

Additional session:

Our Bodies

TIME: 120 MIN FOR 2 OF 3 EXERCISES, see facilitation notes

REQUIRED MATERIALS: EXERCISE: TAKING TIME FOR PLEASURE, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE, EXERCISE ON THE RIGHT TO REST, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

ACTIVITIES:

- *Our bodies exercise.*
- *Exercise: taking time for pleasure.*
- *Exercise on the right to rest.*

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- to encourage participants to explore and strategise around three specific well-being issues: our physical body and health, our experience of pleasure and physical and psychological rest

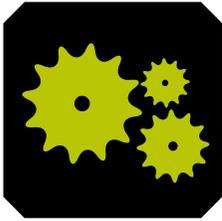
KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- This session is useful for exploring further well-being issues. It can serve as a supplement to the integrated wellness session. Each of the three exercises included in this session can also be 'stand-alone' exercises to inspire deeper discussion of specific aspects of participants well-being.
- The session is composed of three exercises that explore our relationship to: our physical body and health ('our bodies' exercise); our experience of pleasure ('taking time for pleasure' exercise); and physical and psychological rest ('right to rest' exercise).

- This session is best used on Day Two and early on Day Three.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- The session should commence with the first exercise, 'Our bodies exercise' and be followed with either one of the following exercises exploring pleasure and rest, depending on the group's priorities.
- If the facilitator wishes to use both exercises, one of the exercises should be used at a different point in the day or on a different day.



EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

GROUP
EXERCISE

*Our Bodies*⁴⁶

TIME: 60 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: NONE

SUMMARY:

This is a gentle and powerful exercise to help participants connect to their bodies and feel physical or emotional pain that has been suppressed.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

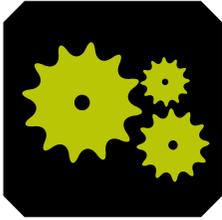
- Location is best in a very comfortable and secluded area, if weather permits, it is good to do this outside.
- Explain to participants that we will try to get in touch with our bodies by doing the following exercise.
- First, participants should lie down on a flat, comfortable surface – or sit comfortably and relax. The temperature should be comfortable.
- Ask participants to close their eyes and breathe deeply.
- Concentrate on the sound of your breathing; think of the air entering and leaving your body and of your muscles expanding and contracting.
- Now focus on your muscles and identify the ones that are tense.
- Try to make these muscles relax, following the soft rhythm of your breathing. Concentrate on your body again and observe which of your internal organs is under stress... relax these organs.
- Now, in your mind, slowly go over your body from head to toe.
- Ask yourself these questions: Does anything hurt at the moment? How long has it been hurting? If this pain had a voice or a sound, what noise would it make?

- Now, let it express itself (using a sound, a word, a movement or a signal, for example). What does this pain tell you about your state of mind, your physical health, your diet, the demands you make routinely on yourself?
- This pain could well be a call for attention by your body. Give it time to express itself.
- After the exercise, the participants should return to a sitting position and reflect on the experience. Then, they can go into pairs and together, list three practical, achievable steps they can take to care for their bodies better.

FACILITATION NOTES:

Prior to the exercise, the facilitator should talk about how activists relate to their bodies. An example text is below, this can be adapted as facilitators wish.

- Most of us appear to relate to our body in a slightly aseptic manner, treating it merely as a collection of organs that need to be kept functioning as well as possible, so that we can continue to conduct our routine activities and fight our battles. The problem with relating to our body in this fashion is that we lose track of what the body feels, enjoys, learns, and what makes it feel alive and express itself in all manner of ways. In



EXERCISE

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FORMAT:

GROUP
EXERCISE

Our Bodies

addition, this also blurs the political dimension of our relationship with our body.

- **The illnesses that we as women activists normally suffer** are associated with the chronic neglect of physical and emotion problems, overworking or bad eating habits, stress and the utilisation of time. In times of crisis all this translates into frequent infections of the respiratory tract, various gastrointestinal disorders (such as colitis, gastritis and constipation), muscular ailments, as well as headaches and migraines. It is also common for the immunological system to be affected, increasing vulnerability to opportunistic illnesses.
- Frequently we have access to important information on prevention, as we work with issues relating to sexual and reproductive rights, human rights and women's health. Nonetheless, often we are a complete contradiction when it comes to our own health, only treating occasional illnesses (if time and money permit).
- Paradoxically, many a time, we do not have the basic information on our own body and health, such as blood type, allergies, and hereditary illnesses. This is fundamental knowledge that we must have of our bodies and our medical history.
- **We usually do not undergo periodical preventive check-ups**, although we are aware that these are

necessary. Only a few of us get a pap smear test or a breast examination regularly, nor do we use contraceptive methods. Only in a very few cases do we use consistently barrier methods during intercourse to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. We tend to underplay or ignore the discomfort caused by menstruation or menopause, or we delay treatment until it becomes unavoidable – as the ailment begins to interfere drastically with our performance.

