

Renewing your NIYYAH (intention)

Beginning the self work to Address Gender-Based Violence

Beginning with the Self

Whenever beginning any work that addresses harm or oppression, it is critical to begin with the self. Understanding why this work is important to you, what role you want to play, and how your lived experiences and biases can be barriers and opportunities to whether or not you ultimately feel successful. It is easy for many people to skip this stage of the work and move directly to relational and community work; however, not beginning with the self can lead to numerous roadblocks with respect to personal and professional leadership that can cause more harm to the people you are trying to help.

Grounding in intention

A well-known hadith reminds us that “every action is judged by its intention.” Put differently, the concept of niyyah, or intention, is an important Islamic concept that encourages people to purify their motivations for their deeds to ensure that their deeds are for the sake of Allah. As such, an act of worship, such as giving charity, is worth nothing if it is executed with the wrong intention (for example, to gain prestige or power rather than the pleasure of Allah). Moreover, an incomplete deed with the right intention is rewarded as if it were actually done. When thinking about gender-based violence, it can look like ensuring that the needs of the most impacted are prioritized over your own need for power, fame, money, accountability, or revenge. As such, as you begin this important work of gender-based violence and reproductive justice, it is crucial to ground yourself in your intention.

NIYYAH stands for:

Name your Intention

Invest in lifelong self-learning

Yes, begin by believing survivors

Yield to your needs

Assess your biases

Honor your commitment to building a world free of violence and oppression



N

Name your Intention

Just as there is a process for beginning prayer or another act of worship by stating your intention, it is important to name and renew your intention frequently as you embark on the work of responding to, addressing, and preventing gender-based violence. Ask yourself why you are wanting to commit yourself to this work, and what your intention is behind the work.

I

Invest in lifelong self-learning

Many survivors make first contact about sexual violence after careful deliberation, and you may be the first person someone talks to about these issues. Disclosing is a brave step. Believe them and affirm any feelings they have about the situation. Ask open-ended questions like "How can I help you?" and "How are you feeling?" Don't ask for details of the assault or accused.

Y

Yes, begin by believing survivors*

The biggest hurdle to seeking healing and justice is not being believed. Only a very small percentage of disclosures are false. Not believing survivors when they disclose can lead to additional trauma, delaying seeking help, and not holding those who harm accountable.

Y

Yield to your needs

Your needs can determine your capacity to show up (or be present). Listen to your body and your needs, and ensure you have what you need in order to stay present in this work.

A

Assess your biases

We all have biases - racial, gender, class, etc. Understand your biases, learn about the privileges (earned and unearned) you hold, and interrogate how they may impact your attitudes, decisions, and relationships.

H

Honor your commitment to building a world free of violence and oppression

Gender-based violence and reproductive injustice will not be eradicated overnight. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone doesn't have to play every role. How will you implement the intention you named for yourself? What will your role be? How can you honor your commitment as a life long one

*we use the term survivor expansively to include the range of experiences across sexual and reproductive health and violence (i.e survivors of abortion, reproductive violence, systemic oppression, medical racism, etc).