Ending Violence
ASSOCIATION OF BC



HOPE

The Healing, Openness, Peers, Empowerment Group Facilitation Guide

for Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs

November 2026

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Introduction

Land Acknowledgment

EVA BC acknowledges that the work of our organization takes place on the ancestral, unceded and traditional territories of many Indigenous Peoples across the province. Our office is located on the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

We also recognize that current and historic colonial structures further the harm that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people face when experiencing gender-based violence and accessing services, safety and justice. We recognize that simply acknowledging this is not enough and we are committed to taking concrete actions, informed by Indigenous leaders and Knowledge Keepers.

Throughout this guide, we strive to honour the ways that Indigenous Peoples have resisted this oppression and cared for the land and others outside of colonial structures.

Acknowledgments

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EVA BC would like to acknowledge Chimo Community Services for sharing their STVC group counselling material, which informed the development of this guide. EVA BC would also like to thank members of the STVCEP Advisory Committee of STV counsellors across BC for their feedback, input and contributions to this guide.

Advisory Committee member organizations:

- Ann Davis Transition Society
- Archway Society for Domestic Peace
- Atira Women's Resource Society
- Cythera Anti-Violence Society
- Nicola Family Therapy
- North Island Crisis and Counselling Centre Society
- Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre
- South Okanagan Women in Need Society

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To access the resources used, visit endingviolence.org/hopereferences

Group Theory

Stopping the Violence Counselling (STVC) groups benefit both participants and counsellors. Participants gain an opportunity to connect with other survivors of gender-based violence to overcome isolation and learn from one another. Counsellors can provide psychoeducation to participants, manage waitlists for individual sessions and diversify their caseloads — which helps to counter experiences of burnout.

Research on counselling in group settings has found that

- Outcomes for group participants are equivalent to outcomes for those in individual counselling (Rosendahl et al., 2021).
- Group counselling is effective at reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety (Schwartze et al., 2019).
- Group cohesion and support from other participants increases effectiveness of group counselling (Rosendahl et al., 2021; Yusop et al., 2020).
- Trust in the group counselling process is essential for the formation of group cohesion (Yusop et al., 2020).
- Effective group facilitators are genuine, caring, open, self-aware, and supportive (Yusop et al., 2020).

Although this guide outlines a group that is based on the deliverables of the STVC program, it can be adapted for other counselling programs (e.g., Sexual Assault Services Counselling).

This guide outlines just one possible way to facilitate an STVC group. Facilitators are encouraged to use their own unique skill sets and abilities to adapt the content and to modify it as needed to best serve participants accessing their services.

Service Guidelines

STVC programs, funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, provide “individual and/or group counselling for Women who have experienced sexual assault, violence/abuse in relationships, or childhood abuse” (Stopping the Violence Counselling Schedule A, p. 1).

Service guidelines for the STVC program suggest the following:

- Facilitate survivors’ understanding of the emotional and psychological impact of the trauma resulting from experiences of abuse or violence.
- Focus on specific behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and physical consequences of abuse or violence.
- Explore past and present coping strategies, foster development and strengthen coping skills.
- Address issues such as depression, self-esteem and other issues that may hinder recovery or promote powerlessness.
- Facilitate understanding of how power imbalances influence relationships with self and others.

These service guidelines have informed the content of this guide.

Basics of Group Facilitation

Consent

Prior to the first session, facilitators should meet with each potential participant individually to discuss and obtain informed consent.

During sessions, facilitators should inform participants that they can choose if they want to participate in group activities and obtain verbal consent from participants for each activity.

Confidentiality

During the first session, facilitators should explain confidentiality and its limits, including

- If a participant discloses serious risk of harm to themselves or others
- If a participant discloses that a child has been abused or is in need of protection
- If the facilitator receives a court order or subpoena for their records

As well, facilitators should explain that participants are expected to uphold the privacy and confidentiality of other participants. Facilitators can explain that although participants are permitted to share general information about the group with their significant others, they cannot share information about other participants.

Group Design

Facilitators

It is recommended that STVC groups have two facilitators: one lead facilitator and one co-facilitator. The lead facilitator will be responsible for delivering most of the content during sessions. The co-facilitator may be another counsellor from the same organization, a professional from a similar or complementary program in the community or a practicum student.

The co-facilitator can support the lead facilitator if one participant requires individual attention or in the event of a challenging scenario. A challenging scenario is an event that has the potential to disrupt group safety and/or cohesion. Some examples include a participant speaking more or less often than other members, a participant becoming activated during the session and conflict between participants. Having two facilitators also means that if one facilitator is unable to attend, the session can still move forward, which is less disruptive to participants.



It is beneficial for the facilitators to meet before the first session to build rapport, review the group content and discuss the division of responsibilities.

Participants

Participant recruitment may take some time, so allow for up to six months to recruit participants for the first group.



An optimal group size is 6 to 12 participants, but there is likely to be some attrition over the course of the sessions.

Groups with fewer than four participants may have difficulty maintaining a group dynamic — that is, the group may start to splinter into one-on-one sessions between the facilitator and individual participants instead of participants forming a group identity. If this occurs, consider putting group sessions on hiatus and offering individual sessions to the remaining participants until there are enough participants to resume.

Consider recruiting participants of different ages, cultures, religions, gender identities, sexual orientations, socio-economic groups, and parental status. Diversity allows participants to see that gender-based violence and abuse can impact anyone, and they can gain a broader perspective informed by various life experiences, opinions and beliefs. Alternatively, there may be a need in your community to offer groups that are language- or culture-specific, and so your participants may have more similar identities and experiences.

Structure

This guide outlines psychoeducational group sessions that are designed to be delivered over 10 to 12 weeks. Long breaks between sessions due to holidays or vacations should be avoided, if possible.



Each session is recommended to last 1.5 to 2.5 hours.

The facilitator might consider keeping the group open for the first two or three sessions to allow additional participants to join. Sometimes a participant will ask if their friend can join after the first couple of sessions. After the second or third session, it is recommended to close the group to new participants to help build safety and cohesion.

Materials

Materials used for **in-person group** activities include

- Name tag stickers (for the first session)
- Flip chart and paper
- Permanent markers
- Tissues
- Folders for handouts
- Blank greeting cards
- Snack and beverages
- Pens and pencils*
- Arts and crafts materials (e.g., markers, pencil crayons, construction paper, old magazines, glue, tape, scissors)*



***For virtual groups,** participants can either gather these materials themselves, or you can give them a box of materials during their assessment meeting, if possible. Encourage participants to create a care box that contains tissues, a notebook, a grounding object, snacks, and tea.

