



Purpose

This tip sheet provides an overview of a survivor-centered approach and why and how it should be used for all types and phases of GBViE programming¹.

What does survivor-centered mean?

The term survivor-centered originates from the work of women's rights activists providing support and services to women experiencing sexual and intimate partner violence.² Now a common term used globally in the context of GBV service delivery, **survivor centered** describes *a supportive, compassionate approach to working with a GBV survivor that focuses on promoting her safety and facilitating her agency – her power within and to*. A survivor-centered approach draws from feminist, social work and trauma-informed theory and practice.³ It is a helping process that is intentionally **therapeutic**—by seeking to facilitate healing and recovery—and **political**—by seeking to redress patriarchal systems, norms and practices that are the cause of interpersonal and systemic forms of GBV.⁴ These therapeutic and political goals are interconnected and are facilitated in parallel as a service provider works with a survivor.



Figure 1: image credit ICRC, Asia Pacific

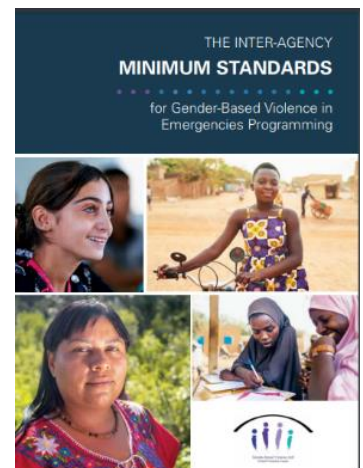
At an individual level, a survivor-centered approach recognizes that each survivor: should be believed and treated with respect, kindness and empathy; is unique and has different strengths, resources and coping mechanisms; reacts differently to GBV and will have different needs as a result; and has the right to decide who should know about what has happened to her and what happens next.⁵

What does survivor-centered mean for GBViE programming?

In GBViE programming, a survivor-centered approach has relevance beyond GBV services.

The Interagency GBV Minimum Standards

state that “all aspects of GBV programming must be survivor-centered to preserve and promote the confidentiality, safety, non-discrimination and respect for the choices, rights and dignity of women and girls, including GBV survivors”. (The GBV



Guiding Principles).⁶ In other words, using a survivor centered approach is **how** GBV actors uphold and implement the GBV guiding principles in all phases and types of GBV programming and is **mandatory**.⁷

¹ Recommended resources for further reading and reflection are hyperlinked throughout the Tip Sheet.

² GBVIMS Steering Committee (2017). [Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines: Providing care and case management services to gender-based violence survivors in humanitarian settings](#).

³ Ibid.

⁴ IRC (2021). [Women Rise: A Gender-based Violence PSS Toolkit](#).

⁵ GBV AoR (2019: 4). [Interagency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence](#).

⁶ Ibid.: xvi

⁷ GBV AoR (2019: 2). [Interagency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence](#).

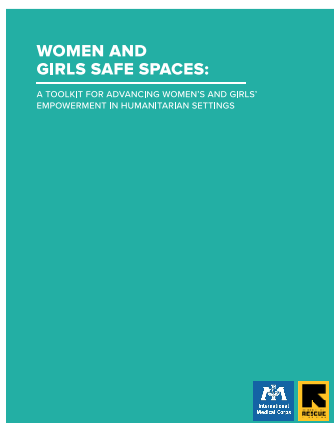
Why is a survivor-centered approach important for all GBViE program implementation?

GBV programming must be survivor-centered because of the reality that women and girls experience violence and oppression on a daily basis throughout their lives. More specifically:

- Myriad obstacles to disclosure of GBV and help-seeking mean that GBV actors can assume there will be women and girls engaged in their programming who are not receiving services but who are survivors. Upholding the GBV guiding principles, and in particular safety, in all GBV programming therefore is a must.
- Due to the pervasive, multi-level and systemic nature of GBV, GBV actors must assume that every woman and girl with whom they engage has been impacted by violence and oppression in some way—whether that be perpetrated in relationships or through social norms and systems.
- All GBViE programming- response, risk mitigation and prevention- seeks to promote the safety and empowerment of women and girls. To do this effectively GBV actors have to be intentional about **how** they engage and work with women and girls. A survivor-centered approach offers a purposeful framework for the ‘**how**’ of GBV programming.

What does survivor-centered GBViE programming look like in practice?

Design: When designing a program or intervention, GBV actors should consult with a diverse intersection of women and girls not only to get their input but to also facilitate processes for them to make decisions about types and approaches to programming. Decision-making power- not just consultation- is critical to survivor-centered design.



Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS):

The whole approach to designing, implementing and monitoring WGSS is based on a survivor-centered approach. A specific example of this is the emphasis

on physical safety and psychological safety of the space.

It is a space **only** for women and girls, designed to allow for anonymous and confidential help seeking. The physical set up of WGSS as well as the programming is focused on facilitating relationships and building community and solidarity between and among women.

GBV Guiding Principles for GBViE programming

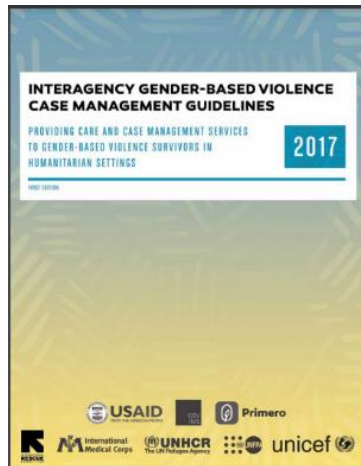
Safety. Refers to both physical safety and security and to a sense of psychological and emotional safety. All programming must consider risks for women and girls accessing and participating and ensure that they are not put at risk of further harm.

Confidentiality. Refers to a person's right to choose with whom she will or will not share her story. As each survivor is the owner of her own experiences, the decision to release any information related to the incident or the survivor rests with the survivor alone. Confidentiality promotes and supports safety, trust and empowerment. GBV services should be designed to protect confidentiality.

Respect. Respect for the choices, rights and dignity of women, girls and GBV survivors requires that survivors are the primary actors in all aspects of service delivery. All actions should be guided by respect for the choices, wishes, rights and dignity of the survivor.

Non-discrimination. GBV programmes must be informed by an analysis of the ways in which identities create increased risk for GBV and may create further barriers to help-seeking. Programming must be designed to be inclusive and meet the needs of diverse women and girls.

Case management: A survivor-centered approach is the foundation of case management. An important example of this is the emphasis on the informed consent process which facilitates the survivor's right to make decisions about receiving services, referrals and how information she shares is used, shared and stored. Case management processes also incorporate feedback mechanisms in order to understand from survivors what was helpful to them and what service providers can do differently to best support them. *The Interagency GBV Case Management Guidelines* outline a survivor-centered approach to case management and can be considered the standard to follow for case management services.

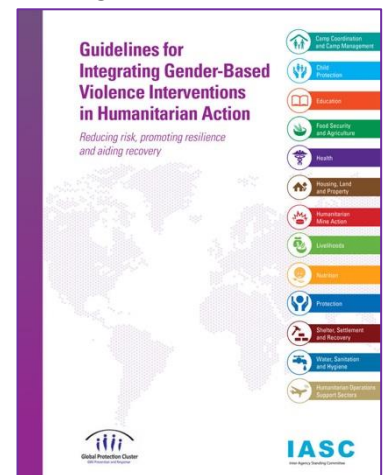


Data protection: Women and girls must always have control of how their identities, information and stories are used by GBV actors, the humanitarian community and the media. GBV actors ensure data protection of survivors through compliant use of the GBV Information Management System in line with the [GBVIMS user guide](#) and associated [GBVIMS resources and learning tools](#). In addition, GBV actors play an important role in advocating with other actors, [including the media](#), to follow **robust** data collection guidelines for all women and girls.

Prevention work with men and boys: Work with men and boys to prevent violence against women must always keep the needs and priorities of women and girls centered and ensure women and girls agency is not undermined. Creating mechanisms within this programming in which women and girls are routinely consulted and part of decision-making ensures that men and boys use their power in a way that is

accountable to women and girls. Not using a survivor-centered approach in male engagement programming results in privileging men who already benefit from patriarchy rather than dismantling the very systems of power that produce GBV.⁸

Risk mitigation: Risk mitigation programming must always keep front and center the safety of women and girls. For example, economic interventions with women and girls (cash, livelihoods, savings groups) must always consider, plan for and monitor that women and girls may be at higher risk of GBV due to earning income. [The IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions](#) in Humanitarian Action offer guidance for all humanitarian sectors on how to prevent and mitigate women and girls' risk for GBV using a survivor-centered approach. GBV actors play an important role in advocating for other actors to implement the guidelines and for supporting those efforts with training and technical support.



⁸ COFEM (2017). *Feminist Perspectives in Addressing VAWG Series: How a Lack of Accountability undermines work to address violence against women and girls.*

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

You can contact the GBV AoR Helpdesk by emailing us at:
enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk

The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to 17.30 GMT Mon – Fri.
 Our services are free and confidential.