

HOW TO BE A BETTER ALLY

Handbook for peer
consultants working with
youths and
victims/survivors of teen
dating violence



Erasmus+

love & respect

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What is this handbook about?

an introduction

This handbook is intended as a **basic information and practical tool pack for ambassadors of the Love and Respect project**. But it will be useful for anyone talking to teens experiencing difficulties, especially experiencing teen dating violence.

It introduces you to your role as ambassador and what you can do while you are in contact with teens experiencing teen dating violence. Through practical examples of what to say and how to react to specific situations on one hand, and what is best to avoid on the other hand, **it should help you to navigate teens towards professional help, support them and make them feel welcome and safe.**

The handbook also focuses on the topic of psychological hygiene and your own self-care, and shows some basic tips to help you debrief and cope with this sometimes difficult and demanding role - to talk about violence and to be there for victims of violence might be difficult and frustrating so to be able to help others you have to make sure that you are OK first.

From where we stand

what is your role and the goal of contact with teens?

It is very important to realize and keep in mind what your position is - what the goal of the project is and what your limits are in contact with teens.

- **You are neither a non-stop crisis line provider, nor are you a professional consultant or psychotherapist. Therefore you CANNOT analyze the situation deeply, maintain long-term contact, save the person completely or help them with their problems.**
- **HOWEVER you can SUPPORT teens by: letting them know that they are not alone in their situation, listening to them, letting them know that the way they feel is OK and helping them to identify what's going on and who should they contact to receive professional help.**

The advantage of facebook groups and instagram is that they are very accessible - they are a natural way of communication present in the everyday life of teens. Also they are geographically and time accessible. So you might be even the first one, who is contacted by teens in trouble, you might be the first who hears about their problems - this contact is important and it's crucial to provide them with support and information about where they should seek professional help.

The main goals of contact are to:

- ❖ validate emotions
 - ❖ make teens feel welcome, understood, safe
 - ❖ support good choices - contact professional help, practice safe self-care
 - ❖ reduce feelings of guilt
 - ❖ provide them with professional help contacts
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- **When you are providing teens with professional help contacts, make sure that you provide them with contacts to organizations which you know, which are providing professional services and which are relevant to their situation. You should have a list of these organizations already prepared.**

Importance of a helping hand

what is crisis and crisis intervention?

It is good to know, what crisis is and how crisis intervention works, because some of the tools explained in this handbook have their roots in crisis intervention theory.

→ **But again - you are not a crisis intervention provider, you are not a therapist, you are not a professional and the particular contact in the project does not provide you with space to do crisis intervention.**

A crisis is a psychological reaction to an extremely difficult life situation, with which a person is not able to cope on their own or with help from their loved ones. In crisis, all standard coping mechanisms don't work and don't help. A crisis is very subjective - what is difficult or endangering is perceived very differently. Crisis might be a potential to change and to learn new positive coping mechanisms. If the crisis is recognized and worked through, it might promote personal growth. On the other hand, if it is not recognized, the crisis might be dangerous.

Crisis intervention is a method of work with a client in a situation they experience as stressful or threatening. It focuses mainly on the current situation, the current emotions and feelings; it does not usually focus on the past or future. The goal of crisis intervention is:

- ❖ structure what the person is now experiencing
- ❖ stop endangering or risky behavior
- ❖ provide emotional support, support expressing emotions
- ❖ support feeling of safety
- ❖ support natural coping strategies
- ❖ break out of the tunnel vision situations

Crisis intervention is NOT

- ❖ persuading or providing a person with the “right” advice and quick solutions
- ❖ shutting down emotions
- ❖ belittling the symptoms of crisis (eating problems, sleeping problems...)
- ❖ taking responsibility for the situation and for the person in crisis

We hear you

what to say to teens with experiences of violence

Our goal is to establish contact with teens, provide them with support, make them feel welcomed and understood and in some situation to provide them with professional help contacts.

Try to be authentic - you can use the same words - if they say “mum”, “mother”, “her”, it all has different meanings. You can use same emoticons.

Answer or react exactly to what was written, don't assume too much, you have only a little information.

Work with what's here and now - don't ask how it all started, focus on what's now.

You as the Ambassador might be important in letting the person know that:

- ❖ they are not alone in this
- ❖ it is possible to receive help and they deserve it
- ❖ they deserve to feel better
- ❖ it is completely OK to feel whatever they feel
- ❖ what happened isn't their fault
- ❖ what are the ways of helping - provide them with contacts to helpful organizations

Don't be afraid to name the situation as it is - if you think they are describing domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, manipulation, etc. - name it. Sometimes victims of violence are not aware that the situation they are experiencing has its name or they don't realize that the behavior of their partner is abusive. By naming the situation you might help them realize it and realize the seriousness of it.

