

## Resilience Programme for Young Men: An introduction to the activity catalogue

The information in this introduction is for facilitators organising psychosocial activities for and with young men. It includes notes on planning and implementing activities and provides guidance on dealing with difficult or intense emotions, as well as self-care for facilitators.

### THE ACTIVITY CATALOGUE

This catalogue is part of the **Resilience Programme for Young Men** which also includes a psychosocial handbook for managers and trainers. However this catalogue can be used separately to organise activities for young men in vulnerable and unstable situations. The psychosocial handbook is also available from the PS Centre at [www.pscentre.org](http://www.pscentre.org).

The catalogue has a wide variety of activities. They are grouped into three main categories:

- arts-based activities, called 'art'
- physical activities, called 'body', and
- life skills activities, called 'life skills.'

There is also a box named 'Safe Spaces' with illustrations of spaces for psychosocial activities (see more on safe spaces in the handbook).

#### The activities in the catalogue

The activities can be run individually or put together into workshops with multiple activities following each other, and include the following:

*Art:* Modern storytelling with workshops on using video, social media and blogging; 'The challenge' with flash mob, painting, photo marathon and street wall art activities.

*Body:* Traditional dance, urban gardening, creative football, and making kites.

*Life skills:* Life skills workshop part 1 including an introduction, setting life goals workshop, building self-esteem workshop, self-awareness, empathy, sympathy workshop. Life skills workshop part 2 including a making decisions workshop, peer pressure workshop and conflict management workshop. Coping with stress part 1 and part 2. Exploring the future workshop. First aid activities.

The **art activities ('art')** focus on using art and modern storytelling as ways of self-expression and communicating. They also promote group cooperation and collaboration. They guide participants in exploring how they can positively contribute to their communities.

The **physical activities ('body')** promote bodily and emotional health by engaging the participants in physical activities that have been designed to encourage group cooperation, collaboration and

interpersonal tolerance. The activities promote trust and a sense of togetherness and can also be used to encourage positive competition and learning to play by the rules.

The **life skills activities ('life skills')** help participants identify and acknowledge their strengths and positive attributes, and encourage them to explore their dreams for the future and how to achieve these. They also promote respect and positive communication.

Each set of notes for the activities has the same format. The notes include the name of the workshop, the aim, the resources needed for each element of the activity and the estimated running time. There are full facilitator notes and instructions detailing all the steps for the activity.

Activities vary in length from 45 minutes to several hours. They are designed to be fun, but at the same time they require serious effort and work. They all aim at enhancing the resilience and psychosocial wellbeing of young men by focusing on cooperation, stress relief, concentration and positive physical activity.

## **PLANNING PSYCHOSOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

It is important to keep the overall goals of the activities in mind, when planning and implementing psychosocial activities for young men. The ultimate goal will always be to enhance and strengthen the resilience and psychosocial wellbeing of the young men. This means supporting the young men to:

- resume normal, routine activities in the aftermath of or even during crisis situations
- experience less stress
- be physically and emotionally strong and healthy
- feel good about themselves and confident in their own abilities
- make good and safe choices
- engage in social activities
- trust others and feel comfortable about sharing feelings
- seek help from others when needed
- cope better with everyday challenges
- solve problems without violence
- avoid substance abuse.

The activities in this catalogue have been designed to help the facilitators to:

- implement meaningful activities
- build the skills and capacities of young men
- strengthen communication and non-violent communication techniques
- support young men to cope with psychosocial issues and challenges

- facilitate young men's initiative-taking and active participation
- encourage peer support
- raise awareness and understanding of psychosocial and protective needs
- explore needs and resources in the local community that impact one own wellbeing
- enhance the beliefs in young men's own ability to change oneself and/or their community
- explore ways to strengthen community mechanisms to enhance psychosocial wellbeing for young men
- strengthen social structures in the community.

### **How to implement activities**

Activities should be planned according to the specific context the young men live in and the difficulties they face. Once the needs and resources in the community have been identified, programme managers and facilitators should, together with the young men themselves, decide what the focus of the activities should be.

