



Sexuality and
Reproductive Health



Fatherhood
and Caregiving



From Violence to
Peaceful Coexistence

Author:



**Reasons and
Emotions**

Preventing and
Living with HIV/AIDS

Section 4



MODULE 1



What and Why

REASONS
AND EMOTIONS

Author:



 **OVERVIEW**

This section focuses on the general mental health needs of young men, taking a detailed look at specific questions, particularly substance abuse and suicide. This module combines theoretical and methodological discussions, seeking to provide a useful framework for the topic, while also providing information on the current situation of young men in Latin America in relation to this question. In Module 2, we provide easy-to-use educational activities that can be used with young men in different settings.

Throughout Latin America there are numerous programs reaching young men, but the majority of these focus on sexuality and reproductive health. Rarely do we find discussions related to young men on the issues

of emotional and mental health. And even when mental health is discussed regarding young men, it generally focuses on a narrow range of problems, rather than taking a comprehensive or holistic approach.

For these reasons, we begin our discussion with the premise that young men are the products of their own subjective experiences and we see our tasks as health promoters to promote a reflection by young men on the difficulties they face in expressing emotions in positive ways, and helping them rediscover, direct and strengthen their emotional intelligence. While this section focuses on these issues from young men's perspectives, we believe these issues must be approached in a relational sense. Thus, many of these activities can be used in mixed-sex groups.

“Mental health is a tool for each person to construct their own path.”

Juanita, healthworker

What do We Mean by Mental Health?

Many mental health professionals still receive a biologically-based training that makes socio-cultural aspects of mental health secondary, both in terms of recognizing mental health problems and managing them. We believe that, in preventive mental health work with community groups, including young men, we must focus more on health and education, and less on illness. This strategy implies the need to understand in detail the conditions under which resilient behavior patterns develop, and how to go beyond mere provision of information and communication. By resilience, as we saw in the section on violence, we refer to a combination of factors that allow a person to successfully cope with or mitigate the damage of difficulties and traumas in life.¹

According to the WHO, mental health is the capacity of people to attain and carry out their life goals and plans. Thus, when we talk about mental health, we are referring to a complex process of the daily individual and collective construction of persons in relation to their feelings, bodies, sexuality and environment. Positive mental health creates well-being, in the sense of “feeling good” about our way of being, thinking and feeling. It includes our subjective realities and perceptions and our affectivity as well as our ability to interact with others, and thus form what is frequently called intersubjectivity, or

the ability of two or more persons to share the same meaning or understanding of something.

Mental health implies the capacity of constructing relationships of respect and intimacy with other people and is key to understanding different issues that appear in this and the other modules in this series. Gender is clearly related to mental health. Numerous studies have documented the different ways that men and women face different sets of mental health needs, many of these directly related with socially constructed gender expectations.² For example, in our direct work with men and women at Salud y Género, we have repeatedly seen how men’s socialization leads to a series of risk behaviors for men that also affect women. These include competitiveness, and violent and reckless behavior, to mention just two.

Specifically, we must consider the strong link that exists between the characteristics of being a “tough guy” and “not showing fear” as masculine attributes and the use of psychoactive substances. While affirming that substance use is a multi-causal and complex problem, it is important to recognize the links between gender socialization and substance use to improve our understanding of the issue and to devise appropriate prevention and self-care strategies. For example, how often have we seen a young man in some risk-taking situation, encouraged by his peers to prove that he is a “real man?”³

How Does Gender Affect the Mental Health of Young Men?

We know that the social construction of masculinity varies by historical moment, social class, race, life cycle and sexual orientation. As we have seen in the other modules, adolescence is often the time in life when the hegemonic or predominate values related to masculinity⁴ are internalized, and in turn begin to limit a young man's emotional life, or his expression of emotions.

Specifically, we see that the emotional repertoire of young men to respond to stress and trauma is limited and rigid. Add to this the fact that most young men have difficulties in asking for help or support, because to seek help is to be vulnerable, even feminine or effeminate. All these tendencies create risk factors for young men in terms of mental health.

The use of violence and all its variants and excessive use of alcohol and substance use – which in turn can be seen as emerging symptoms of unresolved affective needs – are both more associated with or carried out by men. How we show our emotions, and which emotions we show, is also influenced by gender. For example, men typically have problems showing fear and sadness, while women may have more difficulties showing anger, issues that have implications for mental health⁵. Thus, gender figures as an important factor in the manifestation of substance use and many mental health needs.

For a long time, any expression of emotions was considered to be a sign of a mental health disturbance and was seen as inherent to women. Today, expressing feelings and emotions is seen not only as a positive manifestation of mental health, but is also highly recommended to promote mental health. Denying the existence of tensions and the problems of daily life, as well as having difficulty in talking about the associated emotions, is common among men and may

be associated with substance use, including alcohol use⁶.

Furthermore, as in the health field in general, mental health statistics more often refer to illness than to health. There is little information and research on the factors that promote mental health. However, we have endless volumes of data on indicators of mental health and other health problems, such as:

- the frequency in which young men are victims and perpetrators of violence or accidents;
- suicide rates;
- access and use of legal and illegal substances;
- the number of young people who live in poverty or live in the streets (the majority of whom are male);
- lack of access to education and work opportunities;
- lack of specific services for young people;
- the number of young people infected by STIs, including HIV.

As we have seen previously, statistics from Latin America show greater mortality among men, particularly adolescent and young adult men than women. Regionally, for all children and youth between 5-19 years of age, males account for 70 percent of the deaths to this age group. Overall, the likelihood of a man dying in an accident is four times greater for men than for women⁷. And we know that most of these accidents are due to a combination of factors: demonstrating “manhood” or bravado, lack of self-care, high-speed driving and alcohol and/or other substance use. Based on these statistics, we find that at birth, the life expectancy for men is 5.2 years less than for women in Latin America (1990-1995). This difference in life expectation between the sexes has been observed for many years, but it is important to note that this difference has increased from 3.3 years in 1950-1955. It is also important to point out that the majority of these differences in life expectancy between men and women is related to social, not biological factors – that is, they are related to the way men and boys are socialized to be and interact with others.

What about Men and Substance Use?

The consumption of alcohol and drugs in the adolescent population has long been observed and studied in various parts of Latin America⁸. The use of psychoactive substances has been associated, directly or indirectly, with many of the other mental health needs of adolescents and adults. Currently, about 50 percent of deaths among young people (accidents, traumas, homicides, poisoning, drowning, suicides and more recently, HIV/AIDS) are associated with the use of alcohol and other substances⁹. Although we can also see an increase in the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other substances among young women, regular consumption and excessive consumption are more commonly seen among young men.

Currently, various countries in the region are debating whether to legalize or decriminalize drugs as a strategy for reducing drug trafficking and the influence of drug trafficking groups. This strategy, if it were well organized, might also be an incentive for promoting self-care practices and personal responsibility in the face of drug consumption. We as an organization and the authors of this section do not have a defined point of view on the issue of legalization of substance use. Nonetheless, we believe it is necessary to widen the debate on the issue as a possible way of reducing the growing levels of consumption among young people.

How Can Substance Abuse Among Young Men be Prevented?

In recent years, substance use prevention programs have gradually changed from being aggressive, fear-based and basically informative, to more holistic educational models that take into account the wider environment and setting. These newer models consider the interaction with the environment and the social setting, rather than focusing solely on the individual and his/her problems, which data suggest is key. For example, in the United States there was a decrease in the consumption of illegal drugs among adolescents between 1996 and 1999. The reason for this decline is generally attributed to two key factors: (1) the growing disapproval of substance use by peers, and (2) the perception of the risks associated with substance use (by family, school and other social groups). In short, adolescents apparently have reduced substance use largely because those around them disapprove of its use.

We believe that health education must work with young people to create conditions in which the young person can conscientiously and with social responsibility create his or her own lifestyle and promote his or her own healthy development. We see our prevention activities as helping young people recognize and overcome emotional, family and social conflicts and find ways to enjoy life that do not include substance use. Thus, in this section, we offer activities related to self-esteem, reliance on positive social networks and conflict resolution. Indeed, research in the substance use prevention field suggests that the best prevention strategy is to combine specific prevention actions on the use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other substances with non-specific types of activities that promote general life and coping skills.

What about Suicide?

Around the world, suicide attempts are three to four times more common among women, but when it comes to actual deaths from suicide, the situation is inverted: suicide rates are three to nine times higher among young men than young women in Latin America (see the table below).

Data from throughout the region show that the two groups of men most likely to commit suicide are adolescents and young men, followed by older men. We can also see the trend of higher rates of attempts among women and higher rates of suicide deaths by men. This is due at least in part to difficulties that men have in asking for help, since socially they are expected to be "stronger" and "self-sufficient." On the other hand, women are more often seen as having the right to ask for help and express more

freely their fears and suffering. The difference between the suicide attempts by women and the actual suicides by men is also due to the kind of suicide methods used (men are more likely to use lethal methods such as firearms)¹⁰.

