

Eurojoke Contest

It's only a laugh! What does it matter if we tell Irish and Belgian jokes anyway?



Issues addressed

- Stereotypes and prejudice.
- How humour is often used to maintain or fuel prejudice.
- Personal responsibility to respond to situations we disagree with.

Aims

- To explore the basis of our humour
- To be aware of the effects of jokes both on us and on those against whom the jokes are told
- To start discussion about the fears which are hidden in the jokes we tell

Time: 45 minutes

Group size: Any

Preparation

Gather a variety of jokes appropriate to your group including those:

- against people such as vegetarians, rich people, Jews,
- disabled people,
- politicians, pop stars, foreigners, homosexuals...
- about taboo subjects,
- puns and word plays
- tricks and practical jokes to be played against a member of the group
- cartoons
- You will also need a hat
- A large sheet of paper or flipchart and pen to mark up the scores.

Instructions

1. Write the jokes on slips of paper and put them in a hat.
2. Get everyone to sit in a circle and the pass round the hat and ask players in turn to take out one piece of paper, and then to read or act out the joke to the rest of the group.
3. The rest of the group rate the joke by giving it a score out of ten.
4. On a command from you or on at a count of three ask the players to vote by a show of fingers.
5. Mark up the scores on a flipchart.

Debriefing and evaluation

Talk about how people felt while playing the game and then go on to ask:

- Which joke won and why?
- Which joke got the least votes and why?

- How do you feel when the joke is against you or about something you feel strongly about?
- What sort of jokes are the best jokes?
- What makes a joke unacceptable?
- What's the harm in telling sexist/racist jokes?
- What do you do when someone tells an offensive joke
 - smile politely*
 - laugh because your friends do*
 - tell the person you think they are out of order*
 - leave the group but don't say anything?*

Tips for the facilitator

The choice of jokes is important because it enables you keep control of an activity which could easily get out of hand.

Include both destructive and constructive jokes in your selection. Cartoons may be the best source of jokes, which help us learn something positive about ourselves and the world.

Beware of jokes which might deeply offend some members of the group. It may be instructive to include some jokes, especially practical jokes against some members of the group.

Suggestions for follow up

Start a collection of cartoons and jokes to share with each other. Make a permanent space on a pin board to display them. Or make up your own jokes or cartoons to share with other groups and organisations. Try to get them published in your local paper or organization's newsletter.

Look further at how we discriminate against certain groups and then blame them for it. Use 'Just do it!' (page 103). Alternatively, explore ways of how to respond best in difficult situations, use 'Sharing discrimination' (page 158).