

# Our Strength is the Solution: Communities Can Prevent Sexual Violence

Quick Chats for 16 Days of Activism 2008

GBV Prevention Network



[www.preventgbvafrica.org](http://www.preventgbvafrica.org)



## Introduction

The 16 Days of Activism is about taking action to create change – everyone one can take action – in small and large ways. Quick Chats are a small but important way that we can start breaking the silence around sexual violence in our communities. A Quick Chat is a guide for an impromptu discussion – they are designed to help you open up a conversation with someone, mention a few key points and then close a discussion. You can use quick chats with neighbors, friends, relatives and other community members.

The purpose of quick chats is to get people talking about issues that relate to violence against women. They initiate discussion of sensitive issues, stimulate and lay ground for reflection among individuals and communities. Talking about sensitive issues is the first step in creating awareness and changing attitudes and beliefs that contribute to violence against women.

When doing quick chats, remember to stay polite and friendly at all times, listen to what other people have to say, encourage others to express their views, yet also keep the conversation focused on the strengths and responsibilities of communities to prevent sexual violence against women. Those you chat with are likely to disagree with some or much of what you say – that’s okay! In a quick chat, you don’t have to convince someone to see things in the same way as you – sharing a different perspective and getting them to think about an issue in a new light is enough.

Quick Chats can be done with anyone, anywhere, anytime! You can take them to a church group, community meeting, in a bus, marketplace, or busy street corner and start asking questions. If you approach people with an open mind and positive attitude, they will respond with ideas and comments from which everyone can learn.





### **Quick Chat 1: Rethinking what it Means to be a Man can Prevent Sexual Violence.**

Social norms about masculinity (ideas we hold about what it means to be a man) are often associated with power, strength, competition and aggressive behaviour. This makes it seem okay for men to force or coerce women into sex. You can talk with men and women about how accepting the social norms about men can lead to sexual violence and make it seem normal and acceptable in our communities.

#### **Opening Lines**

- A lot of people talk about “being a man”, what does that mean to you?
- Some people think that being a man means having power, authority and control over women, especially in relationships, what do you think about that?

#### **Ideas to Chat About**

- Being a man is sometimes associated with having lots of sex or sexual partners, even if that sex is achieved by using force or coercion, but sexual violence is harmful to the health and well-being of women, men and communities.
- A man does not have to be strong and dominant and a woman does not have to be weak and passive. Each of us have all of these traits within us – we can express and live them. Being able to express a full range of emotions means we can live fuller lives.
- As men, we can decide to take the responsibility to change what it means to be a man in our community. Things can and are changing. We can balance our power to create happy, healthy and safe relationships with the women in our lives.
- As women, we too have to be ready for and encourage change. We can support men to take on different roles and traits that many people think are only for women. We can value men who respect women and balance power in their relationships.

#### **Departing Words**

The 16 Days of Activism is a great time to learn more about what it means to be non violent. Let’s talk to more people in our community about how we can work together to change ideas about manhood that hurt us all – we can prevent sexual violence.

### **Quick Chat 2: Healthy and Happy Relationships are Free of Sexual Violence.**

Sexual violence includes rape from strangers as well as rape that happens between intimate partners – women and men cohabiting or married couples. This Quick Chat focuses on marital rape. The idea that husbands ‘own’ their wives and can control all aspects of their lives and bodies makes marital rape seem normal and acceptable. Talking to men and women about the rights of married women and the benefits of a violence-free relationship can prevent marital rape.





### Opening Lines

- Some people think that when a woman and man get married, the man has ownership over the woman and has control over her mind and body, what do you think about that?
- More people in our community have been talking about marital rape, but some believe that rape cannot happen in marriage, what do you think?

### Ideas To Chat About

- Just because a woman is married does not mean she has given up control over her body. Women have the right to decide when, where, and how to have sex.
- When bride price is paid to a girl's family it reinforces the idea that she has been sold and is now property of her partner. This kind of thinking can lead to marital rape.
- Everyone benefits from a relationship free from violence, including the wife, husband, and children. Without violence, the whole family can be happier, healthier and more developed.
- Happy relationships come from shared decision making power. Making decisions together about how and when to have sex can allow women and men to have better relationships and better sexual experiences.
- It is sometimes hard to talk about sex in our own relationship. It can be even harder to talk about sex with others. Yet these issues affect us all, we could be helping each other learn healthier ways of talking about and negotiating sex – and sending a message to others that relationships that are free of violence are happier and healthier.

### Departing Words

The 16 Days of Activism is a great time to learn more about marital rape and open up dialogues in our communities. Let's talk to more people in our community about how we can work together to prevent sexual violence by promoting happier healthy and safe relationships.

