Session 6: Creating a Safe Space

|	
OBJECTIVE	By the end of the session, participants will be able to define 'safe space', identify girl-specific needs and suggest ideas on what teachers can do to create safe spaces
SUGGESTED TIME	1 hour
MATERIALS	Chart paper, tape, markers, exercise books, PPT Slide 6, PPT Slide 7, Handout 13

1. **Introduction:** Explain that both girls and boys need to feel safe in the school and the classroom. During this session we will focus on what the safety concerns are for our students and how we can address them. We will also look at the need to think very specifically about safe spaces for girls.

2. **Think-Pair-Share:** Divide participants into pairs and ask them to define the term "Safe". Once they have shared their ideas, present the formal definition (**slide 6**). Now, ask them what we mean when we say "Safe Space". Once they have shared their ideas on the meaning of safe space, share **slide 7** (definition of Safe Space).

3. **Group Work:** Ask participants to brainstorm all of the safety concerns they can think of in their school and in the classroom that may have an impact on girls' education. Divide participants into groups and assign each group 1 safety issue (depending on the length of their list, some groups may be examining some of the same issues). Ask them how teachers and the school can address these safety concerns (solutions). Once the participants have completed their group work (approximately 20 minutes) allow them to review what the other groups have done through a **gallery approach**. Ask each group to hang their chart on the wall for a group viewing. Bring the whole group back together and tell them you would like them to go and view the charts prepared by each group. Remind them to take their exercise book and pen with them and note; **a)** any general comments or questions that you have **b)** do I see any omissions/anything I would add, **c)** is there any point I really like or, alternatively, disagree with? Debrief with the whole group. Once they have shared their ideas through the whole group debrief, distribute **handout 13** and discuss. As you read the handout, remind participants that what they do in the classroom and school can impact girls' safety and security outside the class as well. In working to change boys' attitudes and in supporting the development of girls' confidence and life-skills, such as positive assertiveness, girls will be better equipped to address the specific challenges they might face.
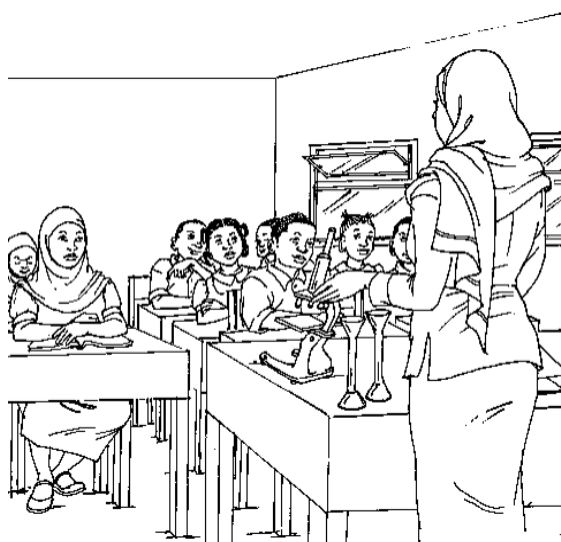
Creating a Safe Space

What do we mean by Safe Space? As teachers it is important that we create safe spaces for all of our students, but what does this mean?

Safe Space: A safe space is one where everyone is safe physically and emotionally, free from abuse and harassment. It is a place where everyone in that space feels welcomed and can voice an idea or opinion without fear of being teased or threatened. Sometimes this means creating a separate and dedicated space for girls, and particularly adolescent girls, to provide an opportunity to talk about sensitive issues such as addressing girl-specific needs that are often ignored.

Creating a Safe Space

School Environment: The school is the starting point. Before students enter the classroom as they step onto the school compound how do they feel?

- Is there warm and welcoming environment with friendly and supportive teachers?

- Are there female teachers who can support and mentor girls?

- Do students leave the school compound to purchase food and if so are there vulnerabilities associated with this activity?

- Where are the latrines located? Are there separate latrines for girls and boys, are they safe and secure with completed walls and doors that lock? Do flush toilets have appropriate disposal bins for sanitary pads?

Risk-Taking: Students often fear giving the wrong answer or an opinion that may be ridiculed. As teachers we need to create a learning environment that fosters risk-taking. Students should know that their ideas and thoughts are valued, that creativity and difference are valued and that wrong answers are not humiliating, but part of the learning process.

Bullying: This refers to unwanted aggressive behavior that is repeated over time. It may be physical or verbal aggression (for example teasing, making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.) Schools and classrooms need to ensure that students understand the concept of bullying and that there is zero tolerance for this behavior.

Discipline vs Punishment: The management of classrooms and schools is determined by national, district and school policy. In determining what works best for you and your class, make an effort to explore all the tools and strategies available. State expectations clearly, develop class behavior agreements, set a clear criteria for disciplinary measures and be consistent in following through. Teachers should be fair and discipline girls and boys consistently, not based on gender biased behavioral expectations.

Abuse: All children have the right to be protected from harm. As part of an anti-bullying policy students should know that any form of physical violence is unacceptable. In addition, teachers, social service agencies and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have the right and the responsibility to intervene where they suspect physical, sexual or psychological abuse in the home. Seek support and training from your local government agency or CBOs that focus on these areas.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual advances and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This has a strong negative impact on girls in particular. Developing life skills such as positive assertiveness, working with boys, girls, parents and the community to change attitudes, and developing a school policy are some important measures needed to address this issue.

Mentors and Role Models: Both boys and girls need strong role models; people they can look up to who have been successful in various aspects of life. If you can see yourself in another person's success, you feel you too can succeed. Mentors are not just those we look up to, sometimes from afar, but those who work directly with us to support us and help us achieve our goals. Teachers themselves can be role models and directly mentor their students. This is especially important to boys and girls who are lacking guidance in their homes or who are highly vulnerable. Girls in particular need strong leadership and support in terms of developing life and career aspirations and knowing their rights.

Girls Groups: One common method of creating a safe space is creating a club or group where girls can meet, talk, share concerns and be given the opportunity to build important knowledge and skills. Many countries have set national level mandates for the establishment of youth clubs and clubs tailored to the specific needs of girls and boys is one option. Some common themes addressed through clubs are:

- Rights education

- Life skills and esteem building: leadership, positive assertiveness, goal setting

- Study skills

- Professional skills and career planning

- Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Financial literacy

- Dealing with issues of harassment and abuse

While in many contexts, such spaces need to be sought out for girls, take a close look at the needs of boys and particularly those who are vulnerable. In addition, remember that changing attitudes is critical to positive change and boys, girls, men and women need to be engaged in this process.

Self-Assessment - Remember always ask critical questions:

- Do I encourage students to share ideas, ask questions and learn without fear?

- Do I make an effort to use positive classroom management rather than corporal punishment? Do I understand that humiliation is not a good form of discipline?

- Are the toilets in my school located in a safe area, do girls and boys have separate toilets, are the toilet walls high enough and do the doors have locks?

- Are girls and boys safe walking to and from school?

- Does my school have a sexual harassment policy and do students understand what sexual harassment is, why it is not allowed and what will occur if they harass another student in this manner?

- Are there measure in place to protect girls and boys from sexual abuse?

- Does my school have an anti-bullying policy, do teachers and students know what bulling is, why it is not acceptable and what will occur if they take part in bullying others?

- Do I foster collaboration and mutual respect between boys and girls? Do I focus on teaching boys and girls important life skills such as positive assertiveness?

- Can I create opportunities for girls-only only or boys-only spaces as needed (after school clubs)?