



**GUIDE FOR VICTIM EMPOWERMENT
BY PEER TO PEER SUPPORT**



Co-funded by
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Mariposa wants to deliver tools and approaches to support victims of domestic and sexual violence during crisis and develop new perspectives to avoid the risk of social exclusion and poverty.

The tools we developed aim to support the victims themselves to get aware of unhealthy relations and situations, before and after seeking professional help: <https://mariposaproject.eu/>

The tools are to be used by themselves. It shall help them get more clearness on their emotions and thoughts, future objectives and empower them and their decision-making in the future. It shall also help to set preventative steps to avoid repetition of exposures.

It is important that they are in an emotional and socially safe situation and aware that in case they need additional support professional help to seek this help.



This guide has been developed to better equip other women that would like to support their peers in the process.

If this is your case you are then reading the correct document 😊

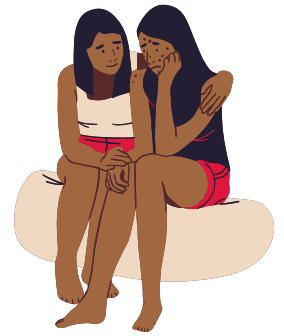
OBJECTIVES OF THE MANUAL



How to organize and run peer to peer support groups



Overcome potential obstacles and challenges



How to provide support, give an useful framework, give advice

WHO IS IT FOR?



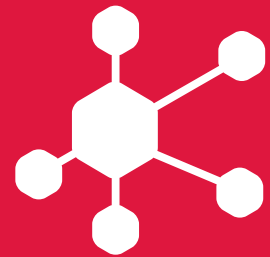
Peers

Other women willing to commit and engage on the process of supporting and accompany the victim



Woman who had been victims themselves

and was to commit, engage and support others



People in the victim's network

WHAT CAN YOU FIND HERE?



Give some resources you can use to cope with challenges during the process



Specific instructions concerning the method



The content is intended to better equip the peer supporters during the process



A friendly and short explanation about "Empathy, Active listening and Non violent communication"

CHAPTER 1

HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF TIME, SPACE AND HOST

1 - Plan your activities (and your breaks!)

Respecting the common agreements is easier by taking care of the space in which the conversations take place.

For support groups: preparing the activities in advance and planning the time for activities, breaks, and feedback, while ensuring a good flow between these times. Breaks of 10-15 minutes are planned every 1,5 hours to rest and to promote conviviality within the group.



2 - Prepare the physical space to be safe and cozy

It is also important to prepare beforehand the physical space in which the participants will be welcomed, whose cleanliness and layout will already be one of the first things that will contribute to their well-being, but also to the smooth running of the activity. It is then important that each member of the group takes ownership of the space, which will help them to take care of it, but also to feel more secure.

Some ideas for creating a safe and cozy place:

- having paper tissues around if somebody cries
- having something to drink (water, tea)
- having some snacks (it's also important for stress release)
- decorating with candles, a bunch of flower in a vase or a plant in a pot, a scarf or nice piece of tapestry put into the middle.
- sitting in a circle, preferable without a table in between



Before the session starts, take care that there is enough chairs, but not too many (a couple of more is still good, in case new people turn up, or someone wants to put their feet up to another chair etc)

3 - Show interest and take care of others

More generally, taking care of others, whether they are your peers or participants in a support group, is mainly a matter of showing interest in them. It is then necessary to take the time to check the mental and emotional state of the person(s) you are facing. To do this, you should take the necessary time to give feedback to the group during an intervention, but also take time for more privileged moments with certain members of the group when you deem it necessary. In the context of a peer-to-peer relationship, this can be done for example through regular check-ins, through your availability (always considering your personal limits) and of course through the secure and respectful space you offer (see chapters on empathy, non-violent communication, and active listening).



HOW TO SET COMMON AGREEMENTS

1- How to create a safe environment?

It is one of the main tasks of a facilitator or helper to provide a safe environment to allow your peers or support group members to use the space you offer them in the most beneficial way. Indeed, we believe it is essential to create a warm and friendly space that allows for dialogue and reflection, which is under the responsibility of all of us, both in the activities we offer and, in a peer-to-peer relationship.

This agreement might be built more or less informally but it is important to redefine your mutual needs and limits with your peers in order to make this helping relationship beneficial.



2 - How does this help?