### **Facilitators**

Facilitators have the responsibility for planning and guiding the activities. It is important that they are well prepared for each activity and feel comfortable about what they are going to do. Typically peer supporters - young men who are from the same communities and have received training and support - facilitate the psychosocial activities for other young men.

#### **A good facilitator**

- prepares well for every activity
- trusts and believes in the abilities and capabilities of the participants
- listens to understand, not to evaluate or challenge what is being said
- manages group processes
- takes responsibility for good communication amongst the participants
- is sensitive to unexpressed feelings
- protects minority points of view
- keeps the discussion moving
- limits their own contributions to make more time for others' participation
- avoids evaluating or judging the ideas brought forward
- does not make decisions for the participants, but allows them to make their own decisions
- empathizes with the participants
- listens carefully without interrupting
- is aware of appropriate language, posture, gestures and facial expressions
- is prepared to take part in all activities if needed
- is flexible and responsive, adapting activities when needed
- enjoys facilitating activities with young men and has fun doing it.

## **Participants**

The most successful activities are specifically designed to suit the characteristics, capabilities and needs of the participants. Try to use natural groupings for activities, such as young men from the same area, those who are facing the same challenges and/or are within the same age group.

Make sure that non-discriminatory and all-inclusive methods are used to choose participants. This means that when a natural grouping of young men is invited to participate in activities, such as a group of young men living in a particular village or area, there should be no reason to exclude any particular young man in the chosen target group. This means, for example, if a particular group of men is invited, no one should be excluded because of a physical disability. If there are young men who need assistance, make sure this is available.

The number of participants should not be too small or too big. A good number for these activities is between five and 15. However, they can also be run with a smaller or larger group depending on the venue, resources available, number of facilitators and the activity itself. The activities in this catalogue are designed for young men between 15-30.

## **Involving the young men**

Make sure that the activities are relevant so that the participants want to be involved. Use the young men's own ideas and initiatives for new activities and themes in subsequent activities. This is a good way to motivate their participation and to make them feel that they are being taken seriously. Involve the participants in locating and preparing the venue too. This encourages the participants to feel a sense of ownership for the programme.

## **Informed consent**

It is essential to get permission from the young men themselves to participate in the activity. If the young men are under 18 years of age, it may be necessary to get consent from their parent or caregivers. Careful explanations of what the activities will involve and why they are being held should be given to both the participants and their parents or caregivers.

## **Dates and times**

Deciding when to run an activity depends on a number of factors:

- **Available time:** How busy are the young men and facilitators with other activities and commitments in their usual daily schedules? When do they have time for activity activities? Once a week? Twice a week?

- **Young men who are in school or who are working:** Is it possible to hold the activities during school-time/business hours or will it be an activity that has to be held after regular school/business hours?
- Get to know the young men you are working with so you know what interests them and what challenges they are facing.
- **Young men who are out of school or are not working:** Are the young men gathered in a common place at a regular time? How is it possible to facilitate this?
- **Project period commitment:** Is the activity supposed to be held within a certain time period that has been set by an external organization? Remember to plan the activity so that it does not interfere with school exams, and if it runs into school vacation time, make sure this is accounted for in the planning.

### Venue

It is important that the activities are carried out in a 'safe space' without interruptions. Identify a safe space either at the RCRC branch or in the community. For ideas on locating and setting up a new space, look at the 'safe space' box. If funds are available you can buy a ready made structure or choose to turn an existing space into a safe space fit for psychosocial activity for the young men involved in the project. You may need the supervision of skilled carpenters for this activity.

### Breaks and refreshments

When possible, provide drinking water, snacks and refreshments.

### Choosing activities

Deciding which activities to include depends on:

- **The young men's psychosocial needs:** The activities should be carefully chosen to address the issues that are challenging the young men.
- **The young men's resources and capabilities:** The activities chosen must be suitable for the specific ages and capabilities of the young men.
- **Cultural and social norms:** All activities that are held with the young men should be in their best interest. If there is a risk of negative repercussions as a result of any activity, then that activity should be left out or replaced with another more appropriate activity. The activities should be appropriate and acceptable in the daily cultural and social environment.

