

"I'm the one you love to hate."

Rob Halford

Kati's Story



Level 4



10 to 20



60 minutes



Complexity: Level 4

Group size: 10 to 20

Time: 60 minutes

Overview: This short simulation activity helps to build empathy towards victims of interpersonal or relationship violence and demonstrates that leaving a violent relationship generally takes place in stages. Participants listen to a story and use blankets to symbolise different stages of entering and leaving an abusive relationship.

Objectives:

- To identify the stages of a typical abusive relationship and to develop understanding about the process of leaving a violent relationship
- To build empathy towards victims of interpersonal or relationship violence
- To discuss the role of third persons (friends, family members, professional helpers, etc.) in helping a person to remove themselves from a violent relationship

Materials:

- An enclosed space, with doors that can be closed, and large enough for the whole group to stand in a circle around a chair
- One chair for the middle of the room
- Eight light blankets or bed sheets, large enough to cover an adult fully



Preparation

- Before running the activity, familiarise yourself with the issue of violence in relationships, including physical violence. Chapter 1 of this manual will be helpful in clarifying the differences between various kinds of violence, particularly the sections dealing with domestic violence and abuse.
- Make sure you have a co-facilitator – ideally someone who has already worked with this group. If you are facilitating alone, ask a participant to act as co-facilitator.
- Before running the activity, approach a participant you believe to be “emotionally strong” and ask them whether they would agree to take on the role of Kati. Talk them through the entire activity before asking them to decide, and make sure they understand that the blankets will be placed over them. Make sure that they do not suffer from any form of claustrophobia or anxiety.
- Prepare the room by placing one chair in the middle and create a space so that everyone can sit in a circle around the chair or in a semi-circle in front of it. Put the blankets in a pile nearby.



Instructions

The activity illustrates the different stages of entering and leaving a violent relationship.

As facilitator, your task will be to read aloud the story of Kati (see the handout below), leaving a pause after each episode of the story.

The story is divided into two parts: part one describes the different stages of the abusive relationship, and part two deals with leaving it. In part one, after the first paragraph, your co-facilitator will put the blanket over Kati. The blanket symbolises an event that is likely to lead to or be the result of abuse or violence. After this, participants should understand what they are expected to do after each episode in the story.

In the second part of the story, your co-facilitator will remove the blanket from Kati, to symbolise a stage of leaving the violent relationship. Participants should follow accordingly. To maintain the surprise effect, it is better not to tell the whole group straight away about the meaning of putting blankets over Kati or removing them.

- 1) Explain that the aim of the activity is to build empathy towards victims of interpersonal or relationship violence, using a symbol to represent the highly limited space and possibilities available to battered women.
- 2) Ask the participant that you have prepared to take on the role of Kati to come forward. Introduce the participant to the group. Tell everyone else that s/he will have a difficult task, but that s/he will be safe during the activity. Ask the volunteer to sit on the chair in the middle of the room. Then introduce your co-facilitator to the group. Explain that this person will assist you in running the activity. Pass around the blankets or sheets among participants evenly (1 for every 2 or 3 participants). The co-facilitator should have one.

- 3) Explain to participants that you are going to read out a series of statements. There will be a short pause between each statement. Participants should follow the story closely and pay particular attention to the pauses, as each of them will have a task during the pauses. Also tell them to pay attention to the co-facilitator, as during the first pause s/he will demonstrate what participants will need to do later. Explain to participants that the person playing 'Kati' has been briefed thoroughly, is fully aware of what is going to happen and is happy to accept the challenge.
- 4) Ask participants to be silent during the reading of the story, and tell them that if they have questions, they should keep them until this part of the activity is over. Tell them to take note of their feelings as the activity proceeds. If they have questions of clarification, ask them to raise these now, before the main part of the activity begins.
- 5) Start reading the story slowly. At the first pause, signal to the co-facilitator to put the first blanket over Kati. Make sure that the co-facilitator knows in advance to cover Kati completely. Continue reading the story. At the next pause, encourage participants to put on another blanket over Kati. If participants are hesitant, you can look up, nod your head or signal to the co-facilitator to guide a participant in putting on another blanket.

