



EXERCISE:

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EXERCISE

Integrated Wellness and Safety Strategies

TIME: 60-90 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: SIX BLANK CARDS OR STRIPS OF PAPER PER PERSON; AND SEVERAL CONTAINERS OR BOWLS FOR PAPERS.

SUMMARY:

This is an exercise to draw out a range of individual strategies that participants use to stay well, to care for themselves, and to cope with the demands of their work.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

1. Ask each participant to find a comfortable place to work alone. They should write down six different strategies on coloured pieces of paper that they employ to deal with stress and to stay well and safe.
2. As soon as they have completed them, ask the participants to fold their pieces of paper and to place them in the bowls (or other containers).
3. Note that sometimes, participants will resist and say that they do not have that many strategies – facilitators should encourage them to think more deeply. In addition, be clear that no judgement will be made about whether it is a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ strategy – ‘coping’ strategies such as eating chocolate, smoking and drinking are also strategies and should be included on the lists.
4. Facilitators take the answers and group them into themes (this can take a little time, so it is best to do it as answers come in, then complete it during the break).
5. Facilitators will need approximately 20 minutes to organise strategies into themes and to prepare to read them out.
6. At this point, ask participants to go to the workshop’s ‘second space’ and to get very comfortable – ideally

they should lie down and close their eyes. Then the facilitator(s) reads out the themes, with examples, elaborating a little on each, and asks the participants to feel each strategy – how it feels in their body; the thought that they could take the time for it.

FACILITATION NOTES:

This can be a challenging exercise for women human rights defenders – many have told us that they did not have any strategies, and if they did, they were just ‘negative coping mechanisms’. Sometimes they focused on externalised strategies (for example, exclusively obtaining support from international agencies) or challenged some strategies as ‘elitist’ or inaccessible due to cost – during the Nepal workshop, for instance, the idea of ‘massage’ as a wellness strategy was quite contentious and perceived by some as a Western luxury. Others, though, examined the use of massage traditionally in their own cultures, and pointed out that, essentially, this is a healing activity, and can be requested from and received by family members/friends or through a system of barter.

When you spend some time on this exercise, a range of strategies emerge that are accessible to all activists – and often revolve around personal choices, establishing boundaries and value for our bodies and spirit. Examples



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include sleeping more, eating better, exercising, gardening, spiritual practice, dancing, painting, writing, reading light novels or children's books, and spending more time with friends and family members.

This exercise shows the group how many strategies are right there in the room. It demonstrates too that most strategies do not require money – just time – so they are all possible, it is just a matter of taking that time and prioritising wellness, which connects back to the use of resources exercise.

After this exercise, there should be a spontaneous discussion of the strategies. During this discussion participants will add more strategies, and debate why some may or may not work for them.

This is also a good point for facilitators to reflect on why we are looking at strategies and why they are so important, and to reinforce great strategies that came up. Furthermore facilitators can look at themes, and add other strategies or themes that were missing – points that we want to reinforce.

Variations:

Alternately, facilitators can lay out the strategy cards around the circle in the centre of the workshop space and then read them out while walking around. This can be very beautiful visually and connects the strategies with the central space. In addition, it allows participants to look at the strategies later.