

Guidance Note 3: How can we amplify self and collective care?

Series on Preventing Violence against Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This Guidance Note focuses on how organizations can prepare to best support staff, our communities, and women at increased risk of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Challenges for Self and Collective Wellbeing


The COVID-19 crisis is a destabilizing time, deepening social inequalities and increasing violence against women (VAW). This is also a moment of significant unpredictability and many are experiencing fear, anxiety, and anger as a normal response to these rapid changes. Certain groups are more vulnerable to pandemic-related hardships and consequences, including women, LGBTIQ people, people living with chronic illnesses and other disabilities, people reliant on daily wages, among others. Further, within the COVID-19 response, women providing essential services—from health care provision to cleaning to vendors in the market—are particularly impacted and at risk of violence. These vulnerabilities compromise our collective well-being, as individuals, organizations, and movements to prevent VAW. We recognize—and insist—on the importance of caring for ourselves and each other during COVID-19 as a political act that is integral to our social justice activism, resisting the patriarchal norms and other systemic oppressions that value certain people over others.

Considerations & Creative Problem-solving

Prioritizing self and collective care is always essential, creating the foundation for positive mental health and resilience in our VAW prevention work. Now more than ever, amplifying our focus on self and collective care can serve as a balm, tending to wounds and giving us the emotional and physical stamina needed to respond effectively to the COVID-19 crisis. Below we share some practical suggestions. For those wishing to go deeper there are many feminist resources available, for example: the GBV Prevention Network and Just Associate's Zine: [Self and Collective Care](#), Black Lives Matter's [Healing in Action](#) Toolkit, CAPACITAR's [Emergency Response Tool Kit](#), CREA's [Self-Care and Self-Defense Manual for Feminist Activists](#), FRIDA's [Self Care Plan](#), among others.

(1) Share self-care suggestions. Self-care does not need to involve resources or require large amounts of time. Even five minutes of an intentional activity can create a meaningful shift and enhance a sense of calm and resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. Develop a list of simple self-care suggestions that resonate in your context, and share with staff, partners, activists, community leaders, and other women and men in communities where you work. Consider ideas that touch on different aspects of self-care:

- Meeting our basic needs for physical safety, nutrition, water, sleep.
- Looking after our whole body, mind and spirit. Consider dancing, exercising, prayer, meditation, cooking, cultural or religious rituals and practices, intimacy, etc.
- Filtering out media and information sources that sensationalize the pandemic, and/or provide misleading information. Take breaks from the news.
- Prioritizing time to “just be” and do things that give us happiness, joy and pleasure.
- Recognizing that it's normal to feel stressed, worried, fearful etc. during these tumultuous times. Try not to resist the feelings; yet set limits and seek support from family or friends if overwhelmed. For some, positive affirmations can be especially helpful.
- Connecting and reaching out to others (virtually, by phone, or in-person when safe) and practicing small acts of kindness.

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- Accepting that there is no one size fits all when it comes to caring for ourselves. Explore, be open and deepen any practices that resonate. We may not have existing self-care practices, so learning what feels soothing, restorative and pleasurable may require some experimentation and patience.

(2) Integrate self-care within programs and practice. Embedding self-care within organizational processes and program activities sends a powerful message that these activities are not simply nice to have but instead are critical for social justice and one of the ways we live our values as feminist organizations. Organizational leadership can set the tone by prioritizing time and resources to support self-care, for example:

- Implementing flexible work hours so staff have time to attend to personal needs—and setting limits on extended workdays, particularly as staff may be working remotely for the first time.
- Discussing and accepting lower productivity during this time.
- Offering virtual dance, exercise or other movement sessions that align with staff interests—ideally during work hours or at a convenient time.
- Facilitating personal check-ins (group and individual) to discuss how staff are navigating COVID-19 realities and offering support and encouragement.
- Starting calls or online meetings with a few moments of breathing together or any other practice that feels grounding and calming.
- Sharing affirming emails, voice notes, social media messages etc. that celebrate staff for their efforts beyond the technical work.

Beyond engagement with staff, look to infuse self-care into your program activities. Many of the suggestions above can be included in your activities with activists, leaders, students, community members and program partners. In addition, consider facilitating discussions about the value of self-care itself. Reflect on how unequal gender norms frequently dictate that women should bear the primary responsibility of caring for others and that women who prioritize their own needs—bodies, minds and hearts—are selfish or inappropriate. Openly discuss the consequences of this perspective—and the benefits of creating more expansive and equitable expectations around women’s caregiving roles.

(3) Take positive actions for stronger collective care. The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing our shared humanity and fundamental connectedness in important ways. During this time, new opportunities are emerging to demonstrate the power of mutual care and support. Unlike the provision of organized programs and services, collective care efforts frequently emerge organically, where communities (virtual or physical) take responsibility to care and show kindness for one another. For example, during COVID-19 groups can come together (virtually, within faith communities, or other social networks) to ask about specific needs among members, identify volunteers who can help address these concerns, and/or pool resources (based on members’ diverse skills, expertise, and supplies) to redistribute based on need. Some networks may find creative ways to share messages of reassurance and hope—or to celebrate compassionate efforts unfolding in the community. Respecting health guidelines around social distancing, self-quarantine and other COVID-19 prevention measures is also central to collective care at this time.



The COVID-19 pandemic is a moment of global crisis, posing significant health risks, increasing VAW, and exacerbating gender and other injustices. At the same time, this moment is revealing our deep interconnectedness and opening space to actively care for ourselves and each other. Self and collective care is an important aspect of “walking the talk” of feminist leadership and allyship. Together we can demonstrate a compassionate response to the crisis, strengthening our solidarity and movements.

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