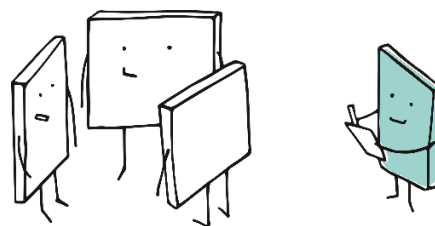## Training concept: Role play

Role plays are a very useful didactic tool for activating participants in trainings on domestic violence and for developing practical skills (e.g., communication with victims). This document provides a general guidance on how to use role plays in trainings on domestic violence and what needs to be considered.

General guidelines

➢ *Psychological Safety & Trauma Awareness*
- **Role plays on domestic violence can be triggering** – for participants and observers alike.
- **Screen participants** (or at least provide an opt-out) in case of lived experience with domestic violence.
- Offer **content warnings** before each scenario.
- Work in a trainer-tandem.
- Have a **mental health professional or support resource** available, especially in longer or more intensive sessions.

➢ *Clear Learning Objectives per Sector*

In case of multisector trainings, each sector has a different role and perspective. Tailor scenarios so they:
- Reflect **realistic dilemmas** participants would face in practice.
- Highlight **intersections** (e.g., how medical records support prosecution, how social workers help police identify coercive control).
- Support **interdisciplinary collaboration**.

For example:
- **Police** → risk assessment, trauma-informed interviewing, evidence gathering.
- **Social workers** → identifying signs of abuse, safety planning, liaising with shelters.
- **Medical professionals** → documentation, recognizing physical/psychological symptoms, mandated reporting.
- **Justice sector** → legal protections, restraining orders, victim support during court processes.

➢ *Realism & Accuracy*
- Use **scenarios based on real cases** (anonymized).
- Reflect **different forms of abuse**:
  - Physical
  - Emotional/psychological
  - Financial
  - Coercive control
  - Technological abuse
- Include **cultural, gender, or immigration status complexity** where relevant.
- Involve **actors or trained facilitators** who can portray trauma responses accurately.

➢ *Role Clarity and Guidance*
- Provide **brief role descriptions** in writing (e.g., "You're a survivor who doesn't want the abuser arrested"; "You're a paramedic who noticed signs of fear").
- Clarify **boundaries**: what participants can and can't do in character.
- Encourage empathy, **not just procedure**—you're training responders to *see the person*, not just the problem.
- Provide time for participants to find into their roles
- Use a clear signal for the start of the role and the end
- Allow for time for the participants to disengage from their roles

➢ *Debriefing is Non-Negotiable*
- Hold structured **debriefs immediately after each role play**:
  o What went well?
  o What was hard?
  o What could have been done differently?
- Discuss both **technical actions** (e.g., did the police follow protocol?) and **relational dynamics** (e.g., was the survivor treated with dignity?).
- Use debriefs to correct **myths**, challenge **biases**, and build **shared understanding**.

➢ *Interdisciplinary Insight*
- Use role play to highlight where communication breaks down between services.
- Let participants observe each other's methods (e.g., how police interviews differ from social worker conversations).
- Include moments of transferrals – these are often where victims of domestic violence fall through the cracks.

➢ *Structure and Facilitation*
- Keep role plays structured:
  o Introduction → Role play → Debrief
- Assign skilled facilitators to guide, stop, or re-direct as needed.
- Consider using "pause and reflect" techniques during intense scenarios.

➢ *Ethical Framing*
- Reinforce that this is not theatre; the goal is professional growth.
- Avoid sensationalism or over-dramatization.
- Use inclusive language (e.g., not all victims are women, and not all abusers are men, though gender dynamics do matter).

➢ *Optional: Recording or Observation*
- With consent, consider recording role plays for educational review.
- Or use observers who note behaviors, strengths, and missed opportunities during the scenario.