

Timeline

Introduction

In this activity, participants identify major life events and reproductive and sexual experiences, as well as times when they felt either happy or unhappy. Participants are also asked to identify moments when they felt more powerful or less powerful.

Because it can bring up strong or painful emotions in participants, this activity should be handled very carefully and skillfully by the facilitator. There are several options for making sure that no one feels pressured into revealing something deeply personal that they don't want to discuss in public:

- **Option 1:** Small groups of participants create the timeline of events for a fictional person as a representative of what is commonly experienced in their community. This option can help make the participants feel less vulnerable because the events on the timeline belong to the fictional character and not the participants. This is a better option if the group is well known to each other, but not well known by the facilitator.
- **Option 2:** Each person draws his or her own individual timeline, but does not label the events. Participants then pair up with another person to discuss their timelines, sharing only the parts that they choose to.
- **Option 3:** The facilitator conducts individual interviews with each participant. After a series of interviews, without revealing specific information from anyone's timeline, the facilitator reports back to the group with a general summary of the moments in life that were viewed by the participants as particularly happy or sad, or particularly powerful or powerless.

Objective

■ Participants will examine how gender has affected their lives as well as their sexual and reproductive experiences.

Timeframe: 2 hours

Materials needed: Flipchart paper, markers, pens, blank sheets of paper

Ideal workspace: enough space for participants to work in small groups and talk privately

Number of participants: 4-20

STEP 1

If participants are not already acquainted, ask them to introduce themselves.

Describe the activity, its purpose, and how it will work.

Remind participants that this is a group learning exercise, and that it is not necessary for everyone to agree on everything. However, everyone in the group deserves respect. Participants should refrain from judging, interrupting or ridiculing others, and should respect the privacy of others by maintaining confidentiality.

Distribute paper and markers/pens. For some participants, it may be their first time using a pen/marker/pencil/chalk, so encouragement may be needed.

STEP 2

Option 1:

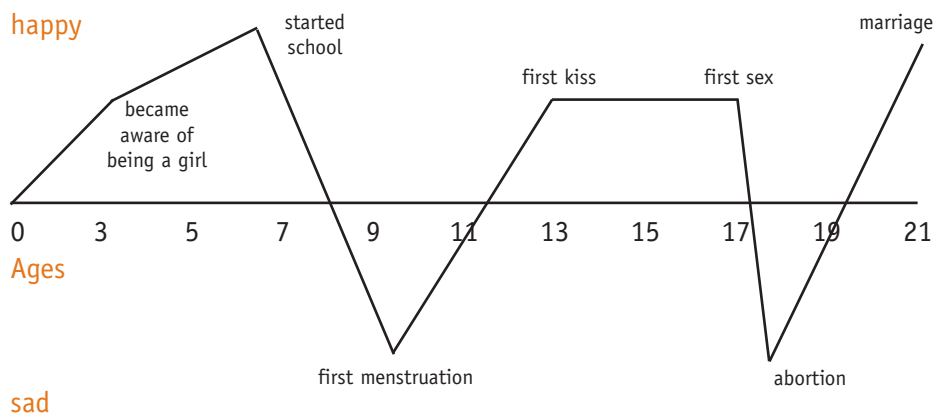
Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people. It's helpful if the small groups are same-sex (i.e. contain only men or only women).

Ask each group to think of a name of a fictional person that they will be creating a timeline for; ask that they use a name that is common in their community. Ask the men to create a timeline for a fictional man, and the women to create a timeline for a fictional woman.

The timeline will show major events in the fictional person's life, starting at age 0 and ending at whatever age they decide. The group will decide which events have happened, at which age, and whether they are positive or negative. Ask the participants to focus on: events related to when the person thought of herself/himself as male or female; events related to sex and parenthood; and any other events such as graduation.

Participants should place major life events on the timeline in the order that they happened. On the graph, participants indicate which events were positive or negative (happy or sad) in the person's life.

Allow about 15-20 minutes to finish this. The final graph will look something like this, with a line that shows the ups and downs of life events:



Next, ask the groups to show certain times in life when this fictional person may have felt powerful or powerless. They can draw a second line to show the ups and downs of feeling powerful or powerless.

Bring the groups back together and ask each group to share with the larger group the timeline of their fictional character (5–10 minutes each).

Facilitate a discussion based on the discussion questions provided in Step 3.

Option 2:

Ask each person to draw their own individual timeline without labeling the events. After a few minutes, ask participants to pair up with another person. Participants can talk about their timelines with their partners, sharing only those parts of the timeline that they choose to.

When the pairs have finished, ask the larger group if anyone wants to share something about themselves from their timeline with the entire group. Remind them that no one has to share anything that they don't want to. Allow 5-10 minutes for voluntary sharing from participants.