Practical examples:

“I don't know what to do” - uncertainty, shame, they don't know the practical information connected to their situation

- ❖ what you can say: “I can provide you with contacts to helpful organization which will help you find the solution” - show them support to open up, make them sure they can talk about anything, it's safe here

“I am very (sad, frustrated, afraid, ashamed ...)” - writing about feelings, emotions

- ❖ what you can say: “You write that you are very sad, that's understandable after all you have gone through. Many people would feel the same after that.” - let them know that what they feel is OK, they have the right to feel that, its normal and many other people do feel the same in such situations, they are not weirdoes that they are feeling this

“I am afraid” - fear

- ❖ what you can say: “It's OK to feel afraid and you shouldn't feel ashamed. if your life or your health is in danger call the police or crisis help line”

“What can I do when happened to me?” - clear request for information

- ❖ what you can say: “It's really great you want to find a solution / help / support. There are organizations which can provide you with information or support. You deserve help and you deserve to feel better”- support them and say it's great they ask about this, provide them with information/contacts

“I don't understand why this had to happened to me ... I don't understand what mistake have I made” - guilt, very often the victims feel that they should have done more, they should have fought more, protected themselves more, and nothing would have happened - your role here is to clearly let them know it wasn't their fault and so to remove this guilt from their shoulders

- ❖ what you can say: “I want to let you know, that rape is not your fault at all. Always the one responsible is the perpetrator”
- ❖ “You were a kid and he was an adult, so he was the responsible one. Adults are always responsible for children and it's their role to protect them. it is not your fault”

“I don't deserve this (help, your attention)” ... “sorry for complaining” ... “I shouldn't complain here” - victims or survivors very often have low self-confidence, your role here is to let them know that they deserve help and they deserve a life without violence

- ❖ what you can say: “You deserve help, no one deserves to be abused and treated with disrespect” ... “You deserve a life without violence” ... “Your boyfriend has no right to treat you like this, to do”

Suicide, suicidal thoughts, self-harm

- ❖ if there is someone talking about suicide or self-harm **it's very serious - do not analyze the situation, just let them know you understand them and provide them with contacts to a crisis help line**. Do not try to help them by talking about it - you are not a professional and this is a very difficult topic to cope with
- ❖ **although you might not agree with suicidal thoughts - this is not a place to patronize**
- ❖ you can write: "It's understandable that you are thinking about suicide, after everything you experienced"... "Thank you for your honesty and sharing this with us. Suicidal thoughts might appear when you are dealing with such difficult issues. Contact crisis-help 111 222, its anonymous and you can talk about your thoughts and feelings with professionals"

It will be OK soon

what not to say and what to say instead

You made it all up. It is all just in your head. You're just an attention seeker. Stop being so dramatic - by this you are saying you don't believe them

- ❖ what you can say instead: "thank you for your honesty" ... "it must have been difficult to write all this" ... "thank you for your trust" ... "it seems that it is really hard for you right now"

Stop complaining all the time. You need to stop feeling sorry for yourself - this is the safe space to complain and to feel sorry, maybe it's the very first time they have talked about it, maybe other people told them not to complain and now they feel misunderstood

- ❖ what to say instead: "you deserve help" ... "you deserve to feel better" ... "you deserve to be safe"...."there are ways to solve your situation, you can contact this NGO, they provide professional help and they will help you to find the solution"

No one said the life was fair. Things could be so much worse. At least you have, .. At least you are alive.... - this means that we are not listening to them and makes them feel they don't deserve help, that their pain or their emotions aren't OK

- ❖ what to say instead: "it's normal to feel this" ... "many people in this situation would feel the same" ... "it's completely understandable that you feel, after all you went through"

You don't have to be scared - to be afraid is OK, we all feel scared sometimes. Even if the reason for fear doesn't need to be logical for us, it's real for them. Plus they can be in real danger

- ❖ what to say instead: "it's Ok that you feel scared now, you don't have to feel ashamed about that, if your life or your health is in danger the call police or a crisis helpline"

It will be OK soon, you will feel better soon - how can we know? This might be a false promise, we don't know how the situation will develop and maybe it just won't be OK

- ❖ what to say instead: "you deserve help" ... "you deserve to feel better"

You have to tell me what happened - forcing a person to talk about a traumatic experience is secondary victimization. Usually you don't need to know exactly what happened and if yes, you can ask differently

- ❖ what to say instead: "is it OK for you to tell me what are you dealing with so I know what NGO contact I should send you? If you don't want to, it's completely OK, it's just up to you, and I can also send you this general list of helping organizations..."

