



Key Principles

Effective and Ethical Communications for VAW Prevention

Maintain the Dignity of the Characters. When creating communication materials about violence, it is tempting to use images that show women being abused. This approach needs to be used carefully, if done at all. Avoid showing women in undignified positions (i.e., naked, laying on the ground, in the middle of experiencing rape, etc.). Explicit images of acts of violence show women in powerless and exposed situations and, while it may accurately reflect reality, it is rarely effective in helping change people's attitudes. Similarly, avoid showing men being highly aggressive or violent, these are undignified portrayals of men. Women and men viewing explicit images such as these rarely want to identify with the characters or the issue that is being represented. Many people may feel ashamed to look at the image and, as a result, will either ignore it or make jokes to diminish feelings of shame and embarrassment. The use of explicit images can further marginalize the issue, keeping it taboo instead of encouraging people to discuss it. Try instead to show women and men as reasonable and thoughtful characters who are able to make positive decisions.

Portray the Positive. When discussing violence, instead of telling people that violence is bad, show the benefits of non-violence. For example, instead of showing a picture of a woman being beaten that reads "Stop Domestic Violence", it may be more effective to show a picture of a woman and man sitting together discussing a problem with the male character saying "I respect my wife, we talk about our problems together. Do you?" Materials that portray the positive and role model respectful and alternative ways of thinking and behaving are more engaging and can help facilitate a process of change, more so than just showing the violence.

Help Viewers Engage. When viewers see themselves in the materials and characters, they are more likely to think about the issue and reflect on how it affects them. Materials that show 'regular' women and men will help more people identify with the characters. Avoid stereotypes. When showing women and men in materials, try to make the characters look just like 'regular' people in your community. Make them different ages and sizes, from different economic levels, or having a disability. The characters should represent the range of people in your community.

Avoid Blaming and Accusations. Communication materials should avoid blaming women or men for violence. This does not mean that the issue of male responsibility for domestic violence should not be explored, but accusing men of violence and publicly shaming men in materials often only increases resistance and backlash. It is important to hold men accountable yet not to insult, demean, or demonize them. This will only make them defensive and unengaged.

Get People Talking! Materials that tell people what to think rarely have meaningful impact on the attitudes or behavior of their viewers. Try to make materials controversial, inject new ideas, ask questions, encourage people to think and feel something about

the issue being portrayed. Don't be afraid to raise taboo or hidden topics; materials that tell people what they already know are rarely useful. Be willing to stir things up!