Session Format

Each session follows the same format, but time spent on each section depends on the total session time.

Check-in (30 to 60 minutes)

- Each session starts with a check-in to allow participants to settle into the group and share some of their story.
- A check-in might be as simple as asking participants how they are feeling or asking about their day/week.
- A check-in might also include an icebreaker question.
    - *What is your favourite movie?*
    - *Is anything distracting you that you need to contain to be present today?*
    - *Share a metaphor that describes how you are feeling.*
    - *What is a unique food combination that you enjoy?*
    - *What is bringing you energy/joy today?*
    - *Share a highlight/win from the past week.*
- The length of time needed for check-in will depend on how talkative participants are and can be better determined after the first few sessions.

Break (15 minutes)

Lesson and Activity (30 to 60 minutes)

- Lessons can be presented either formally (e.g., slide deck, flip chart, handouts, virtual whiteboard, word cloud app) or informally through discussion.
- Integrate activities into the sessions. Activity suggestions include
    - Arts and crafts
    - Worksheets
    - Role plays
    - Scenarios followed by small group discussions
    - Silent reflection
    - Videos
    - Audio recordings/podcasts

Check-out (15 minutes)

- Ask participants what they will take away from the session.
- Provide relevant handouts, resources and websites.
- Lead the group through a movement or grounding exercise (e.g., stretching, singing, drumming, smudging, deep breathing, tapping) to help them transition back to the demands of their day.

Policies, Procedures and Challenging Scenarios

Eligibility

Facilitators can consult with their program manager/supervisor to determine if a survivor is eligible for the group. Individual organizations may also have internal policies regarding program eligibility that facilitators will need to consult.

Some facilitators may decide to set up their group as a wait-list management tool. In this case, their organization might consider creating a policy that states that a survivor must attend the group to be eligible to receive individual sessions. This practice is beneficial for providing timely service to survivors when individual counselling is at capacity and unavailable. However, some survivors may find groups to be intimidating or anxiety-provoking and decide that they do not want to access STVC services at all if group attendance is a requirement to access individual sessions. This could potentially result in some survivors not receiving any support from the STVC program. If this is the case, you might consider making an exception and allowing the survivor to access individual sessions first.

Some facilitators may decide to set up their group as a transition tool for survivors who have already completed their individual sessions but do not feel ready to leave the program entirely. This benefits survivors by providing a slow and supported transition out. However, if an STVC program has a high rate of survivors who do not complete individual sessions, facilitators may have difficulty recruiting enough participants to form a group. Also, programs in smaller communities may not have enough survivors completing individual work at the same time to form a group.

Facilitators will also need to decide if survivors can attend individual sessions and the group simultaneously. Facilitators will need to weigh the pros and cons of simultaneous services against the pros and cons of services received at different times to determine what will benefit survivors in their community the most. Potential pros and cons of both practices are outlined in the table below.

Practice	Advantages	Disadvantages
Survivors attend individual and group STVC services **simultaneously**	• Survivors receive varied service simultaneously that addresses urgent and/or diverse needs. • Potential for accelerated progress by combining deeper individual work with peer support of group.	• Requires survivors to attend multiple sessions at a time (i.e., significant time commitment, scheduling conflicts). • Survivors may feel emotionally overwhelmed by engaging in both services simultaneously.
Survivors attend individual and group STVC services at **different times**	• When individual services are attended first, survivors › Have an opportunity to process deeper trauma before group. › Learn skills that they can then practice in group. › Build strong rapport with the counsellor, helping to build greater safety in group (if counsellor is also the facilitator). • When group services are attended first, survivors › Have a firm understanding of gender-based violence before engaging in deeper work.	• Survivors do not have the opportunity to practice skills learned in individual sessions concurrently in a group setting (missed feedback loop, reduced momentum).

Assessment

It is best practice for facilitators to meet with survivors individually before the first session to ensure that the group is a good fit for their needs.

During this assessment, if it is determined that the group is an appropriate fit for the survivor's needs, facilitators can

- Complete paperwork with the participant (e.g., intake form, informed

consent, informed consent for virtual services, confidentiality and privacy)
- Discuss informed consent
- Discuss expectations for the group
- Identify risk factors and safety planning strategies
- Ask about child care needs and facilitate referrals to community partners that provide child care
- Explain where and when the group will take place



For virtual groups, explain which video conferencing platform/app will be used, how to download the platform/app, how to use the platform/app, and how to access group sessions (e.g., meeting ID number, passcode)

- Tell the participant if they need to bring anything to the group

If it is determined that the group is not an appropriate fit for the survivor's needs, facilitators can offer alternate services (e.g., individual sessions).

Documentation

After each group session, facilitators should document the session's activities, key takeaways, items for follow-up and any challenging scenarios that occurred.



Session notes should be stored and destroyed in accordance with each organization's records management policy.

For more information about documentation and record keeping in anti-violence programs, please see *Records Management Guidelines: Protecting Privacy for Victims/Survivors of Violence* (EVA BC, 2022).

Follow-up

Some facilitators might choose to send a follow-up email to all group participants after each session that includes key takeaways and any resources that were discussed.

Facilitators should follow up individually with participants who presented any safety concerns during the session. During this follow-up, facilitators can debrief with the participant what happened during the session, identify risk factors and support them with safety planning.

Evaluation

It is best practice to evaluate the effectiveness of the group sessions by gathering anonymous feedback from participants. Feedback can be collected using a paper form or electronic survey, or through informal discussion. Consider using questions that align with the STVC program mandate or questions that align with the participant's individual goals. Facilitators can inform participants that their feedback will be used to improve the development of future group sessions.



Facilitators can decide if they will gather feedback from participants after each session, at the mid-point and the end or only at the end of the group. Facilitators can use feedback to make improvements to future group sessions and to let interested parties know how the group has benefited participants.

If a participant shares that they did not have a positive experience in the group, the facilitators should use this as a learning and growth opportunity. If the participant is a member of an underserved community or equity-deserving group, the facilitators could modify the group to make it more equitable, culturally responsive, accessible, and inclusive.

Self-Evaluation

Facilitators can also engage in their own evaluation of the group sessions. After each session, the co-facilitators can debrief with one another and discuss what worked well and what could be improved. Facilitators could journal after sessions to reflect on their experience as the facilitator. Facilitators could evaluate the outcomes of the sessions in a more formal way by completing an evaluation form at the end of each group; responses can be used to inform modifications and updates to future group sessions.

