

See the ability!

See the ability - not the disability!

Themes	Discrimination and Xenophobia, Social rights, Sports
Complexity	Level 3
Group size	6 - 36
Time	120 minutes
Overview	<p>A practical activity to encourage empathy with people with disabilities. Among the issues addressed are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The obstacles disabled people face in integrating into society ▪ Perceptions of the rights of the disabled as basic human rights
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The right not to be discriminated against ▪ Equality in dignity and rights ▪ The right to social security
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To raise awareness about some of the everyday problems faced by disabled people ▪ To develop insights into, and skills to respond to, the needs of disabled people ▪ To promote empathy and solidarity
Materials	<p><i>For the introduction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A sheet of paper and a pen per participant <p><i>For part 2, per pair:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A plastic bag containing a cabbage or lettuce leaf, a pencil, a stick of chalk, a leaf (from any tree), a coloured sheet of paper and a bottle or can of any soft drink ▪ A blindfold ▪ A sheet of paper and a pen <p><i>For part 3, per pair:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 role card ▪ One sheet of paper and a pen <p><i>For part 4:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wheelchairs, one between eight people ▪ Space for creating an obstacle course. (A second room would be preferable, but not absolutely necessary.) Alternatively, access to outdoors would present a further option) ▪ Obstacles, for example, tables and chairs, planks of wood, piles of old newspapers, etc. ▪ One large sheet of paper or board and markers ▪ A watch or timer

THEMES



DISCRIMINATION



SOCIAL RIGHTS



SPORTS

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 3

GROUP SIZE



6-36

TIME



120 MINUTES

Preparation

- Make the role cards. Either choose one of the situations suggested with this activity or develop your own.
- If possible, have a second room that you can prepare in advance for the obstacle race, or better still go outdoors where you will be able to make the obstacle track over more challenging terrain. If you are setting it up indoors, then use tables and chairs to make narrow passages and planks of wood or old newspapers on the floor to substitute for naturally difficult terrain.

Instructions

This activity is organised in four parts: part 1, the introduction, part 2, the blindfold walk, part 3, signing, and part 4, the wheelchair race.

Part 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Explain that the activity focuses on three particular disabilities: blindness, deafness and muteness, and paralysis.
2. Invite the participants to think for a few minutes about how they would like - and how they would not like - to be treated if they were disabled. Let them write down a few key words.
3. Now ask participants to write down what they would be most afraid of, if they were disabled.
4. When this has been done, ask the participants to turn over their papers and to get ready to "step into reality".

Part 2. The blindfold walk

1. Ask people to get into pairs. Hand out the blindfolds. One person from each pair is to be the disabled person and the other is their guide. It is the guide's responsibility to ensure the safety of their partner at all times. They may only answer simple questions related to safety with a "yes" or a "no" answer.
2. Ask the guides to take their partners for a 5-minute walk around and about, including up or down stairs or outside if possible.
3. On returning to the room let the guides lead their partners to their chairs. But there is a surprise on the chair! A bag! What is in it?
4. The blind players have to identify the contents. The guides' job is to write down their guesses.
5. Then let the "blind" people take off the blindfolds and see the objects. Invite the partners to briefly review their experiences and surprises with each other.
6. Give people a few minutes to come out of their roles and then move on to part 3.

Part 3. Signing

1. Tell the pairs that they are to swap over; the guides are now to be the disabled, this time people who are mute (can't speak), and the partners are the able-bodied helpers.
2. Hand out one of the situation cards to each disabled player. They must not show the cards to their partners. Give a piece of paper and pen to the helpers.
3. Explain that the mute players have to convey their problem to their helper. They may not speak, write or draw. The helpers must write down what they understand the message to be about.
4. When the "mute" player has communicated as much as they can, s/he should reveal the role card to their helper. Invite the pairs to briefly review their intentions, problems and frustrations.

Part 4. The wheelchair obstacle race

1. Point out the obstacle course to the participants. Explain that the winner is the person who gets round in the fastest time. There are penalties for crashing into the obstacles on the way.
2. Record the results on the large piece of paper.
3. When all who wish to have had a turn, take a short break and then go on to the debriefing and evaluation.

Debriefing and evaluation.

Take this in plenary. Start with a review of parts 2, 3 and 4 of the activity and then go on to reflect on what people knew at the beginning and about what they learned as a result of their experiences.

