



Women and Girls' Safe Space

1. What is a Safe Space?

A **safe space** is a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term 'safe,' in the present context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. It is a space where women and girls, being the intended beneficiaries, feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm.

2. Why Safe Space in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, women have limited space to meet, and public spaces are often inhabited largely by men. For many girls, the opportunity to move freely in the community becomes limited at the onset of puberty. Parents often keep their daughters inside the house, protected from any contact with males. Most of the communities are sensitive to mix different sexes in one platform. Hence, the creation of 'safe spaces' for women and girls in Afghanistan has been a key strategy in the protection and empowerment of women and girls.

3. Purpose and Objectives

The **purpose** of the safe spaces is to help women and adolescent girls in crisis to receive needed referrals and basic support for their rehabilitation such as psycho-social counselling.

The **key objectives** of the safe space are to provide an area where women and girls could:

- Socialize and re-build their social networks;
- Receive social support;
- Acquire contextually relevant skills;
- Access safe and non-stigmatizing multi-sectorial GBV response services (psychosocial, legal, medical and referral); and
- Receive information on issues relating to women's rights, health, and where critical services are available.

4. Methodology and Approach

Safe spaces are established based on the following criteria:

- 1) A place in an area that is conveniently accessible to young women and adolescent girls;
- 2) A district with high rate of illiteracy, and high rate of girls dropping out from schools, and
- 3) A district with high rate of child marriage, violence against women and girls.

Partners ensured the safety and privacy of selected places, where women and girls could feel welcomed and engaged. Activities and approaches were planned to be culturally and age appropriate, maintaining a balance between structured activities, services, and time available to socialize.

Activities and Services in Safe Spaces include, but not limited to the following:

- Information and awareness raising sessions on adolescents' rights, health, nutrition, hygiene and gender equality;
- Library and Internet access for adolescent girls in terms of their education, social networking and employment;
- Psycho-social counselling to girls and GBV survivors including referrals for specialized care;
- Life-skill training for adolescent girls;
- Age appropriate group discussions and group therapy;
- Prevention and outreach activities;
- Advisory support in legal matters through collective community and stakeholders' actions were also provided at the provincial level

The common issues being discussed in the safe space center are child marriage, abuse and violence cases of children rights, psycho-social stress management, inheritance rights, educational issues, social information and economic-related issues.



Photo@UNICEF 2021. Young women and adolescent girls participating in the awareness raising session on health provided at the safe space in Bagrami, Kabul



Photo@UNICEF 2021. An adolescent girl receiving psycho-socio counselling from a Safe Space Officer

Responsible Individuals in running Safe Space Center

Safe Space Officer	Lead the operations and management of the safe space. The Officer was also in charge of supervising the staff and establishing linkages with community dialogue groups
Community outreach/ mobilization officer	Assist Safe Space Officers to closely work with the Reflect Circles, community dialogue groups and Change Agents to coordinate and address adolescent girls' and boys' issues, conduct advocacy and networking at the district and provincial levels. In addition, District Officers assisted both the Safe Space Officer and Community Officers in coordinating, networking, advocating and monitoring the Safe Space's operations and take joint actions to resolve management related issues.
Psychosocial Support Officer	Provide psychosocial services and activities
Case workers	Provide individual psychosocial support where required and overall case management
Livelihoods/ Income Generating Activities Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct market assessment and identify opportunities for women and girls to earn an income in that context • Develop a plan to train and support women to develop the relevant skills • Develop linkages with other relevant actors (e.g. economic empowerment programmes, VSLA groups)
Mentors (women from the community with whom adolescent girls can identify, and who can serve as role models)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and facilitate activities with adolescent girls, with the support of the Women's Support Officer • Refer girls in need of individual support to a case worker

Beneficiaries and Key stakeholders

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Beneficiaries (Recipients)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescent girls and young women • Adolescent and Youth Network members • Older adolescent girls with leadership skills who provide peer-to-peer support
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer legal experts; Psychosocial councilor; Midwives and teachers
Influential persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious leaders; Teachers (formal and CBE/ALC); Community Development Councils (CDCs)/Community Shuras and GBV clusters
Government officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorate of Justice (DoJ) • Directorate of Education (DoE) • National and international CSOs • Directorate of Labor and Social Affairs and Child Protection Action Network (CPAN) • Department of Youth Affairs (Directorate of Information and Culture) • Directorate of Public Health • Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)