



“Singing to the Lions”

A NEW TOOL FOR RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY TO VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has released a new tool to help people recover from traumatic events. *Singing to the Lions: a Facilitator's Guide to Overcoming Fear and Violence* describes the steps in running a workshop for participants aged 11 to young adult. It is based on principles of psychosocial resilience, cognitive psychology and narrative therapy. In the workshop, lions represent fear. By singing, people demonstrate their ability to overcome their fear.

The workshop's premise is that there are two ways people can respond to fear and violence in their lives. One is to try to lessen the impact of the fear by reaching out for help, strengthening connections with friends and loved ones, and developing problem-solving skills. Realizing their talents and skills also helps people feel better about who they are, which in turns lessens the feelings of fear. And they can remind themselves that they have overcome past difficulties, so they can do it again. Another way is to control the way they *respond* to fear so that it doesn't overwhelm them. They do this by practicing breathing techniques and other calming exercises. *Singing to the Lions* teaches these

skills by allowing participants to experience them, all the while having fun. By the end of the workshop, participants will have learned that they can transform their lives and no longer feel dominated by fear. Suggested follow-up activities, such as youth clubs, reinforce the lessons learned for ongoing groups.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The workshop can be held with groups of 20 participants as a three-day event or through six separate modular sessions of three hours each, for example once per week. There are also pre-workshop sessions, post-workshop activities and a monitoring and evaluation component to track outcomes and impact. Target audiences can include survivors of armed conflict, refugees and young people who experienced physical or sexual abuse, as well as others who are affected by violence, harassment or fear. The guide itself is designed for trained facilitators, to enable them to help workshop participants develop skills to resolve the impact of violence and abuse in their lives and to heal.



In one activity, participants write things they like about a person on a piece of paper taped to their back, thereby providing each participant with a list of the good things that others think about them.

Singing to the Lions does not rely on the availability of electricity or costly materials. It uses games, art, drama, calming techniques and songs. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt it to the local cultural context. In addition to the facilitator's manual there is a supplement that provides background information, guidance on M&E, recommendations on how to train facilitators, an outline for a one-day orientation workshop (for example, for local government officials and community leaders) and suggestions on how to handle sensitive issues that might arise. An experienced facilitator can lead the workshop without external training, but training is recommended for less experienced facilitators.

RESULTS TO DATE

Singing to the Lions was internationally reviewed and pilot-tested in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Sierra Leone. Both adults and children gave input and offered high praise. Our initial M&E comparisons (pre- and post- workshop) showed a 67% increase in knowledge and skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Singing to the Lions was created Dr. Jonathan Brakarsh, a child psychologist who lives and works in Zimbabwe.

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In another activity, participants are told the story of a "Treasure Tree" that lives inside of them, containing all of the good things about them that no one can take away.

Catholic Relief Services is the official international humanitarian agency of the United States Catholic community. CRS' relief and development work is accomplished through programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding. CRS eases suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality.

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