

# What can I do?

Tools for interventions in situations of discrimination and how to promote solidarity in youth projects

*A manual for  
youth organisations/ workers*



This manual was created by Servicio Civil Internacional (SCI Madrid) during the seminar “What can I do? Tools for interventions in situations of discrimination and how to promote solidarity in youth projects” from 12th to 18th of October 2019 in Madrid. Editors: Valerie Weidinger, Thomas Schallhart.

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## Thank you

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# Introduction

In 1964, 38 people watched while Kitty Genovese was murdered, and no one intervened. This collective observing and not supporting or showing solidarity is since then called the “Genovese syndrome” or the “bystander effect”. We have all been guilty of that in the smaller or the bigger scale. Usually no one dies - but we observe discrimination, microaggressions, violence and do not intervene because we are afraid, we think someone else will do it or we simply do not know how. While we hesitate, young people in our projects might get hurt. The concept of civil courage pushes us out of this shell. It shows the need for solidarity and that we are all each other’s responsibility in the moment of aggression. It also teaches us small tricks, like how to make sure you will not get hurt during the intervention in a physical fight or how to involve others to also stand in solidarity.

In youth projects and centers - and in their context - in interactions young people can be (physically and emotionally) discriminated against - from other young people or other people they are in contact with. As youth workers it is our responsibility to recognise when we need to intervene and understand how we can do that.

The seminar “What can I do? Tools for interventions in situation of discrimination and how to promote solidarity in youth projects” focused on giving youth workers, both staff and volunteers from volunteering and youth organisations, the possibility to exchange good practices, skills and around how to intervene when observing situations of discrimination and violence in youth projects. We wanted to explore how we can make ourselves as youth workers as well as volunteers and youth we are working with stand in solidarity with victims instead of just being bystanders. The seminar promoted the concept of “civil courage” and tools for safe and successful interventions.

During the seminar we discussed solidarity, active citizenship and other important terms/ concepts that make us stand up for each other. A focus was given on civil courage - definition, history and forms. The contrary, so the bystander effect described above, was analysed in detail. We looked at situations that need our interventions: how to identify them, ways to intervene while still staying safe, interventions on- and offline, understandings of safe spaces and more. All the exchanges were done using methods of non-formal education, such as forum theatre, silent exhibition, violence barometer etc.

On the final day the group sat down and collected ideas for a manual. They decided to share with others the main learning points in relation to the following:

- Civil courage and other related terms
- Conflict situations
- Overcoming barriers
- Competences

The below used definitions, concepts and ideas were created solely on the discussions during the seminar.

Here some impressions of how we reached them:



# Civil courage and other related terms

Some basic terms have to be defined to understand what we are talking about:

**Civil courage** is related to intervening in situations of conflict or discrimination in the protection of someone or something where one's integrity or safety are being threatened. There are many different forms of civil courage. Civil courage can be: voting, protesting, standing up for yourself, standing up for others, implementing first aid, knowing different methods for intervening and using them appropriately. Such methods can be mediation of a beneficial outcome for all, standing physically in protection of someone or something, showing solidarity, using humour to disarm a charged atmosphere, using non-violent communication tools or theatre of the oppressed to show solutions etc. **Courage** is the ability to control your own fear. It is not only reduced to being brave, but also includes taking part and making a decision by evaluating and understanding the dangers of the situation.

To give a very simple example: In a public space (like a bus) a woman is being harassed verbally and physically in a sexual way. Instead of turning my head and ignoring the situation I get up and support her in a way that is appropriate in the situation, and involve other people standing by through addressing them directly as to make sure I and the harassed woman are safe.

**Violence** is a form of aggression. It could be verbal (offensive words and comments); physical (hitting, pushing, pulling etc.); psychological (harming the long-term perception of self, or of different situations). The end result is always negative as violence threatens the happiness and integrity of the individual (or the group).

**Intervention** is the action of taking part in helping the resolution of the conflict or oppression. It also includes evaluating the situation and its outcomes. **Bystander effect** instead is a psychological effect characterised by not taking responsibility or trying to intervene in a situation. Many experiments proved it exists - it is best noticed when at a time of crisis a lot of people watch. The more people witness the situation, the less likely are they to react/ intervene. An example is the Kitty Genovese case.

**Solidarity** is the act of supporting an individual or members of a group (victimised people, minorities etc.). To stand up in solidarity is to support and doing that is also a form of civil courage. **Active citizenship**, in the context of civil courage, refers to acting in a way that keeps peace and safety. A person who is an active citizen is one who exercises rights and manifests his\*her solidarity, empathy and courage when he\*she has to intervene or take part in a social situation.

