



TIPS RESOURCE

Tips for Engaging on
Gender-Based Violence Topics

Community Engagement on Mass Casualty Commission and Desmond Fatality Inquiry Recommendations

With thanks to individuals from Community and
Government who participated and provided input

Understanding Gender-Based Violence

What you need to know

Community Engagement on topics related to Gender-based Violence

In addressing the epidemic of gender-based violence, engaging communities effectively about recommendations and solutions is crucial. This resource is a starting point for understanding key considerations regarding gender-based violence. It is intended for use by engagement staff, service practitioners, program managers, Government departments, and community organizations who work on engagement projects related to gender-based violence and recent inquiry recommendations.

Do Your Research

The following reports are a good starting place for understanding the context of GBV and getting an overview of key issues and strategies. Review these and other relevant reports and past engagements to prepare effectively for your engagement:

- [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(2019\)](#)
- [Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission \(2023\)](#)
- [Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence \(2022\)](#)
- [Final Report of the Desmond Fatality Inquiry \(2024\)](#)
- [Not Without Us: A report about changing the response for women with disabilities experiencing domestic violence \(2021\)](#)
- [Standing Together Action Plan \(2022\)](#)

Identify Partners/collaborators

Partner with Community organizations:

- Transition houses, women's centers, sexual assault and sexual health centres, and youth organizations
- Women's advocacy organizations
- Men's intervention programs
- Indigenous organizations

- African Nova Scotian and Black communities and organizations
- Newcomer, immigrant, and refugee organizations
- Organizations supporting people with disabilities
- Seniors groups
- Gender diverse and non-binary groups - 2SLGBTQIA+
- Independent experts

Gender-Based Violence and the Mass Casualty

The Mass Casualty Commission affirmed that family violence, intimate partner violence, coercive control and domestic violence were precursors to the mass casualty events of April 2020.

Definitions and distinctions

- **Gender-Based Violence** is an umbrella term that refers to any kind of violence against another person because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender. There are several specific types of violence included under the term gender-based violence. Gender-based violence can be physical, as well as emotional, psychological, financial, spiritual, and technology-facilitated.
- **Coercive Control** is a pattern of behaviour that takes away the freedom, sense of self, and feeling of control from the person being harmed. Coercive Control can involve physical violence, but not always. Coercive Control can include psychological and emotional abuse, surveillance and monitoring of everyday activities, gaslighting, financial control, isolation, and threats of harm.

Types of Gender-Based Violence

- **Intimate Partner Violence** refers to behaviours that control/harm an intimate partner, including both current and former partners. Intimate partner violence can happen if partners live together, do not live together, or have never lived together. Intimate Partner Violence is an umbrella term that also includes Domestic Violence.
- **Family Violence** refers to behaviours that neglect/control/harm a member of a household or a family member. Family violence encompasses a wider range of relationships, including non-intimate family relationships.
- **Sexualized Violence** refers to any unwanted physical contact or attempted physical contact of a sexual nature that violates the sexual integrity of a person and/or that occurs without consent. All sexual touching that occurs without consent, is inherently violent, even if no overt force is used.

Myths and Harmful Social Norms

- **Victim Blaming:** survivors and victims of GBV are **never** to blame for the violence inflicted on them. The person who used violence must be held accountable for their actions, and provided with appropriate services to help them stop their behaviour and address the reasons they use violence.
- **Social Pressures for Girls and Women:** There is social pressure for girls and women to internalize self-blaming or think that they are at fault. While GBV is an umbrella term that includes all genders, it is important to centre and understand the unique social pressure and expectations for women and girls.
- **Harmful Social Norms for Boys and Men:** There is social pressure for men and boys to suppress their feelings, not cry, be tough, be unemotional, and not ask for help. If they are domineering, aggressive or controlling, this is often viewed as “normal” or even expected. These rigid gender expectations may affect mental health and lead to unhealthy relationship dynamics, escalating to violence and abusive behaviour.

Rates and risks

- GBV affects many people in Nova Scotia and can happen in any relationship.
- Women are the primary victims and men are the primary perpetrators of gender-based violence. In Nova Scotia, 79% of domestic violence victims are women and 21% are men.
- These threats to women’s safety can have both immediate and long term impacts on their health, social and economic well-being, and that of their children. Growing up in a family experiencing GBV can impact a child’s brain development and increases their risks of being victimized or using violence as adults.
- GBV is rooted in gender inequality, intensified by systemic inequalities and social determinants of health, and affects various groups in different ways. Women from Indigenous, Black and African Nova Scotian communities, as well as newcomer women, people with disabilities, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, experience significantly higher rates of GBV than others.
- GBV is highly under-reported. It is estimated that only one in five incidents are reported to police (Stats Can, 2022) and only one in ten incidents of sexual violence are reported.
- According to the 2014 General Social Survey, the two most common reasons for not reporting spousal violence to police were a belief that the abuse was a private or personal matter and a perception that it was not important enough to report ([Burczycka 2016](#))

- Additional key barriers to reporting GBV include: a) being re-traumatized by police, the legal system, and the health care system; b) fear of having children removed from the home; c) feelings of discrimination, judgment, fear, shame, and gaslighting from friends, families, and service providers; and d) fear of financial insecurity.

