



## *A Practical Guide*

# How to Implement Safe Spaces for Schoolgirls in the West African Sahel

### **What are safe spaces?**

Safe spaces are mentored groups of in-school girls where they strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills, connect with their peers, and develop critical life skills. Together, these enable them to have greater say over the key decisions of their lives.

### **Why safe spaces?**

Helping girls stay in school is arguably one of the most promising strategies available to improve a girl's life outcomes, especially in regions where child marriage remains prevalent. It allows a girl to protect her health, expand her economic potential, and earn respect in the eyes of her community. However, in many rural parts of Africa, schools lack resources and many parents remain unconvinced of the value of educating their daughters. Establishing safe spaces is one proven intervention that can alter this mindset, by responding to the aspirations of girls, their parents, and their communities.

Rigorous evaluations have shown that safe spaces build academic skills which enable girls to stay in school longer. Girls gain the confidence to express themselves, including communicating with their parents about who and when they wish to marry. They also forge deeper connections with peers, sharing the joys and the hardships of transitioning to adulthood. As parents and community members witness the transformation of safe spaces participants, the girls themselves become living proof that educating girls supports the family and the entire community – a realization that is the first step towards transforming social norms.

### **Who are we? Why this guide?**

This guide is presented by four organizations currently leading safe space interventions in Niger and

Nigeria. The [Centre for Girls' Education \(CGE\)](#) and the [Hallmark Leadership Initiative \(HALI\)](#) have worked in Nigerian classrooms and communities since 2007 and 2016, respectively. The [Lumière des Filles et des Femmes \(LFF\)](#) ('The Light of Girls and Women') has implemented safe spaces in Niger since 2018.



OASIS

[Organizing to Advance Solutions In the Sahel \(OASIS\)](#) has supported the implementation of safe space programming for nearly 20 years.

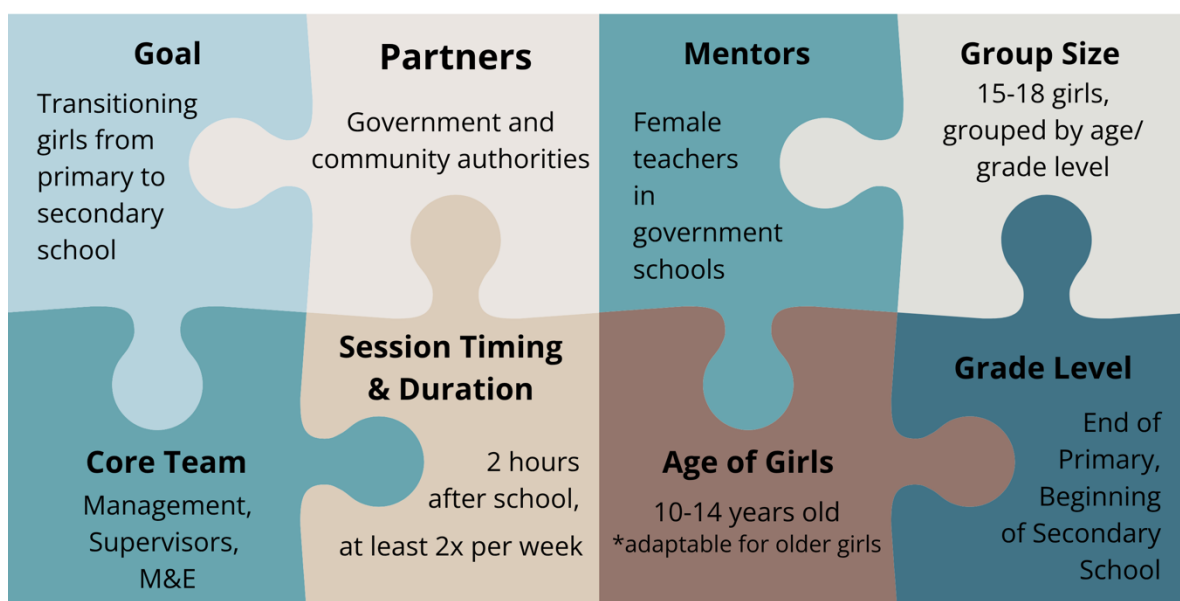
This guide sets forth our concise and practical 15-step model of how to organize and implement safe spaces for in-school girls, ages 10 to 14, with adaptability for girls up to age 18. In sharing our approach and resources, we hope to equip your organization to launch a safe space club in a cost-effective and collaborative manner that builds toward long-term, life-changing programming. Help us scale up the provision of safe spaces and educate and empower adolescent girls!