Suicide is in turn related to depression and stress and trauma. In Mexico, studies carried out with young people ages 15 to 24 who have attempted suicide, show that 90 percent of these young people suffer from acute anxiety, 60 percent have depression symptoms and 21 percent have acute depression¹¹. The association between alcohol use and other psycho-active substances and suicidal behavior has also been confirmed.

Discussing suicide can be intimidating for many groups of young people and for many health professionals. To start the discussion, we recommend that the educator review some common myths and facts about suicide:

Suicide rates by sex in selected countries of the Americas

Country / year	General Rate (per 100,000)	Rate for men	Rate for women	Men x Women
USA (1989)	12.2	19.9	4.8	4.1
Puerto Rico (1990)	10.5	19.4	2.1	9.2
Uruguay (1990)	10.3	16.6	4.2	4
Argentina (1989)	7.1	10.5	3.8	2.8
Costa Rica (1989)	5.8	9.3	2.1	4.4
Chile (1989)	5.6	9.8	1.5	6.5
Venezuela (1989)	4.8	7.8	1.8	4.3
Mexico (1990)	2.3	3.9	0.7	5.6

Source: Desjarlais, et al (1995), *World mental health: problems and priorities in low income countries*, Oxford U. Press, NY. P. 70.

Myths and Facts Related to Suicide

Belief: People that threaten to commit suicide never do it.

Fact: Out of every 10 people who commit suicide, 8 give clear signs of their intentions.

Belief: A person who tries to commit suicide really wants to die.

Fact: Most suicidal people are in doubt about wanting to live or die and are open and/or want to talk to others about this decision.

Belief: Speaking openly about suicide and suicidal ideas can be dangerous.

Fact: Asking questions and allowing free expression of these ideas is the best way of outlining strategies of intervention and support for persons at risk.

The causes and risk factors associated with suicide are of course complex, but some risk factors or issues are frequently found to be associated with suicide in adolescents and young adults, including:

- ✎ Abuse or dependence on alcohol and other psycho-active substances.
- ✎ Dysfunction and/or violence in the family.
- ✎ Difficulties in defining and accepting homosexual feelings.
- ✎ Difficulties in accepting oneself.
- ✎ Depression or loneliness.

When we talk about suicide, we must keep in mind that suicide is the final event in a chain of events and factors. Therefore, general mental health promotion – for example, enhancing social networks, promoting self-care and enhancing self-care and communication care – are all in themselves ways to reduce suicide.

What Can be Done to Prevent Suicide?

At the individual level, suicide prevention often focuses on being able to recognize certain warning signs associated with depression, signs which in turn suggest a higher risk for suicide and general mental stress. The following are some of the common signs of depression:

- ✎ Mood is predominantly sad or irritable.
- ✎ Loss of previous interests (hobbies or other regular amusements);
- ✎ Change in diet and sleep habits (increase or reduction);
- ✎ Restlessness or sluggishness;
- ✎ Fatigue or loss of energy;
- ✎ Feeling of guilt or uselessness;
- ✎ Despondency;
- ✎ Reduced capacity to concentrate and indecision;
- ✎ Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideas;
- ✎ Isolation or withdrawal.

If, during the course of interactions with young people, the facilitator observes individuals who display many of these characteristics, he should refer the young person to specialized services.

Generally speaking, depression and suicidal thoughts in young men are not caused by one specific factor, but instead are generally the result of individual- or family-specific problems interacting with wider social problems that include:

- ✎ Exclusion from the educational system and from work opportunities in rural and urban areas. Loss of meaning of education as a way to insure employment and social status.
- ✎ Migration for political and economic reasons or due to natural disasters.
- ✎ Exploitation in the work place.
- ✎ Expulsion to the streets, which is more common among boys than girls in low-income urban settings.
- ✎ Violence in the home, in schools and in

wider society.

These problems may lead to depression or suicide when young people lack appropriate coping mechanisms, including the ability to talk about these issues. Because of the way they are socialized, depression in men is frequently ignored or hidden. However, depression is a problem that health professionals can and should learn to identify to prevent both suicide and dependence on psycho-active substances.

Conclusions: How Can We Promote Mental Health with Young Men?

In conclusion we affirm that:

1- It is important to identify and reinforce all the factors and mechanisms which operate as protective factors and help young people cope and thrive even in adverse situations¹². The role of service providers is fundamental in this respect in establishing good communications with young people and making sure that the messages and information are transmitted with clarity, respect and affection. In the same way, it is important to teach by example and show respect, thus facilitating the learning process and developing the active capacity of young people to deal with adults and the environment, while at the same time building up their confidence and self-esteem.

2- In working with young men it is crucial to detect risk factors which can help us in developing prevention strategies and knowing when to refer to young men to specialized help. We should also identify other risk factors or behaviors, such as:

- ✎ Acute depression and risky behavior as identified by relatives and friends;
- ✎ Frequent impulsiveness, hostility and aggression toward others or to oneself;
- ✎ Difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships;
- ✎ Chronic school problems;
- ✎ Sense of lack of control or loss of control of one's own life.

This list, of course, is merely illustrative; each educator should add his/her ideas to it.

3- One of the main challenges of mental health work with young men is to help them develop practical knowledge to live in positive ways¹³. One approach is to help young men learn how to identify and recognize problems as needs in themselves, that is, to take stock of their own mental health.

4- Schools are important places for anyone who wants to work with young men, but unfortunately they are often a comparatively



controlled environment, thus inhibiting young men (and young people in general) from expressing their ideas and needs. Furthermore, many young men are not in school, thus limiting our work to a specific group of young men¹⁴.

5- It is important for us to see adolescents and young men as persons with problems and, therefore, the product of their own process and not as problems in themselves. In this respect, the participation of young men as actors in solving their problems and

meeting their own needs is vital.

We believe that our educational work can promote processes in which young men appropriate the necessary tools and information to transform themselves into peer promoters, who in turn multiply and share what they have learned. To this end, it is necessary to view our actions in a broader and more comprehensive way, where the young men are one more link in the chain of activities and not just simple users or consumers of our programs¹⁵.



AND FINALLY...

We must work in mental health not as experts, but on an equal plane with the young men, so that we exchange and appropriate both knowledge and power. Only by working as equals with young men will we be able to assist them in addressing mental health needs and foster a sense of independence and autonomy among young men that will enable them to improve their own mental health.

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MODULE 2



Educational Activities

REASONS
AND EMOTIONS

Author:



▽ OVERVIEW

In this module we present a series of activities that when applied well are useful for promoting and mobilizing personal resources – that sometimes go unused – to help young people deal assertively with the tensions of daily life. We have centered our attention on what is known as emotional intelligence, which we define as the ability to identify our own affective needs and our ability to communicate our emotional needs in an assertive way.

In these activities, we provide the young men with information about different mental health problems common to young men, while at the same time help them learn about their own affective needs and commit them to resolving their own problems. As in the case of the other themes discussed in this manual series, it is important to recognize that the mere application of these activities is not

enough in itself to resolve all the problems that affect young men. We must always work to engage others in this process – particularly the family and the community – and young men themselves.

Frequently, young men cannot identify their emotions. This is common given the fact that societies in general do not encourage men to express emotions, a fact that limits men's coping abilities. The activities in this manual require young men to identify and talk about problems and feelings, which for some young men may lead to expression of intense emotions or cause anxiety. The facilitator, in these and all the activities in this manual series, must be attuned and sensitive to the emotional needs of the young men and prepared to deal with the range of emotions that may be expressed. At the end of this module, we offer specific suggestions for facilitators who are faced with such cases.

This activity uses a drawing of the body to discuss young men's bodies and their health.



Activity

1

A Young Man's Body

Purpose: To identify the main mental health problems of young men, to discuss how gender affects mental health and to reflect about the risks that young men face because of gender socialization.

Materials required: Flip chart paper or butcher paper, flip chart, adhesive note pads, adhesive tape, colored pencils and felt-tip pens.

Recommended time: 2 hours.

Planning tips/notes: It is important that the instructions are given in the form indicated, so as not to induce the replies. This is a very simple activity, adapt-

able and easy to reproduce, useful in most settings and with men and women of various age groups. It is important for the facilitator to have on hand national or local statistics on the different health needs of young men. (Some of these can be found in the various introduction sections to the different modules in this manual series).

In working with various types of groups of young men, we have sometimes found a number of young men who do not have a positive self-image. Promoting a critical reflection about the causes for low or negative self-image is one way to encourage young men to take care of their bodies without losing their "manhood."

Procedure

- 1- Form two or three sub-groups (maximum of ten persons per sub-group).
- 2- Hand out two post-it sheets (or adhesive note pad sheets) to each participant and ask them, in silence and individually, to write two attributes or typical characteristics that are related to being a man. Ask them to keep their post-it sheets for a later stage in the exercise.
- 3- Ask them to draw on two or three large sheets of paper, taped together, the body of a young man. One person in the group can serve as a model for them to draw the outline.
- 4- Once they have drawn the silhouette, ask them to complete the sketch with details: Give him a face and characteristics, dress

him, give him a personality (What does he like to do for fun? What does he do on the weekends?). Everyone should take part in the drawing. Ask them to give a name to the figure they have drawn.

