WORLD YWCA VIRTUAL SAFE SPACES

WorldYWCA

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL SAFE SPACE?

An online space/platform created to provide an environment that encourages all people present to share experiences, opinions, and views without fear or threat of political, economic or personal harm.

WHY DO WE NEED VIRTUAL SAFE SPACES?

virtual safe spaces

COVID-19 pandemic has forced everyone to take drastic measures in the ways we live and operate. "Physical distancing" has become the most common way to ensure safety of all and thereby to flatten the curve of infection rates.

The YWCA movement is always committed to standing up for women and young women supporting communities. YWCA leaders are problem solvers, caretakers, leaders in communities, both formally and informally. Through this practice of resilience, YWCA leaders showcase commitment, kindness and gratitude in all their work. Today YWCA leaders are once again redefining the way YWCA will operate for some time, ensuring communities worst affected are being provided with the means and resources to adapt in times of stress.

virtual safe spaces

Women of all ages are more isolated with the quarantine and distancing protocols. Many of them are unable to reach out for support if they face domestic violence, are marginalized, pregnant, or facing health (e.g. cancer, STIs, HIV) and mental health issues or if they are just lonely. Time together and conversations regarding women's issues break down the barriers and stigma that women in all their diversity face on a daily basis.

- Safe spaces, peer networks, intergenerational leadership, the widespread promotion of women's rights, and support of local communities are key drivers for leadership especially for young women.

- Women and young women often have varying levels of self-confidence and little awareness of their rights. They lack safe spaces to validate their experiences with peers and have few platforms to share power with adults.

- Safe spaces are places that provide an environment online and/or offline that encourages all people present to share experiences, opinions, and views without fear or threat of political, economic or personal harm.

- They are characterized by a culture of respect, equality and accountability, ensuring that everyone can actively participate and meaningfully contribute to the best of their ability.

- They are designed to facilitate trust, confidentiality, dignity and respect.

8 ELEMENTS OF A YWCA SAFE SPACE

Accessible and Safe Location

Leadership and Participation

Accurate and Reliable Information

Building Trust

Holistic Approaches

Intergenerational Cooperation

Dignity and Respect

Partnership and Accountability

HOW TO CREATE A VIRTUAL SAFE SPACE?

1. Choose a virtual platform

2. Is it accessible? Have you thought about internet bandwidth, language, downloads?

3. Who do you invite into your safe space?

4. How do you take into account cyber bullying?

5. How do you ensure confidentiality or privacy of space?

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HOW TO CONDUCT A VIRTUAL SAFE SPACE?

- Test your platform in advance.
- Prepare your guiding questions. To have an impact, it is good to prepare a topic and refrain from keeping safe space discussions random. Make sure you do this preparation work before going digital.
- Prepare your moderation in advance.
- Invite participants and let them know who else will be joining. People are more comfortable if they know who they are speaking with.
- Set up guidelines and basic rules for conversation and respect. Agree on those with safe space participants to ensure that respect prevails at all times. Ensure anonymity if required.
- All participants are valued and respected.
- The conversation is confidential, "what happens in the group stays in the group".
- Discuss speaking time for each person.
- Make sure everyone gets to speak and make space for more quiet people.

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Mental Health

This is a hard time for anyone with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, but also for everyone else, and being anxious is a completely natural reaction.
- What are we doing to keep ourselves and others safe and mentally and physically healthy during this current situation?
- How can we reach out in confinement when suffering from mental health issues?
- How can we support each other during this difficult time?

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights & Mental Health

Women and marginalised communities are at higher risk of mental illnesses due to the structural discrimination they face in achieving their SRHR. These inequalities persist and may be reinforced in emergencies.
- What are the harmful practices, different forms of discrimination surrounding SRHR and mental health?
- How to deal with depression before or after childbirth.
- How to handle post-traumatic stress disorder following sexual assault.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Confinement, physical distancing and self-isolation with a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse can be dangerous.
- How can we install policies to protect women and children from domestic violence during self-isolation or quarantine?
- How can we support people who suffer from domestic abuse?

Peace with Justice

During COVID-19 people might fear to see or are already experiencing authoritarian responses or a backlash of rights.
- How can we sustain peace work during this time?
- How can we create more solidarity?
- How do we ensure that health and safety of those affected with peace issues is not ignored?
- How do we protect human rights during this crisis?

Economic Empowerment

The working of women is shifting with more focus at home in times of crisis. (with school closed, aged relatives at risk, and their work, women are managing even more than usual) while facing loss of informal sector jobs.
- Can we share tips and find ways to support each other?
- How to handle economic insecurity - job loss/loss of income- being forced to go to work in sub-optimal circumstances.
- What are the linkages between COVID-19, gender and socio-economic inequalities?

Women's Rights and Feminism

Supporting marginalised women and working to end patriarchy is an ongoing process.
- What changes could more conversations on these issues bring about? What changes would be most beneficial to women in all of their diversity?
- How can we support marginalized women (women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women, sex workers, those with addiction, homeless women, refugees, the economically disadvantaged/poor) bearing the brunt of oppressive religious norms?

Since its founding in 1855, the YWCA has provided safe spaces to women and girls of all ages in the heart of local communities. This began with the first YWCA in London and other, which provided safe housing to young women coming to the city in search of employment during the Industrial Revolution and continues today in many forms. From emergency shelters for survivors of violence, to safe spaces for young women to discuss harmful traditional practices and cultural taboos, to support groups for women living with HIV, and inclusive and accessible spaces for women with disabilities, YWCAs are synonymous with safe space. For the past 160+ years, YWCAs have expanded safe spaces to reach millions of women, young women and girls in 100+ countries. Providing access to economic, social, political, and cultural opportunities to fulfill their potential and actively contribute to the development of their community, country and world, YWCAs are providing spaces where women, young women and girls become champions of their rights and their lives.