

Spaces and Places

“How safe is safe...?”

- Complexity** Level 2
- Group size** 10 to 30
- Time** 40 to 60 minutes
- Overview** This exercise explores the safety of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) young people in different ‘everyday’ situations and locations.
- Objectives** To raise participants’ awareness of the fact that openly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender young people may feel unsafe when entering (public) spaces
- Materials**
- A large empty wall-space along which there is space for the participants to move
 - Three large pieces of paper of three different colours with the titles ‘VERY SAFE’, ‘UNSURE’ and ‘VERY UNSAFE’ written on them
- Preparation** Prepare three separate large pieces of paper of three different colours with the titles ‘VERY SAFE’, ‘UNSURE’ and ‘VERY UNSAFE’ written on them. Hang the posters on a large empty wall along which there is space for the participants to move in each direction. Leave a large space between each of the posters on the wall. The poster with ‘UNSURE’ written on it should be placed in the middle of the other two.

Instructions

Ask participants to imagine the room is a giant opinion scale with one end of the room representing ‘very safe’, the middle ‘unsure’, and the other end ‘very unsafe’ on the scale.

Ask participants to think about how safe they imagine it is for LGBTs to be ‘out’ (i.e. open about their sexuality) in a variety of settings:

- at a gay or lesbian bar
- during a classroom discussion at school
- during a pop concert where homophobic slogans are chanted by the singers
- in a conversation with parents
- during a discussion at school where racist, homophobic and xenophobic remarks are made
- at a gay or lesbian bookstore

LEVEL: 2



GROUP: 10-30



TIME: 40-60 MIN.



- at the work place
- in a local youth club in a highly culturally diverse urban area
- asking for condoms at a village pharmacy
- at a youth conference or training course where, despite good intentions from the organisers, homophobic remarks are expressed by participants

To clarify the differences of opinion in the group, and to create a basis for discussion, ask participants to move to the place on the scale at which they feel the setting raised corresponds. Some will move to the part of the room corresponding to 'very unsafe'. Others will move to less extreme positions on the scale.

At this point ask participants to justify the position they have taken by asking why individual participants think a particular setting is more or less safe for LGBTs who are 'out'. You have the choice at this point to encourage participants to discuss in more or less depth about their different perceptions. Try to ensure that participants speak from positions of experience or provide relevant, evidence-based arguments for their positions. Participants should speak for themselves rather than arguing why they think others are wrong, although making references to other people's arguments is perfectly acceptable. Repeat the procedure for several or all the settings on the list. Decide in advance how long you want to devote to the discussion in each round (5 minutes? 10 minutes?). This will inform you how long you need for the overall exercise.

Debriefing and evaluation

This exercise can be debriefed in more or less depth and with a variety of focus issues. Depending on the group you are working with (its composition and size), on the time you have available and on what you want to achieve by running this activity, you can choose what emphasis to give the debriefing.

Here, we outline a debriefing that charts the middle ground, offering several related directions in which the discussion can be led.

Ask participants to sit in a circle. Get a round of first impressions about the exercise and about the results. A good way to start this discussion is to check if anyone is surprised by the opinions demonstrated by the exercise.

You can continue the discussion by focusing on the differences in perceptions and asking, for example,

- Why do you think there are differences in perception concerning the safety of different everyday places for LGBTs who are 'out'?
- Based on the results of this exercise, what do you consider to be the characteristics of settings which can be considered as 'unsafe' for LGBTs?
- Based on the results of this exercise, what do you consider to be the characteristics of settings which can be considered as 'safe' for LGBTs?
- Can you identify any of the situations of relative safety or lack of safety described

in this exercise in your local context?

- What dangers do young LGBTs who are 'out' face in your local context?
- What do you think that responsible players in each of these settings can do to help LGBTs who are 'out' to feel safe?
- What precautions can young LGBTs take to increase their own safety?

You may broaden the discussion to take into account the ethnic, religious and cultural differences within the LGBT movement. For example, would a transgender man or a black lesbian woman be more vulnerable to intolerant and violent behaviour? What do racism and trans-phobia mean for the safety of LGBT people?

This can, for example, open up a wider discussion on the problem of vulnerability to gender-based violence. You can ask participants to think about how safe female representatives of (visible) minority groups might feel when entering settings usually dominated by male members of the majority.

Tips for facilitators

The list of settings given here is not exhaustive. You might consider revising the list to make a strong link with the context and reality of participants.

It can be useful for the debriefing that the facilitator or a co-facilitator notes down the results for each setting in a place visible for the participants, in other words, how many people thought the setting discussed was unsafe or safe, etc. It can also be very useful to note down some of the arguments used by participants for later reference, if you decide to go into a deeper discussion.

Suggestions for follow-up

Run the activity 'Where do you stand?' using statements adapted to the themes of gender and gender-based violence, Compass¹⁰, pp. 254.

Ideas for action

Suggest that your co-activists in your organisation or your group conduct an 'inclusivity analysis' of your organisation. This can be simply done by reviewing organisational policies and practices to check whether or not they are safe, welcoming and open to LGBT young people, although it does require a large measure of openness to self-critique on your part and that of the others in your organisation. Alternatively you can use a more sophisticated or scientific method. Several of these exist in the youth gender field and can be found by searching the Internet.

¹⁰ www.coe.int/compass