

# SAFETY RULES/NEEDS/EXPECTATIONS

Activity developed by In Touch



## OVERVIEW

The goal of this exercise is to create a good level of safety in the group.



## LEARNING CONTEXT

This activity can be done online, offline with social distancing, and offline with physical contact.

## DURATION

45 minutes



## PARTICIPANTS

Adaptable for any number of participants



## MATERIALS

Flipchart paper  
Markers  
Post-it/piece of paper and pen for everybody  
Red papers, scissors



## OBJECTIVES

- Create a good level of safety in the group
- Without making the atmosphere “heavy”, you can acknowledge needs and boundaries
- You can make clear that we are going to work with sensitive topics, experiment with boundaries and also explore spaces beyond(!) boundaries
- Name the needs and expectations of participants
- Ensure equality and protect vulnerable members from oppression



## PREPARATION

As a preparation, write “SAFETY RULES / NEEDS / EXPECTATIONS” on the top of a flipchart paper and stick it on the wall.

# SAFETY RULES/NEEDS/EXPECTATIONS



## INSTRUCTIONS STEP BY STEP



1. Invite participants to take a pen and paper and silently think about this question: “What do I need to feel safe in social situations?” and write down their answers. Ask the participants: “Imagine any kind of situation when you were not alone, but with someone. It can be a private one – with a friend, your partner or public – on a train, at work, family event, etc. Try to focus on body sensations, emotions, and write down all kind of needs, even the ‘silliest’ ones.”(Examples: “to feel safe I always need my phone around”, or “I need no violence around me”, or “I need to know the rules”, etc.) Invite participants to write down as many needs as come to mind, and to not think too much, just let the ideas come fast.
2. After three minutes, come back to plenary and invite participants to read their needs aloud, starting with the first one from their list. One by one, everybody in the group reads their first need. Write all the needs on the flipchart paper. Continue until all the needs are listed.
3. Invite participants to look at the flipchart paper and add more needs if necessary.
4. Ask them what they think what the aim of this exercise was. Explain that these rules would work in two ways: The list contains our individual needs, so during the workshop we are responsible for (1) our own safety, but also (2) for that of others.
5. The whole list is going to hang on the wall during the workshop reminding us of our common rules of safety.
6. Invite participants to cut out a red heart from the red papers. Tell them: “Keep the heart with you the whole day. Use it when you feel it is necessary. This can happen when we would talk or work with sensitive topics, or touch anything that is sensitive for you personally. Please use the heart to protect yourself. You can just feel it in your pocket when your body gives you a message, or you can show it to the others and stop participating in a particular exercise.”



# SAFETY RULES/NEEDS/EXPECTATIONS



## DISCUSSIONS AND DEBRIEFING



To debrief, you can explain how important is to respect our basic needs for safety (physical, emotional, regarding identity, basic human rights, etc.), literally in every social interaction. To keep or break these rules can be crucial in any kind of social situation. The aim of the exercise is to remind us how easily we tend to forget about our own safety and suppress body signs which tells us: “Watch out, you are crossing your own boundary!” The exercise helps sensitize us to the importance and complexity of the concept of safety, and to become more conscious how to protect ourselves, notice own boundaries and respect those of others.

In the debriefing, you may want to take the time to name all the possible “ghosts” in the training room; such as diversity (age, gender, nationality, social status, skin colour, etc.), power positions. You may want to mention how your own position as facilitator (identity, roles, responsibilities, power) is present in the room.

## TIPS AND HINTS



Use this exercise to create a good level of safety in the group. No need to make it “heavy” or too long, but it is important to acknowledge needs and boundaries. Here you can make clear that we are going to work with sensitive topics – we are going to experiment with boundaries and explore spaces beyond boundaries. Listen carefully to the needs of participants. Designate a safe place in the room where participants can sit alone if they don’t want to participate.

If participants are not eager to mention their safety needs – and the group becomes slow, silent and thus a bit “heavy”, you can add a couple of important things, mentioning them with a personal touch such as: I can say, “No, I don’t want to be filmed”, I am allowed to not share, I am allowed to say stupid things, I can express emotions, I can even cry, no violence, language barriers, etc.

There are other ways of using this exercise, depending on the atmosphere and the style / preferences of the facilitators. This activity can be renamed (if you feel that the reference to “safety” gives the impression that something dangerous could happen); instead of “Safety Rules”, it can be called “Needs / resources / ground rules agreement”, or “What do I need to feel respected / open / ready to learn...”, etc.

The questions of inequality, power and status differences may or may not come up directly. If you have a diverse group in which you expect that these dimensions will come up, suggest that the group invent some rules that would ensure equality. This can refer to equality of turns (members of lower status groups may be less inclined to speak up in group), but it can also concern expressions of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racism. Explore with your group how you can work together to ensure that learning is possible without putting members of different minorities into uncomfortable situations.

