

# CROSS THE LINE

## Facilitator guide

### SESSION OVERVIEW

This activity is used to bring participants' different views on safe abortion care to the surface and address the connection between safe abortion care and cultural norms and stigma. It helps participants understand how cultural norms and stigma affect people's diverse views and experiences with abortion.



#### NOTE TO FACILITATOR

In some settings people may feel uncomfortable crossing the line (for example, during times of war, "crossing the line" could represent something negative). In such cases, it may be preferable to organize this activity as a discussion or to have participants hold up colored cards instead of physically crossing the line.

### OBJECTIVES

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

- Articulate their feelings and views on safe abortion care
- Identify diverse views among participants
- Describe how life circumstances and stigma affect individual and cultural norms, views and reactions to safe abortion care

### MATERIALS

- Masking tape or string, approximately two to three meters long, to make a line on the floor

### TIMELINE

Total time: 45 minutes

### ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Clear a large area of the room to allow participants to move around, and place the line in the middle of this area.
- Review and adapt "Cross the line" statements (included here), if needed. Print or show them on screen if necessary. Select in advance the statements that most apply to this group of participants. It is advisable to end with a statement that you think all (or at least most) participants can agree with.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**STEP 1:** Introduce the activity.

**STEP 2:** Explain that you will read a series of statements and that participants should step entirely across the line when a statement applies to their beliefs or experiences.

**STEP 3:** Remind participants that there is no “in between,” which means they must stand on one side of the line or the other, and that there are no right or wrong answers. Encourage participants to stand on the side of the line that best reflects their own beliefs and not feel pressured to move with the rest of the group.

**STEP 4:** Stand at one end of the line and start with a practice statement, such as: *Cross the line if you had fruit for breakfast this morning.*

**STEP 5:** Once some people have crossed the line, give participants an opportunity to observe who crossed the line and who did not. Invite participants to notice how it feels to be where they are.

**STEP 6:** Ask someone who crossed the line and then someone who did not to briefly explain their reasons for crossing or not crossing the line. If someone is the only person who did or did not cross the line, ask them what that feels like.

**STEP 7:** Invite all participants to move back to one side of the line.

**STEP 8:** Repeat this for several of the “Cross the line” statements about abortion. Select the statements that most apply to this group of participants. When you are finished, ask participants to take their seats.

**STEP 9:** Discuss the activity. Discussion questions may include:

- What did you learn from this activity? (or: What did you learn about your own and others’ views on safe abortion care?)
- 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 does this activity teach us, in general, about the stigma and cultural norms related to safe abortion care?
- How might stigma and cultural norms influence a woman’s decision about terminating a pregnancy?
- How might stigma and cultural norms influence the comfort of staff in your agency with providing or supporting the provision of safe abortion care in your projects?

**STEP 10:** Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey:

- Not all of us may be comfortable with abortion care services, but regardless we have a responsibility to ensure women can access safe services.
- If you are uncomfortable or unable to provide a safe abortion service, be sure to refer women to a provider that can provide a safe service.
- We may feel afraid to talk about abortion work, but the bottom line is that safe abortion services save women’s lives.

## “CROSS THE LINE” STATEMENTS

### **Cross the line if:**

- You were raised to believe that abortion should not be openly discussed.
- At some point in your life, you believed abortion is wrong.
- You have been asked to keep someone’s abortion a secret.
- You have ever felt uncomfortable talking about abortion.
- You have ever heard a friend or family member talking in a negative manner about women who have had abortions.
- You or someone you are close to has had an abortion.
- You have ever avoided the topic of abortion in order to avoid conflict.
- You have heard the term “baby killers” applied to women who have abortions or medical staff or other health-care workers who provide safe abortion care.
- At some point in your life, you believed that relief is a common reaction after a safe abortion.
- You believe there is a medical need for safe abortion care to be available to women, in general.
- You are committed to addressing all the main causes of maternal death, including unsafe abortion.
- You have had to tell a woman she could not have an abortion.
- You have had to tell a woman with an unwanted pregnancy as a result of rape that she cannot have an abortion.