### ***A note on adaptation***

Creating a secure and supportive learning environment for girls is central to the safe spaces methodology, and how to best do this depends on the local context. Please remember that the advice contained in this guide is merely a suggestion. Your organization is welcome to reproduce and use any of the resources linked throughout this guide but they will need to be carefully adapted to the specific needs of the girls and the communities with whom you work.

*Ce guide est également disponible en français ici.*

## **SAFE SPACE KEY COMPONENTS**



## Phase 1: Preparation & Relationship Building



### 1. Define program goals and metrics

- Establish your organization's core values and approach.
- Collect basic educational and demographic data \*for your geographic area.
- Outline your safe space model. Draft/ adapt curriculum to match local context.

*Tip:*

*Resource:* [Key Data to Collect to Start a Safe Space Program](#)



### 2. Establish key resources and core staff

- Define core team responsibilities and community support roles.
- Plan the scale of and consequent budget for your safe space program and apply for funding as needed (can take 6 months-1 year).
- Onboard and train staff. Explain mandatory policies to ensure child welfare. Prompt staff to practice explaining program benefits to communities and stakeholders.

*Tip:*

*Resources:* [Safe Spaces Organizational Map Resource EN & FR](#);  
[Code of Conduct](#) & [Child Safeguarding Policy](#);  
[Budget Reporting Template for Implementation Guide.xlsx](#)



### 3. Meet with educational authorities to select communities/ schools

- Set up a meeting with state government authorities to introduce the program, explain objectives, and establish collaboration.
- Obtain local contacts (heads of communities and schools) from these state authorities. Jointly select schools.
- Request a point person at the Ministry of Education and at schools to maintain regular contact with, including transparent exchange of data.

*Tip:* Selection criteria for schools should include presence of female teachers.

*Resources:* [Safe Spaces School Selection Criteria](#)  
[Scale-Up Manual by ExpandNet](#)



### 4. Get agreement of the community and religious traditional leaders

- Identify how program aligns with values of religious and community leaders.
- Request meeting with community leader/ district head to gain access to community, especially the chief religious leader. Present your data and program objectives. Get their agreement to move forward with safe spaces in community.



- c. Ask leaders to suggest (male or female) community members who can help with recruitment and program logistics, including encouraging girls' attendance via house visits, supplying nutritious snacks, etc.



*Tip: Prepare for meetings with local leaders and other stakeholders by leading your staff through oral simulations.*

*Resource: [CGE video on Religious Leader Collaboration](#)*



## 5. Host a workshop with leaders to adapt the curriculum and materials

- a. Organize time, date, and place to present your chosen curriculum in a workshop of 1-3 days.
- b. Write a letter to (re)introduce your organization and program goals, and invite religious and community leaders and state and local government authorities to give their feedback.
- c. Integrate needed changes and finalize the curriculum.

*Tip:*

*Resources: [Sample curricula](#)  
[Sample agenda for leaders' workshop](#)*

## Phase 2: Implementation & Monitoring



## 6. Host community dialogue to get parents' permission

- a. Ask religious and community leaders, community volunteers, and head of school to help gather the community.
- b. Discuss the importance of educating girls and explain how the safe spaces model works. Obtain consent forms.
- c. Invite ongoing involvement of the community. Explain support roles and identify volunteers.

*Tip: Offering something to eat as a small gift at the community dialogue is important. If mothers volunteer to prepare healthy snacks for girls, money for ingredients should be distributed a few days before the session.*

*Resource: [Consent form](#)*



## 7. Enroll girls & recruit mentors

- a. Management team and head of the school determine number of safe space groups based on number of girls in the target class(es).
- b. The number of clubs determines the number of mentors needed. Request head of school to refer female teachers, based on desired skills and temperament. Share preferred candidates with head of school, who makes formal invitations and informs inspectors.

