individuals who may be triggered by discussions of human rights violations**. For example, in the context of activities related to gender-based violence, particularly to sexual violence, if a disclosure does occur, **implement the immediate measures identified in your plan while ensuring the confidentiality and consent of the victim/survivor**. For example:
  - Put the survivor/victim in contact with organizations that offer medical, psychosocial, legal and community assistance.
  - Offer a mobile phone or credit to call the organization and/or accompany the survivor/victim to the organization and stay with her/him until the need it.
  - Pay for the transportation of a family member or friend of the survivor/victim to come and support them or pay the transportation costs for the survivor if they want to leave.



### **Considerations after the human rights education activity:**

- **Continue providing the mental health/wellness space** after the activity is over, offering an opportunity for participants to debrief with the counselor/focal point person. Participants might not want to miss any of the main activity but might need additional support afterwards.
- **Follow up with any participants who had requested additional support and resources** during and/or after the activity (*e.g., linking them to essential service providers, organizations working on gender-based violence, legal services*).

## **Reference**

BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council, 2013, Trauma-informed Practice Guide, retrieved from: [https://cewh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013\\_TIP-Guide.pdf](https://cewh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf)