

Finding a Space of Your own¹

Note: This section focuses on female participants, due to what most women are taught in society about what it means to be a 'good' woman. However, it can be adapted and used by male activists as well.

Women generally have difficulty finding a space of their own. It is even more difficult when we are young and still living in our parent's home. After we have our own family and children, or share a living space with another, the key challenge lies in setting limits, defining spaces, and creating a sacred space—however small—that belongs just to you. One of the fundamentally important conditions for autonomy is to have a space that is exclusively yours, with your own stamp.

If you do not have such a space, create one or reorganize your home to identify a patch of your own—which would probably represent a breaking away from the past and a starting point for changes in your environment. It could be a corner in the room you share with someone else, or a room for just yourself where you can think, reflect, write, and express how you feel: your needs, thoughts, and personal plans.

Normally, women try to justify their movements by saying that someone or something needs their attention, or they are fulfilling a duty. Of course, there are times when we are needed, but generally this is a way of situating ourselves in a world on the basis of our gender status, or justifying our movements in such a way that we are permanently answerable to others.

Though this situation is changing slowly in different parts of the world, there is a personal dimension that we can change ourselves by reviewing the arguments we have internalized and which have limited us.

Reflect

What are the things in your environment that affect you positively and what affects you negatively? What would your ideal environment be? What can you do to get closer to living in your ideal environment?

Creating new spaces and new conditions within our current spaces allows us to transform our perspective of the world and the way in which we live it.

Prioritizing Your Time

What is most important to you in terms of how you use your time? Where do your needs, your free time and caring for your body stand on your list of priorities?

Exercise

Try to remember how you distribute the number of hours in terms of the activities that are mentioned below, per day, per week, and per month, in a typical month. Write your comments on a photocopy of this table [or copy the table onto another sheet of paper].

¹ *Adapted from: CREA. (2008). Self-Care and Self-Defense Manual for Feminist Activists. New Delhi: CREA, pp.73-77.*

Questions: How You Use Your Time		Hours/ Day/ Week/ Month	Comments
1. How many days do you work in a week?			
2. Hours per day/ week/ month that you spend working: Meetings (in or out of the office), events, conferences, work chats, replying to official emails, workshops, office work, or other activities.			
3. Hours per week/ month spent on non-remunerated activism.			
4. Hours per week/ month spent on domestic chores.			
5. Hours per week/ month spent on your training (as appropriate): school, classes, library, courses, lectures, workshops, diploma courses, preparing for exams, or thesis			
6. Personal Care	<i>Food: Hours spent eating per day/ week/ month</i> <i>How many times do you eat, on an average?</i> <i>Do you frequently skip any meal in a day or substitute it with junk food? YES __ NO __</i> <i>Which meal? _____</i>		
	Exercise: Number of hours spent on some form of exercise		
	Hours spent per day/ month on personal care (having a massage, getting your hair done, etc		
	Number of monthly or annual visits to the doctor for a routine check-up. Number of monthly or annual visits to the doctor for any specific problems.		
	<i>Rest: Number of hours a day/week/month spent sleeping or resting.</i>		
	Hours spent per day/ week/ month on personal development (being with yourself, reflecting, meditating, going to counseling, etc)		
7. Hours spent per day/ week/ month on your interpersonal relationships: family, partner, friends, others			
8. Hours spent per day/ week/month on your interpersonal relationships: Family, partner/ lover(s), friends, others			
9. Hours spent per day/ week/ month on other activities (indicate what they are)			

Reflect

After completing this exercise, think about the following and write down your answers.

1. How do you feel about the way you distribute your time?
2. On what activities or aspects of your life do you spend most of your quality time?
3. What aspects or activities are priorities for you, are practically absent from your daily routine or are very occasional? Why do you think this happens?
4. How would you design an ideal schedule that would satisfactorily balance the different dimensions of your life?
5. Make two more photocopies of this table. Write the ideal way in which you would like your time and priorities to be distributed on one of the photocopies of the table.
6. Which activities in your daily routine can be restricted so that the actual distribution of time is as close as possible to your ideal?
7. Who is in a position to help you with this? What changes do you need to make in different aspects of your life so that this new distribution of time can become a reality? What redistribution of time do you need? With whom do you need to discuss?
8. Write your actual plan for change on your last photocopy of the table.
9. Now, try to follow the plan step by step. When it becomes difficult, return to your ideal table to see if you are being too ambitious by attempting to bring about a personal transformation in such a short time. Get clear on the new challenges or obstacles that come in the way of changing your priorities.
10. Look within your organizational or professional space for allies seeking to make the time changes in their lives.

Our work and professional development are a reflection of our empowerment and autonomy and indicate that we have taken our lives in our own hands. However, the desire for professional growth, a social or political commitment, or an affirmation of what gives meaning to our lives may not be the only reasons we spend our time and energy on professional and activist issues. We could also be transferring the need to live for others onto the persons or sectors with whom we work, thus benefitting others to our own cost.