Facilitate a discussion based on the guiding questions in Step 3.

Option 3:

Pair a single participant with a facilitator experienced in conducting individual interviews. Conduct the interview in a private area where confidentiality and privacy can be ensured.

Draw a timeline with ages marked on it. Ask the participant to list major life events (i.e. graduating from school, death of a parent, marriage, etc.) and to write or draw each one on the timeline. Ask the participant what mood they identify with each major life event and ask her/him to place a symbol next to the event on the timeline (there should be four mood symbols or colors: happy, unhappy, powerful, powerless). Major life events mentioned by the participant will be placed on the timeline in chronological order (i.e. from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood).

Next, ask the participant to list major events associated with sexual experiences (i.e. first sexual experience, masturbation, seeing a picture of a naked person, etc.) and to write or draw each one on the timeline. Ask the participant what mood they identify with each event and ask her or him to place the event either above the line (indicating a happy event) or below the line (indicating a sad event).

Next, ask the participant to list major life events associated with reproductive experiences (i.e. first menstruation, first pregnancy, first fatherhood, etc.) and write or draw each one on the timeline. Ask him/her to identify a mood with each event, and place it above or below the line.



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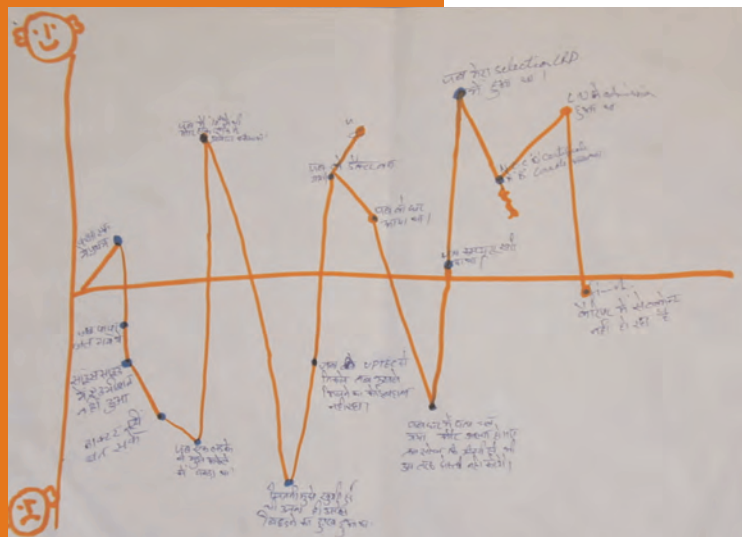
As a next step, ask the participant to show on the timeline certain times in life when he/she felt powerful or powerless. They can draw a different line to show the ups and downs of feeling powerful or powerless.

STEP 3

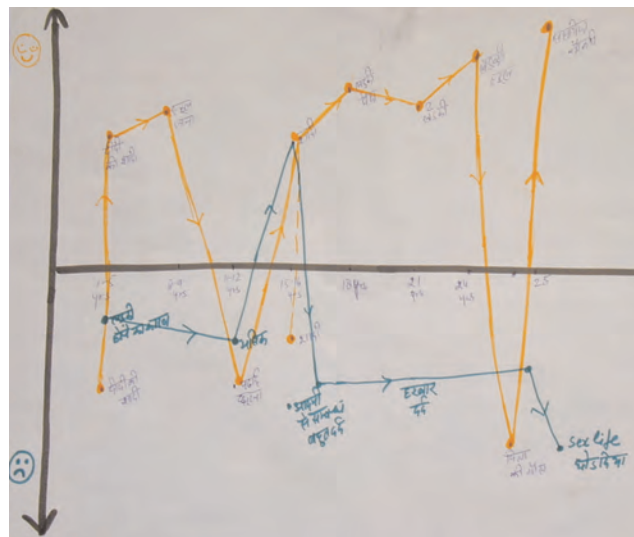
After the timelines have been completed, initiate a discussion with the participant or with the group, depending on how you chose to do the activity. You can use the following questions to guide you.

Guiding Questions

- How did it feel to do this exercise? What did you or your group learn from it?
- How are major life events different for men and women?
- How did the positive experiences help you (or your fictional character) to grow as an individual? What did you (or your fictional character) learn from these happier moments in your life?
- During your most difficult times, how did you (or your fictional character) cope with events? What did you learn from these difficult moments in your life?
- Among all the events that you have marked on the timeline, which ones led you (or your fictional character) to feel your own power?
- Where do you see differences in powerfulness or powerlessness between men and women? Is there anything about these differences that you feel should change? Why? What would need to happen in the community for this to happen? What can you do as an individual? What can you and others do in your community to change the situation? How can the project assist you and community members in making this change?



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