1. Start with the blindfold walk. Ask both those who were blindfolded and those who were the helpers to share their reactions:
 - How did each of them feel during the exercise?
 - What was most difficult? What was funny? What was scary?
 - How hard was it to trust and to be trustworthy?
 - How successful were people at identifying the objects in the bag? Which senses did they use? How many people dared to open the bottle/can to try the drink?
2. Then go on to review part 2, the signing:
 - How did each of them feel during the exercise?
 - What was most difficult? What was funny? What was scary?
 - Was it frustrating to sign and not to be understood?
 - Was it frustrating or embarrassing not to understand?
3. Next review the wheelchair obstacle race:
 - How did people feel not being so mobile?
 - What was most difficult? What was funny? What was scary?
4. Now review the fears and expectations people expressed at the beginning of the exercise. Ask people to look at the key words they wrote down:
 - Were some of their fears confirmed during the activity?
 - How did people try to help their partner?
 - How was the help received?
 - How easy is it to assess how much help to give?
5. What did people fear about being disabled? What did they base their fears on? Have people ever been afraid of becoming disabled as a result of an accident or illness?
6. What was the most surprising thing people learnt through the activity?
7. Do people know anyone who is either blind, mute or confined to a wheelchair? What is their social life like? How do other people react to them?
8. Look at the environment in the buildings and in the streets nearby, how “disability friendly” are they?
9. What can and should be done to ensure the equality and dignity of people who are disabled?
10. Are disability rights also a matter of human rights? Which rights in the UDHR are particularly relevant?
11. What can your school, association or local youth group do to promote the equality and dignity of people with disabilities?

Key dates : Tips for facilitators

3 December
International Day of
Disabled Persons

Do not make the obstacle course for part 4 too long. 2-3 minutes is sufficient, especially if you only have two or three wheelchairs, because people will have to wait and they may get bored. You can try to borrow wheelchairs from a local hospital or organisation providing support for people temporarily in need of wheelchairs. Alternatively, you will have to improvise to give the participants physical disabilities. For example, by making people wear enormous rubber boots on the wrong feet!

How you run this activity will depend very much on the group. Make sure that everyone realises that they are going to go through different “simulations of reality” during which they will have the opportunity to experiment with their feelings and reactions to what it is like to be disabled. Explain that the purpose is not to make fun of anyone, or to cause undue stress or embarrassment. They should act “naturally”, and not overdo things. Reassure people that at certain moments they may feel awkward and insecure, but that nothing harmful or dangerous will happen to them.

If you do not have time to do all the “simulations of reality”, then do one or two. The experience of being blindfolded is perhaps the most personally challenging and touching of the experiences presented in this activity. Therefore, if you have to choose one part, it is recommended that you choose this one. Let the participants swap over so that both have the experience of disability. Remember, in this case to create a second set of objects for identification.

This activity is serious, but you should expect many funny situations. Let it be so. Feel compelled to intervene or comment only if people are doing something unsafe or making comments which ridicule people with disabilities. You may also wish to address this in the evaluation and debriefing with questions such as: when do people make fun of those with disabilities? Who does it and why? When is it all right to make jokes about people’s disabilities? How does one judge the borderline between good humour and offence?

Variations

You may simulate many other kinds of disabilities, including less visible ones, such as learning disabilities or language difficulties, according to what is closest to your group’s reality. One possibility is to simulate situations of disability due to age; this may contribute to raising young people’s awareness towards older people and the (lack of) conditions for a life in dignity.

Suggestions for follow up

If you are working with children, you may like to look at Article 23 of the CRC, which states that disabled children have the right to special care, education and training that will help them to enjoy a full and decent life. You could ask the groups to find out about people in their own social environment (including family) who suffer from some kind of disability. They could further investigate what services and provisions those people have access to. Are there any children with disabilities in the youth group or association or in school? Can they do the same as everyone else? If not, why not?

If the group would like to look at how to respond to “everyday” problems of discrimination of another form - discrimination on the grounds of race, they could do the activity “Responding to racism”, on page 201.

Ideas for action

The group may wish to identify a vulnerable group and decide what they can/should do to support them. Consult the section of the manual on “taking action” for guidance and ideas. It is important to work together with organisations that work with the disabled and to start from the needs of the disabled, as defined and identified by the disabled themselves.

Further information

The level of care and safeguarding of rights of the disabled varies greatly from country to country, ostensibly for economic reasons but in reality for reasons that have probably more to do with taking equality and social solidarity seriously than with anything else. For example, hearing aids may or may not be paid for by social security. There may or may not be special provisions for extra telecommunications equipment for deaf people and if someone needs an electric wheelchair, then sometimes the community or the state pays for it.

Information about discrimination against people with disabilities can be found in the background information on discrimination and xenophobia on page 338. Information about the Paralympic Games can be found in the background information on sports and human rights on page 392.

Note: This activity has been suggested by Dr Mónika Márai, President of Common Fate Organisation (Közös Sors Egyesület, a Hungarian NGO working for promoting social integration of disabled and non-disabled people). She is also a member of the Hungarian National Council on Disability Affairs, which represents Hungary in Rehabilitation International, an international youth trainer and a concerned person, disabled since birth.

HANDOUTS

Situation 1.

Without words, try to explain to your friend that you have been a victim of violence. A group of young skinheads attacked you in the park, stole your bag and beat you up. Ask where the police station is.

You cannot speak, write any words or draw on paper.

Situation 2.

You are in a cafeteria; possibly at school or perhaps the cafeteria at one of the European Youth Centres. Explain to the cook that you can not eat Spaghetti Bolognese because you are a vegan: not only do you not eat meat but you are a vegetarian who doesn't eat any dairy products either (i.e. no milk, eggs or cheese).

You cannot speak, write any words or draw on paper.