

8.3 Vote with your feet – Child sexual abuse

Objectives:

Reflect on common beliefs and attitudes about child sexual abuse, and how they impact survivors of child sexual abuse

Time:

15-20 minutes

Resources required:

Signs with the words “agree” or “disagree” written on them

Facilitators instructions:

- Find a space where participants can easily move around.
- If the group is too big, split into 2 or 3 groups and do the exercise in 2–3 different spaces (for example, a breakaway room or different ends of the room).
- Ask the participants in each group to stand in the middle of the room in a straight line.
- Place a sign (either on flip charts or pieces of paper with large writing) with “Agree” written on one side of the space and on the opposite side a sign with “Disagree” on it. Consider using a rope or tape to have a line on the ground between “Agree” and “Disagree” sections.
- Read out loud one of the statements.
- Ask participants to respond by moving towards one of the signs – either agree or disagree – depending on whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Give the option of standing in between for “Maybe”, “Unsure” or “I Don't Know” to help prevent tension and give an option for those who don't want others to know what they believe.
- After each statement facilitate a discussion about why people chose the places they took. This will help them to dig deeper into their underlying belief systems.
- Ask each side to explain its point of view to the other side. Allow some time for debate.
- After a short debate, ask if anyone would like to change position.
- Repeat this by reading 4–5 more statements, depending on how much time is available. If possible, before the training choose statements that are most appropriate to the context together with colleagues.
- Note: This exercise can be intensely personal and uncomfortable for some participants. If you hear discomfort expressed, intersperse the statements on child sexual abuse with those that are under the miscellaneous (such as Football is the best sport, I love to cook, I am a good dancer, I am tired, etc) to create a nonthreatening atmosphere. This exercise can also result in some participants feeling isolated if their values do not align with those of other group members, or it can create feelings of negativity towards their peers. Encourage participants to maintain a non-judgemental attitude towards beliefs that are not aligned with theirs or with those of the majority of the participants. These are complicated, emotional issues, and some participants may react strongly to the statement and others’ views. Remind them that everyone brings his or her own personal perspective to this exercise and that they need to be respectful of each other.

Key Messages

- We all have certain beliefs & attitudes
- We must reflect on personal thoughts, feelings & beliefs about children & child sexual abuse - affects how we treat people
- Important we all have positive attitude towards child survivors, so we show children respect & give them the appropriate child-friendly care they need

Statements:

A 30 year old man has the right to demand sex from his 16 year old wife even if she says she does not want to, given she agreed to marry him

DISAGREE: Even within marriage sexual abuse is possible

Some forms of child sexual abuse are socially promoted or permitted, such as early marriage
Child may have agreed due to norms, pressure, & push factors, this is not informed consent
Child marriage is a violation of human rights

Children make-up stories or lie about sexual abuse, we can't always believe them

DISAGREE:

Children rarely lie or make up stories about being sexually abused

Statistics show that the majority of reports of child sexual abuse are true
Children make up stories about other things, however they rarely lie about sexual abuse
It's often adults who cannot accept or won't believe the child

Children are most often abused by people close to them

AGREE: Children are most often abused by people close to them

Children knew the perpetrator in most cases of sexual abuse, most sexual abuse against children is committed by family or friends

Sexual abuse can be the child's fault, because of the way they dress and behave. E.g. A 15 year old girl wearing make-up, a short skirt, out at night in a bar, talking to men is somewhat to blame if she is exposed to sexual abuse

DISAGREE: Sexual abuse is NEVER the child's fault

Perpetrators are responsible for their own behavior
A child or youth is never responsible for behavior of an adult
Adults must reassure children that they are not at fault for the abuse

If a boy was sexually abused by men or other boys, it means he is homosexual or will become homosexual

DISAGREE: Sexual abuse does not determine or change a person's sexual orientation

An experience of sexual abuse is NOT part of someone's sexuality because it was not a consensual experience.

But boys who are homosexual and who are abused often internalize societal attitudes that they are to blame for what happened

Children who have been abused are too distressed to make any decisions on services they should receive

DISAGREE: Children can and should be involved in any decision making process that affects them

Children have the right to be heard and be involved in decisions that affect them

Information about their condition, wellbeing and treatment should be shared with children in a way they understand

Adapted from UNICEF, IRC (2015) Caring for child survivors of sexual abuse Training Users Guide