- c. Create a database for this information/ personnel.

*Tip: Select female teachers who are passionate and willing to stay extra hours after school. In rare cases where there are too few female teachers, it is possible to recruit mentors from outside of the school and/or to have one mentor lead two clubs on different days.*

Resource: [Criteria for Mentor Selection EN & FR](#)

## 8. Train mentors

- a. Program five days of training, starting with a pre-test to measure mentors' academic and life skills knowledge.
- b. Review and practice the curriculum and, at the end of the training, implement a post-test.
- c. Establish a way to communicate with mentors (ex. WhatsApp or direct calls) for follow-up.

*Tip: Break the barrier in order to put the mentors at ease while exploring the curriculum.*

Resources: [Mentor pre- & post-test](#);  
[Sample 5-day training agenda](#)



## 9. Initiate program girls & implement baseline assessments

- a. Assign unique identifying number to each girl and organize into Safe Space clubs (A, B, C) by age and/or school class.
- b. Implement beginning of year assessments (pre-test and/or baseline assessment) based on your organization's key indicators.
- c. Before the official launch of Safe Spaces sessions, girls participate in an initial meeting to get to know the space, mentors, and peers.

*Tip: Specially train all M&E staff that will be involved in data collection to know how to administer baseline questions. Administer tablet-based surveys, if funds permit, to save on transcription costs and facilitate database management.*

Resources: *Sample spreadsheet organizing girls*;  
*Sample Baseline Survey*;  
*Sample Pre-test*

## 10. Implement and monitor safe spaces throughout the school year

- a. Hold safe spaces 1-3 times weekly, for two hours per session. Supervisors attend each session to observe and give mentors constructive feedback.
- b. Mentors maintain attendance logs and, if girls are routinely absent, work with staff to arrange home visits. Mentors and supervisors report successes and challenges in weekly management meetings.
- c. Managers lead monthly team meetings to continuously sharpen mentors' skills.

*Tip: To complete the curriculum over the course of the program and before the end of the school term, days and times of safe spaces may need to be changed and/or sessions added.*

Resources: *AGILE ATTENDANCE SHEET*;

### Phase 3: Evaluation & Dissemination



#### 11. Analyze baseline results

- a. Within 3 weeks of collection, M&E team enters, cleans, and analyzes baseline data.
- b. M&E team shares baseline survey results with management in order to adapt program plan to girls' learning needs.

*Tip: Remember to safely store baseline data to be compared with the endline later!*

*Resource: tool for analysis/ key framework*



#### 12. Implement endline assessments

- a. After the last module is complete, implement end-of-year assessments (endline survey and/or post-test).
- b. Compare endline and baseline results to assess program impact and plan for next year.

*Tip:*

*Resource:*



#### 13. Get data on enrollment and dropout rates, and exam scores

- a. Request the head of school to provide girls' (trimesterly) exam scores.
- b. Find out drop-out rate and enrollment rate of participating schools from inspectors.
- c. Include all school data in your assessment of program impact, alongside baseline and endline results.

*Tip: Do a capacity building session (ex. online data storage) and continuously strive for good record-keeping (of exam scores, attendance, etc.) with school staff. Keep in close touch with parents' associations and government agents to maintain accountability.*

*Resource: [Safe Space Program Database](#)*



#### 14. Share results

- a. First, join with and share results with your organization's team, community leaders, and volunteers.
- b. Share with participating schools and government authorities the results and how they may be used to improve program sustainability.
- c. Compile results in a brief to share with donors or other stakeholders.

*Tip: Disseminate results through diverse channels (in-person meetings, email, briefs/presentations, to the public via radio stations, TV, and newspapers).*

*Resource:*



#### 15. Repeat the cycle

- a. Aim to provide each girl with two years of safe spaces.
- b. Keep in touch with girls and encouraging them to stay in school.
- c. At the end of the two years, invite community to a closing dialogue to share overall experiences and observed program impact.
- d. Encourage the community to take program ownership.

*Tip: Three months after the girls start school, the team should visit the secondary schools to monitor if the girls are present or not.*

Resource: [Cascading mentors video](#)

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