5- When they have finished this part of the activity, ask each participant to write two common health problems or needs that young men face.

6- When they have finished writing, ask each participant to read out loud their post-it sheets and stick them on the part of the body where this health problem appears. It does not matter if some problems are repeated.

7- In a second round, still as a group, each in turn should read out loud their first post-it sheets (about characteristics and attributes) and stick them around the body. When they have finished, ask them to answer the following questions for discussion:

¹ One variation can be for one of the groups to work on the health of young women. Ask this group to write down female attributes or characteristics and then reflect on the health problems of young women.

Discussion questions

- ✎ What is the relationship between young men's health problems and the characteristics of being a man that we identified?
- ✎ Did all the groups reach the same conclusions?
- ✎ How do young men take care of their health?
- ✎ Which of the health problems mentioned are related to mental health?
- ✎ What health risks do young men face?
- ✎ What is the relationship between mental health problems and young men's identity?
- ✎ What can we do to improve the health of young men?



▼ CLOSING

- ✎ Probe to see if the young men identify alcoholism, violence, suicide, HIV/AIDS and substance use as health problems. If they have not mentioned them, ask if any of these problems exist in their community.
- ✎ Emphasize the influence of socialization and mental health on these problems.
- ✎ Provide data and statistics on the health situation of young men, incorporating national, regional and local data.
- ✎ Reinforce, with the material provided, the relationship between health, gender and socialization.



LINK

Activity 4: Reproductive Body in the *"Sexuality and Reproductive Health"* section is similar to this one; the difference between the two should be the range of health needs or problems discussed. This activity also works well in conjunction with **Activity 5:** Caring for Oneself: Men, Gender and Health in the *"Fatherhood and Caregiving"* section.



This activity uses a short story to promote an individual reflection about how we express our emotions.

Activity 2

Expressing My Emotions

Purpose: To recognize the difficulties that exist in expressing certain emotions, and analyze the impact of this on our mental health, and to promote a personal reflection about how we suppress or exaggerate our emotions.

Materials required: Large sheets of paper/ flip chart, post-it notes, adhesive tape, colored pencils, water color paints.

Recommended time: 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Planning tips/notes: We recommend that the facilitator go through this activity individually and reflect about his/her own emotions and emotional expressions before facilitating the activity with young men. When carrying out the activity, the facilitator should emphasize that how each person expresses his or her emotions varies. However, it is important to note a number of tendencies that emerge, particularly related to how boys are brought

up. For example, it is common for young men to hide their fear, sadness and even their kindness. But it is common for them to express their anger via violence.

The facilitator should emphasize that a person who does not know his own emotions, not only cannot express them, but also runs the risk of being carried away by them. It is fundamental to distinguish between “feeling” and “acting” in order to find forms of expression that do not cause damage to others. For this reason, this activity is very useful in working with violence prevention.

It is important to emphasize that promoting our emotional intelligence starts first by learning to recognize our emotions and to see the emotions of others. Because of the way men are socialized, they often have difficulty looking another young man in the eye, which can be interpreted either as a challenge (or a call to fight) or a sign of sexual attraction. This is an opportune moment to clarify to the young men that looking another young man in the eye is another way of expressing and improving communication and not a challenge or a sexual invitation.

Procedure

1- Ask the group to sit in a circle and read the story : "The other me."¹

2- When the reading has finished, ask:

a) *What most attracted your attention in the story?*

b) *What do you find in the story which is very like what happens in real life?*

c) *Reflect for a while on the aspects, attitudes, emotions that you think have been left out. Why do you think this happened?*

d) *What was the point of leaving out these aspects, and what areas, attitudes and emotions should have been developed further?*


e) *What was the cost of this omission?*


3- Ask the group what their favorite food is. Allow various persons to reply. Do the same with the question: what food do you like the least? Explain that just as with food, there are likes and dislikes in dealing with emotions; there are also certain emotions that we feel more often and express with greater facility, just as there are others that are more difficult to manage and which we even try to avoid.


4- Write up on the board five basic emotions² and tell the group that these are the emotions they will be discussing in this activity:
Fear Affection Sadness Happiness Anger


5- Explain that from now on, the exercise will be to identify in which parts of the body each emotion is felt and how can we differentiate one emotion from the other.


6- Tell the group that the exercise will be carried out individually in the following way:

 Put a number (1) on the emotion that they express with the greatest ease.

 Put a number (2) on the one they express easily but not as much as the first.

 Put a number (3) on the emotion that falls in between, that is, it is neither too hard nor too easy to express.

 Number (4) on the one they have some difficulty in expressing.

 Number (5) on the one they have great difficulty in expressing, and which they may often deny.

7- After finishing this individual exercise, ask them to share their results with the rest of the group. It is important that everybody takes part. If the group is very large, form sub-groups.


8- With the complete group, reflect on the similarities and differences found within the small groups. Explain that:


a) *The emotions that we numbered as 1 and 2, are the ones we have often learned to express in an exaggerated way;*


b) *Numbers 4 and 5, are those that we have learned to express less, or maybe even to repress;*


c) *Number 3 may represent the emotion that we do not exaggerate nor repress but probably deal with more naturally.*

Discussion questions

 Why do we either repress or exaggerate certain emotions? How did we learn to do this? What has been the cost for you in doing this?

 How does my FASHA influence the relationships that I establish with other people (partners, family, friends, etc)?

 What is the function of emotions? Give examples (fear helps us in a dangerous situations, anger to defend ourselves) and ask the group for examples.

 What can we do to express our emotions more openly? How can I be more flexible in expressing what I feel? (Each person can make a note of his personal reflections and, if they so desire, they can share their reflections with the others in small groups).

¹ Benedetti, Mario, *A morte e outras coisas*, Ed. Século XXI.

² Other proposals of feelings might emerge from the group which, generally speaking, fit in with or are related to one of those already mentioned, for example, hate related to anger. Once a young man proposed indifference, but in working on it, he discovered that more than a feeling, it was a mask that hid fear and sadness. Also shame, guilt or violence might come up. One can give support to the participants encouraging reflection on the costs and consequences and whether these help us to grow as human beings.

▼ CLOSING

At the end, the facilitator should emphasize that emotions can be seen as a form of energy that allows us to perceive what is oppressing us or bothering us and perhaps even causing harm internally. Being able to express them without causing harm to others helps to make us stronger and to relate better with the world around us. Different emotions are simply the reflection of affective needs, and it is best to learn how to deal with all of them as they appear in our lives. Generally speaking, from the time we are born, certain ideas are imposed on us, such as, for example, that boys should not be cowards and girls

should not show anger. Emotional health has to do with being flexible in dealing with our emotions.

Explain that emotions are neither good nor bad, nor female nor male, but are part of all human beings. Explain that we are not responsible for feeling certain emotions, but for what we do with what we feel. In terms of anger, it is important that the group recognizes the difference between violence and the direct and verbal expression of anger. It may be useful to connect this activity or remind the group about Activity 10: What Do I Do When I am Angry? in the "From Violence to Peaceful Coexistence" section.

Close the session with the question: Have you discovered anything new about yourselves from this activity?

"The Other Me "

This is a story about an ordinary boy: his pants were worn at the knees, he read comic books; he made a noise when he ate; he picked his nose; he snored when he slept. He was called Armando. He was ordinary in everything, except one thing: he had an Other Me.

The Other Me had a romantic look in his eye, fell in love with movie actresses, could make up stories and lie easily, and got all emotional when he saw the sun set. Armando was worried about his Other Me, which bothered him when he was with his friends. In addition, the Other Me was often sad and sensitive, which meant that Armando couldn't laugh everything off like he wanted to.

One afternoon, Armando came home from work feeling tired, took off his shoes, wiggled his toes and turned on the radio. The radio was playing classical music, a piece by Mozart, and Armando fell asleep. When he woke up the Other Me was sobbing. At first Armando didn't know what to do, but then he pulled himself together and rudely insulted

the Other Me. The Other Me was silent while Armando insulted him, but the next morning the Other Me committed suicide.

At first, the death of the Other Me was a bitter blow for poor Armando, but then he thought about it and realized that now he could finally be rude all the time without feeling sad or sensitive. The thought of this made him feel better.

After just five days of mourning, Armando went out with the express purpose of showing off his new and improved rudeness. From a distance, he saw his friends walking along in a group. The sight of them filled him with joy and he immediately burst into laughter. However, when they walked past him they didn't even notice he was there. And what was worse, he overheard what they were saying: poor Armando, who would have believed it, he seemed so strong and healthy.

On hearing this, he immediately stopped laughing and at the same time, felt a tightening in his chest, which seemed like nostalgia. But he could not feel real sadness, because the Other Me had taken all the sadness with him.