Challenging Scenarios

The diverse perspectives and personalities that participants bring to the group help to create a vibrant dynamic, but they can also create challenging scenarios that have the potential to disrupt group safety and cohesion. The following is a list of possible challenging scenarios that might occur during a group and suggestions to address these scenarios.

A participant experiences barriers to attending the group

- If a participant is experiencing barriers to attending the group, facilitators should contact them and inquire about these barriers. Together, brainstorm ideas of how to overcome these barriers (e.g., child care referrals, transit tickets, reminder calls). If the participant has decided that they no longer want to attend, facilitators can ask if they are permitted to share this with the other group members to ease any anxieties or fears the other members might have.

A participant discloses deep, personal information before group safety has been established or speaks more than other members

- If a participant discloses deep, personal information before group safety has been established or speaks more than the other members, group members may feel discomfort or resentment toward this participant. To avoid this, facilitators can find opportunities to gently interject and invite others to share.
- Some Indigenous cultures consider interrupting another person's story to be disrespectful. In a group setting, this could result in one participant speaking for the entirety of the session. To avoid confusion, establish a group norm during Session 1 regarding interruptions and sharing space.
- Facilitators might also consider using an item that needs to be passed between participants to permit them to speak (e.g., talking wand).



For virtual groups, facilitators can ask participants to use the "raise hand" function to determine whose turn it is to speak. When a participant is done speaking, they can "lower" their hand.

A participant speaks less than other members

- If a participant speaks less than other members due to discomfort, anxiety or a belief that their words are not as important as the words of others, facilitators should find opportunities to invite them to speak and note that their contributions are appreciated.

A participant becomes activated in group

- Group activities may elicit strong emotional reactions in some participants. This is not necessarily problematic and can often feel cathartic. However, if a participant becomes activated in the group (e.g., experiences heightened anxiety or a flashback) and is having difficulty participating in the activities, the co-facilitator can move to another location with the participant for a one-on-one conversation. The co-facilitator can guide the participant through grounding exercises and discuss safety planning strategies, if appropriate.



For virtual groups, the co-facilitator and the participant can enter a breakout room.

Conflict between participants

- If a conflict arises between group participants, facilitators can use this as a learning opportunity to demonstrate how conflict can be resolved in a respectful way using assertiveness skills. Facilitators can ask participants to use "I" statements when speaking with one another (e.g., *I appreciate your suggestion, but I am going to handle my situation differently*). Facilitators can use empathic statements to validate how the participants involved might be feeling due to the conflict.
- If the conflict grows beyond the facilitator's ability to de-escalate, the co-facilitator can move to another location with one of the participants involved.

  For virtual groups, the co-facilitator and one of the participants can enter a breakout room.

- Facilatators should also check in with participants who were not involved in the conflict to allow them a chance to debrief and share their reactions.
- If appropriate, facilitators can acknowledge the conflict during the next session's check-in and ask participants to share any reflections they have had since the conflict occurred.

Two people in an intimate or family relationship request to access the same group, and both present as the person harmed (e.g., intimate partners, siblings, parent and adult child)

- It is not recommended that two people in an intimate or family relationship participate in the same group. This scenario could result in conflicts of interest, triangulation (i.e., each party tries to get the facilitator on their "side") and role confusion for the facilitator (i.e., group counselling vs. couple/family counselling). We recommend that one person attends the group first and the other person attends a subsequent group.

Templates for these policies and procedures can be found in the templates section of this guide.

Best Practices for Virtual Groups

Facilitators may decide that a virtual group is the best fit for their community due to travel or transportation issues, public health concerns, a lack of adequate space to host groups, or a preference among participants in their community for virtual services.

When delivering groups virtually, it is important to follow best practices for virtual service delivery. EVA BC is currently developing an *STVC Virtual Counselling Best Practices Toolkit* with more information on this topic. Relevant excerpts from this toolkit are included below.

Creating a Virtual Office

Facilitators should take the same time and care to set up their virtual office as they would to set up their physical office. Facilitators can:

- Make sure the room is well-lit and that they are not backlit.
- Use a professional and neutral background.
- Avoid using a blurred background, as this may lead participants to think the facilitator is trying to conceal others in the room (Montesanti et al., 2021).
- Position their screen so that people in the workspace would not see participants if they were interrupted (Montesanti et al., 2021). Ideally, facilitators should have a “do not disturb” sign on their door to prevent any interruptions.
- Use a mid-screen camera placed at eye level to mimic natural eye contact (Sheperis & Smith, 2021).
- Turn off notifications and reminders to limit distractions (Werbart et al., 2025).
- Use a high speed Internet connection and good quality audio equipment (Schell, 2019).
- Familiarize themselves with and practice using their video conferencing app’s functions to ensure a smooth delivery of service.
- Guide participants to create similar set-ups in their own spaces during initial assessment meetings, if possible (Sheperis & Smith, 2021).
- Give participants a tour of their space so participants can see that it is private. Facilitators can let participants know if they are joining from their office or from home (EVA Canada, n.d.; 2022).
- Inform participants of any potential noises they might hear (e.g., pets, construction; EVA Canada, n.d.).

Housekeeping

When performing housekeeping in a virtual setting, facilitators can:

- Send written guidelines to participants before the first session to ensure that appropriate boundaries are in place.
- Schedule an individual introductory session so that participants can make sure their technology works properly.
- Be transparent about expectations for the group:
  - Ask participants to wear appropriate clothing, similar to what they would wear to an in-person group (Whittingham & Martin, 2020).
  - Ask participants to attend from neutral spaces. If a participant does not have access to a neutral space (i.e., can only join from their bedroom), ask them to ensure that private items are not visible to the group.
- Ask the co-facilitator to oversee technological responsibilities (e.g., managing the waiting room, assisting with technical questions, responding to the chat, muting participants, offering one-on-one support to participants who are in distress in breakout rooms) (Nieborowska et al., 2022).

Building Rapport

Research indicates that the following **non-verbal** behaviours are effective at building rapport and conveying empathy in a virtual setting:

- Making eye contact (Choi et al., 2024)
- Employing facial mimicry (facilitator displays facial expressions that correspond to participants' feelings, such as frowning when a participant discloses sadness; Choi et al., 2024)
- Head nodding (Choi et al., 2024)
- Using advanced listening skills to be better attuned to changes in the participant's presentation (i.e., paying attention to changes in tone of voice, acknowledging pauses/silences, identifying themes and patterns in conversation; Smith & Gillon, 2021)
  - *I noticed that you have mentioned your siblings a few times during our session today. Would you like to talk more about them?*
- Paying attention to participants' facial expressions to "read the room" (Weinberg, 2021)

Research indicates that the following **verbal** behaviours are effective at building rapport in a virtual setting:

- Stating emotional reactions to compensate for limited communication through body language (Békés et al., 2023; Smith & Gillon, 2021; Werbart et al., 2025). For example,
  - *I am very saddened to hear this.*

    - *That's wonderful news! I feel so happy for both of you!*
    - *I am a little confused. Can you please explain that some more?*
- Asking more check-in and body scan questions to compensate for limited body language and safety cues (EVA Canada, 2022). For example,
    - *Does anyone notice tension in any part of their body right now?*
    - *Take a moment to scan your bodies. Does anything feel different (for example, more energized)?*
    - *If anyone starts to feel uncomfortable or anxious during this activity, please let me know and we will pause.*
- Telling participants what you are doing, if you are not looking at them (e.g., writing notes; Montesanti et al., 2021)
- Being aware that group sharing will not flow as it does in an in-person setting (e.g., going around the circle). It may be helpful to establish an order for sharing with participants ahead of time (Nieborowska et al., 2022)
- Drawing out quieter participants, as they are less likely to speak in a virtual setting (Andrews et al., 2024)
- Reinforcing your presence by using self-disclosures and recognizing your mistakes (Weinberg, 2021)

Risk Management

When facilitating groups in a virtual setting, it is paramount that proper steps are taken to manage risk for both participants and facilitators. The following are best practices to help ensure that the virtual setting is private, confidential and safe. Facilitators can :

- Use the lobby function to control who is admitted into the group.
- Ask participants to change their screen names to only their first names or a pseudonym to protect confidentiality (Nieborowska et al., 2022).
- Inform participants that the virtual setting requires boundaries for the group to be effective. Clarify that this is not a casual conversation.
- Educate participants on the risks of virtual settings. If participants are currently living with a violent partner, roommate, landlord, or employer, inform them that this person may be able to track their activity on some apps. Ensure that participants understand that they are responsible for the security of their own devices (EVA BC, 2022).
- Ensure participants are aware of the increased risk to their privacy and confidentiality in a group setting (e.g., facilitators cannot control what happens in each participant's location).
- Ask participants to find a private space to attend sessions, where others cannot overhear (e.g., partners, children, roommates, landlords). Ask participants to use headphones/earbuds to keep the audio of the group private.
    - The facilitators should also use headphones/earbuds, particularly when they are working from home, to keep the audio of the group private.

- Create a back-up contact plan with participants in case of disconnection.
- Ensure a participant is parked if they are attending from a vehicle (EVA Canada, 2022).
- Identify a code word that participants can say (or type in the chat) if it is no longer safe for them to talk (Church et al., 2023; Ghidei et al., 2023) or use the Signal for Help (CWF, n.d.).
- Ask participants not to record sessions, use AI transcription tools, or take screenshots to protect the confidentiality of other participants (Whittingham & Martin, 2020). Explain that there would be an increased risk to the group's privacy if the recording, transcription, or screenshots were discovered by someone else. Explain that if files were subpoenaed in a court case, the recording, transcription, and screenshots would have to be released.
- Consider disabling the chat function (particularly between participants). Private chat conversations may be distracting and undermine group cohesion.

Technological Considerations

When facilitating virtual groups, certain technological considerations must be addressed to protect participants' and facilitators' data and personal information.

- Ensure that the virtual platform being used is secure, offers end-to-end encryption, stores its data on servers located in Canada, and is compliant with the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).
- Use a password management system, strong passwords and two-factor authentication.
- Follow standards of practice related to technology if the facilitator is registered with a professional association or college.
  - For registered clinical counsellors with the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors, follow BCACC's Standard of Clinical Practice #7 (Virtual Practice and Digital Technologies).
  - For Canadian certified counsellors with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, follow CCPA's Standards of Practice.
  - For registered social workers with the BC College of Social Workers, follow BCCSW's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- Encourage participants to use a computer or tablet to attend, since smartphones have a limited gallery view function.
- Instruct participants on how they can turn off self-view if they would prefer to not see their own image. This is different from turning off their cameras.
- Ask participants to practice technology etiquette:
  - Do not attend sessions from public spaces.
  - Keep the camera on for the duration of the session.
  - Keep the cameras steady.

- Do not use a blurred background.
- Use headphones/earbuds so others do not overhear.
- Stay muted unless speaking (if the group decides they want to remain unmuted so they can speak freely, everyone should be in a quiet place).

Organization Support

Organizations have a responsibility to support facilitators in the delivery of groups in a virtual setting.

- Facilitators should use organization-owned devices and accounts to conduct virtual sessions (BCSTH, 2020).
- Organizations should have clear and robust policies and procedures on technology and virtual service delivery (Wong, 2019). For an example, see *Use of Technology: Policy Template Guide for Women's Shelters and Transitions Houses* (Tech Safety Canada).
- Organizations should have virtual service delivery consent forms that include details on which communication technologies will be used and boundaries for their use. Forms should avoid technical jargon (APA, 2024). For an example, see *Anti-Violence Organization Template: Informed Consent for Digital Support Services* (Tech Safety Canada).
  - Participants should provide informed consent to both counselling in general and to virtual service delivery (APA, 2024).
- Organizational insurance should cover virtual service delivery.
- Organizations should invest in technology, cybersecurity and timely technical support. As new technologies develop, organizations should be committed to ongoing adaptation and learning (APA, 2024; Leroux et al., 2022; Montesanti et al., 2021).
- Organizations might consider purchasing document management software that allows users to sign a scanned/photographed form and then encrypt it into a password-protected PDF (Montesanti et al., 2021).

Due to limited resources and/or capacity, some organizations will be unable to follow all the best practices stated above. Organizations are encouraged to follow these practices to the best of their ability.

