

Reflection and Sharing Activity

In many communities, women rarely have the opportunity to talk about their experiences and feelings. A reflection and sharing activity can provide a private and safe place for women to think and talk with other women about difficult experiences they have had. Together, women can discuss how their experiences are similar or different, and also think

of possible solutions. An exercise like this can help to strengthen women's trust with each other.

"A journey through time" is an example of a reflection and sharing activity to help women explore their personal experiences around sexuality.

A journey through time

Before you begin, explain to the group that strong feelings may come out during the exercise. Women may remember painful personal experiences that are hard to talk about. Ask the women to make suggestions about how they might like to be supported, and how they could offer support to others in the group.



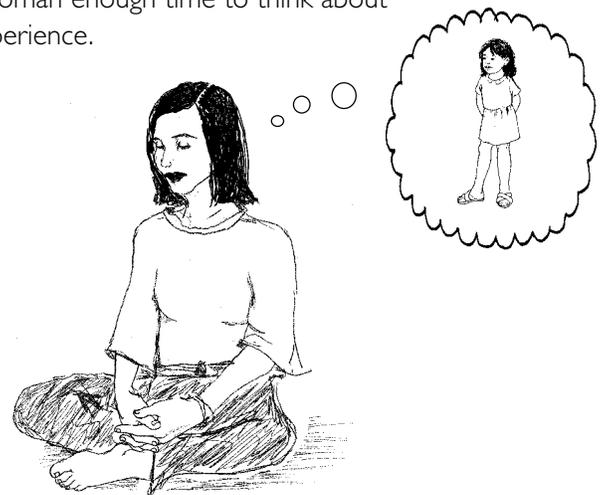
To make the setting feel more intimate and less like a meeting, ask the women to form a circle. Try to help everyone relax. For example, you can make the room darker, play soft music, or ask the group to lie down.

Tell the group they are going to take a journey back in time. Ask the women to close their eyes, breathe deeply,

and imagine themselves as little girls. Speak calmly and slowly, and ask questions such as the examples below. The women do not answer out loud — this is a silent exercise. Wait a minute or 2 after each question to give each woman enough time to think about her experience.

Questions for reflection:

- How and when did you first realize that being a girl was different from being a boy? How did you feel when you realized this?
- How did you feel the first time you had your monthly bleeding? What had you been told about it and by whom?
- What was your first sexual experience like? What had you expected?
- What feelings do you have about your sexual life today?



Reflection and Sharing activity continued...

Ask the women to open their eyes and invite them to share some of their thoughts. (If someone does not want to share, do not force her. She may be ready to speak at the next meeting.)



Sometimes if the facilitator shares first, it helps to put the women at ease.

Sharing can be done either with the whole group, or in pairs, or in smaller groups. Each woman should have enough time to talk while the other women listen quietly.



Women closer in age may prefer to be in the same group.

Once everyone has shared, ask the women to form a circle again. Talk about the feelings the group may be experiencing. Remind the women that although they may each be feeling alone, the group can be a source of support. Assure the women that their sharing is important and will help each other. If it seems appropriate, you can symbolize this support by holding hands, or by having a silent or spoken ritual. Make sure you spend as much time as the group needs.

Ideas for leading reflection and sharing activities

Here is some advice from the trainers who contributed to this issue:

Because you do not know how long a sharing and reflection exercise might take, it is better not to have a strict time limit. Women may worry that they are taking too much time. Assure them that they can take the time they need.



It is important that the facilitator shows that she is comfortable with the experiences women share and does not judge anyone.



You may want to have a personal reflection in the middle or at the end of a workshop, when the participants feel more comfortable with each other. Or you can start the workshop with a personal reflection as a way to warm up for the other activities.



There are many possible outcomes to this exercise that are hard to predict. Try not to create any expectations among the group before the activity.



To help set the mood for a personal reflection, ask the women to close their eyes. Describe an image or situation they can imagine. For example, to help women think about their childhood, begin by saying something like "You are young, playing games outside with your sisters, brothers or friends. The sun is shining."



If women do not feel comfortable with the group, they may not feel ready to share their emotions.