Mario Benedetti

This activity uses eye contact to communicate "who I am."



Activity 3

I am...

Purpose: To reflect on the importance of affection in a person's life and to promote the expression of affection.

Material required: None

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Planning tips/notes: It is important that all the participants take part in the exercise on a volunteer basis and that there is a climate of trust and respect. Only in this way will it be possible for the young men to freely and spontaneously express themselves. Occasionally, a participant may cry or laugh or have difficulty speaking. The facilitator should be ready to deal with these situations and resolve them positively.

Procedure

- 1- Form two or three groups (no more than 10 persons per sub-group).
- 2- In the small groups, ask the participants to stand in a circle.
- 3- Ask one volunteer to stand in the center.
- 4- Ask the volunteer in each sub-group to walk around looking into the eyes of each member of the group, saying his name and one of his characteristics, using the set phrase: "I am _____ and I am _____." For example: "I am Fernando and I am a good student."
- 5- When the volunteer has gone round the whole group, ask the others to sit down and reflect on the exercise.

Discussion questions

- How did they feel?
- What thing did they notice in the group?
- What did they feel and where (in their bodies) did they feel it?
- What does it mean to look another man in the eye?



LINK

This activity connects well with the theme of communication found in activities 4 and 5 of this module.



CLOSING

- Ask the participants to use three different ways to talk about emotions: "what I thought," "what I felt in my body" and "what I feel emotionally." Use this activity as well to talk about how men relate to men. In many countries, to look directly at another man is seen as a challenge or an affront, or a sign of sexual

interest. In cases where there appears to be some difficulty in looking at each other, ask each person to stop for a moment and identify the feelings experienced. Invite the participants to freely express these feelings and then do a number of breathing exercises until each person finds his own rhythm. Finally, encourage them to go back and look at each other again, trying to keep in mind that nothing has happened, that they are just looking at each other.

This activity shows the importance of body language in communication.

Activity 4

The Wall

Purpose: To reflect on the importance of communication and self-esteem in personal relationships and every area of our life and to encourage us to be consistent with what we say, feel, think and do.

Materials required: None

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Planning tips/notes: It is important for the facilitator to make sure that the volunteers do not change the phrase they have chosen, which often happens. This activity helps to identify the types of phrases and the ways we commonly try to get what we want.





Procedure

- 1- Ask for five volunteers. The others will watch.
- 2- The five persons position themselves to form a wall. Explain that each of them will take turns facing the other four and trying to pass through the wall.
- 3- Each of the five volunteers should think of a phrase that is suitable for getting them through the wall. *Having once chosen the phrase, they CANNOT change it. What they can do is repeat it, using different tones of voice, body language, etc.*
- 4- Next, each volunteer stands in front of each of the four remaining persons that form the wall and with the chosen phrase try to convince the person, one by one, to let him pass. The volunteer can only pass through the wall when he obtains the permission of all four of the other members. Allow all five to have their turn at trying to break through the wall.
- 5- Thank the volunteers for participating and start the debate with the full group.

Discussion questions

- Ask the volunteers:
- How did they feel when they went through the wall? What role did each of them play?
 - What attitudes did they adopt when they were walls? (collaboration, openness, willingness, indifference or competition).
 - What strategies did they adopt to get through the wall? What made the persons in the wall allow them to pass through?
 - In the case of someone who was unable to get through the wall, ask: Were you really convinced that you would get through the wall, or did you foresee that you were not going to succeed?

Ask those that were observing:


-  What did they observe?
-  How did they feel in the role of observers?
-  In what way does this exercise seem like real life? Does it tell us anything about how we express and get what we need in life?
-  In our everyday lives, do we use all our emotional repertoire (that is, all the ways we have to express ourselves), or usually just one or two ways?



LINK

This activity connects well with the next theme: *Types of Communication*.

▼ CLOSING

 Good interpersonal communication is achieved by recognizing the desire of the other person to know something about us. It also implies knowing the other person better, without interpreting or giving other meanings to what that person is telling us. For this reason, it is important to clarify what we hear (i.e.

understand) in cases when there is some doubt or confusion. We should remember that communication can be verbal and non-verbal, and that our gestures and body language also express what we feel and think. And, in addition to our words, the tone that we use to express ourselves is also important. Finally, we should reflect about whether we say what we really want to say or if we say what we think others want to hear.



This activity promotes a discussion about different kinds of communication.

Activity 5

Types of Communication

Purpose: To recognize the different forms of expressing ourselves and develop mechanisms for assertive communication.

Material required: Paper, pencil, felt-tip pens, large sheets of paper, flip chart

Recommended time: 2 hours

Planning tips/notes: When discussing communication, it is fundamental to teach and lead by example; there is no point in having a well-constructed discourse, if everything we do indicates the contrary. Thus, the facilitator should reflect about his/her own communication style and model positive, assertive communication throughout the course of this activity (and all the activities!).

Procedure

1st part:

1- Addressing the full group, ask participants what comes into their heads when they hear the word communication. As they are talking, note what they say on the flip chart.

2- Ask them to choose a partner and think of a situation where they felt that communication had been satisfactory. Then ask to relate the situation to the other.

3- Working in pairs, ask the participants to analyze the common elements of satisfactory or positive communication and write these down.

4- When they have finished, ask each pair to join another pair and share their examples.

5- Continue to merge the sub-groups until only two groups remain. Then ask them what conclusions they reached about what is required for good communication. Remember that it is important to consider verbal and non-verbal communication.

6- When the two groups have finished, ask them to present their conclusions about the elements of good communication to the full group.

2nd part:

7- Explain the different types of communication:

Aggressive:

Using violent behavior to communicate —

something that can hurt other people.

Passive:

Refers to communication which we do not take responsibility for, by avoiding the truth and allowing others to decide for us.

Assertive:

Is when we take into account our needs and answer clearly what we think or feel, and, at the same time, respecting others.

8- Ask the participants to form three groups. Ask each group to role play one of the following situations. In the role play, each group should illustrate the three forms of communication: aggressive, passive and assertive.

9- The situations are:

a) *"You are invited to go to a party tonight, but you don't want to go."*

b) *"Someone asks you to have sexual relations without protection."*

c) *"Your friends are trying to pressure you to drink."*

10- Tell each group that they should work on these situations or invent another which is more appropriate to their own circumstances. It is important that they think about the three possible kinds of communication.

11- Give the group about 15 minutes to discuss and develop the role play and then present it to the other groups.

For the final discussion, reflect with them on how they felt doing the exercise and the importance of establishing relations by using assertive communication.

▼ CLOSING

✎ Clear and effective communication is characterized by simple, clear and concrete words and expressions, and is expressed with honesty in a positive, constructive and responsible way.

✎ It is important not to manipulate affections or emotions, which means it is necessary to have a clear idea of what we want to communicate, to know and identify our own personal resources, and to listen to our feelings about the issue, that is, apply our emotional intelligence.

✎ The need to respect diversity of opinion should be emphasized.

✎ It is important in communicating to be brief and not speak about everything at the same time. It is useful to cover one concrete point before moving on to the next, without mixing up issues, such as confusing past complaints with present ones. We must always be open to listening, and listening first, and replying openly and honestly. When communicating, it is best not to establish power relations and to avoid the idea that one person has to “win” the argument.

✎ Assertive communication is a balance between expressing ourselves and our wishes assertively and expressing ourselves without insulting ourselves or third parties. It means defending our own rights and respecting the rights of others.



LINK

This exercise is directly related to communication in themes like sexuality or violence. See, for example, Activity 8 in the section on “Sexuality and Reproductive Health” and Activity 1 in the section on “From Violence to Peaceful Coexistence.”

This activity promotes a reflection about self-esteem and how to build it.

Activity 6

The Seven Points of Self-esteem¹

Purpose: To reflect on the different elements that comprise self-esteem and to assess the degree of importance of each of these elements.

Material required: Paper, pencils, photocopies of the seven points of self-esteem.

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Planning tips/notes: Discussing self-esteem with young men is not always easy, particularly since we tend to think that low self-esteem or self-esteem problems are “female” problems. However, our experience has

shown us that even though men are socialized to be strong and powerful, they do not always feel that way. For example, we often think that men who use violence against a partner or against others have high self-esteem. On the contrary, the fact that we use violence against someone often reveals our own lack of confidence in ourselves and our ability to communicate what we want. In this activity, we should avoid generalizations and judgmental positions about self-esteem. We should also use the activity to recognize the connection between various “myths” about masculinity – for example, that men are always strong, and that men always have positive self-esteem.

Procedure

1- Hand out copies of the following resource sheet to the participants with the seven points of self-esteem. (Alternatively, write these 7 phrases on the chalkboard). Ask the participants to rank themselves from 1 (having no or a minimal ability) to 10 (having lots of ability or ease) for each of the following aspects:

- a) *My ability to set limits and say NO.*
- b) *My confidence to give and receive at the same level.*
- c) *My ability to defend my point of view and maintain my integrity.*
- d) *My capacity to express what I feel in an assertive way.*
- e) *My self-respect, or respect for myself.*
- f) *My acceptance of my body.*

2- It is important to mention that the ranking is an arbitrary number which symbolizes approximately the situation of each participant at the time of the exercise.

