

COMFORT CONTINUUM

Facilitator guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to help participants reflect on their level of comfort discussing, advocating for and/or providing abortion services. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their life experiences that influenced these comfort levels and how they relate to norms on abortion.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Articulate their own comfort levels regarding safe abortion care
- Discuss their comfort levels on abortion and the life experiences that inform them
- Discuss how these varying comfort levels relate to norms on abortion
- Express their personal levels of comfort providing or referring to safe abortion care

MATERIALS

- “Comfort continuum: Wall signs” or handwritten signs (three paper signs labeled “A Lot,” “A Little” and “Not at All”)
- Tape (to tape signs to the wall)
- Comfort continuum statements (see below)

TIMELINE

Total time: 45 minutes

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Rearrange chairs and tables in the room, if necessary, to create an open space for participants to move around.
- Prepare, print and tape three signs labeled “A Lot,” “A Little” and “Not at All” on one wall. Place the signs in order in a row to indicate a continuum. Leave enough space between each sign so that participants can spread out.
- Review the comfort continuum statements and select statements that are most relevant for the group of participants and the specific topic(s) covered. Begin with easier statements and progress to harder or more complicated

ones (use between 5-8 statements). It is advisable to use an overarching, final statement.

- Familiarize yourself with the country's abortion laws and policies, and your agency's policies and how they are applied in the country.

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Introduce the activity.

STEP 2: Read each comfort continuum statement aloud (see following page) and ask participants to physically move to the point along the continuum that best represents their comfort level. Encourage participants to be honest about their feelings and to resist being influenced by where other participants are placing themselves. Explain that this is a continuum—not distinct points—so they can position themselves at any point along it. Emphasize that it is perfectly acceptable for participants to have differing levels of comfort and assure them that this is a space where they will not be judged for honestly sharing their feelings.

STEP 3: After participants have arranged themselves, ask for volunteers at different points along the continuum to explain why they are standing there.

STEP 4: If, based on someone's explanation, participants want to move to another point on the continuum, encourage them to do so.

STEP 5: Once you have finished reading the statements, ask participants to return to their seats. Ask two participants to share their feelings about the activity.

STEP 6: Refer to the reasons participants gave about their place on the continuum as you facilitate a brief discussion about the different responses and levels of comfort in the room. Discussion questions could include:

- What observations do you have about your own responses to the statements? Other participants' responses?
- Were there times when you felt tempted to move with the majority of the group? Did you move or not? How did that feel?
- What about your responses to the statements surprised you? How about other participants' responses?
- What did you learn about your own and others' comfort levels on abortion?
- What observations do you have about the group's overall level of comfort with abortion?

STEP 7: Ask participants to reflect on the life experiences that influenced their levels of comfort or discomfort. Invite them to imagine how a different set of life circumstances might have led to a different level of comfort with abortion. Ask a few people to share their thoughts on this.

STEP 8: Discuss how these different levels of comfort with abortion impact cultural norms on abortion, women's feelings when they have an abortion, and medical staffs' feelings when they provide safe abortion care.

STEP 9: Facilitate a discussion on how their comfort levels impact the provision and quality of safe abortion care. Emphasize what a large impact that providers' attitudes have on women's access to safe abortion care and the link between safe abortion care access and reduced maternal deaths and injury from unsafe abortion. For example, a provider who is not comfortable with abortion care provision might counsel a woman toward different options or might not refer her to safe abortion services. This could have a significant negative impact on the woman's health and on the overall rate of maternal deaths.

STEP 10: If questions arise during the discussion, for example, on abortion laws in that country or agency policies and practices related to safe abortion care, be prepared to provide correct information once participants have finished the discussion.

STEP 11: Ask one or two participants to share what they learned from this activity.

STEP 12: Solicit and discuss any outstanding questions, comments or concerns with the participants. Thank the group for their participation.

STEP 13: Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey:

- Provider and staff comfort levels with abortion care can impact the quality of the service they provide and the way that women are treated when they seek a service. Regardless of our personal comfort level, we should try to treat all women seeking an abortion service with the same level of professionalism and respect.
- Provider and staff attitudes can have an impact on women's ability to access safe abortion care services. For example, a provider who is not comfortable with abortion care provision might counsel a woman toward different options or might not refer her to safe abortion services. This could have a significant negative impact on the woman's health and on the overall rate of maternal deaths and injuries.

Comfort continuum statements

INSTRUCTIONS

Read the statements below as you facilitate the “Comfort continuum” activity.

1. How comfortable are you with the topic of abortion?
2. How comfortable are you talking about the topic of abortion with family members?
3. How comfortable are you talking about the topic of abortion with friends?
4. How comfortable are you talking about the topic of abortion with colleagues in your agency?
5. How knowledgeable are you about the abortion laws of the country where you work?
6. How comfortable are you providing information on safe abortion care to a woman or girl who requests it?
7. How comfortable are you with your agency’s policy on safe abortion care?
8. How comfortable are you with your agency or agency’s partners providing safe abortion care in its projects?
9. How comfortable are you working in a health-care facility or on a project where safe abortion care is provided?
10. How comfortable are you providing (or supporting the provision of) safe abortion care up to 13 weeks gestation?
11. How comfortable are you providing (or supporting the provision of) safe abortion care at or after 13 weeks gestation?

A Lot

A Little

Not at All