

Balloons

In order to pursue our dreams we first need to break free from the chains which oppress us. Together we can make our dreams come true.

Issues addressed

- Those chosen by the group

Aims

- To create a positive atmosphere in the group.
- To reflect about the mechanisms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion.
- To lead the group to positive action and encourage follow up activities.

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

Group size: 10 to 40

Preparation

- 2 balloons per participant
- 2 pieces of string (about 50 cm long) per participant
- Permanent felt-tip or marker pens - enough to share
- One block of sticky labels and pencils
- A blank wall or notice board
- The room should be large enough for people to run around and the central space free of chairs and tables.

Instructions

1. Ask the participants to reflect individually for a minute on the kind of society they would like to live in and then to identify one or two characteristics of that society.
2. Ask them to write those two characteristics on a sticky label and then, one at a time, to come up to stick their label on the wall or notice board.
3. Now ask the participants each to think about two things, "chains", which prevent them from pursuing the two characteristics of their ideal society.
4. Hand round the marker pens, give each person two balloons and two pieces of string and tell them to blow up the balloons and write on in big letters the two "chains" that prevent them from pursuing their dream society.
5. Go round the circle and ask each person in turn to say the two words they wrote on their balloons.
6. Tell the group that they now have the possibility to break the "chains". Each person must tie one balloon to each ankle. When everybody is ready, explain that to break the chains they have to stamp on the balloons to break them. To add some more fun and competition, you may like to suggest the participants try to burst each other's balloons while protecting their own.
7. Give the signal for the game to start.



Debriefing and evaluation

Start the discussion by asking whether participants liked the activity and what they felt about it. Follow on with questions such as:

- What makes the chains that “oppress” us so heavy? Where do they come from?
- Do you think there are people who carry more chains than others?
- Who are they?
- Can we do something to help them break their chains?

Tips for the facilitator

This activity fits together well with the activity, “Dreams” (page 74) as they deal with similar topics. Play “Balloons” after the group has put together their dream drawings.

What is interesting in “Balloons” is the dimension of fun and excitement when everybody is stamping on the balloons and you can hear them bursting. This therefore is the element to keep if you adapt the activity.

Instead of using balloons, you may opt for condoms. Condoms have the advantage of being harder to break and therefore the task of bursting them is more exciting. On the other hand, some varieties are very hard to burst so you should try them out before deciding. In some groups using condoms has the advantage of helping to break taboos about talking about sex and AIDS. But, be aware that in some settings their use could be counter-productive!

A simplified version of this activity just using the balloons and strings, although expensive, is useful as an energiser or starter for the group.

Suggestions for follow-up

Ideas for concrete activities to follow-up will come from the discussion. One possible outcome could be that the group plans some specific activity on which they'd like to work together to “break the chains”. Another might be that they plan to work to realise a particular aspect of their ideal society.

You might like to go on to the activity Dear Friend (page 70) which provides an opportunity to explore views and feelings about issues in greater depth.