***When engaging on topics related to GBV and community safety,** using a trauma-informed lens and ensuring engagements are accessible and inclusive promotes the creation of safer spaces to support participation of individuals and communities.

Practical Tips for Applying a Trauma-Informed Lens

Being trauma-informed during engagements means being aware of the ways in which people experience trauma, how trauma can impact someone's thoughts, behaviours, and memories, and working with people in a way that doesn't create more trauma. Trauma-informed practice can also be called trauma-and violence-informed practice to emphasize the link between trauma and violence.

1. Establish Safety and Trust

- **Create Safer Spaces:** Create engagement settings that are physically and emotionally safe. Consider locations that feel secure and offer privacy for sensitive discussions. Pay attention to details such as having accessible bathroom, preferably standalone accessible bathrooms.
- **Build Trust:** Foster trust by transparently communicating the purpose, goals, and outcomes of the engagement. Have agreements for how discussions will take place, and ask participants how to support their needs. Clarify how participant input will be used and ensure confidentiality.

2. Understand Trauma and Its Impacts

- **Educate Team Members:** Provide facilitators and organizers with training on trauma and violence-informed practices. Understand the potential triggers and responses of trauma survivors.
- **Acknowledge Diversity:** Recognize that trauma looks different across cultural, gender, and socio-economic contexts. Recognize that trauma can be individual, collective, passed down between generations, and individuals may have trauma from multiple causes. Your approach should recognize and respect the diverse and intersectional identities and experiences.

3. Prioritize Choice and Agency

- **Offer Options:** Provide participants with choices on how they engage (e.g., written submissions, in-person meetings, third-party representation). Respect preferences for anonymity or visibility.
- **Flexibility with Breaks:** Offer regular breaks and the option for participants to choose their own breaks to help support participants' physical and emotional needs. Ensure there are qualified support persons available.

4. Communication and Transparency

- **Clear Communication:** Use plain language free of jargon or acronyms. Clearly outline the purpose of the engagement, how information will be used, and what follow-up will take place.
- **Transparency:** Be upfront about the potential emotional impacts of participation. Explain the process of engagement, including any changes or unexpected developments.

5. Collaboration and Validation

- **Share Leadership:** Facilitate engagement by collaborating with community organizations, leaders, and participants in planning, implementing, leading, and evaluating initiatives related to GBV prevention and response.
- **Validate Experiences:** Validate the experiences and expertise of survivors and affected communities by:
 - o listening with respect, humility, and without judgement
 - o recognizing that information from first voice participants will provide insights that will likely lead to more effective solutions
 - o provide honorariums for participation in engagements

6. Cultural Humility, Sensitivity and Inclusivity

- **Cultural Competence:** Understand and respect cultural norms and practices related to trauma and healing. Consult with cultural advisors or community leaders for guidance.
- **Language and Accessibility:** Provide information in multiple formats (written, visual, auditory) and offer translation services as needed. Work with community partners to choose venues that are accessible and accommodate diverse needs.

7. Support and Follow-Up

- **Wellness Supports:** Discuss with engagement partners what arrangements for onsite counsellors, support workers, social workers, or other community supports make the most sense. Work with community organizations and leaders to conduct wellness checks after engagement sessions to assess participants' emotional well-being. Offer referrals to support services or additional resources as necessary.
- **Follow-Up:** Communicate outcomes and actions taken as a result of the engagement. Demonstrate accountability by showing how information gathered in community engagements will be applied to decision-making processes.

8. Facilitator Reflection and Self-Care

- **Self-Awareness:** Recognize and manage personal biases, triggers, and emotional responses. Practice self-care strategies to prevent burnout and maintain resilience.
- **Supervision and Support:** Provide opportunities for debriefing and supervision for facilitators and organizers involved in sensitive community engagements.

Additional Resources & Tools

The following resources and tools may also be helpful in planning your approach when engaging on GBV topics:

Gender-Based Analysis Course - Women and Gender Equality Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-analysis-plus/take-course.html>

Domestic Violence Resource Centre - NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women

<https://women.novascotia.ca/domestic-violence-resource-centre>

Find Programs and Services in Your Community

<https://women.novascotia.ca/domestic-violence-resource-centre/find-programs-and-services-your-community>

Trauma-informed Engagement

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/our-organization/our-direction/engagement/sha-engagement-framework/trauma-informed-engagement#:~:text=The%20core%20principles%20of%20a%20trauma-informed>

Trauma-informed Approaches - An Introduction and Discussion Guide for Health and Social Service Providers

https://www.novascotia.ca/dhw/addictions/documents/TIP_Discussion_Guide_1.pdf#:~:text=Introduces%20a%20concept%20of%20trauma%20and

Trauma and Violence-informed Approaches to Policy and Practice

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/trauma-violence-informed-approaches-policy-practice.html#s5>