

A Recipe for a Safe and Productive Workshop on Gender Equality



2GATHER

Building quality and emotional resilience in youth work on gender equality*

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Dear Youth Worker,

You are about to facilitate a workshop that tackles sensitive and complex topics surrounding gender issues and equality. It can be a controversial, polarising, and potentially divisive topic even within the group of participants.

It is important to be aware of the dynamics that can emerge, and equally important to have some tools to marginalize the drifts. Facilitation is not just about sticking to the agenda; it's about creating an environment that nurtures trust, openness, and meaningful dialogue.

Here's a recipe to spark your creativity and help you lead an awesome workshop on gender issues, making it a meaningful and inclusive experience for everyone!

Step 1: Prepare Yourself (Read the Agenda Carefully)

Start by setting up a clear plan. Take a moment to read through the schedule of activities. You don't need to memorise every detail, but knowing the overall flow helps you stay on track. Identify which parts can be "tightened" if time is running short or "stretched" if you have extra time. This way, you have a flexible roadmap to navigate the workshop smoothly, adapting to the group's needs and creating seamless transitions between activities.

Step 2: Double-Check the Ingredients (Organize Materials and Set Your Space)

Before you begin, double-check your ingredients. Make sure all materials, like post its, markers, posters, etc., are ready. Arrange a friendly, comfortable space where participants can move freely and feel relaxed, especially for activities that require movement. A well-prepared setup sets the tone for an inclusive and engaging workshop.

Step 3: Describe What's on the Plate (Set a Clear Goal)

Introduce the workshop like a chef presenting the day's special. Ensure that participants understand the main goal and what they can expect to take away. Give a brief overview of the key themes and objectives so everyone knows what's on the plate for today's session. This helps set clear expectations and focuses the group's attention on the goal.

Step 4: Prepare the Ground (Set the Rules Together)

Just like preparing the worktop for baking, start by setting a strong foundation. Work with participants to co-create the ground rules. Establish key guidelines together—for instance, no interruptions, active listening without judgment, and respecting diverse opinions. This shared agreement is your base, ensuring the workshop runs smoothly and inclusively.

You can refer back to the agreement at any point during the session if necessary.

Step 5: Add a Dash of Confidentiality (Encourage Openness)

To make your participants feel safe and ready to share, sprinkle in a reminder of confidentiality. Emphasise that what is shared during the workshop stays within the room, and everyone can only share what they feel comfortable with.

In this workshop, you'll be both a sharer and a listener—embrace each role with care, respect, and a commitment to confidentiality. This secret ingredient helps build trust among participants.



Step 6: Mix in Zero Tolerance for Hate Speech (Create a Safe Space)

Add a rule of zero tolerance for aggressive behaviours. Make it clear that any form of hate speech or discriminatory comments about gender identity, gender expression, or other personal traits will not be tolerated. This ingredient ensures a respectful space where everyone can speak without fear of ridicule or harm.



Step 7: Make Sure Everyone is Involved (Facilitate Inclusive Communication)

Make sure every participant gets a chance to share their thoughts and ideas. If needed, suggest methods to guide the conversation - like using dialogue objects or a show of hands.

Balance the mix by gently inviting quieter voices to speak up, ensuring everyone is heard. Use encouraging prompts and non-verbal cues, like nodding, to show you're actively listening and value their contributions.

Remind participants to really hear each other out, respecting differing perspectives. This careful attention helps create a dialogue where everyone's input blends harmoniously.

Step 8: Carefully Handle Complex Ingredients (Introduce Concepts with Care)

When working with delicate ingredients like gender stereotypes and intersectionality, take extra care. Simplify difficult concepts and use relatable examples. Add trigger warnings before diving into sensitive topics, giving participants the option to take a break if needed. This thoughtful preparation helps keep the conversation safe and digestible.



Step 9: Whisk in Interactive Activities (Keep Participants Engaged)

Keep the workshop dynamic and engaging by proposing interactive exercises. These hands-on activities are the yeast that helps your discussions rise, keeping the energy high and participants involved.

