

REFLECTING CRITICALLY ON MESSAGES CONVEYED BY EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



This good practice was developed in partnership with **Rencontre africaine pour la défense de droits de l'Homme (RADDHO)** in **Senegal** for the **Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education** project. The good practices featured in this series are 'living practices,' meaning that they are continuously evolving and adapting.

When developing educational activities, a good practice consists in questioning the messages that are conveyed by our own discourse and content to address the theme of **gender-based violence**. As Coates and Wade (2007) note, talking about violence is never a neutral or impact-free action, as it contributes to a way of thinking about violence that can either counteract it or, unfortunately, contribute to its continuation.

More specifically, educators can make connections between the messages they send out and the principle of accountability in the human rights-based approach with a gender perspective by continually asking the key question: **"Who does the message attribute responsibility for the violence to?"** By asking this question, it is possible to detect whether educational content that addresses gender-based violence has the effect of **reinforcing gender-based power inequalities** in three distinct ways:




- 1 By blaming the victims/survivors of violence**, which amounts to putting the responsibility for the violation of a right on people who have rights.
- 2 By removing responsibility from the perpetrators of violence**, which amounts to maintaining impunity for aggressor and those who have moral and legal obligations.
- 3 By trivializing or legitimizing the violence**, which amounts to not recognizing a situation of violation of rights and therefore, attributing responsibility to no one.



On the other hand, educational content has the power to contribute to deconstructing unequal gender-based power relations when the messages sent by educators:

- **Assign full responsibility to the perpetrators of violence**, which amounts to putting the responsibility for the violation of a right on the right people, i.e., the aggressor and the people with moral and legal obligations.
- **Remove blame from the victims/survivors**, which is tantamount to removing responsibility from the rights holders, since a rights holder is not responsible for a situation in which his or her own rights are violated.
- **Denounce all forms of violence** as unacceptable, which is tantamount to recognizing human rights as universal and inalienable, regardless of the situation.

Here are some examples of common beliefs that can be analyzed asking the question: Who does the message attribute responsibility for the violence to?

 <p>Common beliefs that reproduce unequal power relations:</p>	 <p>Who does the message attribute responsibility for the violence to?</p>	 <p>Alternative message that denounces and deconstructs unequal power relations:</p>
<p>It is not sexual violence if the act is done in exchange for something (e.g. Better grades in the context of an educational institution).</p>	<p>Trivialization and legitimization of violence. Blame and accountability are placed on the victims and perpetrators maintain impunity.</p> <p>By putting the blame on the victims, we are moving away from the real problem we should be talking about, which is that a person in a position of power, control, or authority abuses their power and the situation of vulnerability of another person to achieve their own ends and maintain their power.</p>	<p>The right question to ask is: Has there been an abuse of power? Abuse of power is at the heart of violence. Any sexual contact committed by taking advantage of a position of power and control and/or the situation of vulnerability of another person is a form of sexual violence.</p>



<p>Men cannot control their sexual urges.</p>	<p>This message completely removes blame from the perpetrators of violence and reinforces gender stereotypes.</p> <p>It also reinforces the belief that victims provoke violence in some way. The burden of responsibility is therefore placed on the victims not to provoke, rather than on the perpetrators of violence to control themselves and not to abuse their power.</p>	<p>Sexual assault is an act of violence. It is not sexual desire. These assaults are about controlling another person. Everyone can control the sexual impulses of their body.</p>
<p>A woman going to a man's home is an automatic invitation to sexual activity.</p>	<p>Trivialization and legitimization of violence.</p> <p>Blame and responsibility are placed on the victims. They may be afraid to ask for help for fear of being guilty or may not feel legitimate to ask for it. They may feel shame and guilt, which interferes with the healing and repair process.</p>	<p>A person does not ask to be sexually assaulted by their actions or appearance. Staying out late, drinking, taking drugs, dressing a certain way, or expressing a desire to go home with someone is not an invitation or provocation to sexual assault.</p> <p>The real responsibility that should be talked about is the responsibility to always have the clear, free, informed, and continuous consent of a person before initiating and continuing any sexual contact with them.</p>

Reference

Coates, L. Et Wade, A. (2007). Language and violence: Analysis of four discursive operations. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22, p. 511 – 522. DOI 10.1007/s10896-007-9082-2