When you get to the part of the story where you ask Kati questions, read even more slowly.

When you get to the first pause in the second part, signal to the co-facilitator to come forward to remove the first blanket. Again, signal to participants that they should follow the example of the co-facilitator at the next pause. Participants do not normally hesitate to remove the blankets, but if they do, signal to the co-facilitator to guide them.

- 6) After all blankets have been removed, thank the participant who played Kati, and ask them to sit back in the circle. Allow participants a moment to settle before beginning the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

Begin the debriefing by asking for a round of impressions, to get an idea of how everyone feels. It is important to remember that this can be an emotionally challenging activity, and participants may feel upset or uncomfortable. Remind them that they have the right not to say anything. Offer the participant who played Kati the possibility to speak first about their feelings. Continue with others who indicate that they want to speak. During the debriefing, keep the paper with Kati's story close at hand, so that you can refresh participants' memories of any aspects of the story, as necessary.

The following guiding questions can help you to develop the discussion:

- How did it feel to put the blankets on Kati? How did it feel to watch others cover her?



- How did you feel about the removal of the blankets?
- Did you notice the reaction of other participants during the covering and the removal? Were there differences?
- Who is responsible for Kati having been covered by so many blankets? Is it Kati, her husband, or other people in the story?
- Why were the blankets removed in stages? Why did we not just remove them all at once?
- In your opinion, what were the different roles and responsibilities of the people in this story for ending the abuse? Could they have played their roles differently?
- What, in general, is the responsibility of “third parties”, i.e. to individuals not belonging to either side? What is the responsibility of society?
- Which human rights are violated in cases of domestic violence? How does it affect the struggle for gender equality?
- What do you think that young people, youth workers and youth organisations can do to prevent or stop violence in abusive relationships?



Tips for facilitators

This activity needs a particularly safe environment. It is not an activity that can be run with a group that has only recently come together. If your group works together regularly, this is an activity for when they already know and trust you, as facilitator, and each other. If your group has come together for a one-off residential activity, it is suggested that you run this activity only after the group has worked together for a few days. Trust in the facilitator is just as important as trust in each other for the success of this activity.

Make sure that no one disturbs the storytelling: avoid any coming and going at this stage. If you are running this activity after a break, make sure that everyone is back in the room before you start.

It is strongly suggested that before the activity, you explain to the volunteer playing Kati that s/he will be covered fully by several blankets. The volunteer must be claustrophobia-free and ready to experience some physical hardship during the activity. You may also decide that Kati should be played by a co-facilitator. This is advisable if you have not, by this point, had the chance to build a high level of trust and safety in the group.

Some participants may be hesitant about putting the blanket over Kati, or may prefer to put it on Kati's lap rather than over her head. The facilitator and co-facilitator should stay silent during the activity: try to encourage participants to perform the act of covering Kati fully by using eye contact and guidance. Bring into the debriefing stage any hesitations or unwillingness on the part of participants, according to how they have performed the act of covering Kati.

Remember that you cannot necessarily know “who is in the room”. Any of the

participants may have experienced an abusive relationship, and you should avoid putting any pressure on such people to disclose things they do not want to speak about.

Try to formulate the questions you ask in the debriefing in a non-personal manner, so that even if participants have experience of such matters, they do not feel the need to answer by referring to their experience directly. Be aware that such experiences may be painful for participants to be reminded of, and that as a facilitator it will be your responsibility to deal with the emotional consequences of running the activity in your group. In other words, and in practical terms, if a participant gets upset or starts to cry, you need to be prepared to deal with that both on a one to one basis, and with the whole group. This may be as simple as taking a break, asking the participant if they want to go to their room to freshen up, and telling the rest of the group that the person needed some time out and will speak about it when he/she/they are ready; or it may involve addressing the reasons for the participant getting upset in a discussion with the whole group - with their prior consent, of course.

Variations on this activity exist. You can alter the story to fit the environment you are working in. You could also make 6 to 8 steps rather than 9. Be sure, however, that you have an equal number of story steps for both the first phase and the second phase of the activity (i.e. putting on and taking off blankets). Do not go above eight steps; staying under the blankets is no fun!

