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TOOLS TO WORK WITH FAMILIES IN IRELAND

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Daphne Project JUST/2009/DAP3/AG/1235
Project workstream 4



SUNIA GEEL – Prevent and combat violence
against children, young people and women and to
protect victims and groups at risk

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Methodologies for Social Service Provision for Travellers affected by Domestic Violence

Tools to work with Families



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Domestic Violence – Introduction

Violence within families is a worldwide social problem. Besides children, women in particular are victims and the deeds go mostly unpunished. Estimates suggest that more women worldwide die within their own homes than as a result of war and civil war. Domestic violence is one of the most common human rights violations and is a result of structural power asymmetries within intimate relationships and families.

Violence hinders development: such traumatic experiences have a serious negative influence on the self-esteem of affected women and undermine their ability to be strong members of a strong civil society, who stand up for their rights. Furthermore, the damages caused by violence affect health, education and working ability. Therefore it contributes to poverty in affected families. (*Basics and Source: "Bread for the World"(Editor): Overcoming of domestic violence – A global challenge, Stuttgart 2007*)

Objectives of the tools

The tools are meant to offer social workers additional instrument to work with Traveller families affected by domestic violence within the framework of social service provision.

The tools concentrate on methods of awareness raising, self-awareness and of acceptance of the presence of domestic violence within families. The tools can be applied to support families in developing internal instruments to prevent domestic violence by understanding the reason of the problem and by understanding how domestic violence has been developing and has been dealt with within the family structure.

The tools help family members to better understand their role within the family-power-relations, to reflect upon the function of their position within the family and to learn how to find ways to overcome domestic violence.

If an exercise asks participants to write notes, self-reflective stories or other forms of written expression, these elements may also be replaced by oral stories or the social worker taking written notes on a flip chart. This method is suitable when working with illiterate participants.

NOTE: *The tools are for social workers. The tools are not intended for use in psychotherapy-settings, for individual with psychological disorders due to severe trauma experience and are not intended for confrontational therapy settings between victims and perpetrators.*

Required equipment for the different tools

Flipchart	Pens
Flipchart pens	Pins
Paper	Toys
Name tags	Evaluation sheets
Video camera and player	

Duration

Each session will probably take 45 to 60 minutes, in some cases 90 minutes – depending on the size of group.

Tool 1 **'Step silently into the circle'**

This exercise is suitable for the core family (wife, husband/partner and children) as well as the larger family including grandparents and extended family members.

The exercise is designed to open a conversation on the subject of domestic violence.

Preparation:

The entire family meets with the social worker in a room. As many chairs are standing in a circle as family members are present. An additional chair for the social worker is standing outside the circle.

If two facilitators are available, they should agree on a clear role division beforehand. If, for example, somebody wants/needs to leave the room, one facilitator can leave with them.

Materials:

- Paper cards for flipcharts
- Chairs in a circle

Setting:

- The room should be light, open and have enough space for a circle in which all participants are able to move around freely.

Duration:

- Up to 90 minutes.

Step silently into the circle

First the members of the family stand in a circle or square. There has to be enough room for every person for at least one arm's length to the right and left, so that everybody can easily do one step into the circle and back again. Before you begin, it is agreed upon that there are neither comments nor questions during the exercise.

The moderator says the following sentences individually, with small breaks in between. The participants addressed step into the circle and back again.

(The Social Worker can amend the sentences as appropriate to their knowledge of the family group they are working with)

Step silently into the circle if you ...

... are older than ... years

... are younger than ... years

... like to do sports

... like music

... feel comfortable in your class

... are the only child in your family

... have more than 3 siblings

... are the youngest child

... are the oldest child

... live with only one parent
... have ever been insulted
... have ever insulted someone yourself
... have ever been threatened with violence
... have ever threatened someone yourself with violence
... have ever helped someone who was threatened or beaten
... have ever hurt where you should have helped instead
... have beaten or injured another person physically
... have been beaten or injured physically yourself
... have ever beaten somebody so bad that he or she was bleeding
... have been touched by somebody unpleasantly
... have touched somebody unpleasantly
... have been forced by somebody to touch him or her, without you wanting to
... have wished that a certain person was dead
... have wished to be dead yourself
... have ever been involved with a mediator of conflicts or quarrels
... have ever apologised to someone after you had used violence against him or her
... have been honest with all of your answers.

After the last sentence everybody sits together in a circle to discuss:

- What have you noticed during this exercise?
- Where was there agreement?
- Where not?
- What is the reason for this?
- Was it difficult to step in the circle for some questions? Why?

After the first round the questions is asked:

- Where have you ever experienced violence?

Respect

Participants often do not realise how vulnerable others might be to their comments or feedback. It is important to pay attention, protecting whoever speaks or contributes to exercises. Intervene immediately if you consider the participant needs protecting. For example say *'I think it is courageous of you to have talked here. We are not going to discuss what everybody says at the moment, but will maybe have a chance to come back to it at a later stage'*. In doing this, you will set the tone for keeping people safe and maybe encourage others to participate.

boundaries

Observing body language

Pay attention, not only to what is being said, but also body language, as this can provide further understanding of the dynamics of the family group.