For additional guidance on best practices for virtual service delivery, please contact EVA BC's Program Support team:

- Email: programsupport@endingviolence.org
- Phone: 604-633-2506
- Toll-free: 1-877-633-2505

Sessions

Session Objectives

Session 1: Introductions
- Get to know one another
- Discuss confidentiality
- Establish groups norms
- Review group content

Session 2: Understanding gender-based violence and abuse
- Define gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and childhood abuse
- Learn about gender socialization, the root causes of gender-based violence and barriers to leaving abusive/violent situations
- Learn about different types of violence
- Review the Power and Control Wheel

Session 3: Impacts of gender-based violence and abuse
- Learn how gender-based violence and abuse impact survivors psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, etc.
- Reframe mental health “disorders” as responses to experiencing violence and abuse

Session 4: Safety planning
- Discuss safety planning strategies
- Learn about other programs/services in the community that provide support to survivors

Session 5: Boundaries
- Learn about different types of boundaries (e.g., porous, rigid)
- Learn how to assert firm but flexible boundaries

Session 6: Assertiveness

- Learn about assertiveness
- Practice assertiveness skills and techniques

Session 7: Coping strategies and self-care

- Develop coping strategies
- Learn about self-harm and self-care
- Learn a grounding technique

Session 8: Self-concept and self-compassion

- Learn about components of self-concept (e.g., self-esteem, self-confidence, self-worth)
- Learn how gender-based violence and abuse can impact self-concept
- Discuss ways of practicing self-compassion

Session 9: Healthy relationships

- Learn about the needs of a healthy relationship
- Review the Equality Wheel
- Discuss “red flags” of potential violence/abuse
- Discuss how intimate partner violence impacts families and children

Session 10: Rebuilding and closing

- Discuss grief, healing and rebuilding safety and self-concept
- Review content of group sessions and close the group
- Evaluate the group sessions

Session 1: Introductions

Objectives

- Get to know one another
- Discuss confidentiality
- Establish groups norms
- Review group content

Agenda

Introductions and land acknowledgement

Facilitators welcome participants to the group and provide them with labels to share their names and pronouns.



For virtual groups, facilitators ask participants to ensure that their screen name is accurate and to include their pronouns.

Facilitators introduce themselves and provide a land acknowledgement.

Icebreaker activity

Facilitators lead an icebreaker activity to help participants ease into the group and get to know one another.



Suggested Activities

- ***The Nickname Game***

Participants create nicknames using adjectives that describe their personalities and begin with the same letter as their first name (e.g., Extroverted Emily). Participants take turns to see how many nicknames they can remember.

- ***The Coin Game***

Facilitators hand out a coin to each participant. Use coins that were issued within the past ~10 years. Participants share an exciting or positive event from their life that happened during the same year that their coin was issued.



For virtual groups, facilitators ask participants to find a coin in their home.

Confidentiality and groups norms

- Facilitators explain confidentiality and exceptions.
- Facilitators and participants collaboratively create a list of group norms. Facilitators write the list on a flip chart.



For virtual groups, facilitators can either share their screen and type norms in a document or use the virtual whiteboard in their video conferencing app.

Examples of group norms include

- Maintain confidentiality
- Respect the right to pass
- Share the space
- Be respectful of differences
- Start and end on time **OR** allow a 10-minute grace period for arrival
- Only answer the phone if it is an emergency



For virtual groups, stay present and do not engage in other activities (e.g., texting, gaming, watching videos)

Break

Group content overview

Facilitators provide handouts with an overview of the group's content and session objectives (*see pages 21-22*). Facilitators review group content and ask participants if they have any questions.



For virtual groups, facilitators can share their screens to review group content.

Facilitators ask the group if they are comfortable with having a guest speaker attend during session 4 and, if so, which community programs they are most interested to learn about. Relevant programs might include housing, family law, advocacy, or victim services.

Check-out

See earlier section (*Group design > Session format*) for guidance on what to include in a check-out.

Session 2: Understanding Gender-Based Violence and Abuse

Objectives

- Define gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and childhood abuse
- Learn about gender socialization, the root causes of gender-based violence and barriers to leaving abusive/violent situations
- Learn about different types of violence
- Review the Power and Control Wheel

Agenda

Check-in

See earlier section (*Group design > Session format*) for guidance on what to include in a check-in.

Break

Understanding gender-based violence and abuse

- Facilitators provide definitions of gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and childhood abuse.
- Facilitators discuss gender socialization and the root causes of gender-based violence. Facilitators explain that participants are not to blame for the violence/abuse that they have experienced.
- Facilitators discuss the systemic barriers that make it difficult for survivors to leave abusive/violent situations.

For example

- A survivor who is a newcomer to Canada and does not speak English cannot access services in their community because they are not offered in their language.
- A survivor who is older cannot leave their adult child's home because they cannot afford housing.

- A survivor who uses a wheelchair cannot attend counselling sessions in person because their local organization's office is on the third floor of a building without an elevator.

Power and Control Wheel

- Facilitators provide handouts of the Power and Control Wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs) and review its content.



For virtual groups, facilitators can share their screen to review the Power and Control Wheel.

- Facilitators review the Wheel to explain different types of violence (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, spiritual, etc.).
- Facilitators share adapted versions of the Power and Control Wheel and discuss forms of violence that are experienced by survivors from equity-deserving groups. Adapted Wheels include:
  - Power and Control Wheel for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Relationships (Love is Respect)
  - Power and Control Wheel for Older People (Northern Society for Domestic Peace)
  - Immigrant Power and Control Wheel (Tahirih Justice Center)
  - Power & Control Wheel: People with Disabilities and their Caregivers (Liberty Lane)

Check-out

*** Session 2 can be structured to take either one or two sessions to complete.*

Session 3: Impacts of Gender-Based Violence and Abuse

Objectives

- Learn how gender-based violence and abuse impact survivors psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, etc.
- Reframe mental health "disorders" as responses to experiencing violence and abuse

Agenda

Check-in

Inform participants that the content of Session 3 can feel emotionally heavy, and that they are welcome to share as much or as little as they want.

Break

Impacts of gender-based violence and abuse

- Facilitators explain how gender-based violence and abuse can impact survivors psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, etc.
- Facilitators discuss common responses to experiencing gender-based violence and abuse, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, dissociation, etc. Facilitators reframe these "disorders" as responses to experiencing violence and abuse.



Suggested Activity

- ***World Collage***

Participants cut words out of old magazines that speak to their experiences of violence and abuse. All participants glue their clippings on one paper to create a group collage.



For virtual groups, facilitators use a word cloud-generating app and ask participants to type words that speak to their experiences of

violence and abuse. The app will automatically increase the size of words typed by more than one user, illustrating commonalities across participants' experiences.

Gender-based violence and the body *(See fig. 1)*

- Facilitators draw a diagram of a human body to illustrate how gender-based violence impacts each part.
  - From the brain: anxious and depressed thoughts ("Everyone will hurt me. The world is dangerous.")
  - From the shoulders: tension, worry
  - From the heart: emotional impacts (sadness, fear), racing heart rate when activated
  - From the stomach: digestive problems, disordered eating



Suggested Activity

- ***Gender-Based Violence and My Body***

Participants draw diagrams of their own bodies and add impacts of gender-based violence that are specific to them.