# Conflict situations

Showing civil courage is a combination of being prepared with tools and being aware of risks. In this case the risks that can occur are conflicts that happen in the context of youth work. We collected a couple of examples:

**A** participant occasionally would refer to another trans female participant as “he”. It was unintentional, but would make everyone uncomfortable.

I had a friend who didn’t know any English words, and other volunteers didn’t talk to her, they didn’t even try to explain. They ignored my friend.

Two young people on a camp fall in love. One of them starts getting aggressive/ controlling everytime the other one speaks to the “opposite sex”.

**A** group leader on a youth exchange tells you: “Keep that person away from my group. We think he is gay. If he comes close to one of us again, we will beat him.”

In a volunteer camp in Vienna, the group is on the bus. A Portuguese participant speaks very loudly on the phone in Portuguese. An old man sitting next to her starts shouting: “Speak German!! The boat is full!!”

**My** friend lived in a very religious host family during the exchange project and was strongly recommended to go to church with them, which she did. However, she ordered a “I’m an atheist” T-shirt from Amazon and started wearing it to school. The situation happened in the US and the school didn’t oblige students to be Christian, but the family was furious and it was a religious school.

## **Now reflect:**

*Have you ever seen any situations like the ones above or others of conflict or discrimination?*

*How did you react, if at all?*

*Are you happy with how you intervened? What would you do differently now?*

# Overcoming barriers

The first thing to consider in all actions of civil courage is your own safety. Because this safety is a natural instinct of ours we face internal or external barriers that stop us from intervening. Here are some recommendations to overcome them:

## **Physical barriers:**

If you feel like you are physically too weak to intervene or there are too many people to go up against, consider:

- Show physical support through gestures or facial expressions
- Have a partner - don't stay alone physically if you can avoid it (it is ok to ask a stranger on the street to intervene with you)
- Ask for help from a facilitator or other team member

## **Emotional barriers:**

There are many examples of how we can experience emotional barriers: lack of confidence, fear of failure, hesitation, afraid of getting someone physically/ emotionally hurt, lack of argument, age, no one respects you (or at least you feel like that), don't want to be an authority, being alone, losing someone close to you, personal trauma, not sure about what is happening, afraid to look stupid, afraid of authorities/ authority figures, fear to disappoint, too much responsibility, feel like an intervention would not succeed anyway etc. A special case can also be that in general you hold the opinion of the oppressor so you don't know how to point out that some specific actions are not ok for you. Here are some suggestions on how to overcome these fears:

- Work on personal limits and be aware of them ( - you can even go to therapy to find inner stability and tranquility)
- Work on your self respect and self esteem
- Prioritize the emotional (and mental) health of the victimized person
- Find allies
- Ask for advice
- Refer to the group contract (in projects or youth centers)
- Realize that the aim is not always to win against the oppressor but to show solidarity to the victimized person, so they know they are not alone
- If you don't know the answer, ask the group/ family and friends
- Practice (e.g. through theatre exercises or using non-violent communication also in other situations)
- Be aware of your good intentions
- Empathy - learn to feel and show it

**Social barriers:**

With this term we refer to an intersectional relation between all players in a situation based on class, culture, language, gender etc. and the context of the situation such as the place of the incident, mass opinion in a group, work rules etc. In your team of colleagues and in working with young people therefore it important to work on:

- Education on solidarity and active citizenship
- Sense of responsibility
- Team building
- Train civil courage using non-formal education
- Train non-violent communication and other forms of conflict transformation

# Competences

In addition to working on overcoming these barriers and breaking out of the bystander effect the seminar group collected a set of competences/ tricks that we see important in preparing for and showing civil courage.

## Knowledge:

- Emergency numbers
- First aid
- Know your rights, and those of the victim
- Scream “fire” and not “help”, as people will come quicker
- Language
- Non-violent communication

## Skills:

- Delegate (never just in general like “someone call the police”, but pointing at one person specifically saying “you call the police”)
- Use “I” statements
- Use your privilege(s), e.g. being a tall man you can easily intimidate but also a young woman has the privilege that people will hesitate more before actually becoming violent towards her
- Broken reward (repeat the same phrase over and over to confuse the oppressor)
- Don't come too close
- Distract
- Break the situation through humour
- Self-defense techniques
- Psychological tricks like reversed psychology
- Know your own limits and the limits of your context

## Attitudes:

- React quickly
- Comedy/ think outside the box
- Pro-actively involve others/ ask for help
- Know what you want
- Overcome your fear
- Be confident
- Be willing to be the leader
- Feel responsible for the situation

Thank you! Gracias!

