

Reflecting on Ways of Responding to Violence

Purpose: Explore our own ways of responding to violence, recognising patterns so that you can begin to think about the appropriateness of our responses.

Time: 20 minutes

Preparation: flip sheet, pens and paper

Explanation for facilitators:

This exercise is meant to be a quiet, personal reflection with minimal discussion. Invite clarifying questions and elicit feedback, but keep the focus on the participants and the flip sheet. Prepare flip sheets with the following:

3 Typical Response to Personal/Interpersonal Violence

1. Avoid violence
2. Accommodate violence
3. Respond with violence

When we avoid violence typical behaviour –

- steer clear of getting involved
- decide it is “not my problem”
- get someone else to deal with it, eg police, military
- look the other way
- feel powerless to do anything
- don't know what to do
- think to ourselves “We're not the problem makers. Why do we have to do something?”
- deny that the violence exists

When we accommodate, typical behaviour -

- get used to violence: 'That's just the way it is, just accept it.' 'I can't change the system, there's nothing I can do.'
- adapt to the violence: 'If I do anything it will just get worse. Maybe if I keep quiet it'll go away.'
- think 'Oh, it's not so bad.'

When we respond with violence -

- take the offensive, try to get power over and control to stop the violence (true in even the smallest political unit, the family)
- think 'An eye for an eye.'
- think 'The ends justifies the means.'
- think 'justice can prevail through violence.'

Description of Exercise:

Explain the procedure to participants: you're going to lead them in reflecting on typical responses to violence, asking them to note that paper. And then have a quick follow up question to each of the points.

1. Avoid violence

- Run through the main points on the flip chart and ask participants: *Can you think of a time when you responded in this way to a form of violence done to you/another/the planet? Write or draw something that you connect with this memory.*
- Ask participants to look up when they are done and then invite a few responses to the question: *What might be some of the problems/limitations of this response?*
- Summarise participants responses, which probably will run along the lines of *Sometimes we have no real choice but to avoid violence. But when we use the strategy or habit of avoidance we do not deal with the root causes of the conflict. Nor do we deal with the consequences, including the consequences that others face.*

2. Accommodate violence

- Run through the main points on the flip chart and ask participants: *Can you think of a time when you responded in this way to a form of violence done to you/another/the planet? Write or draw something that you connect with this memory.*
- Ask participants to look up when they are done and then invite a few responses to the question: *What might be some of the problems/limitations of this response?*
- Summarise participants responses, which probably will run along the lines of *One of the problems with this strategy or habit is that we become accustomed to the violence to the point where we no longer notice the violence or see a problem with it.*

3. Respond with violence

- Run through the main points on the flip chart and ask participants: *Can you think of a time when you responded in this way to a form of violence done to you/another/the planet? Write or draw something that you connect with this memory.*
- Ask participants to look up when they are done and then invite a few responses to the question: *What might be some of the problems/limitations of this response?*
- Summarise participants responses, which probably will run along the lines of *This approach reinforces what becomes a cycle a violence: 'you did this to me, so I will do this to you.' Nor does it address the roots of the conflict or create a solution that meets the needs of the people involved.*
- Wrap up: Take a moment to look over all three responses. Is there a pattern or a way you typically respond?

Optional Add-on: Continue exploring this theme with Breaking the Cycle of violence explore