If necessary, add an icebreaker or energiser.

Step 10: Fold in Inclusivity and Intersectionality (Promote Diverse Voices)

Remember to walk the talk on inclusivity with a gentle hand. Remind everyone that there are different genders, cultural backgrounds, and ways of seeing gender roles, and that identity is multi-layered. Acknowledge that you also see the world through your own cultural lenses—don't assume they're universal.

If possible, use gender-neutral language throughout—terms like “they/them” or “partner” help create a more inclusive atmosphere.

Step 11: Release Steam from the Pot (Re-establish Emotional Safety)

When running the discussions, be mindful of emotional safety. Encourage the use of “safe words” or signals if participants feel overwhelmed.

Be mindful that if you receive worrying confidences from the participants, you might need to refer them to the appropriate support services. To learn more about this step, read the manual.



Step 12: React When it Boils (Manage Group Dynamics)

Pay attention to the group dynamics. Keep an eye on power imbalances, making sure no one voice dominates. If conflicts arise, deal with them in a respectful and diplomatic manner, trying to find a solution that meets the needs of all parties involved without favouring one idea over another. The group will decide and find the compromise.

If you're struggling with someone's behaviour, remind the group of the rules they agreed upon.

Step 13: Taste and Adjust (Reflect and Debrief)

After each activity, take a moment to taste the progress with a debrief session. Invite participants to share their thoughts and any surprising insights they gained. Ask questions like, "What stood out to you?" This reflection helps refine the discussion and brings out deeper flavours of understanding.

Step 14: Pay Attention to Time (Keep Track of Time)

Monitor the time during the session and make sure you devote enough time to each agenda item without prolonging discussions too much.

Step 15: Don't Hesitate to Involve Others (Ask for Help)

If the work of the facilitator becomes tiring or if you cannot find a solution to the impasse or tensions in the group, do not hesitate to ask for help from the teacher (if you are at school) or the group itself, clearly pointing out the things that make it difficult to run the workshop.



Step 16: Finish with a Sweet Touch (End on a Positive Note)

At the end of the activity, the young people might feel a bit overwhelmed—that’s a sign they’ve begun to grasp how gender stereotypes fuel inequalities. Congratulate them on taking this crucial first step—they’re now ready to focus on finding solutions and driving change!

Step 17: Ask for the Review (Get Feedback)

Finally, gather feedback through an evaluation questionnaire (or other evaluation method)—preferably online to reduce paper use. Evaluation is crucial, and it enables you to run your workshops even better.

By following this recipe, you’ll create a safe, engaging, and thoughtful space to explore gender equality. With the right mix of care and preparation, you’ll inspire participants to leave feeling informed, motivated, and ready to make a difference. Enjoy facilitating – you are the secret ingredient in making this experience truly impactful!



Brief (and not exhaustive) tips for moderating controversial issues in Youth Workshops

The topic of gender can spark heated discussions because it is a controversial issue. If this happens during your workshop and the conversation escalates between participants, do not worry—this is normal. Also, do not worry about the time; here are some tips to better manage the situation.

1. Let the conversation flow

Allow the conversation to continue for a little while, then intervene to stop it. Propose a two-minute silence, and then ask everyone to answer the following question individually, without sharing their answers: "Why am I so fired up?"

2. Remind participants of common rules

Remind the participants of the common rules and emphasize that when politeness is lost, the value of the discussion diminishes. Invite them to find another way to express their viewpoints in a calmer manner.

3. Maintain neutrality as a Youth Worker

As a youth worker, try to distance yourself from the topic. Do not take sides or engage in the discussion. Intervene only to calm the confrontation and keep the environment respectful.

4. Identify and manage leaders of the confrontation

Identify the leaders in the confrontation. Once they have calmed down, propose discussing the topic again. You can split the group into smaller groups (ensuring the leaders are in different groups) and suggest continuing the discussion in these smaller settings.

5. Ensure respect for everyone

Emphasize that everyone deserves respect as a person. Make it clear that there is no space for discrimination or offensive behavior during the workshop.