

THE INTEREST-BASED APPROACH IN THE VAW SHELTER CONTEXT

As part of Women's Shelters Canada's Circles of Safety project, three shelters across the country were trained in the Circles of Safety process developed by Justice Options for Women in Prince Edward Island. The Circles of Safety process uses an interest-based approach to facilitation. This approach stood out to participating shelters as one of the most helpful aspects of the model.

WHAT IS THE INTEREST-BASED APPROACH?

The interest-based approach focuses on the "why" before getting to the 'how'. The focus is on identifying the survivor's interests - their needs and values - and then brainstorming ways to meet these interests. Focusing on the underlying interests opens up many possibilities for how to meet the survivor's needs and allows survivors and their supporters to pivot quickly if one approach isn't working.

The goals of an interest-based process are:

- ✓ Good relationships
- ✓ Good solutions

An interest-based process uses different types of questions to understand someone's interests and identify solutions:

- **Broadening questions** are useful when trying to gather information: Tell me more about...
- **Clarifying questions** help move from the general to the specific: When you say threatening, what does that look like?
- **Interest-exploring questions** examine interests, concerns, hopes, and values: What is it about ____ that is important to you?
- **Brainstorming questions** help develop or build on ideas and solutions: With ____ being important to you, what other ways do you think this interest can be addressed?
- **Consequential questions** examine the outcome of a choice or behaviour: Who do you think will be affected? How do you think they could react?

HOW CAN THE INTEREST-BASED PROCESS BE USED IN THE VAW SHELTER CONTEXT?

The three shelters that participated in the Circles of Safety project integrated the interest-based approach into their work in a variety of ways. Here are some examples of how interest-exploring can transform the questions being asked:

- In intake forms and initial meetings with survivors
Do you have a safety plan? → Tell me about the ways you have kept yourself safe...
- During safety planning
Walking to work is too dangerous → We have to talk about safe transportation. What could that look like for you?
- During outreach
Keeping all your important documents in one spot can be helpful when you leave in a hurry → I want to make sure that accessing any services after you leave can happen quickly and with as little stress or delay as possible. What could that look like?
- During meetings with other service providers and case conferences
Participating in X program would be a good idea → It is important for you to feel supported. How can we make that happen?

I need you to speak up during meetings when you hear something you don't like → I want to know how you are reacting to information shared during the meeting.
- Within their own organization, during staff meetings or board meetings
Shall we use our additional funding to hire another staff person or purchase furniture for our client waiting room? → How can we use our additional funding to ensure accessibility for clients and manageable workloads for staff?

For more information on Circles of Safety:

- [WSC's Circles of Safety project](#)
- [The original Circles of Safety model from PEI](#)

For more information on interest-exploring:

- [Justice Options for Women Inc](#)



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