3- Point out that in the case of phrases that have two elements (“ability to give” and “my ability to receive”), we should develop an average. For example, if I gave myself 0 on ability to give and 10 on my ability to receive, I will give myself an overall score of 5.

4- When they have finished, ask each participant to choose a person to share their self-assessment with, commenting on why they chose this ranking and identifying where they have scored high and where they have scored low.

5- Explain to the full group that these points, on which they have assessed themselves and commented on, make up what is commonly known as self-esteem.

¹ The points were adapted from an idea by Angeles Arrien (1988).



LINK

The issue of self-esteem is directly linked to all the activities in this manual series. Specifically, we can use this activity to reflect about how self-esteem relates to sexual decision-making, to the use of violence and to our ability to care for others.

Discussion questions

- ✎ How do these issues show up in our daily lives? In our attitudes and relationships?
- ✎ What determined whether certain points obtained a lower score than others?
- ✎ Do you think you would have ranked yourself differently at some other moment in your life?
- ✎ What can we do to improve our self-esteem?
- ✎ What did each of you get out of this exercise?

▼ CLOSING

✎ When we talk about self-esteem we are referring to the way we see ourselves, what we feel about ourselves and how we value ourselves. We construct our self-esteem in relation to our environment – based on how we see others responding to use. It is important to recognize that self-esteem does not depend

merely on our own personal will. Of course, we can change our assessment of ourselves, but we are also highly responsive to what others (our friends, our family, teachers, the media, etc.) think about us. Self-esteem is important because it affects the way we feel and this in turn influences what we do in our lives. It affects how other people see us and how we relate to those around us, whether we are satisfied with ourselves and how we face problems.

This activity consists of brainstorming about substance use and drug dependency.

Activity 7

Addicted or Not¹

Purpose: To provide an explanation of dependency behavior in general.

Materials required: Sheets of paper or notebook, flip chart and felt-tip pens.

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Planning tips/notes: As facilitator, discuss this theme in an open-minded way. The young men themselves will no doubt have criticisms on the hypocritical attitudes of some adults and many policies and laws related to substance use.

Procedure

1- On introducing the theme, stress that dependence includes not only toxic substance use, but also different types of behaviors, such as eating certain types of food or spending all your time watching television.

2- Propose an initial brainstorming session based on the following questions:

What things, substances or activities make people become dependent or addicted? Which of these forms is most common among young men?

3- Examples of illegal toxic substances, as well as legal ones, such as tobacco and alcohol, are almost certain to appear. Other examples might also come up, such as coffee and, widening the definition, fast food snacks, overeating, electronic games, the computer, TV, work and certain types of relationships.

4- Then ask the participants to form groups with 3 or 4 participants to choose one type of dependence or addiction mentioned and discuss the reasons that might lead a young man to depend on it or become addicted to it.

5- Ask each group to present their topic and





their findings, and, at the end, invite everyone to add their comments.

6- Emphasize the question of substance availability and how this increases the risk of abuse or addiction.

7- Conclude by commenting that there are various psychological and social reasons which lead us into substance use.

8- Finally ask them to write in their notebooks a message to protect themselves from substance dependence.

Discussion questions

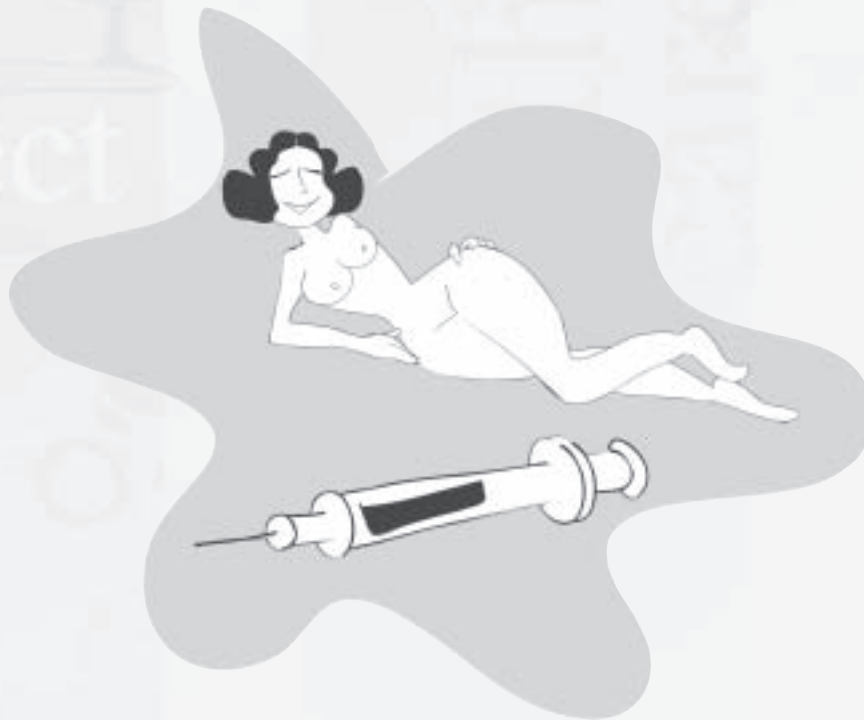
-  How do young men become dependent on or addicted to something?
-  Why do they become dependent or addicted?
-  How does dependence or addiction affect them?
-  What are the advantages and disadvantages of being dependent on or addicted to some substance, food, person, equipment, etc?

¹ Based on the program "Construya tu vida sin dependencias". Conduas de dependência ICONADIC, INEPAR, Mexico.

▼ CLOSING

It is important to stress that being aware of anxieties and tensions in daily life helps us to develop various forms of channeling them positively and to avoid behavior that can lead to dependence or addiction. It is important to consider that dependence or addiction can be acquired by not finding a way out and/or a solution to a problem; however, having an addiction only helps to postpone finding the solution. Frequently, having an addiction is

related to emotional problems which begin to create a void in our lives, leading to a growing lack of interest, motivation and/or meaning to life itself. When working with young men on the theme of addiction prevention, we should be alert to mood changes, prolonged sadness, depression, apathy and uncontrolled anger, which are possible warning signs of addiction. Similarly we should pay attention to the unmet needs of young people. Young men should learn that even when they feel that everything is bad around them, there is always something that can be done, and that it is never too late to seek help.



This activity discusses the myths and facts about alcohol.

Activity 8

Talking About Alcohol and Alcoholism

Purpose: To question various myths related to alcohol use and alcoholism.

Recommended time: 1 hour.

Material required: Ball, chalkboard and chalk or flip-chart and felt-tip pens, pieces of cardboard with phrases written on them.

Planning tips/notes: Prepare beforehand the phrases on the cardboard written in large legible letters.

Procedure

1- Ask the group to sit in a circle. In the center, place the cardboard sheets in the form of a circle, so that each person can take one when it is his turn.

2- Explain that each participant will read out a phrase and answer if they agree or not with the statement and explain why. The other participants will be able to give their opinions in the course of discussing the statements.

3- Throw the ball to one person in the group and ask them to start the activity by choosing one of the cardboard sheets. Note their opinions on the flip-chart, ask if the other participants agree or not and why, and then read the text elaborated on the basis of scientific information (Responding to Common Myths about Alcohol Use). Ask if there are any other comments.

4- After the discussion, the person that read the first statement throws the ball to another person in the group and so on, until all the statements have been discussed.

5- Phrases to be written on the cardboard sheets:

- a) Alcohol is not a drug...
- b) Having high alcohol tolerance means that the person will not become an alcoholic...
- c) Mixing drinks makes you drunk...
- d) Beer does not make you drunk...
- e) Alcohol is sexually stimulating...
- f) Alcoholism is an illness that affects older adults...
- g) Alcoholics are those that drink daily ...
- h) Having a coffee or washing your face with cold water reduces the effects of alcohol...
- i) Alcohol is good for making friends...
- j) Parties are not parties without alcohol ...

✿ CLOSING

✿ It is important to reflect on these ideas and myths about alcohol use, which nearly all of us have believed at some point.