Family/health/anything else is the most precious thing we have - this is a patronizing, plus we don't know how it is for the person, maybe they feel something else is more precious, maybe they are currently dealing with something else concerning family or health and we might make them feel bad about it

- ❖ what to say instead: "it is good that you have this close relationship with your mum and so you can tell her everything"
- ❖ if they are dealing with suicidal thoughts or self-harm - see the paragraph above mentioning these

You should just try harder, you need to get out more, just think positively, you're not pushing yourself enough - this means we don't believe they are doing their best. Your goal is to support them and make them feel welcome, not to criticize them

- ❖ what to say instead: "you did all you could in that situation" ... "I see you are trying everything to solve the situation" ... "I really appreciate that you are looking for help, there are organizations which can help you and you deserve it"

Why haven't you said it sooner, why did you go there alone? It's all your fault - this is blaming, victim blaming. It is very difficult to talk about topics like this, so we have to always be supportive when people talk about it

- ❖ what to say instead: "thank you for your honesty, it must have been difficult to write this all" ... "you are very brave"

We are not talking about it here - this makes them feel unwelcome, misunderstood

- ❖ what to say instead: "it's a serious problem and thank you for sharing it, but you should consult with professionals - let me give you some relevant contacts..."

Don't feed the troll

how to react to trolls and haters

Set clear rules and follow them. The rules are there for you as well - follow them even if someone makes you feel angry.

Try to discern between those who don't agree with you but some discussion is still possible with them and those who will do anything to make you angry - those are trolls.

How to identify a troll: usually they are anonymous (their profile picture is either an avatar or fake profile, they have few friends and none personal info or content), their goal is to make you angry (they are not polite, they attack you personally, they don't add anything meaningful to the conversation, they would write anything provocative enough just to get some attention and a reaction from you).

Don't feed trolls. If you feel that someone is a troll, don't react to them and consult your mentor about this. If you have to respond - don't get involved in the argument; limit it to pointing out that the posting may be considered as troll, for the benefit of other list members.

Try to stay positive.

Practice self-care. Read the last chapter in this handbook.

Respect choices

ethics and principles

We are here to help. So every time you should keep in mind the question - is this helping this particular person? The main premise is the goal of the project - we are here to spread awareness, promote healthy relationships and discussion about them and prevent relationship violence amongst teens. And of course - there is no place for hate and xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and other discrimination based on gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, political opinion, religion, etc.

Respect choices. All of us have some opinions, values and beliefs, and we might not always agree with others. You may not agree with all decisions teens make, but you are here to support them, not judge them. As ambassador, your role is to support discussion and support teens experiencing difficulties in relationship. It is OK to give your own opinion, but in a respecting and supportive way.

Confidentiality. Discussion about anything related to relationships is likely to be very intimate. Keep all that private. Do not contact people involved in the discussion privately. Set as many rules as possible to protect the privacy of teens involved in discussion. It might even promote further discussion, because teens may feel ashamed or awkward to talk about some topics openly.

You first

self-care and psychological hygiene

Being there for others might be very demanding. You as Ambassador also deserve self-care and rest. When dealing with especially difficult topics, it is also necessary to let it all go and debrief with someone else.

There are some tips what you can follow to ensure you have all your energy needed (emotional, psychological and also physical):

Set the boundaries and the rules. Make sure you have a clear plan of your activities with your mentor, and you know what your responsibility is and what is already up to someone else

Stick to your schedule. This also includes the time - is it your due day to reply to this message? If not, don't reply

Don't forget your role. You are a peer consultant, you are neither a therapist, nor a social worker, you cannot save the person completely, your role is to support them and make them feel welcome, understood and safe in the group/instagram.

If dealing with a difficult topic. It's OK to ask for help, contact your mentor. Also take your time to debrief - talk about it with your mentor, do some self-care practice - do what helps you to relax (music, walk, exercise, food, meditation,...) if you are in doubt about what to answer, if you don't feel safe, if the conversation/question is connected to your direct experience - contact your mentor and talk about it

YOU FIRST. You have to feel safe and feel OK to be able to help/support someone else