- **We accept discomfort as something normal.** We are accustomed to feeling some type of pain. Many of us live with chronic back pain, headaches and stomach aches, for instance, and our body has in some way numbed itself to this pain. It could be said that our threshold of pain is 'upset' so our bodies get used to functioning with a 'moderate' degree of discomfort. In general, we react only if the pain is too intense, but the solution tends to be merely palliative.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
WRITTEN
EXERCISE,
GROUP
DISCUSSION

*Taking Time for Pleasure*⁴⁷

TIME: 60 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: TAKING TIME FOR PLEASURE EXERCISE, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

SUMMARY:

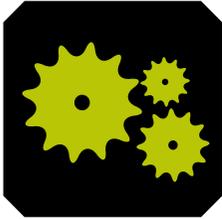
This is a written exercise that participants can do alone to explore how they relate to activities that give them pleasure – identifying which activities they enjoy, and to what extent they regularly experience these activities in their daily life. It is often a surprising exercise for participants, as they often realise through the process that they have stopped engaging in most pleasurable activities in favour of work.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

- Ask participants to sit alone and fill out the ‘taking time for pleasure’ questionnaire.
- After they have filled out the questionnaire, ask them to come together as a group to discuss their reactions to the exercise, and as appropriate, to share some of the steps that they will take to reconnect to pleasurable activities in their life.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- Making time for pleasure and sexuality requires a determined effort on your part to overcome inertia and to combat the obstacles that stand in your way. It also means changing your perception of your self, which also could be preventing you from enjoying your sexuality. Never forget that pleasure is a key strength.
- Try to identify *things or activities that give you pleasure and are not linked to your work or your activism*. As activists, often we declare that our activism is a source of ‘great pleasure’ for us, and this is very good.
- In this exercise, though, we want you to pinpoint other things that give you pleasure, adding variety to it and making it more sustainable.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
WRITTEN
EXERCISE,
GROUP
DISCUSSION

Taking Time for Pleasure

Below, list 10 different activities that you particularly enjoy, that give you pleasure:

1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8
9	10

Try and remember when was the last time you did or enjoyed something that gave you pleasure and how often do you do so?

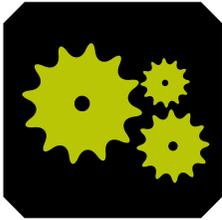
Identify the personal, environmental or social obstacles that have prevented you from enjoying these pleasures more often.

At times, it could be that our way of organising our priorities and distributing our time is governed by the logic of 'work before pleasure'. But probably your 'to do' list is interminable and thus time for pleasure never really arises.

It could also be that in your social or organisational context, the activity or practice that you consider pleasurable is socially sanctioned, particularly because it is not considered to be 'in keeping' with the life of an activist.

List three practical, achievable changes you can make to increase pleasure in your life:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

PAGE 1/2

FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
WRITTEN
EXERCISE,
GROUP
DISCUSSION

*Right to Rest*⁴⁸

TIME: 60 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: RIGHT TO REST EXERCISE, IN APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

SUMMARY:

This is a written exercise for individuals to assess the quality and quantity of rest they are experiencing in their daily lives.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:

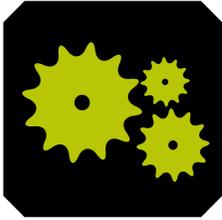
- Ask participants to sit alone and fill out the 'right to rest' questionnaire.
- After they have filled out the questionnaire, ask them to come together as a group to discuss their reactions to the exercise, and as appropriate, to share some of the steps that they will take to improve their pattern of rest.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- Rest is essential if your body is to function properly, and it even helps you develop a different perspective of yourself and of the world.
- However, in the majority of cases, activists have an accumulated deficit of hours of sleep and rest. Rather, time is spent preparing projects, closing reports, completing things at the last moment, helping people in an emergency, and trying to devise solutions to 'important' problems when in bed trying to fall asleep.
- When we think of the way in which we distribute our time and the time that we dedicate to rest, often we feel a certain dissatisfaction not only in terms of the time that we get for sleep, but also in relation to other aspects of our lives, such as time for leisure, recreation and rest. Time available for friends and rest is increasingly

limited to 'obligatory or festive occasions', increasing the trend of reducing vacation time in favour of work, spending weekends finishing tasks that were impossible to complete during the week, or engaging in professional activities that are only possible on a weekend (such as workshops or lectures). Subsequently there is no attempt to compensate for the time spent on such activities, in favour of much-needed rest. Thus, month after month, we find it impossible to spend valuable and necessary time with friends, just having fun or conducting any other activity that is recreational or even plain restful.

- This routine leaves us exhausted, stressed and even depressed. We are not able to recuperate the energy we need for our daily chores and activities.



WRITTEN EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

INDIVIDUAL
WRITTEN
EXERCISE,
GROUP
DISCUSSION

Right to Rest

- Answer the following questions and try to reflect on your pattern of rest and sleep:
 - Do you sleep long enough for your body to recuperate energy?
 - Do you need or take any type of medication to help you sleep?
 - Do you think you could make changes, such as to your routine or habits, that would help you feel more relaxed when you go to bed and help you to fall asleep more easily and thus be better rested?
 - Do you rest sufficiently when you feel tired, exhausted or sick?
- When you are resting, do you just rest or do you use the time to do things that you are not able to do during your working day? (For example, do you check your e-mail, correct a document, plan an activity for the following day, or call for a meeting?)
- How frequently do you work on the weekend? Do you compensate for it during the week?
- When was your last vacation?
- Are your holidays spent resting or do you use them to catch up on pending work?
- Do you ask for or take time off when you need it or only when it is given to you?
- Identify and write down three changes that you promise to make to improve your pattern of rest:
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)