Responding to Common Myths about Alcohol Use

- ✎ Alcohol is not a drug... Alcohol is a drug in the sense that it alters the functioning of the organism, particularly the central nervous system on which thoughts, emotions and behavior depend. It can also cause dependence.
- ✎ Having high alcohol tolerance means that the person will not become an alcoholic... The truth is exactly the opposite; high tolerance means that the brain is becoming accustomed to the drug.
- ✎ Mixing drinks makes you drunk.... What really gets one drunk is the quantity of alcohol and the speed that one drinks.
- ✎ Beer does not make you drunk.. In the case of beer, the absorption of alcohol through the stomach is a little slower, but depending on the quantity consumed, it does cause drunkenness.
- ✎ Alcohol is sexually stimulating... Initially alcohol can reduce inhibitions and help people to become more outgoing, but since alcohol has a depressant effect on the nervous system it ends up reducing these sensations and can hamper sexual relations. Alcohol use is one of the most frequent causes of erectile dysfunction (impotence).
- ✎ Alcoholism is an illness that affects older adults... The majority of alcohol dependent persons are young men of working age.
- ✎ Alcoholics are those that drink daily... The majority of alcohol-dependent persons, in the initial and intermediate stage of the process, drink mainly on the weekend, and continue with their normal school and work activities, but with increasing difficulty.
- ✎ Having a coffee or washing your face with cold water reduces the effects of alcohol... The only thing that really reduces drunkenness is the gradual elimination of the alcohol from the organism, which means forcing the liver to work, which takes time.
- ✎ Alcohol is good for making friends... In reality, alcohol creates complicity around drinking, but true friendship includes much more than that.
- ✎ Parties are not parties without alcohol... The media often tries to convince us that parties need alcohol, and that alcohol must be at the center of every social gathering. But is this really true? What makes a social gathering or a party – the alcohol or the people?

In this activity, participants practice making decisions related to alcohol use.

Activity 9

Decision-Making

Purpose: To reflect on decision-making related to alcohol use.

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Materials required: Questionnaire for each participant, flip-chart and felt-tip pens.

Planning tips/notes: It is important to maintain an atmosphere of frankness and respect toward different opinions and attitudes. It is worth making copies of the questionnaire or reproducing it in a flip-chart with large letters.

Procedure

1st Part

- 1- Hand out the questionnaire to be completed individually with two possible answers: "Yes, and why" or "No, and why" (Resource Sheet).
- 2- Having answered the questions, the participants should share their replies with each other. If the group is large, it can be divided in groups of 8 to 10 participants.
- 3- Ask each participant to read their answers and keep a note of the findings in the flip-chart.

At the end, reinforce the following ideas:

- ✎ Since peer pressure and group imitation is one of the most important factors behind adolescents drinking, we need to question these.
- ✎ Stress that to drink or not to drink is a decision that we make based on various factors: personal beliefs, religious beliefs, health concerns, out of respect for certain family or social standards and, above all, because we have alternatives for having fun and making friends.

- ✎ Work with the participants to consider alternatives where friendship and belonging to the group can be achieved without alcohol.

2nd Part

- 4- Continue the activity by asking the group other questions:
- 5- What happens to someone who, to feel good in a social situation, needs to drink?
- 6- Why would someone be so concerned that you drink? Is it friendship or complicity?
- 7- How do we know if someone is already alcohol-dependent?
- 8- Tell the group that it is worth remembering that one of the early symptoms of alcoholism, according to Heilman's criteria, is to use alcohol deliberately with the intent of obtaining some subjectively agreeable effect, such as to lose your inhibitions in a social context.
- 9- To provide some guidance to the group on recognizing the early signs of alcohol dependency, use the following table:

Criteria for the early recognition of alcohol abuse or dependence ¹

- 1- To think about, talk about or plan when the next occasion to drink will be.
- 2- Tolerate a greater amount than the average.
- 3- Drink rapidly.
- 4- Drink to obtain some effect, as a tranquilizer or to have courage to do something.
- 5- Forget some detail or event of what happened while drinking.
- 6- To protect, store or ensure the supply of alcohol.
- 7- To drink more than planned or without having planned.
- 8- An additional highly sensitive criteria is: to express concern or regret to someone close about what you did (or did not do) while under the effects of alcohol.

Note: The presence of more than two criteria indicates a need to consider or assess the person's alcohol abuse risk.



¹ Heilman Richard. "Early recognition of alcoholism and other drug dependencies." Hazelden, 1990.

Resource Sheet

Individual Questionnaire: Decision-making

Answer the following questions sincerely:	YES	NO
1- Would you feel out of place at a party or gathering with your friends if they offered you a drink (with alcohol) and you decided not to have one? Why?		
2- Imagine that you are at a party or social gathering where they are serving alcohol and you are drinking, but one of your friends doesn't want to drink. Would you view your friend as an oddball, a drag, or a nerd? Why?		
3- Would you defend your friend's decision not to drink to the other friends? Supposing that you decided to defend him/her, how do you think the other friends would judge you? Why?		
3- Do you believe that to be accepted in a group you have to do what the other persons in the group want? Why?		
4- Do you think that it is possible for a person to lead an enjoyable social life without consuming alcoholic drinks? Why?		
5- Can a person feel good about himself even without drinking? Why?		
6- Can an adolescent feel accepted without drinking? Why?		

This activity discusses the health aspects of drinking and substance use.

Activity 10

Learning not to Drink too Much¹

Purpose: To discuss various attitudes and values that can potentially protect a young person from addiction.

Material required: Cardboard, felt-tip pens, notebooks.

Recommended Time: 1 hour.

Planning tips/notes: If a group drinks a lot at parties, one idea that can be suggested is to plan a party where there are no alcoholic drinks and the aim is to have fun in a natural way. This activity, in an adapted form, can also be used in relation to other substances.

Procedure

1- Introduce the purpose of the activity by referring to the fact that, these days, it is common to use substances (alcohol, marijuana, among others) in our social life, and that many young people use these substances regardless of whether they have a solid family life and an adequate school environment.

2- Explain to the group that this trend means that no one is immune from the risk of getting involved with the drug culture and for this reason it is important to know how to establish limits and protect ourselves.

3- In small groups, ask the participants to discuss practices or strategies for controlling or minimizing the possibility of a risk situation developing in relation to substance use, commencing with the question: "What protective skills do we know or can develop?"

4- After the discussion, ask the participants to present their conclusions and supplement their findings with a number of protective skills that were not mentioned, for example:

a) *Don't get in a car that is driven by a person who is drunk or has used some other substance.*

b) *Don't drink or use another substance when you don't feel like it.*

c) *Learn protective ways to use substances. For example:*

d) *drink a small amount;*

e) *don't drink more than one glass an hour;*

f) *only take small amounts of hard liquor;*

g) *don't mix drinks with other substances;*

h) *engage in another activity when drinking instead of only drinking or only using another substance: chat, dance or eat something.*

5- Ask each participant to write down in their notebook the protective messages that emerged, with a brief reflection that begins with "One reason for not overdrinking is ..."

¹ Taken from the program "Construye tu vida sin adicciones" Conductas adictivas II CONADIC, INEPAR. Mexico.



▽ CLOSING

▀ We can learn to have fun and live our lives without the need for alcohol, which implies creativity, imagination and genuine socializing.

▀ Another question concerns the decision to drink responsibly, which means not getting drunk. This principle is linked to the metabolism of alcohol in the liver. This organ has the capacity to process in one hour one measure or unit of hard liquor (whiskey, tequila, rum, vodka, etc.) or one standard glass of beer. For this reason drinking *less than one glass per hour* is the best way of not getting drunk.

▀ Other factors that are recommended to avoid drunkenness from alcohol are: to eat while you drink and to alternate water or soft drinks with alcoholic drinks. It is important to stress that there are no really moderate drinks, just moderate drinkers.

▀ The majority of people are able to follow this pattern of behavior efficiently. However, clarify that there are also factors of personal and psychosocial susceptibilities. There are also authors who talk about genetic factors that make some individuals more susceptible to becoming alcohol-dependent (for example, by being alcohol tolerant). Both high alcohol tolerance and loss of control when consuming alcohol should be considered as pre-alcoholism signs or alcoholism.



LINK

The theme can be related to the activity A Young Man's Body (Activity 1) and the theme of communication (Activity 5) in this section.

This activity introduces the theme of suicide based on reading a story about suicide.

Activity 11

José is Dead!!!

Purpose: To reflect on the combination of factors that lead to suicide and the possibilities of asking for and offering help.

Material required: Flip-chart, drawing material, adhesive tape and scissors and cardboard to make links of a chain.

Recommended time: 2 hours.

Planning tips/notes: Look for statistical data on suicide by age and sex in your region. It is possible that there has been a case of suicide of someone close to the group or some of its members. Be prepared for this possibility and think ahead of time about how to provide emotional support for the persons in the group if necessary. You should have on hand a list of places where you can refer young men with depression symptoms or suicidal ideas.

Procedure

1- Copy or adapt the story of a boy (José) who is experiencing various life stresses, has low self-esteem, is unable to communicate adequately, and begins to show signs of depression and has suicidal ideas. (see the story of José)

2- Ask the group to sit round in a circle and listen to the story. It can be read by the facilitator or by a volunteer from the group.

3- Tell the group that the objective of this activity is to collectively produce a drawing using 3 flip chart sheets.

4- Ask the group to divide themselves in 3 groups: the first group should draw José on the extreme left of the sheet that they receive;

the second should draw José's tombstone on the extreme right of the sheet and the third group should cut out links of a chain made with the cardboard.