### Flexibility

Working with emotional and social issues can lead to unpredictable outcomes. Facilitators of psychosocial activities need to be attentive and responsive to the reactions of the participants and able to adapt the activities accordingly. This includes:

### *Flexibility during an activity*

If an activity takes longer than expected, or it leads to unexpected reactions from the participants, the facilitator should be flexible and adapt the rest of the activities that day. This ensures that the young men are neither rushed, nor left with difficult emotions that are not attended to. It is better to do one activity well than to do many activities poorly.

### *Flexibility in planning the subsequent activities*

Facilitators are often very ambitious about the number and range of activities that can be done. However, in a workshop series, it is important to be vigilant about any issues challenging the young men that have not been planned for. Facilitators have to be ready to adapt activities to meet the participants' needs. This does NOT mean that facilitators should not plan ahead. But they should be careful not to engage the participants in activities that are irrelevant, just because they spent a lot of time and effort planning those activities beforehand.

## **Materials**

The facilitator should make a complete list of all materials that will be needed in the activities. These materials should be put together beforehand to make sure they are available when needed.

## **Evaluations**

Make sure that time is set aside to evaluate the activities and receive feedback on what went well and what did not. This can be done at the end of all the activities, with a recap of what each activity was about and how it went. This gives important information that is needed for planning the next activity. Evaluation can either be done verbally in an informal discussion or written. Written evaluations are sometimes more useful as they can be done anonymously. This encourages honesty about what is not working well, which may otherwise not be said verbally for fear of hurting the facilitator's feelings.

## **ACTIVITY TECHNIQUES**

The activities in this catalogue aim to promote important aspects of psychosocial wellbeing, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-perception. They also aim to strengthen social interaction and peer support by encouraging good communication, group collaboration, mutual trust and understanding and tolerance of differences. The activities are presented using a variety of participatory learning techniques, such as:

**Demonstration:** This technique is used to explain as clearly as possible what the participants are expected to do in a given task or activity. It may be done verbally or physically (for example in showing how to do certain movements or actions).

**Brainstorm and buzz groups:** Participants are asked to respond to a concept, idea or problem, either in small groups or as a large group. Every response is acceptable. There are no right or

wrong responses in a brainstorm and the more responses the better. The responses are written up on a board or flipchart where everyone can see them. The participants are encouraged to keep giving ideas, without judging or commenting on each other's ideas. A brainstorm should not last too long, and time to reflect on the outcome should be given.

**Rounds:** This is a particularly useful technique to encourage everyone in a group to participate. The participants are usually asked to sit or stand in a circle, and as you go round the circle, each participant is invited to share his experiences, feelings or opinions, or do a certain action.

**Discussion:** This is a free flowing conversation that gives all the participants an opportunity to express themselves and listen to opinions and ideas of the group. The facilitator does not take the leadership role, but is an equal participant in the discussion. When a discussion is held as an activity, it can be a lively exchange of different and diverse ideas and opinions. It is a method of learning that stimulates the cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

**Role-play:** Group members act out a relevant life situation as if it were happening at that time. The participants may be given roles to play, or they may be able to choose a role to play, depending on the nature of the role-play activity. Sometimes the participants are asked to play themselves in a role-play. Role-plays often include some form of conflict that the participants have to work through, or present a situation where there is a need for peer support. Role-plays help participants explore their attitudes towards themselves and others. They provide a safe setting to practise dealing with difficult situations, and are therefore useful in learning life skills.

Role-plays should always be followed by a debriefing. This means that group members need to 'step out' of the roles they have been acting and spend some time reflecting on what they learned during the role-play. If any participant seems upset by a role-play, take some time to talk individually with that person to make sure they are feeling good by the time the activity is complete.

