

HOW TO BECOME A SAFE PLACE?

INTERACTIVE PATHWAY FOR (RE)INTEGRATION AT WORK OF WOMEN FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Step 2 Covering basic needs



WHAT IS A SAFE PLACE?

What does "safe space" mean?

Derives from the 1970s women and LGBT movements, "safe place" is originally used to name physical places where like-minded people could meet and share their experiences in a safe environment. It is therefore intended to protect marginalised groups from violations, threat and hatred.

Primarily used in higher education to prevent discrimination, harassment, hatred and threat, it could be problematic if safe space is taken to mean an environment where no one is challenged or made uncomfortable because there is no safe space for everyone. We can therefore speak of a space that is "as safe as possible".

The objective of the safe space is speaking freely without being afraid. Implementing a safe space needs to be open enough to include all kinds of perspectives BUT openness needs to be structured by certain rules:

1. Make a statement of values
2. Define common rules (see resource 21 the Action Plan)

... AT THE WORKPLACE?

We spend most of our day at work and that is why the workplace is a central part of our life. We often bring more emotions and needs to the workplace than we would like to or think. In this situation, productivity decreases, there are delays and absences from work, and relationships with colleagues suffer.

But what happens when serious problems arise, such as domestic violence or other unwanted events that affect our professional life? It happens that we notice the apathy or lack of concentration of a colleague, sadness or worry, or even some hidden signs or bruises. Here comes the role of colleagues, mentors, and team leaders who notice these behavioural changes to try to find out more about the problem.

Therefore, it is necessary to create a safe place in the workplace for women facing domestic violence. This can be organised by taking into account a few basic principles:

- confidentiality,
- empathy,
- taking seriously the risks/challenges that may arise.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A SAFE PLACE AT WORK?

Such a space offers:

- One-on-one, individual and confidential support to the person who, unfortunately, is going through a situation of domestic violence at some point in life.
- Intimacy, the woman may share the trouble she is going through without the other team members finding out.
- Increasing confidence in employers who show a high level of interest in their employees and who cares about their well-being.
- Having a safe place at work also contributes to the empowerment of women facing domestic violence, who can then talk about it if they wish, support each other, and thus increase their self-confidence and self-esteem.

WHO CAN APPROACH A WOMAN WHO IS FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Ideally, the women confronted with domestic violence should feel comfortable enough at the workplace to tell a mentor, or a trusted colleague what she is going through. But sometimes she doesn't speak, because it takes time to understand what she is living (because it can be psychological violence and it's not obvious as physical violence) or because she is ashamed of her situation. In this case, someone she trusts, a close colleague or a supervisor, or a mentor, should approach the woman who is experiencing domestic violence. Maybe she will answer no, and this is fine too. But after that, she knows that she can speak to someone if she needs it. However, anyone who observes a person in a state of psycho-emotional difficulty may ask what happened or how it can help her. A good word and encouragement can make a difference in the life of that person who is facing domestic violence.

Some tips:

- "I see you, I hear you, I respect you" are the fundamental postures for establishing a relationship of trust.
- Be aware of your own emotions.
- Be reflective and accept that you too may have prejudices and stereotypes.

For information on how to deal with a victim of domestic violence, see Resources 9 and 20.

HOW TO LIFT THE TABOO OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AT THE WORKPLACE?

Domestic violence doesn't stop at the house door. That's the reason the workplace should be a safe place, where the woman confronted with domestic violence could speak.

Establishing a safe place involves raising awareness, training, listening, informing. For example, it's possible to display posters, distribute booklets to employees with useful numbers and associations, and make victims feel safe when they disclose. Awareness-raising and training can be provided first to people likely to receive women facing domestic violence, such as managers, human resources, social workers, etc. Then, the same training can also be provided to all employees of the company.

Moreover, awareness and prevention allow making comfortable the victim who wants to speak, but also to set up a safe place before a case is detected.

TO GO FURTHER

The OneInThreeWomen Podcast

<https://podcast.ausha.co/one-in-three-women-the-podcast-companies-united-to-end-domestic-violence>

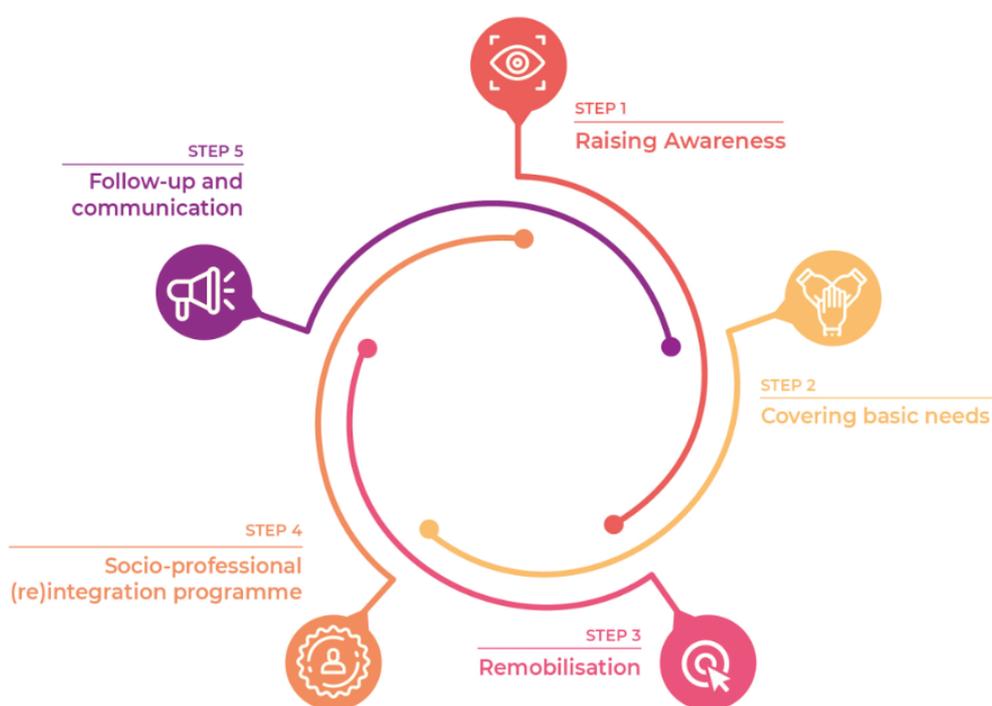
<https://podcast.ausha.co/one-in-three-women-le-podcast>

Prevention of (sexual) harassment is also part of well-being at work, making the workplace as safe as possible and contributing to job retention.

<https://www.centre.aract.fr/outils-violences-sexistes/>

<https://www.cnfce.com/formation-harcelement-moral-et-sexuel>

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