5- Having completed their tasks, ask the group as a whole to reflect, comment and discuss the various factors that led to José's death. When they have decided on a determining factor for José's suicide, write it down on one of the links.

6- When all the links have been filled, the group should decide on the order in which they are to be placed in the chain, commencing with the initial causes until the final causes of his death.

7- Finally, read again each of the links and discuss with the group where it would have been possible to intervene to prevent José's death.

Discussion questions

- ✎ Do you know of any similar case to that of José?
- ✎ What could have been done to prevent this death?
- ✎ What can we do in cases like that of José?
- ✎ Can men ask for help? Why or why not? Where?



LINK

Depending on the factors that the young men identify (communication difficulties, self-esteem, etc.), the facilitator can connect this activity to activities about communication (Activity 5), self-esteem (Activity 6) and social networks (Activity 13).

▼ CLOSING

- ✎ Emphasize that there are frequently signs that indicate that a person is considering or at risk of attempting suicide. This means that there is often some moment when we can help.
- ✎ Read and discuss with the participants the resource sheet Myths and Facts about Suicide and the text *“What can be done to prevent suicide?”* (in the first part of this section).
- ✎ Reflect and promote a discussion about the contrast that exists between suicide attempts in women and achieved suicides among men.

The Story of José

José was born and lived his whole life in a poor district on the outskirts of the capital. His mother worked as a maid in a private home an hour away from their house, which meant that José, being the oldest brother, was responsible for taking care of his younger brothers. He had only seen his father a few times, who emigrated to another country for work. They had not heard from him in four years.

José studied up to the 4th year of primary school, but had to leave school due to the cost of the books. He was forced to work from the time he was a child in all kinds of jobs while his younger brothers went to school. At work, even though he was very timid and withdrawn, he made friends. The older ones got him to start smoking and pressed him into having his first sexual experience (which he didn't want) after getting drunk for the first time. He had other friends in the neighborhood with whom he played soccer on Sundays. With them he felt more relaxed, although he never talked very much.

José did not see many prospects in his life. He was arrested once for shoplifting and as part of the sentence had to go for some counseling sessions. Most of the time he felt sad and felt that life didn't have much purpose. He couldn't sleep well. The week before, he had been to a health center hoping to get some medication to make him feel better, but when he got to the clinic, he saw only adult women and young children there and was too shy to set up an appointment to see a doctor or psychologist.

Three days later, he told Pedro after a soccer game that he didn't want to live anymore. Pedro didn't believe him and took it as a joke: “A few beers will do the trick,” he said.

José tried to telephone his father, but couldn't find him at the number he had. He didn't feel like he could talk about his sadness with his mother – she was always too busy and tired.

José was found dead one Saturday morning. He had poisoned himself. The next month he would have turned 18.

This activity promotes a discussion about how labeling people can limit our individual potential.

Activity 12

Labeling

Purpose: To recognize how personal characteristics are transformed into labels that affect human relations.

Materials required: Self-adhesive labels, felt-tip pens

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Planning tips/notes: It is important for the facilitator to help the young men get involved by participating in the dynamics of the exercise. The facilitator should also make sure that none of the participants become aggressive or offended by any of the labels used.

Procedure

- 1- Ask the participants to form groups of 5 or 6 people and tell them that they will have to carry out a task: develop a program to work with children on the issue of HIV/AIDS prevention.
- 2- At random, stick a self-adhesive label on the back of each participant with a characteristic (sly, intelligent, confused, hard-working, responsible, playful, etc). The participants cannot see the labels on their own backs; they can only see other people's.
- 3- To carry out this task they have to relate with the other members of the team, who should treat them according to the characteristic they have on the label.
- 4- After 10 to 15 minutes working on the task, ask them to stop.
- 5- Reflect with the group about what happened to each of them and how they felt. At the same time, each person should try to guess what their label is based on the way they were treated.

Discussion questions

- ✎ What happened in the exercise? How did they feel?
- ✎ Did you manage to fulfill the task?
- ✎ Did the types of attitudes that emerged in the group hamper or facilitate completing the task?
- ✎ What does this exercise have to do with real life?
- ✎ How do labels affect relationships between people? What other examples of labels do they know?
- ✎ How do we react when these situations occur?
- ✎ How can we live with "labels?"

▼ CLOSING

- ✎ Discuss how labels and stereotypes affect people and where they come from.
- ✎ Emphasize the importance of “unlearning” some of the ways that we interact with others, for example:

- a) *Using punishment, blackmail and being judgemental*
- b) *Using labels or negative nicknames.*

c) *Using discrimination based on skin color, social class, or sexual orientation.*

d) *Making someone in the family and/or classroom a scapegoat.*

e) *Being inflexible or stubborn.*

f) *Showing indifference, silence or spite.*

- ✎ The feeling of belonging to a group, group integration and genuine participation are fundamental for learning and for developing our individual and collective potential.



LINK

This activity is related to violence. We should recall from the introductory section on violence that labeling young men as delinquents or violent actually encourages violence. This activity is also related to the themes of communication and self-esteem in activities 5 and 6.

This activity includes a discussion about the importance of our personal networks.

Activity 13

My "Network"¹

Purpose: To help young men reflect about their important relationships and social networks.

Material required: "Network" sheets, pencils and fine paintbrushes

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes




Planning tips/notes: In the course of this activity, it is possible that participants may recall or present experiences of being abandoned, abused and/or ill-treated. The facilitator should be prepared for this possibility.

Procedure

1- Ask each participant to fill out his "Network" individually. The "network" should be completed with names, symbols or drawings of significant persons in the respective spaces. The name of the person filling out the network should be placed at the center with the other persons being placed according to their degree of proximity.

2- Having completed the form, ask the participants to review their "networks" in pairs, forming pairs with persons who know each other the least.




Discussion questions

-  What did we learn from this exercise?
-  In what ways do social networks influence mental health?
-  What can we do to strengthen our social networks?

¹ Make a copy of Resource Sheet for each participant.



CLOSING

-  Networks serve as a source of resources, solidarity and guidance in life. But they can also serve as a form of social control and discrimination.
-  The construction of affective or support networks provides an opportunity to share what we feel, think and want in a positive way and to learn to negotiate.
-  It is also important to stress the role that help, caring and collaboration have in our lives.

Why are social networks important?

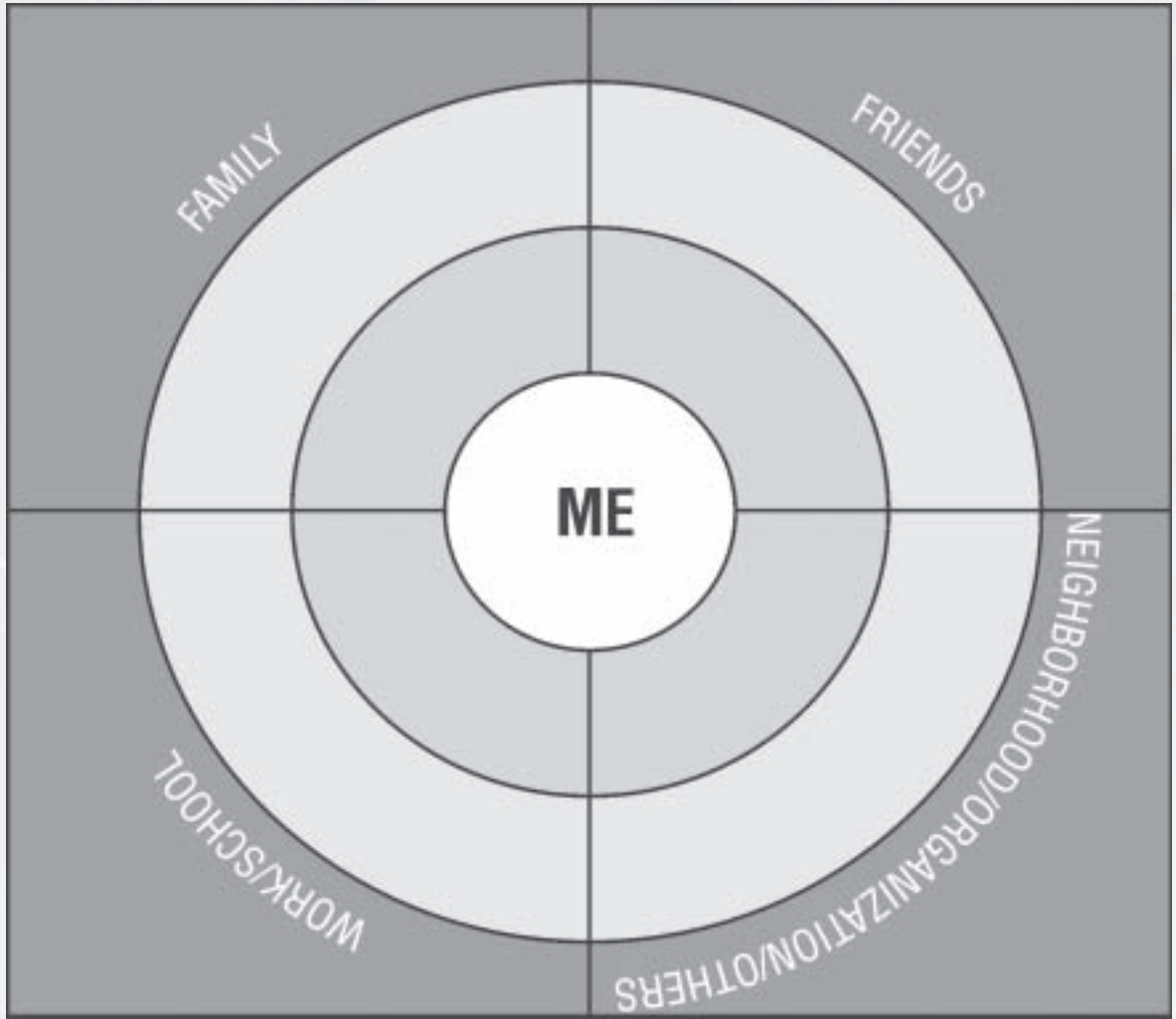
Social networks can be fundamental for constructing affective interpersonal ties which help human beings to grow and develop. Generally, the larger or more extensive the social network, the greater the mental health, since this means we can count on more significant persons with whom we can share things.