Check-out

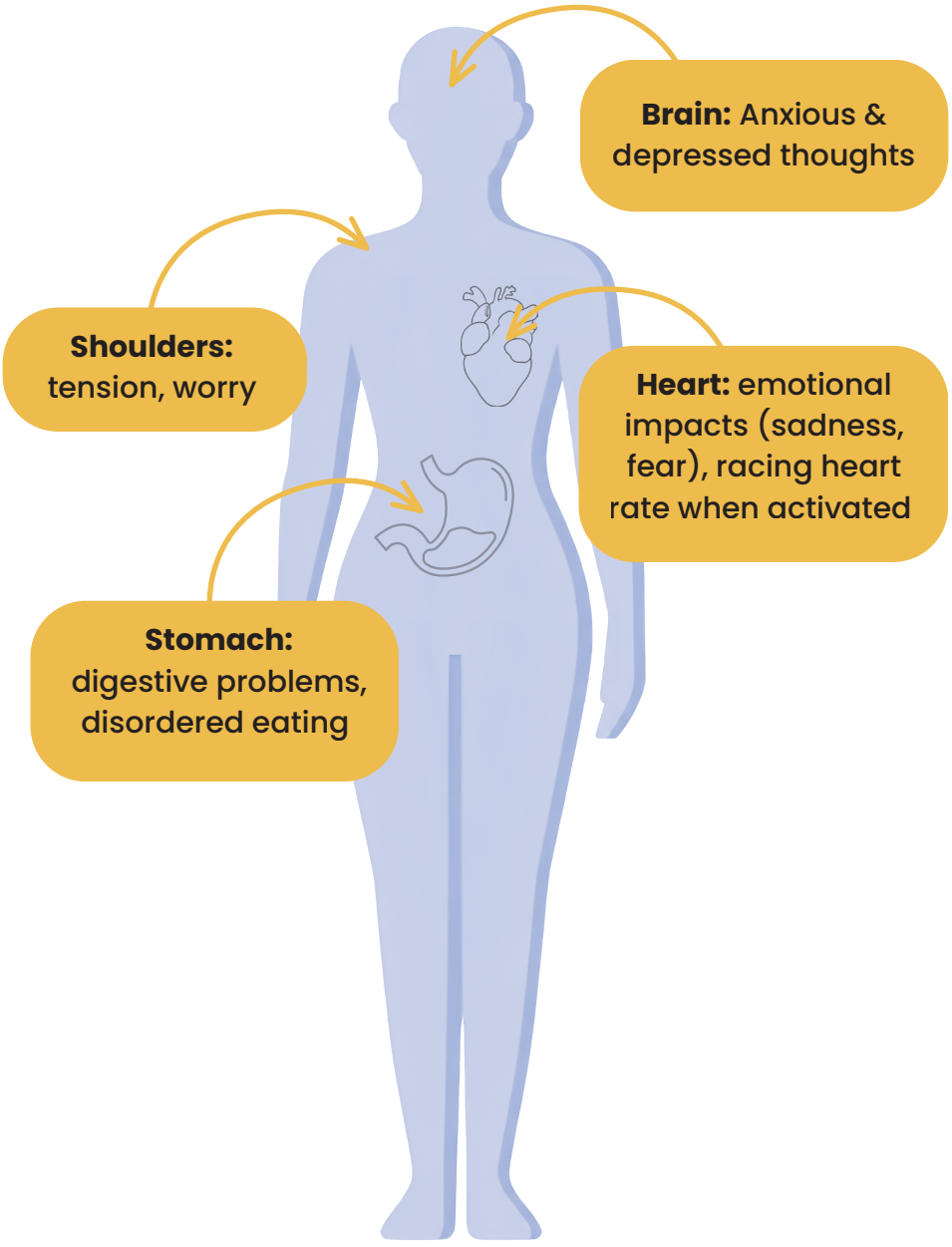
Acknowledge that the content of Session 3 may have felt heavy and encourage participants to practice self-care. Invite participants to share a part of their body that has supported or protected them.



For virtual groups, Facilitators use a word cloud generating app and ask participants to type something that makes them proud.

*** Session 3 can be structured to take either one or two sessions to complete.*

Fig. 1


Brain: Anxious & depressed thoughts
Shoulders: tension, worry
Heart: emotional impacts (sadness, fear), racing heart rate when activated
Stomach: digestive problems, disordered eating

Session 4: Safety Planning

Objectives

- Discuss safety planning strategies
- Learn about other programs/services in the community that provide support to survivors

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Safety Planning

Facilitators discuss potential risk factors for violence and safety planning strategies. Facilitators explain what should be included in a safety plan and clarify that safety plans do not need to be written documents. Facilitators explain that every survivor's safety plan will be different, depending on their unique circumstances.



Suggested Activity

- ***Create a Personalized Safety Plan***

Facilitators provide participants with a safety plan template and support them to complete it. Participants might create a plan to keep them safe from self-harm and suicidality (9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline) or intimate partner violence (yourtoolkit.com).



For virtual groups, facilitators invite participants to create either a written safety plan or a plan saved on their phone, depending on their individual risk level. If a participant does not want to document their plan, the facilitator can offer to document it on their behalf.

Guest Speaker

The guest speaker tells the group about their services and conducts a Q&A period.

Community Resources

Facilitators provide participants with brochures and handouts from other programs in the community that might be helpful.



For virtual groups, facilitators provide website links for community programs.

Check-out

Session 5: Boundaries

Objectives

- Learn about different types of boundaries (e.g., porous, rigid)
- Learn how to assert firm but flexible boundaries

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Boundaries

- Facilitators discuss boundaries and why experiences of gender-based violence and abuse may make it difficult for survivors to assert boundaries. Facilitators provide a handout to discuss different types of boundaries (Therapist Aid), including porous and rigid.

  For virtual groups, facilitators can share their screen to review different types of boundaries.

- Facilitators provide information on how to assert firm but flexible boundaries.

  Suggested Activities

  - ***Fences*** *(See fig. 2a & 2b)*

  Participants draw a fence that represents their boundaries. Fences can be thin or thick and made of various materials. Participants draw the same fence again and add features to make it more secure (add materials, install a security system, repair holes, etc.). Participants are asked how they would feel if they were standing behind each fence.