Suggestions for follow-up

It is possible to work with variations on this activity by using a different 'story' to illustrate Kati's situation.

Have a look at the activity 'Domestic Affairs' to develop the theme of domestic violence and 'Power Station' to develop the theme of how power and violence are related. Both activities are from *Compass – manual for human rights education with young people*.

Ideas for action

Consider providing information about domestic and relationship violence to your own target group. If you have not been active in the field of gender-based violence before, consult an NGO dealing with these issues for advice on how best to inform your target group about the problem, and support them to understand how they can help themselves or others affected by it. Involve your group in the preparation of the resource materials (e.g. flyers, blog, etc.). Check the Internet or local organisations offering crisis intervention to battered women or other people exposed to ongoing relational violence. Find out what support they give to victims. If possible, invite the representative of such an organisation to explain what they do to help in 'removing Kati's blankets'.





KATI'S STORY

PART I

Kati is 28. She married Jan when she was 20 and he was 23. They have two children, who are 3 and 7 years of age.

When Kati was a child, she often saw her father beating her mother. It happened several times a week. Kati remembers that sometimes her mother had to go to the hospital because of her injuries.

(Pause)

Co-facilitator covers "Kati" with first blanket.

Immediately after they get married, Jan tells Kati that he will take care of the family income, because Kati does not know how to save. He tells her she will get from him only enough money to buy food and household items. He tells her she will have to show him receipts to prove that she spent the money on what she asked the money for and that he approved.

(Pause)

Kati gets pregnant in the first year of their marriage. Jan starts to tell Kati regularly that she does not know how to run a household and that she is very lucky to have him, because nobody else would want her for a wife.

(Pause)

After the birth of their first child, Jan starts to beat Kati. He accuses her of loving the child more than him.

(Pause)

Kati goes to her mother and tells her about being beaten by Jan. Her mother tells her that this is part of marriage and she should learn to put up with it. According to her mother, "a woman has to stick with her husband".

(Pause)

As their first son grows older, Jan threatens and beats him too. Kati is worried, but at the same time she believes that it can be very harmful to children to separate them from their fathers.

(Pause)

Kati tells one of her co-workers that she is regularly beaten by Jan, and that she needs help. Her colleague tells the others at her workplace, and now everybody is talking about her.

(Pause)

Kati is increasingly absent from work without a proper excuse and she is laid off. Now she does not have a job or an income of her own.

(Pause)



PART II

(Question to the person in the middle and to mark the transition from covering to uncovering Kati)

Kati, why do you have to live like this?

(Pause)

Why don't you leave your husband?

(Pause)

Kati reads a story in a magazine about a battered woman who manages to leave an abusive relationship. The article contains the phone numbers of hotlines, shelters, and drop-in centres for abused women. Kati decides that she cannot bear being abused any longer. She called a hotline where she had a long discussion with a woman who told her that she is one of many women experiencing domestic violence.

(Pause)

Co-facilitator removes one blanket

For the first time Kati has an open discussion with her older son about their shared fear of their violent husband and father.

(Pause)

After a few weeks of thinking and planning, Kati calls her sister and asks her whether she could move to her place with her sons for a short period. Her sister had long given up hope that Kati would ever leave her violent husband and now she is very glad to be of help. (Pause)

One afternoon Kati packs up their everyday belongings and moves with her sons to her sister's place.

(Pause)

She starts to look for a job. Her sister helps by asking friends if they know of any opportunities, and they look through the job advertisements together.

(Pause)

Kati visits a lawyer to get information about custody and child visitation issues and advice about how the truth about Jan's violence towards them can be revealed. They also discuss divorce procedures.

(Pause)

Kati finds a job she likes, and moves into a rented apartment with her sons. She visits Child Welfare Services and finds out that her older son can enrol in a support group for children who have fled from violent homes.

(Pause)

Kati finds a self-help group of women who have survived domestic violence. Through sharing and listening she learns to understand how and why her romantic relationship developed into an abusive one. She decides that once she feels she is back on her feet, she will join a group to support battered women herself.

(Pause)