

TALKING ABOUT ABORTION

Facilitator guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

This activity helps participants anticipate challenging comments and reactions related to their provision of safe abortion care. Participants brainstorm constructive responses and gain practical experience articulating those responses, drawing on their agency's organizational documents on safe abortion care and their own experiences.

OBJECTIVES

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

- Anticipate possible comments and questions about safe abortion care
- Demonstrate the ability to respond to challenging comments calmly and constructively

MATERIALS

- Flipchart
- Markers

TIMELINE

Total time: 45 minutes

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Prepare discussion questions for debrief as a large group

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Introduce the facilitators and the activity.

For this activity, we will practice anticipating and constructing effective responses to questions people may ask about safe abortion care and your agency's policies and practices related to it.

Occasionally, you may interact with people who have questions or comments about safe abortion care and your role either providing or supporting access to it. These questions and comments can be negative or disapproving or curious about the issue and your experiences with it. They can come from strangers, or people you know and care about.

In small groups, you will brainstorm a list of comments and questions related to safe abortion care (Part 1). We will then develop and share some effective responses to help correct misinformation or misunderstanding, or to offer more information on your personal experiences or understanding, and to respectfully explain your position and views on safe abortion care in humanitarian crises or conflict settings (Part 2).

STEP 2: Divide participants into groups of up to four people (perhaps by numbering people off, or have them work at their current tables). Distribute flipchart paper and markers.

STEP 3: Instruct small groups to take 10 minutes to brainstorm as many questions and comments they can think of that someone might ask them as it relates to abortion care, and to write the questions they come up with on the flipchart.

Reminders to give to participants:

- On the flipchart, leave enough space between the questions you develop to add responses later on.
- Keep these questions/comments as realistic as possible. Suggest they pull examples from their own experiences or from experiences shared by others.
- Remind them that these questions/comments might not always be negative/disapproving, so be sure to list one or two examples that fit within a more supportive or “open-minded” view toward safe abortion care.
- These questions/comments might be from family members, colleagues, community members, other agency staff, or clients themselves.

Examples: Questions/comments can take different forms, including:

- *“I think abortion is a terrible sin.”*
- *“How do you justify killing babies for a living?”*
- *“Shouldn’t a woman’s husband have to consent to her receiving an abortion?”*

STEP 4: When the groups have brainstormed an adequate list of questions and comments, ask for a few volunteers to share an example from their list with the group.

STEP 5: Have each group exchange their **top 2-3 most challenging comments** with another group.

STEP 6: Ask each small group to take 10 minutes to brainstorm effective, respectful responses. Groups should write their responses **directly under** each comment on the flipchart. Groups are welcome to make additions, improvements or even add data.

STEP 7: After the small groups have created their responses, ask for two volunteers to share their responses with the entire group. Encourage participants to take notes for themselves on responses they find particularly helpful.

STEP 8: Instruct participants to divide into pairs.

STEP 9: Introduce the next part of the activity:

*For this last part of the session, we will work on putting these questions and responses into use by practicing in pairs. One person in the pair will ask the most challenging question the group has developed about safe abortion care. The other person will practice articulating an effective response. Encourage people to select the comment they find **the most challenging** and to craft a response in line with their own way of talking about abortion. Once the pair is done, switch roles and practice the exercise again. Keep switching and practicing for the next 10 minutes. As you practice, feel free to discuss how it felt sharing your answer with the other, and offer suggestions on where each person did well and where there is room for improvement.*

STEP 10: After 10 minutes (watch for energy in the room), have everyone come back to the large group to debrief the exercise for 10 minutes. Discussion questions could include:

- How did it feel getting to practice answering some questions about abortion?
- Were there questions you felt ready/ comfortable responding to (via the sessions, information, etc. you gained from today's workshop)?
- What question(s) did you not feel as ready to respond to?
- What additional information or resources would be helpful to build your skill in this area?
- What lessons would you take away from this role play to a real-world situation?

STEP 11: Solicit and discuss any outstanding questions, comments or concerns with the participants. Thank the group for their participation and share that you hope they found the session helpful.

STEP 12: Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey:

- It is not always easy to answer questions about abortion, especially when they are negative or disapproving. Take your time and try not to get upset when responding.
- Even though others may not always be supportive, the bottom line is that safe abortion saves women's lives. It is important to remember that what you do helps some of the most vulnerable women when they feel they don't have any other option and that your work contributes to saving women's lives. Thank you for being an advocate for women and girls and decreasing maternal mortality through your work.