Social Worker Approach:

Pay attention to your own approach: Personal, open and honest language is important. To understand one another is the priority. If in doubt ask for clarification.

Limit group discussion temporarily

Discussions take a lot of time and energy. Stopping a group discussion to take a brief break may be a useful option - but be mindful of how each participant might view this. When returning to the discussion, try to pick up on where you left.

Try to engage all participants

If a participant does not engage in the discussion, respect that choice. At the end you might ask further questions on an individual basis (i.e. not in front of the whole group)

'I noticed you didn't talk. Is everything ok?'

Have referral back-up

Social workers should be aware of the boundaries of their responsibility and competence. Knowledge of further sources of support is essential – both for referral for participants, and for advice/support for themselves.

Tool 2

Communication - Non-violent communication within families

This exercise is for family groups who are in the process of accepting domestic violence is a problem. All members of the family have agreed to work on finding a solution for the problem.

Note: This exercise is NOT suitable if the perpetrator is extremely violent, if rape, suicide or even murder occurred in a family.

The exercise focuses on better contact and communication between family members as a helpful tool to calm down conflict situations.

Preparation:

The family or families is / are invited to meet with their social worker. The family members are informed before the meeting that they will learn some basic principles of communication, of expressing oneself, of listening to another person and of answering questions.

Materials:

- Flipcharts / pens
- Chairs in a circle

Setting:

- The room should be light, open and have enough space for a circle in which all participants are able to move around freely.

Duration:

- Up to 60 minutes with one family.
- Up to 90 minutes with two or three families.

Exercise 1: Personal Space

Aim

Perceiving one's own boundaries

Exploring what people need to feel secure and unthreatened

Finding different ways of expression to make one's own boundaries clear and precise

Procedure

Ask for 2 volunteers from the family group (A and B)

The remainder of the group will be observers

Ask A to stand anywhere within the seated circle of participants

Ask B to walk up to A (slowly at first)

Ask A to feel which distance is her/his personal space boundary

She/He can instruct B to come closer or retreat until it feels right.

A can stop B with 'calling stop' if B steps into A's too closely into their personal space

Several tries follow with the following requests for B:

Walk up to A slowly;

Walk up to A fast and briskly;

Walks up to A aggressively

Next A gets B to stop by only one look with his/her eyes / or non-verbally - which can also be tried with the different walking approaches as above.

Different members of the group then can volunteer to try the same exercise in front of the group.

Analysis

Give the participants some time after each try for feedback – particularly for the person (A) who has tried to set her/his boundary limit:

- Was the distance right?
- Were the gestures, signals, voice, postures clear and unequivocal?

Include getting feedback from the rest of the group

- What did they observe?
- What did they think worked best / was most difficult?

Note

Since this exercise includes several tries and variations, you should introduce only one at a time, complete that, then try another variation – with feedback.

Exercise 2: Controlled Discussions

Aim

Learning about communication techniques
Calming an escalated conflict situation
Sensitisation for empathy and verbal discussion

Procedure

Step 1: Searching for controversial topics

Use brainstorming to collect subjects which can cause different opinions within the group. An alternative is that the Social Worker suggests some topics. One topic is then selected as the 'subject of choice'.

Step 2: Arguing with a rule

The participants form pairs.

Every pair decides on who is going to represent the pro and con position.

Person A begins with a statement (not too long) on the selected topic.

Before person B may answer, he/she summarises the statement from A and asks whether the reproduction was right:

'Well, I have understood that you...';

'I have heard...';

'Have I got you right.....?'

If A feels misunderstood, she/he corrects the misunderstanding.

Only if B has properly understood the statement from A, he/she can represent his/her own view.

It is possible to work in groups of 3 (rather than pairs) to have an observer, and who supports the pairs to keep to the rules.

Analysis

Bring all groups back to the large circle of chairs and get feedback (which could be put up on the flipchart)

- What did you notice?
- What was difficult?
- What was easy?
- In which situations would you see this conversation technique as beneficial?

Exercise 3: Taking a Position

Preparation:

Draw a line with chalk (if possible), or use colourful tape to create a long line within the circle of chairs.

Mark one end: Positive +

Mark the other end: Negative -

(This can be done by placing postcards at either end)

Aim:

To encourage participants to express their views on a variety of topics

To encourage participants to explain their views

To encourage participants to be able to defend their views without attacking another / contradictory viewpoint

To understand that our positions might change if we understand more

Procedure

Read out one statement. The following may provide useful examples – but can be amended by the Social Worker – depending on their knowledge / experience of the group they are working with.

Examples:

- It is a woman's job to look after the children
- Men should have the last say on all important family decisions
- It is never justified to hit another person
- Children should always do what they are told

(Depending on time available – you may need 4 – 7 statements)

Any member can stand up to show where they position themselves on the 'line' with regard to agreeing / disagreeing with the statement

Participants can only vocalise reasons for their own position (briefly). In other words they cannot attack another position in their statement. The Social Worker must monitor this and intervene if necessary.

