

Tips to ensure safe and inclusive consultations with diverse communities

- Consulting communities is key to designing and running good programmes. To do this well, we need to ensure everyone feels included. **Pay attention to specific needs** of [persons with disabilities](#), [indigenous/minority groups](#), [children](#), the elderly etc.
- KEEP IN MIND** Some consultations **may trigger strong emotions and distress**, especially for people facing difficult situations. Here are the key steps on how to handle these situations respectfully and effectively.

Dos and Don'ts during consultations

Do's

- ✓ Engage persons with different abilities, ages, genders, ethnicities & backgrounds. It's usually a good idea to have separate groups for men/women, to ensure people can freely share.
- ✓ If there are barriers to participation (e.g. mobility or other accessibility needs), speak to community members to understand how to facilitate better access to the consultations in advance.
- ✓ Use accessible venues and reduce mobility barriers.
- ✓ Ensure the environment is **safe and non-intimidating & ensure privacy**. If interrupted, find a more private space (where others cannot hear, but see you) to continue or re-schedule.
- ✓ Speak clearly and use simple language - where necessary provide sign language interpreters or other aids.
- ✓ **Listen attentively**. Use phrases like "I see," or "Please continue" and positive body language to prompt sharing.
- ✓ If someone shows signs of distress (panic attacks, or severe trauma), follow the **key steps on the right** and prioritize connecting them with professionals.
- ✓ Keep **local support services contact info at hand**.
- ✓ Offer a break if the discussion feels triggering.
- ✓ Terminate the consultation if the person wishes to stop or if continuing could cause harm.
- ✓ **Be open** to adjusting plans based on participant feedback.

Don'ts

- ✗ **Don't assume** needs or judge: Avoid generalizing or making assumptions about e.g. disabilities, cultures or preferences.
- ✗ **Don't rush**: Allow people to share at their own pace.
- ✗ **Don't interrupt** people – listen carefully.
- ✗ **Don't dismiss** people's feelings or ignore emotions.
- ✗ **Don't make promises you can't keep**.
- ✗ **Don't impose** advice or actions; allow people to choose.

Explore these existing tools

- [GBV Pocketguide](#) [EN]
- [Recognising and Referring Child Protection Concerns Rapid guide for all humanitarian workers](#) [EN]
- [UNDIS: Consulting Persons with Disabilities](#) (Part 3) [EN]

How to communicate with people in distress

Here are the key steps adapted from the inter-agency approved approach for **psychological first aid from the IASC**:

1... Prepare

- Seek information on **referral pathways** (e.g. context-specific key messages and referral contact for gender-based violence, child protection issues, etc).

2... Look

- Remain alert to **sensitive issues**. Allow people in distress to approach you.
- Address **urgent basic needs** (e.g. first aid, shade, water).
- Recognize what you can and cannot manage. If necessary, ask someone else to step in.

3... Listen

- **Without judgement and with respect** to the confidentiality of the information received.
- Allow people to share as much or as little information as they would like to.
- It is not your role to provide counselling.
- *Remember: Being present while demonstrating active listening is supportive in itself. Here are some tips:*
 - Let people talk without interrupting. Show you're listening and stay engaged (such as nodding, making eye contact, or saying things like "I am listening"/ "It sounds like a difficult situation...")
 - Do not investigate or ask probing questions to avoid causing harm.

4... Link

- Where required, link the survivor/person to relevant services, ensuring the right of the person to make **their own decision**.
- Refer: "I am not an expert in this, but I can connect you with someone who can...you."

Note: If a child is at risk of harm, refer directly to [child protection actor](#).

Adapted from the IASC [GBV Pocketguide](#)

REMEMBER: Engaging on sensitive topics can also be overwhelming for humanitarian staff. Reflect and decompress with colleagues and if necessary, reach out to professional support to protect your mental well-being.