  - ***Testing Boundaries***

  In pairs, participants test boundaries by entering each other's physical space. Participants practice ways of reclaiming their space and asserting their boundaries (e.g., stepping back to create more distance, asking the other person to give them more space). Participants are asked to pay attention to their

physiological reactions during this activity (e.g., elevated heart rate, tight muscles, sweating), both when their boundary is crossed and when they reclaim their space. The group comes back together to share their reactions.

A word of caution: If group safety is not adequate, this activity could make participants anxious or uncomfortable.

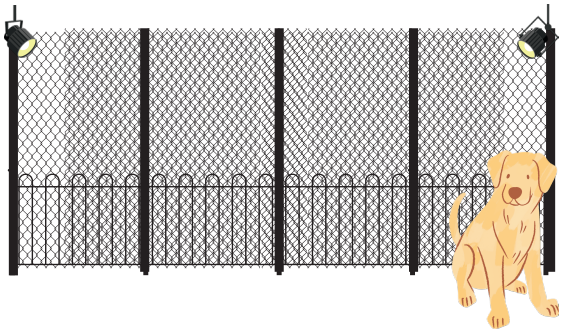
For virtual groups, participants are encouraged to try this activity with a trusted person after the session.

Check-out

Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b



Session 6: Assertiveness

Objectives

- Learn about assertiveness
- Practice assertiveness skills and techniques

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Assertiveness

Facilitators explain assertiveness and why survivors of gender-based violence and abuse may benefit from being assertive.



Suggested Activity

- ***Assertiveness Role Playing***

Facilitators demonstrate assertiveness skills and techniques. Participants are provided with scenarios and role play assertiveness skills with a partner. For example,

- You were served an incorrect order at a restaurant.
- A friend asks you if she can borrow money. In the past, she has not paid you back.



For virtual groups, participants are moved into breakout rooms to do this activity.

Facilitators advise that sometimes others in the participant's life, who are not accustomed to them being assertive, might respond negatively to their new assertiveness. Facilitators help participants to learn when/how to use assertiveness skills safely.

Check-out

Session 7: Coping Strategies and Self Care

Objectives

- Develop coping strategies
- Learn about self-harm and self-care
- Learn a grounding technique

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Coping strategies and self-care

- Facilitators discuss coping skills, ranging from those that might be considered self-harm (e.g., cutting, heavy substance use over time) to those that might be considered self-care (e.g., going for walks, warm baths, meditation, smudging, drumming, singing).
- Facilitators demonstrate a grounding technique (e.g., box breathing, 5-4-3-2-1 method; Calm).



Suggested Activity

- ***Guided Imagery***

Facilitator reads a guided imagery script (The Center for Mind-Body Medicine).

- Facilitators and participants brainstorm a list of coping strategies and self-care practices.



Suggested Activities

- ***Self-Care Lists***

Participants write down personalized lists of coping strategies and self-care practices.

- ***Stepping Stones*** *(See fig. 3)*

Using construction paper, participants cut out stepping stones and write coping strategies on each stone. Participants glue their stones on a separate paper in the shape of a path that leads from where they are today to where they hope to be in the future.

Check-out

Fig. 3


FUTURE
Singing
Learning a new skill
Making a new recipe
Visiting my friends
Going for walks
TODAY

Session 8: Self-Concept and Self-Compassion

Objectives

- Learn about components of self-concept (e.g., self-esteem, self-confidence, self-worth)
- Learn how gender-based violence and abuse can impact self-concept
- Discuss ways of practicing self-compassion

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Self-Concept

- Facilitators discuss coping skills, ranging from those that might be Facilitators introduce the term self-concept and its components: self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth.
- Facilitators and participants brainstorm their own definitions of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth.
- Facilitators explain how gender-based violence and abuse can negatively impact self-concept.

Self-Compassion

Facilitators introduce the term self-compassion and discuss ways of practicing it.



Suggested Activities

- ***Be Your Own Best Friend***

Participants are put into pairs to answer the following questions:

- What helpful things do you do for other people?
- If someone else was having a tough day, what words of encouragement would you give them?
- What is a compliment you have given someone else?
    - › Ask participants to think about what they would say to a friend or their favourite character from a book, movie, or television show.

- ***Be Your Own Best Friend*** *(cont'd)*

  For virtual groups, participants are moved into breakout rooms to do this activity.

Participants share their answers with the larger group and facilitators capture these on a flip chart. Facilitators encourage participants to show themselves the same kindness that they show others.

For virtual groups, facilitators capture answers on a virtual whiteboard.

- ***Affirmation Jars***

Participants write affirmations on strips of paper and place these in a small jar (or container). Participants can decorate the outside of the jars. If it is safe to bring the jar home, participants can do so and read an affirmation when they are in need.

- ***Tender Self-Compassion Break***

Participants watch a video about self-compassion by Dr. Kristin Neff. Facilitators debrief with participants and ask what was helpful from the video and how they can integrate acts of self-compassion into their lives.

Check-out

Session 9: Healthy Relationships

Objectives

- Learn about the needs of a healthy relationship
- Review the Equality Wheel
- Discuss "red flags" of potential violence/abuse
- Discuss how intimate partner violence impacts families and children

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Healthy relationships

Facilitators discuss components of healthy relationships and provide handouts of the Equality Wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs).

For virtual groups, facilitators share their screen to review the Equality Wheel.

Facilitators review "red flags" of potential violence/abuse in a new relationship and why some survivors might have been conditioned to minimize them (National Network to End Domestic Violence).

Suggested Activity

- ***Dating Role Playing***

Facilitators provide participants with dating scenarios and ask them to identify "red flags." For example,

- Your date tells you that their ex-partner broke up with them because they went through their ex's phone to see if their ex was messaging other people.
- You have been messaging with someone on a dating app for a few weeks and they ask you to send them intimate images of yourself.
- Your date tells you he is from a very traditional culture and that he believes women should stay home to raise children.
- On your first date, your date tells you that you are the most perfect person she has ever met and wants to take you on a trip next week.
- You meet someone online and exchange photos with them. You agree to a date, but in person they look nothing like their photo.

Families and Children

Facilitators explain how intimate partner violence can impact families and children (Ministry of Children and Family Development).