When everybody who wants to has stepped onto the line, ask whether anyone wants to move position – up or down. (It is not necessary to look for explanations / reasons for change)

Analysis:

Discussion at end to focus on the experience

- Does listening to others influence what they think?
- Do they get different ideas from this?
- How might this translate into family environment?

Tool 3:

Your own identity within the family

The focus is on individual members of a family. The exercise explores their role within their family. They will learn how they interact with other members, what their position within the family means for the other members of the family and how behavioural patterns may create situations which may lead to domestic violence.

Preparation:

The family or families is / are invited to meet with their social worker. The family members are informed before the meeting that they will learn more about roles in families, about functions members of a family do have.

Family members can be invited to individual sessions or this exercise can be done in a group setting of the entire family.

Alternatively, members with the same functions from different families can be invited. This is a suitable method for families where physical domestic violence is part of daily family life. Thus, the wife, the sons, the daughters, the husbands, the grandparents etc. will all meet separately first and will then be invited to see their own family again during the final phase of this exercise. This exercise can also be split up in multi-session units.

Materials:

- Paper cards for flipcharts
- Sheets of paper
- Pens. crayons
- Chairs in a circle

Setting:

- The room should be light, open and have enough space for a circle in which all participants are able to move around freely.

Duration:

- Up to 60 minutes with one family.
- Up to 90 minutes with two or three families.

Exercise 1: How I see myself versus How others see me

Aim:

To encourage participants to reflect on and express how they see themselves

To encourage participants to reflect on and express how they think others see them

To explore the differences in the two perspectives

Procedure:

Give all the participants paper and pens

Ask them to draw an outline of their own face on the paper

Inside the face ask them to draw elements/ things that represent how they see themselves. (This could include religion, family, roles, gender, culture, qualities)

Outside the shape of the face ask them to draw elements / things that represent how they think others see them.

Give participants plenty of time to complete this task.

Bring all participants back to the group

Ask them to show their 'picture' and explain the different parts to the rest of the group.

Analysis:

Discussion could focus on all / any of the following:

- What aspects are important for identity
- What aspects do they like / dislike
- What is the relationship between how they see themselves and how they think others might see them
- What would they like to change about themselves?
- What would they like to change about how others see them?
- Can this be changed and how?

Note:

The participants need not discuss all elements – only those with which they are comfortable

Depending on the dynamics of the group – feedback might be appropriate – though only with regard to the aspects of how others see them

Ensure the group feedback is respectful

Exercise 2: Gender Roles

Materials / Preparation:

Old magazines
Scissors
Glue/tape
Large sheets of paper
Flipchart / pens

Aim:

To increase participants' understanding of gender stereotypes
To discuss the influence of gender roles in families

Procedure:

Place the magazines in several piles in the middle of the room, along with glue, scissors etc.

Ask all the men / boys to work together
All the women / girls to work together

Explain that their task is to find images (or words) from the magazine that represent men / women (Women to craft the 'female' collage; the men to craft the 'male' collage.)

Give the groups about 30 minutes to complete this task

Ask that each group choose a title for their collage.

The participants should then jointly present their collage to the other group (*pinning it up on the flipchart might work best*). The presentation should not be interrupted by questions / challenges – these to be saved for following discussion

Analysis:

Discussion could focus on all / any of the following:

- What do you like about the male / female image?
- What do you dislike about the male / female image?
- Do the portrayed people correspond with the men / women in your life?
- What is not included in image?
- How does it match up to how you would like to be as male / female?

Tool 4:

A Joyful Family Day

This exercise is suggested as final event of this multi-session tool. This exercise can help to empower families and will help them to experience positive sides of family life.

This exercise uses the methodology of event-and-adventure experience.

Preparation:

The family or families is / are invited to meet with their social worker. The family members are informed that they all have been doing great during the last days / weeks with all the meetings. The social worker wishes to say “thanks for your cooperation” and will thus invite the family to a special event.

Materials:

- Postcards
- Pens
- Flipchart

Duration:

- Up to 60 minutes with one family.
- Up to 90 minutes with two or three families.

Aim:

To encourage participants to note the positive aspects of family life
To encourage family groups to all be involved in decision-making

Procedure:

The social worker explains that the family are to decide on a joint day / afternoon out – in which they will all have to go

Briefly give some ideas about what the event could be. For example it could be a trip to the beach, a park, a picnic or a BBQ, a visit to a gallery or a museum.

Note:

It is important that all events are – as far as possible – free. So for example in Dublin, it might be useful to research possibilities. For example, The ‘Dead Zoo’, the National Gallery are both free.

Ask every family member to individually either write or draw their ideas on a postcard. Only one idea per postcard – but each participant can have as many postcards as they want.

The Social worker gathers up all the postcards and groups them according to topic:

For example: Outdoor activities; food; sport; cultural activity.

Either the number of cards per topic will help the family to decide which event to choose or the social worker will lead the family through a decision making process. In the end, all

family members should agree upon one event they all wish and agree to do!

The social worker and the family will then agree upon a day and time when the event will take place.

Analysis:

Discussion can focus on what the experience was like for them – as individuals – **and** as a family.



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