The construction, and even the co-construction of a safety charter in a support group that you may lead, for example, allows you to rebalance the asymmetrical climate, but also to make the participants active in the process by considering their own needs and limits. Working on a subject as sensitive as sexual and gender-based violence necessarily requires the creation of a secure framework in which each participant can feel comfortable. Indeed, during the proposed activities, intimate and sometimes painful subjects may be discussed, so although it is not a question of providing a therapeutic space, it is still essential to ensure that the group will be able to receive and share in a respectful manner. In order to ensure this, it is possible to co-construct a safety charter that will allow to frame, through rules, the progress of the support group. The construction of the safety charter is therefore best done collectively. This allows us to consider the needs and limits of each person so that the proposed activities can take place in the best possible way.



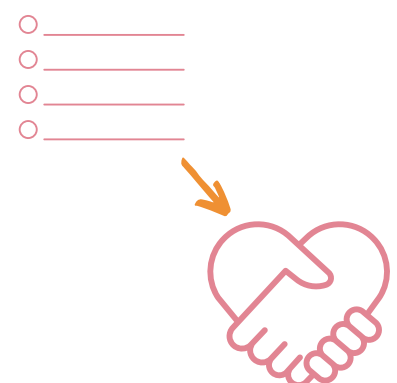
3 - Activity suggestion

To do this, it is possible to distribute pieces of paper to each member of the group so that they can write down what they would like to see on the charter. A discussion, in a respectful and listening atmosphere, will take place afterwards so that each person can share the elements that allow them to feel safe. The rules established collectively will have to be validated and respected by all, and the charter can always be completed as the activities progress. In the case of a peer helping relationship, but also as a support group facilitator, we also invite you to participate in the development of the safety charter, as you also have your own limits and needs,



4 - Examples

Agreements such as confidentiality of what will be said within the group, respect, active listening, non-judgement, maintenance of the physical space (cleanliness, tidiness,...), allowing ourselves to take some time alone, even during a conversation, if we feel the need, not answering questions that make us uncomfortable...are examples of limits set within groups or peers



CHAPTER 2

EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION



a) What is empathy?

Empathy is a quality that is included within emotional intelligence, which allows us to connect with our emotions and those of others. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. This ability allows us to see things from the other person's perspective rather than our own. It is a crucial skill that allows us to develop self-awareness and social and professional relationships. Empathy is necessary for expressing compassion (the motivation to act on the suffering of others).

b) Active listening

Active listening involves the creation of a safe and supportive space for the other, which is favorable for the person in pain to speak and therefore favorable for change. To do this, the peer must try to adopt three postures while listening:

- **Be empathic:** understand the feelings, beliefs, and values of the other person, it is not about identifying or putting oneself in the other person's shoes, but to act "as if".
- **Being supportive and non-judgmental:** considering the other person in a positive way, accepting their point of view and above all respecting them, which does not necessarily mean agreeing with them.
- **Be authentic:** show empathy and acceptance to the other person.

#1 | Actions

These three postures require non-verbal language: the look, the tone of voice, the gestures... but also the speech:

- Rephrasing to avoid misunderstandings and show that we are listening. It is about rephrasing feelings, summarizing a statement, and always asking if it is correct or if there is something missing.

Example: If I understand correctly, the comment he made to you last Monday made you very sad, is that right?

- The supportive questioning to specify, clarify or deepen what the interlocutor says. It is important that these questions are mainly open-ended so that the individual does not feel attacked or interrogated.

Example: How was it the last time you saw each other?

- Do not try to fill in silences when the other person is thinking or needs a moment to digest what has been said
- Briefly share a similar personal experience and then carefully generalize to legitimize the person's problem and increase their hope. Important: be mindful to only share a minimum and avoid drawing the line of the conversation towards your story.

Example: I understand how you feel, when it ended with my first boyfriend, I never thought I would make it, but with time and some work on myself I managed to feel better! And you know, it's normal to go through it, it's a difficult process but there are things you can do to try to get through it as well as possible.

#2 | Words

Finally, to ensure a safe and caring space, you need to stay vigilant and DO NOT:

- Interrupt the other person
- Give advice or instructions: this threatens the belief that the other person can find his or her own solution independently

#3 | Do nots

c) Non violent communication

By psychologist Marshall Rosenberg

Objective: promoting active listening, authenticity, respect, and empathy in human contacts, and encouraging an education in the management and acceptance of conflict

The first principle of NVC is the empowerment of the human being in relation to his or her actions, thoughts, and feelings, moving from the accusative "you" to the responsible "I", with the idea that the lack of responsibility is the cause of violent communication.

observation of the fact or behavior affecting your well-being

"For three days now, I have been feeling some kind of aggressivity in your voice when you talk to me."

