

5. Blindfolded

Don't look, just listen!

Themes	Discrimination, Health and welfare, Participation
Level of complexity	Level 1
Age	6-8 years
Duration	45+ minutes
Group size	4-20 children
Type of activity	Simulation, discussion
Overview	Blindfolded children try to dress a paper doll
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the specific rights and needs of children with disabilities • To develop cooperation and different forms of communication within the group
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create outlines/paper dolls of a child on paper or cardboard for every 4 children • Mount these on the wall • Make sets of typical paper clothing for each outline • Organize a set of materials (outline, clothes, scarf) for each group
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 scarf for each team of 4 • Paper or cardboard for outlines and clothing • Blu-tac, sticky tape or drawing pins for mounting clothes on outlines



Instructions

1. Ask the children if they know anyone with a disability. What are some disabilities that people may have?
2. Ask children if they have ever wondered what it would be like to be blind? Explain that this activity will give the idea of the experience of someone who is visually impaired.
3. Divide the children into groups of four. Show them the paper dolls and the sets of clothing for each. Explain that each member of the group in turn will dress the paper doll while blindfolded. The rest of the group may help by giving instructions.
4. Instruct the groups to blindfold one child's eyes with the scarf. Then ask them to give the blindfolded child pieces of clothing, one at a time, to try to put in the right place on the paper doll. Tell them to say as little as possible but to give instructions when the blindfolded child needs help.
5. To keep the momentum of the activity going change roles after about four minutes, whether the child has succeeded in dressing the paper doll or not. Continue until each child has had a turn to be 'blind'.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Ask questions about the activity such as:
 - a. How did it feel to be blind?
 - b. Was the task hard? Why?
 - c. Did you receive helpful instructions from your group? How could they have helped more?
 - d. How did you feel about giving instructions? Were some instructions hard to explain?
 - e. If you were really visually impaired, what are some other tasks that would be difficult for you? What are some tasks that would be easier or more difficult?



- f. What are some things you enjoy doing that would be easy to enjoy even if you had a disability? What about things which might be difficult to do? Would you still enjoy doing them?
2. Draw out stereotypes based on disability, asking questions such as:
 - a. What kinds of things do you think children with disabilities like doing? Are they different from the things you like doing? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you think children with disabilities have friends? Are all their friends other children with disabilities? What might make it hard to have a disabled child as a friend? What might make it interesting?
 - c. What do you think children with disabilities want to be when they grow up? Are they different from you? Why or why not?
 - d. This activity helps you understand how children with visual disabilities sometimes need help to do things that are easy for people with good vision. Can you think of other kinds of disability that might need assistance?
 - e. Everyone has a right to the things they need to live a full life. What are some things that you need? Do children with disabilities need these things too?

Suggestions for Follow-up

- Ask children to think of an activity that they could do with everyone blindfolded. For safety reasons select a seated activity (e.g. a guessing game, a puzzle, a role play). Debrief carefully to emphasize both the skills that are lacking and those that remain. How could the activity be adapted to include children with a visual disability?
- To emphasize how the need for assistance also challenges the would-be helper, you might try a short activity such as a 'trust walk', with a blindfolded child being lead around a safe place by another. Then exchange roles. Debrief.
- Give the children the opportunity to experiment with other kinds of disabilities such as limited mobility (e.g. a 'sack race', experimentation with crutches, one arm in a sling) or the inability to speak, read or count.
- Several other activities address children with disabilities. 'SILENT SPEAKER', p. 160, experience of deaf children. 'A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE', p. 53, considers the effects of exclusion on the development of children with disabilities.

Ideas for action

- Children could evaluate their meeting or living place, school or community: could a person with disabilities live, work or play here with comfort and safety? Could anything be done to make these places more accessible?
- Where do children with disabilities live and go to school in this community? Children could investigate where disabled children with special needs live and learn and why they are or are not among other children.
- Organise an exchange day with a group of disabled or mixed ability children from another school, organisation or children's group.

Tips for the facilitator

- This activity assumes that none of the children themselves have disabilities. In many groups of children at least some have disabilities, although they may not be immediately obvious (e.g. children who wear glasses could be considered visually impaired). Be sensitive to children and their concept of themselves and their abilities and/or disabilities. Use disabled children in the class as resource peo-



ple for explaining answers to some of the debriefing questions, but only after first privately asking if they are comfortable in this role.

- Balance the discussion of need for assistance on the part of people with disabilities with an affirmation of their competence to do many things for themselves. Emphasize that people with disabilities have the same basic need and rights as everyone else.
- Child cut-outs could be mounted with Velcro, sticky tape or drawing pins (or use cardboard or paper mounted on corkboard.)

Variations

- You could use just one or two paper dolls, asking different children to add articles of clothing. Using at least two allows for both a boy and a girl paper doll, but you could use the single doll twice, once as a boy and once as a girl. You might discuss gender issues and stereotypes related to disability.
- If you have large pieces of paper, you could make an outline of members of the group to use paper dolls.

