

EXERCISE 3.4: TOP-OF-THE-MIND EXERCISE

Objective: This exercise allows you to explore people’s perceptions and immediate associations with a particular topic.

In an emergency this can be used to understand community perceptions about the issue causing the emergency, about activities being delivered, about services and providers and about control measures.

Materials Required: Flipchart papers and marker pens

Time Required: 15 to 20 minutes

Instructions:

1. Select the topic you want to explore with the group. For example, “isolation.”
2. Explain to the group (of approximately six people) that you will say a word and they will have to tell you what are the first associations with that word that come to their mind. Tell them they do not have to think too much and that they should say the first association that comes to their mind. Provide some examples to illustrate your point. For example:
“Isolation” —> “fear,” “loneliness” and “sick people”
3. Start by telling the chosen word to the group and ask them about the first thing that comes to their mind. Then ask them to say the second, the third and so on until no more associations come up.
4. Write the associations on the flipchart paper.
5. Once associations have been exhausted, discuss with the group what these results tell us about how the issue is being perceived.
6. Ask participants to explain the associations to further understand the group’s perceptions of them.
7. Look to see if there is consensus among the group or if there are areas of disagreement.
8. This exercise can also be done on a one-to-one during an interview or when meeting with people. It can provide a rapid insight into what people are thinking and feeling about the issue, highlight any major differences in perceptions, and help define behavioral objectives and activities.