

Looking After Me Resource Kit

Background

This Resource Kit is one of the outcomes from the Looking After Me Project (LAM). LAM was an innovative three and a half year project that began in January 2004 – funded by Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme (WSAAS). The project was auspiced by Penrith Women's Health Centre and it focused in the Penrith Local Government Area.

LAM provided educational/personal growth groups on issues relating to healthy relationships and domestic violence to women with intellectual disability. It also provided professional development to workers in both the disabilities and mainstream services sector on issues relating to intellectual disability and domestic violence.

LAM's research found that there was a lack of visual tools that targeted women with intellectual disability in relation to understanding domestic violence issues or the development of skills to achieve safe and healthy relationships. This Resource Kit aims to address the gap. The actual production of the kits was made possible by a further funding grant from the Office Of Women, NSW in July 2008.

This Resource Kit can be used as a teaching aid in any educational approach and sections can be given to participants/clients as personal handouts. The kit can also be used as a professional development tool for workers in the disability and mainstream service sectors - to help their services become more inclusive and better able to meet the needs of women with intellectual disabilities regarding relationships and DV issues.

Social Context

Women with intellectual disabilities are at great risk of experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault:

- At least 85% of women with disabilities experience domestic violence in comparison to 25 to 50% of the general population. Waxman B, 1991
- Women with intellectual disabilities have ten times greater chance of being assaulted in any situation. Wilson & Brewer, 1992, cited in Salthouse & Frohmader, 2004
- 68% of women with intellectual disability will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old. Frohmader C, 2002
- Women with intellectual disability often do not understand that their situation is violent or how they might get help.
- Even if they do know where to go, mainstream services may not be able to meet their specific needs. Calson, 1997; McCarthy, 1993; Waxman, 1991; Crossmaker, 1991; Mc Pherson, 1991; Sobsey & Doe, 1991, cited in Salthouse & Frohmader, 2004
- Women with intellectual disability are often socialised and educated in ways that increase their vulnerability to violence and reduce their power in relationships. Sobsey & Doe, 1991, Salthouse S & Frohmader C, 2004,

Underlying Principles of the Looking After Me Project

- People with intellectual disability have a wide variety of relationships and they have the right to information, education and the higher levels of support needed to develop meaningful, fulfilling and safe relationships.
- People with intellectual disability need to know how violence manifests in relationships and what to do if it occurs. Everyone has the right to live safely and free from fear in their own homes and within relationships.
- Domestic violence (DV) is a range of abusive behaviours perpetrated in the victim's home by someone who is well known to them. Women with intellectual disability live in a wide range of domestic situations such as institutions, hostels and group homes where they have daily relationships with other residents, professionals, paid and unpaid carers, family members and friends who all could be potentially perpetrators of Domestic Violence. It is accepted practice to define violence within any of these relationships and living situations as Domestic Violence.
- Domestic Violence is perpetrated by men in an overwhelming majority of cases (95% of reported cases) and DV is reinforced by social conditions that reflect gender inequality and the promotion of male power.
- Domestic violence occurs across all cultures and socio-economic groups and it damages the well being and future life chances of women and children.
- Domestic violence is a crime and the sole responsibility of the perpetrator. The safety and ongoing protection of women and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence are paramount considerations in any response to DV.
- Women from non English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal women and women from other marginalised groups such as Lesbians and women with disabilities must have their special needs considered in any response to domestic violence.
- Education is an essential strategy in developing relationship skills and protecting women and children from violence in the home.

Please feel free to reproduce any of these resources.

**Copies of the resources are available
for free download from the following websites:**

- **Women's Health NSW www.whnsw.asn.au**
- **Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse
www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au**
- **Or Contact: Penrith Women's Health Centre
Email: pwhcentre@pwhc.org.au**

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Introduction to the Resource Kit

The resource is divided into the following sections:

1. Group Rules Card Series
2. Body Signs Poster & Worksheet
3. The Relationship Circle interactive tool
4. Healthy Relationships Cards Series
5. Domestic Violence Cards Series
6. Three story books re: Healthy Relationships and Domestic Violence issues

1. Group Rules

- The idea of group rules may be unfamiliar to many people with intellectual disability. Use the cards to discuss behaviour in groups i.e. what makes people feel safe/scared/happy in groups; being assertive/saying what you need to say; listening to others. The Group Rules Cards series could also be used in the healthy relationships section.
- Write up your group rules so you can refer to them later.

2. Body Signs

- These images help develop an understanding of bodily responses and what they that might mean for safety and decision making – early warning signs.
- The images portray possible responses to the emotion of fear/panic. Participants can draw in their own personal physical responses on the blank image.
- This exercise can be carried out one to one or in a group setting. The drawings can be enlarged for easier use in groups.
- It's important to give very specific examples as to when the bodily responses might happen i.e. any time you are scared – going to the dentist or a new school or when something bad is/has happened.

3. The Relationship Circle

- The relationship circle series is used to clarify different types of relationships and appropriate physical responses ie. how we use touch.
- Introduce the circle game by describing different types of relationships and show where they fall within the circles Many people with intellectual disability may think that only boyfriend/girlfriend bonds are 'relationships'.
- The relationship circle image is for one to one work with people and /or as a take home resource. The image can be enlarged for group situations.
- For a group, you could also make a large fabric relationship circle (approx 2 metres diameter – trace using an overhead projector). By physically standing in the circle, people will experience a sense of proximity for each kind of relationship shown in the A4 Relationship Circle Cards.
- Another group technique is to tell a story or use the story books and have participants place the characters within the relationship circle. Discuss appropriateness of touch and physical proximity within that story's relationships.
- When using stories, it is important to stop at points along the story line which indicate change/ interaction/conflict/ and ask questions about what's happening in relation to feelings, choices, and thoughts. – ask, "what should the characters do now?" This gives participants an opportunity to think through situations and give their responses while also listening to other participant responses.

4. Healthy Relationships

- These images portray the qualities of healthy relationships and can be used in many creative ways - picking out the qualities that participants believe they themselves bring to relationships;



naming qualities they like best in relationships; role playing the qualities; opening discussion as to what happens, or what it feels like, when certain qualities are absent in relationships.

- The images can be used as an illustrative device when telling stories, to illustrate qualities being displayed in interactions - or qualities lost in interactions.

5. Domestic Violence

- These cards portray violence in relationships. It is important to spend time building trust with participants before talking about domestic violence.
- Many women with intellectual disability are unfamiliar with what domestic violence is and may think that the violence they have experienced is normal.
- It is useful as part of this trust building to focus on building self esteem. Increased self esteem will make it easier for women to look at difficult feelings and traumatic events in their lives and to find strategies and confidence to move on.
- It's important that group facilitators are aware of appropriate and accessible services /support if women disclose violence.

6. Story Books

- Using the story books helps contextualise ideas of healthy relationships and concepts of domestic violence in all its manifestations.
- It is important to talk about how the women in the stories are feeling - in good relationships and in DV relationships.
- Have the participants imagine how they themselves would feel in both types of relationships and then encourage them to discuss those feelings in the group or later with a worker.
- The story books can be used in all the sections of the resource.

Acknowledgments

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- Penrith Women's Health Centre
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association
- Self Advocacy Sydney
- Nepean Sunnyfield Day Program

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References

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