**Case study:** A case study can be made-up or real. It is a story or description of an incident or situation that has happened or may happen in the future. Case studies are very popular in activities, as they stimulate reflection and discussion. They are usually followed by questions or tasks that require the participants to read, understand and analyse different aspects of the situation being described.

**Feedback:** Giving and receiving feedback is an important part of social interaction and learning in an activity. The participants are often asked to give feedback on their own participation in activities and on how others performed, for example, in role-plays. Make sure that the participants and facilitators give each other positive and constructive feedback that does not put anyone down or hurt their feelings. Encourage participants not to judge another person's behaviour or try to

interpret why someone else is as he/she is, or does what he/she does. Instead ask for feedback on how their behaviour or performance affected the person who is giving the feedback. When receiving feedback, encourage the participants to try to learn from the feedback and to use it as a constructive and helpful tool.

## **DEALING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS**

The activities in this catalogue have been designed for young men whose psychosocial wellbeing might be threatened because they live in difficult circumstances. Such life experiences are likely to result in a mixture of intense and difficult emotions. The activities are designed to be sensitive to the experiences and expression of such emotions. However, sensitivity does not mean that these emotions are ignored or discouraged, and there is a high probability that emotions such as anger, grief, sadness, confusion, guilt, etc. will be experienced and expressed during the course of the activities. The facilitator needs to be prepared for such expressions of emotions, and able to adapt the activities to deal with this. Here are some guidelines in facilitating the activities in this context:

### **Give choices**

Be sure everyone in the group knows beforehand what will be discussed, whether this is about conflict or disaster, in relation to the HIV, unemployment, addictions and violence, etc., and that some people may choose to share personal stories. Let them decide for themselves if they want to speak during the activities. Explain that if anyone becomes very upset when talking about or hearing about people's experiences, they may ask permission to leave the group for a few minutes and be alone. However, stress that you would prefer that they stay together as a group as much as possible, as they can provide support to each other.

### **Respect each other's private information**

Let the participants know at the start that these activities are a safe space, where they are encouraged to share anything they want to. Take some time in the first activity to explain that the activities take place in a safe space where you respect different opinions and confidentiality (e.g. what is happening during the activities will not be shared outside the group).

### **Respond to personal stories**

Do not force anyone to share personal experiences. When participants choose to share, respect what they have to say, and let them know that you appreciate what they have told the group. Some facilitators worry that if participants talk about their experiences, the participants will feel angry or sad. This may happen, but sometimes it also helps them feel stronger. For some, it is a relief to share as they can get support from the group and perhaps realize that they are not alone or that the group appreciate they share. If a participant shares stories of a very sensitive nature, do not probe or ask for details in front of the big group. Instead, follow up with a private conversation with the participant at an appropriate time. Also, remember and respect that in some cultures it is inappropriate to encourage the display of painful emotions in public.



**Hearing others' stories**

Some participants will feel sad when they hear others' stories. Remember, it is normal to feel sad, or even cry, when you hear these stories. Reflect on those reactions in a way that makes the person feel good about showing emotions.

**Change the mood**

After talking about difficult experiences, it is a good idea to do an activity that helps change the mood of the group. There are suggestions for energizers and activities to get the participants moving and laughing. Taking a break or playing some music can also help with letting go of strong feelings.

**Support to parents and caregivers**

Experiencing a crisis is distressing for participants and for their parents or caregivers as well. Participants may look to adults for guidance on how to react and behave. It is important to acknowledge and understand that in these kinds of circumstances, parents and caregivers need support too.

**Take care of yourself**

Talking about difficult experiences with the participants can also bring up strong feelings in facilitators. You need to be aware of this and make sure to take care of yourself. If possible, try to work with at least one other facilitator so that you can take turns leading the group, and take a break if you need to. Ask your co-facilitator to help you plan activities that are safe for everyone. After an activity, talk about it with the other co-facilitators and with the programme manager, or with others you trust. Discuss any problems that come up, and any feelings that you need to share.