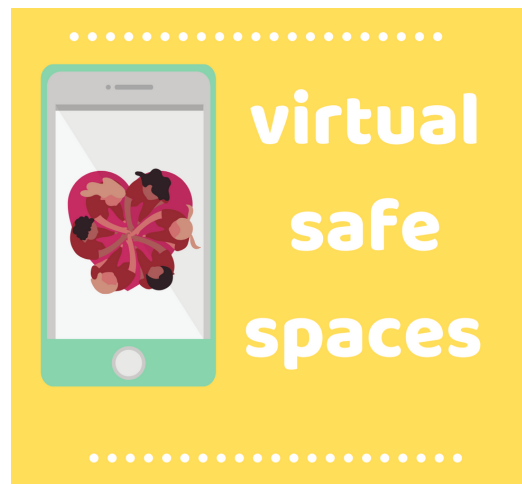


WORLD YWCA DIGITAL SAFE SPACES

Today, COVID-19 pandemic has forced everyone to take drastic measures in the ways we live and operate. “Physical distancing” has become prime in. to ensure safety of all and thereby to flatten the curve of infection rates.

The YWCA movement is always committed to standing up for women and young women supporting communities. YWCA leaders are problem solvers, caretakers, leaders in communities, both formally and informally. Through this practice of resilience, YWCA leaders showcase commitment, kindness and gratitude in all their work. Today YWCA leaders are once again redefining the way YWCA will operate for some time, ensuring communities worst affected are being provided with the means to adapt and resources in times of stress. And as they do this work, they would need to take good care of their own selves.

Women globally are more isolated with the quarantine and distancing protocols. Many of them are unable to reach out for support if they face domestic violence, if they are marginalized, pregnant, or facing health (e.g. cancer, STIs, HIV) and mental health issues. More conversations regarding women’s issues will begin the process to break down the barriers and stigma that women in all their diversity are facing right now on a daily basis.



Since its founding in 1855, the YWCA has provided safe spaces to women and girls of all ages in the heart of local communities. This began with the first YWCA in London, which provided safe housing to young women coming to the city in search of employment during the Industrial Revolution and continues today in many forms.

From emergency shelters for survivors of violence, to safe spaces for young women to discuss harmful traditional practices and cultural taboos, to support groups for women living with HIV, and inclusive and accessible spaces for women with disabilities, YWCAs are synonymous with safe space.

For the past 150 years, YWCAs have expanded safe spaces to reach over 25 million women, young women and girls in 120 countries. Providing access to economic, social, political, and cultural opportunities to fulfill their potential and actively contribute to the development of their community, country and world, YWCAs are providing spaces where women, young women and girls become champions of their rights and their lives.



8 DEFINING ELEMENTS OF A YWCA SAFE SPACE:

- 1. ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE LOCATION;**
- 2. LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION;**
- 3. ACCURATE AND RELIABLE**
- 4. INFORMATION; BUILDING TRUST;**
- 5. HOLISTIC APPROACHES;**
- 6. INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION;**
- 7. DIGNITY AND RESPECT;**
- 8. PARTNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Young women often have low self-confidence, and little awareness of their rights. They lack safe spaces to validate their experiences with peers, and have few platforms to share power with adults.

Safe spaces, peer networks, intergenerational leadership, the widespread promotion of young women's rights, and support of local communities are key drivers for young women's leadership.

Safe spaces are places created to provide an environment online and/or offline that encourages all people present to share experiences, opinions, and views without fear or threat of political, economic or personal harm. They are characterized by a culture of respect, equality and accountability, ensuring that everyone can actively participate and meaningfully contribute to the best of their ability. They are designed to facilitate trust, confidentiality, dignity and respect.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR DIGITAL SAFE SPACE

- Choose a platform
- Is it accessible? Have you thought of internet bandwidth, language, downloads?
- Who do you invite into your safe space?
- How to take into account cyberbullying?

HOW TO CONDUCT YOUR DIGITAL SAFE SPACE

- Test your platform in advance (and make sure everything works properly)
- Prepare your questions. To have an impact, it is good to prepare a topic or questions and refrain from keeping safe space discussions random. Make sure you do this preparation work before going digital.
- Invite participants and let them know who else will be joining. People are more comfortable if they know who they are speaking with.
- Set up guidelines and basic rules for conversation and respect. Agree on those guidelines and rules with safe space participants to ensure that respect prevails at all times. Making digital spaces safe also helps ensure anonymity if required.
- Some examples of basic norms: all participants are valued and respected. The conversation is confidential: what happens in the group stays in the group.
- Discuss speaking time for each person (encourage introverts and make sure everyone gets to speak)
- Prepare your moderation



IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION TOPICS & QUESTIONS

Mental health

This is a hard time for anyone with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, but also for everyone else, and being anxious is a completely natural reaction to this uncertainty.

- What are we doing to keep ourselves and others safe and mentally and physically healthy during this current situation?
- How can we reach out in confinement when suffering from mental health issues?
- How can you support each other during this difficult time?

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights & Mental Health

Women and marginalised communities are at higher risk of mental illnesses due to the structural discrimination they face in achieving their SRHR. These inequalities persist and may be reinforced in emergencies.

Example include:

- Harmful practices, different forms of discrimination and mental health
- Depression before or after childbirth
- Post-traumatic stress disorder following sexual assault

Sexual and gender-based violence

Confinement, physical distancing and self-isolation with a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse can be dangerous. While going outside is not recommended, fleeing a dangerous situation is not forbidden.

- How can we install policies to protect women and children from domestic violence during self-isolation or quarantine?
- How can we support people who suffer from domestic abuse? For example, how about we open our homes to them?

Economic empowerment

- Women caretaking: working more at home in times of crisis. (with school closed, aged relatives at risk, and their work, women are managing even more than usual)
- Can we share tips and find ways to support each other?
- Economic insecurity - job loss/loss of income- being forced to go to work in sub-optimal circumstances
- COVID, gender and socio-economic inequalities - addressing the trifecta

Women's rights and feminism

- What are some basic issues women across the world face?
- What changes could more conversation of these issues bring about? What changes would be most beneficial to women in all of their diversity?
- How can we support marginalized women? (women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women, sex workers, drug addicts, homeless women, refugees, the economically disadvantaged/poor, those bearing the brunt of patriarchal or oppressive religious norms, etc.)

Peace with justice

- Human rights and COVID - authoritarian and backlash to human rights people might fear to see or are already experiencing.
- How can we sustain peace work during this time?
- How can we create more solidarity?