The expression of your **feelings** using the formulation "I"

"I feel angry and lost because I don't understand what this is related to, and it is becoming difficult to deal with."

Identify and express your **needs** or desires awakened by this feeling

"Could we please take a moment to discuss this?"

Formulate concrete and realistic **requests**

"I need to know if there is something going on with you, and especially to communicate with you about it so that we can work things out."

What does this process allow? A dialogue between both people, thanks to the expression of a need and a feeling, while remaining attentive to those of the other. it also gives us clarity.

If it is a situation that provokes a strong feeling for you, it is important to be empathetic with yourself and take your time. By doing so, one prevents falling into judgemental and accusatory communication

CHAPTER 3

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE METHOD

Here we wanted to add specific instruction for peer support concerning supporting the symbolic work of the victim (observation of body language, don't ask open questions, don't give advice etc...)

While using one of the tools proposed in the guide during a group session, the group plays a particular role in the process. It provides support, especially when one of the participants must share her experiences or feelings, as is often the case with some of the proposed activities.

Presentation

When one of the participants shares an experience or presents something related to one of the activities, she is normally surrounded by observers who will constitute a "support group", actively participating, by their listening and their interventions, at the time of the presentation. The observers must indeed offer a sustained attention to the presenter, through an active listening of her words but also of other infraverbale aspects.

Factual questions

When members of the support group wish to ask questions, it is important that these remain factual and are only a way for them to clarify something the person sharing said or presented. This does not involve asking "how" or "why" questions, which could be perceived as accusatory and/or intrusive but could also lead to a form of interpretation of the elements brought by the person sharing, which would go beyond the simple goal of understanding.

Perception

The sustained attention of each supporter will allow them to detect and express elements perceived by the presenter during her sharing. It can be, for example, emotions. In this case, it will consist in explaining the way they have been perceived, through mimics, gestures, height, or tone of voice, etc. This should be done by addressing the presenter directly.

Interpretation

With the help of the practitioner, the members of the "support group" talk about the presenter. They think out loud, ask questions such as "What is the problem?", "What should be different?", "What would he/she like to solve, understand, do?", "Where might there be difficulties? Where not? "The client listens carefully without responding for the moment. As for the supporters, this is not about giving opinions or advice.

Agreement actions

This phase leads to a discussion between the participant and the practitioner about the support needed and the next steps to achieve her goal. At the end, the participant must commit to carry out the agreed actions and you, as support, can accompany her in this challenge. How? by encouraging her to do it, by re-launching her a few days later to see if she succeeds or if she needs help and above all, by valuing her when she achieves her goal.

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CHAPTER 4

RESOURCES TO COPE WITH POSSIBLE OBSTACLES

At certain times, when accompanying a friend or acquaintance who lives in a toxic relationship, or who has suffered male abuse, reactions of sadness, crying, anger may appear.

It may happen that in the face of an attack of crying or emotional discharge, we want to quickly calm her down . But let us not forget that each person has his or her own time and processes, so rushing actions can reinforce the feeling of frustration. Many times we want to calm down quickly because it makes us feel bad to see someone we love like that. But unloading emotions is good, helps, frees, heals. Rather than trying to diminish these reactions, we must accompany them, and this accompaniment will calm them down. When she has already unburdened himself, when he has been able to cry, we can give him a glass of water. The "hurried" glass of water can cut off the process of emotional venting and catharsis.



Crying releases pain, discharges stress hormones and when we sigh after a big cry it means that the anguish is gone and we feel better.

*Accompanying is about being present to another person's pain;
it is not about making their pain go away.*

*It is about going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being;
not believing that we are responsible for finding the way out.*

*It is about listening with the heart;
not analyzing with the head.*

*It is about bearing witness to other people's struggles;
not judging or directing those struggles.*

*It is about walking alongside;
not leading or being led.*

*It is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence;
it does not mean filling every moment with words.*

*Accompanying the suffering is about being still or quiet and silent;
it is not about wanting to move frantically forward.*

*It is about respecting disorder and confusion;
it is not about imposing order and logic.*

*It is about learning from the other person;
not teaching them.*

Accompanying is about having an attitude of curiosity and not of experts".

Alan D. Wolfelt

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