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LEARNING RESOURCES FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH THEM



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Index

Introduction	1
The Stay Safe project	1
The “I Stay Safe!” videos	2
Using the videos.....	2
Video nr. 1 – What is sexual violence / harassment	3
Video nr. 2 – What is emotional abuse	4
Video nr. 3 – Why you should always agree to sexual relationships	4
Video nr. 4 – Don’t forget that you can say no!.....	5
Need to learn more?	6

Learning resources for women with disabilities

A guide for professionals working with them

Introduction

A systematic review and meta-analysis of the global prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities published in the Lancet during the past years, found that overall adults with disabilities are 1.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than those without a disability. Women with psycho-social disabilities in particular, have the highest risk to be a victim of gender-based violence and often unable to disclose violence or seek help. This is due to:

- women being unaware they are being abused or recognizing ill treatment –thinking it is normal;
- a cognitive inability to comprehend what is happening;
- dependence on partner and/or fear of losing partner or children;
- fear of institutionalization, lack of screening for violence, not being aware of her rights and laws to protect her, and lack of access to information on prevention or protection.

If they do seek help, they are met with physical, resource, and attitudinal barriers, for example, because social workers may not understand the issues facing women with disabilities, and disability sector workers may not be educated about the high risk of violence.

The Stay Safe project

The [Stay Safe project](#) is funded by the European Commission under the REC Programme and implemented by an international partnership of organizations from Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal

and Lithuania, which share similar experiences and challenges as regards the phenomenon of sexual violence and sexual harassment against women.

The project aims to raise awareness and educate women with disabilities on how to respond to incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence through the development of two main tools: a training programme for a face-to-face training course and [digital awareness rising resources](#) which are freely available from the project website.

The “I Stay Safe!” videos

The programme is made of four videos:

- The 1st one illustrates what is sexual harassment / violence
- The 2nd explains the concept of emotional abuse
- The 3rd one is about consent
- The 4th one focuses on the message that “You can say no” to unwanted sexual approaches

Each video is focused on a fictional character experiencing a situation linked with the main topic of the video.

Videos last around 2 minutes and are available in English, Italian, Lithuanian, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish.

Using the videos

While these videos have been developed as resources that women can autonomously access from the internet, we think they might be also used with the mediation of a professional, in a group setting or in an individual counselling session, to introduce the topic of how to stay safe and protect yourself from sexual harassment.

In this chapter we provide you a list of suggested questions that you might use to start a conversation with your users and explore their point of view, together with underlying key-messages of each video.

Note that these are just suggestions but you should adapt the questions in relation to the level of cognitive impairment of your users as well as to their personal life story and current psychosocial situation.

Video nr. 1 – What is sexual violence / harassment

The video describes the story of Mila: she meets a new friend named Dan online with whom she initially gets along well. After some time, he asks her to send him a nude picture. She sends one but he keeps asking for more and she starts not feeling at ease and wondering if she did anything wrong.

You can stop the video at min. 1.20 with the question “What should Mila do?” and explore with users what would they do if they were Mila and if they think she did anything wrong. Also, you might explore with them whether Mila should ask for help or keep the situation secret, as she is embarrassed.

The video continues explaining that Mila didn't do anything wrong and that she can ask Dan to stop.

You can discuss with the group how easy it would be for them to tell Dan to stop and how they could do that. What / whom could help them dealing with this situation?

The video concludes by saying that no one has the right to harass another person.

You can ask the group if they agree with this statement: why yes or why no?

KEY MESSAGE:

SOMETIMES PEOPLE CAN TRY TO HARASS YOU: THIS IS NOT RIGHT

Video nr. 2 – What is emotional abuse

This video is about emotional abuse. Its goal is to explain that abuse is not only physical and that words can harm to. It is presented the case of Andrew. When he is in public, Andrew appears to be very kind and gentle but when he is alone with her partner Carmen he mocks her and makes her feel inadequate.

You can stop the video at min. 1.05 and ask your users what they think about this situation: is it fair that Andrew always makes Carmen sad with his words? You could also explore the connection between physical violence and emotional abuse: are they connected? Is one more serious than the other? Why yes or why no? What would they do if they were Carmen?

The video concludes with the statement that emotional abuse is as real as physical abuse.

Ask your users to comment on this statement: do they agree or not? Why?

KEY MESSAGE:

ABUSE IS NOT ONLY PHYSICAL – EMOTIONAL ABUSE HURTS

Video nr. 3 – Why you should always agree to sexual relationships

This video is about the concept of consent. It begins by showing a dialogue between two ladies, one agrees to borrow to the other her scarf, since the first really likes it.

You can stop the video here and explain more the idea of consent, which is when we honestly agree in doing something and we are not upset by this, for example borrowing something to a friend to please her. Ask your users if they can make another example of situation where they consented to do something.

The video then shows a situation where a man asks a woman the permission to sit next to her in a cinema and she says no.

Explain that she didn't give her consent to the man's request and ask why? Explain that it doesn't matter why she didn't want him to sit close to her – this is her will and it should be respected.

Finally, the video shows a couple: he wants to kiss her and she agrees.

Ask your group to comment this situation: what do they see? The woman likes the man and is happy with him kissing her, so she consents to that – she gives him her permission. You can explain to the users that when they are involved in any intimate relationship, it is important that they always agree with what the other person asks them to do, i.e. that they consent to it. They should only consent to acts where they feel happy and at ease with.

KEY MESSAGE:

YOU SHOULD ALWAYS GIVE YOUR CONSENT TO INTIMATE INTERCOURSES

Video nr. 4 – Don't forget that you can say no!

This video recap the definitions of sexual harassment and consent.

Take the opportunity to recap them with your users and make sure they got them right.

Then the video presents Katie, who is sexually harassed by her cousin. He keeps on telling her not to share this with anyone as it is their secret. Stop the video at minute 0.58 and ask your users:

Is it right to keep this confidential? Introduce the idea that it is right to have a private life and keep things for yourself, but not if this is a situation that hurts you or expose you to a danger. Ask participants to make examples of "good" and "bad" secrets.

The video continues explaining that she should not keep the secret. Indeed, Katie said “no” to him and run away. Later, she tells her mum who prevented the cousin to meet her again. Stop the video at min 1.16

Did Katie do the right thing? Why yes or why no? Would they have done something different?

The video concludes that Katie is happier now, as she had the courage to say no to abuse.

KEY MESSAGE:

YOU CAN ALWAYS SAY “NO” TO ACTS THAT YOU DON’T DESIRE AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO TALK WITH SOMEONE YOU TRUST TO SEEK HELP

Need to learn more?

- If you, as a professional, want to learn more about this topic you can access the e-learning course to acquire knowledge and skills on how to prevent and contrast sexual violence against women with disabilities
- If you want to get more in depth about the topic of preventing sexual violence with the disabled women you work with, consider implementing a face-to-face training programme according to the manual developed in the project

All these resources are available from: <https://staysafeproject.eu/outputs/>