LINK

Based on the questions that have emerged, this can be related to Communication and "The 4 Phrases" (activities 5 and 14).

Resource Sheet



In this activity, participants rehearse an alternative model for resolving conflicts.

Activity 14

The 4 Phrases

Purpose: To propose and rehearse a model for the creative resolution of conflicts.

Material required: None.

Recommended time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Procedure

- 1- In a brainstorming session, ask the participants: "What is a conflict?"
- 2- Note the ideas on a flip-chart and keep it on hand, as we will return to it again in the full debate.
- 3- Ask the participants to form pairs and think about a conflict - that they can talk about - and describe the situation to the other person.
- 4- After the two have commented on the conflict, tell both that: "Your partner will play the role of the person with whom you have the conflict. How would you face him?" Allow some time for each one to develop the conflict with their partner and when they have finished present the model for resolving conflicts based on four phrases:

I CAN SEE...

This concerns expressing the conduct that we see in another person. For example, I can see that you never greet me when you arrive.

I IMAGINE ...

Through this phrase we say what we imagine when observing the other person's conduct. For example, I imagine that you are annoyed. It is important to note that when we imagine,

the possibility exists that we are wrong in our interpretation and if we actually express it, we provide the opportunity to clarify it.

I FEEL...

Here we say what we feel to the person about what we can see and imagine. For example, I feel sad and what happened really upset me because your friendship is important to me.

I WANT...

We make a proposal to improve things. For example, I want you to tell me if something is bothering you.

5- Ask them to go back to work in the same pairs, now seeking to resolve the conflict based on the above scheme and discuss how they felt doing this exercise.

6- Finish off by going back to the flip-chart and analyzing the negative values that were given to the conflict during the brainstorming. Remind them that conflict always exists and can be an opportunity for personal growth and development. Explain that this exercise allows us to express feelings and needs which are frequently not expressed in a conflict situation and if there are various conflicts, it is very important to **PRIORITIZE THEM** and deal with them one at a time.

Discussion questions

- ✎ How did they feel in this exercise? Did they note any difference following the model? What did they discover about themselves?
- ✎ Does the way we view conflict (as something negative or positive) have something to do with the way we face it?

▼ CLOSING

- ✎ When we deal with conflicts, positive confrontation is vital.
- ✎ Stimulate confidence and group respect and stress that each person must be responsible for himself. This means talking in the first person and not speaking for others.
- ✎ Emphasize the importance of giving feedback with positive criticism, without making judgments and/or attaching labels which disrespect the other person.
- ✎ Remind them that we should not question what the other person feels, but rather we must respect it. In the case of ideas, we can disagree but not with feelings.

Resolving conflicts creatively

The creative resolution of conflicts is all about learning new processes to deal with differences, disagreements and conflicts. It is about acquiring skills to negotiate in which there are no winners or losers. We do not win an argument or conflict by humiliating others, but rather by finding an agreement or resolution favorable for all involved.



LINK

In the section on *"From Violence to Peaceful Coexistence"*, there are other activities about conflict resolution that combine well with this one, particularly **Activity 5**.

This activity promotes a reflection about our personal resources or assets and provides for a positive and optimistic closing of the workshop.

Activity 15

My Resources

Purpose: To identify our personal resources or assets.

Recommended time: 1 hour



Materials required: Pencil and paper

Planning tips/notes: It is important to reflect about all resources that we have and how we use them.


Procedure

- 1- Ask the participants to form pairs (with someone they know least) following the instructions given by the facilitator step by step.
- 2- Each person will concentrate on something they have done and which makes them feel happy (at work, in the family or in any other place). Allow them 2 minutes.
- 3- Each pair decides who is "A" and who is "B."
- 4- Each person has to talk to the other for 3 or 4 minutes about what he did that turned out well and made him feel happy. Next, each person should write down on a sheet of paper the personal resources or assets that their colleague used to make things turn out well. These assets or resources may include time, patience, passion, affection, intelligence, etc.
- 5- "A" and "B" should compare the lists of resources that each one noted from the other's description.

Discussion questions

-  How far do we use these resources and assets in our own lives and relationships with other people?
-  What can we learn from this exercise?

CLOSING

-  Finish off the activity stressing the importance of being aware of and recognizing our own resources or assets and how we can develop them by applying them to every area of our life.



LINK

You can connect this activity with the questions of self-esteem (activity 6) , communication (activity 5) and the creative resolution of conflicts (activity 14).

Annex: suggestions for the facilitator

As mentioned in the introduction to this module, the proposed methodology in this manual, as in all the others in the series, deals with personal and individual issues and promotes reflections about issues in such a way that past traumas or strong emotions may emerge. Some young men may not be used to this and may experience anxiety and/or fear of the unknown when dealing with these emotions. If this occurs, bear in mind the following:

If the groups have more than 15 young men, it is better to have two facilitators. In this way the group is not left to drift; one of the facilitators can work with the group while the other offers direct support to the person affected.

For the person with the group:

1- It is important to lower the anxiety level generated in the group without making any judgement, which is common. It is important to allow time for the members of the group to process the moment, trying to understand what is happening with the young man who may be experiencing intense emotions. You may comment that what happened is normal. In this way the group will be ready to

welcome back the person that withdrew when he rejoins the group.

2- If the group is restless, allow them to express the emotions that were aroused, generating an empathetic response and an attitude of support from the group. We can ask if anyone wishes to pass comments on the feeling that generated the situation and if they wish to express this feeling. Ask them to speak in the first person and to use short phrases. For example: "It made me sad..." "It gave me courage..." etc.

3- Be careful not to criticize, judge or gossip.

4- When the person rejoins the group, invite him to share with everyone what happened. If he does not want to, respect his decision and offer help. You can ask the group to do the same, should it be necessary.

For the person who provides support for the affected person:

1- It is important to transmit confidence to him. In such cases it is recommended to adopt a listening position, accompanying the person with respect and affection.


2- You can suggest that he breathe slowly and deeply. You can guide him: "Breathe in, allow the air to fill your



whole body, now let it out slowly through your mouth. That's right, now breathe in again, let it fill your body once again and now when you let it out, get rid of all this bad feeling inside of you." Repeat the same exercise three to five times. Talk to him in a soft voice: "I can imagine how you're feeling at this moment, but I am here with you, by your side." Breathing is an excellent resource to make the other person feel calm: if the person allows it, you may hold his hand.

3- When he has calmed down you can say to him; "You are getting through to your emotions. If you want to talk more about this, we can think about who you might turn to for help." It is recommended that you have a network of professionals to whom one can turn to if this proves necessary.

4- Ask him how he is feeling and if he feels up to joining the group again. It is a good idea to tell him that it is his decision whether to share his experiences or not and whatever he decides is fine, the group will respect his decision.

 **In general it is important that the facilitators consider the following:**

1- You should not pursue the issue deeper at this moment, both because of time and because these group

activities are not the appropriate space for therapy.

2- If someone shares with us in confidence, we must respect this trust.

3- Refer or discuss the case with professionals that you trust.

4- Do not try to direct the person's life.

5- Respect individual and group processes.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that given the culture, men can have greater difficulty in looking someone in the eye and/or allowing physical contact. In such cases, you can take advantage of the moment to mention that the messages that are passed on to us only limit our opportunity to live fully with all our senses. We can also remind them that expressing emotions is not just something for women, but that it is an opportunity for every human being to learn and get in touch with themselves and with the people around them. And if the group is interested, this is a good opportunity to work on these questions in a secure environment, where there is no criticism and one can do things in a different way. The idea is to motivate and not push. We should remember that each person has their own rhythm, their own moment for coming to terms with and processing experiences.