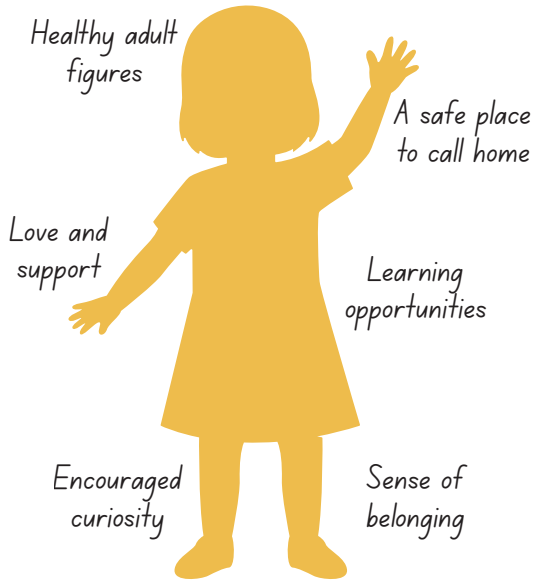
Suggested Activity

- ***My (Inner) Child*** *(See fig. 4)*

Each participant draws a picture of either themself as a child or of their own child(ren). In the space around the child, participants write what the child needs to feel and be safe.

Check-out

Fig. 4



Session 10: Rebuilding and Closing

Objectives

- Discuss grief, healing and rebuilding safety and self-concept
- Review content of group sessions and close the group
- Evaluate the group sessions

Agenda

Check-in

Break

Rebuilding and Closing

- Facilitators discuss grief, healing and rebuilding safety and self-concept.
- Facilitators review what was discussed during the group.



Suggested Activity

- ***Last Words***

Each participant receives a blank greeting card. Participants write encouraging or positive messages in each other's cards. Participants take their cards home as keepsakes from the group, if it is safe to do so.



For virtual groups, facilitators use a word cloud-generating app and participants type encouraging or positive messages into the app. Participants can take a screenshot of the word cloud as a keepsake.

Evaluation

Facilitators provide group participants with an evaluation form/survey.



For virtual groups, facilitators share their screen to review the Equality Wheel.

Check-out

Facilitators thank the group for their participation and inform them of next steps (e.g., they will receive a follow-up email with resources, they will be contacted soon to schedule an individual session).

Templates

Eligibility Policy

Eligible participants for the STVC group are individuals who have experienced sexual assault, violence/abuse in relationships and/or childhood abuse.

Eligibility is also based on where the survivor lives.

- For in-person groups, participants must reside in the community/region of _____.
- For virtual groups, participants must reside in the province of British Columbia.

Option 1: The group is used as a wait-list management tool. Survivors must attend the group first to be eligible for individual counselling sessions in the STVC program.

Option 2: Group participants may be either new or existing clients who have already attended individual counselling sessions in the STVC program.

Option 3: Group participants must be former clients who have already completed their individual counselling sessions in the STVC program.

Option 1: Group participants are permitted to attend both individual and group STVC sessions simultaneously.

Option 2: Group participants are not permitted to attend both individual and group STVC sessions simultaneously.

Option 3: It is at the discretion of the counsellor/group facilitator as to whether a survivor can attend both individual and group STVC sessions simultaneously.

Assessment Procedure

Prior to the first group session, the facilitator will meet with a survivor to assess them and determine if the group is an appropriate fit for their needs at this time.

During this meeting, if the facilitator determines that the group is an appropriate fit for the survivor's needs, they will review the following forms together:

- Confidentiality and Privacy
- Informed Consent
- Informed Consent for Virtual Services (if appropriate)

The facilitator will discuss expectations for the group and ask about child care needs. The facilitator will inform the participant where and when the group will take place and whether they need to bring anything to the group.

If appropriate/necessary, the facilitator may also identify risk factors and support the participant with safety planning.

If it is determined that the group is not an appropriate fit for the survivor's needs, the facilitator will refer them to an alternative program/service.

Documentation Procedure

The facilitator will keep a group record containing consent forms and session notes. Session notes will capture activities, key takeaways, items for follow-up, and details on any challenging scenarios that occurred during the group.

Documentation procedures should align with those detailed in *Records Management Guidelines: Protecting Privacy for Victims/Survivors of Violence* (EVA BC, 2022).

Option 1: The group record will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded seven years from the date of the final group session.

Option 2: The group record will be stored electronically in a password-protected database. The database is programmed to wipe clean or render records unreadable seven years from the date of the final group session.

Follow-up Procedure

After each session, the facilitator will send a follow-up email to all group participants that includes key takeaways and any resources that were discussed. The facilitator will use the blind carbon copy (Bcc) function to hide participants' email addresses from one another.

The facilitator will follow up individually with any participants who presented safety concerns during the session. This follow-up may take place by phone, video conference or in person. During this follow-up, the facilitator will debrief what happened during the session, identify risk factors and support the participant with safety planning.

Follow-up email template

Hello HOPE Group folks,

It was wonderful to see everyone today! I hope you enjoyed our session.

Here are today's key takeaways:

1. When people have experienced gender-based violence, it may be more difficult for them to assert their boundaries. Experiencing gender-based violence can make our boundaries either more porous (we let everybody "in") or more rigid (we do not let anyone in).
2. It is not rude or mean to assert your boundaries. Boundaries can protect you from people and situations that could cause you harm.

Here is the link to the grounding exercise that I mentioned today: https://www.calm.com/blog/5-4-3-2-1-a-simple-exercise-to-calm-the-mind

I look forward to seeing everyone again next Thursday at 10:00 a.m.!

Evaluation Procedure

The facilitator will gather feedback from participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the group. Feedback will be anonymous and participants will be asked to avoid any identifying information on their evaluation forms/surveys.

Option 1: At the midpoint and after the final group session, participants will be asked to complete a paper evaluation form/survey.

Option 2: After the final group session, participants will be asked to complete a paper evaluation form/survey.

Option 3: The participants will be emailed a link to an electronic evaluation form/survey.

The facilitator will analyze participant feedback to determine effectiveness and areas for improvement. The facilitator can then make improvements to the sessions for future delivery.



Facilitators are also invited to connect with EVA BC's Program Support team to share feedback that may inform updates and improvements to this guide.

- Email: programsupport@endingviolence.org
- Phone: 604-633-2506
- Toll-free: 1-877-633-2505

Evaluation Form/Survey

To keep your feedback anonymous, please do not write any identifying information on this form/survey.

Please circle the number that best matches your experiences with the group.

1. **In the group, I learned how abuse and violence can impact me emotionally, psychologically and physically.**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

2. **In the group, I learned coping strategies and skills.**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

3. **In the group, I learned how power imbalances in society can influence my relationships.**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

4. **In the group, I felt safe and respected.**

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

5. **Do you have any suggestions to help improve future group sessions?**

_____

_____

_____

6. **What did you like most about the group? What was the most helpful?**

_____

_____

_____

7. **Do you have any other comments/feedback?**

_____

_____

_____

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To access the references used, visit: endingviolence.org/hopereferences