

In Our Block

Racist attitudes lead not only to violent attacks on foreigners or refugees but also to discrimination in housing and employment and other aspects of everyday life.

This activity is a roleplay.

Issues addressed

- Conflicts between people from different cultures can be solved in a positive way.
- Our analysis of conflict and the way we deal with it differs depending on the origin of the social and cultural background of the people involved.
- Our own interests may distort our perception of the problem and make it bigger than it is.

Aims

- To analyse our attitudes towards people from different cultural or social groups.
- To explore problem solving strategies.
- To reflect upon the limits of tolerance.
- To reflect upon the relationship between discrimination and conflicts of interest.

Time: 1 1/2 - 2 hours

Group size: A minimum of 10 people and a maximum of 25.

Preparation

- Copies of the role cards
- Copies of the Observers' notes
- Copies of the sheet: Clues for finding a solution
- Pens and paper for the observers to make notes

Instructions

1. Tell the group that they are going to roleplay a situation that could happen in anyone's daily life, then read the following:
"There is an apartment block near where you live. One of the apartments is rented to a group of foreign students who often have visitors from home staying and who also frequently organise parties. Some neighbours, especially those living in the apartments closest to the students, are annoyed and complain that the students and their friends make lots of noise, don't let them sleep and don't take care of the building. The neighbours have called a meeting to try to solve this problem."
2. Ask for volunteers to play the roles of the neighbours. You will need a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 9. The rest of the participants act as observers.
3. Share out the role cards between the volunteers and give the observers each a copy of the Observers notes. Allow 5 minutes for people to think about what they have to do.



4. Remind the players that their aim is to come up with a solution to the problem then start the roleplay.
5. Allow the discussion to proceed for about 10 minutes and then, without interrupting, hand each of the players a copy of the Clues for finding a solution. Let the roleplay continue for a further 10 minutes. However, you may interrupt or prolong it as you consider necessary.

Debriefing and evaluation

Ask all the participants to get together in a large group for the discussion, which should be divided into two parts:

1: The roleplay

Talk about what happened in the roleplay using the following questions as a guide:

- What did the observers record and what were their impressions of what happened during the roleplay?
- How did the actors feel about it? Was it difficult to get into the role they were given, what did they find hardest and what easiest etc.?
- Did the participants perceive any difference between the first and second stage i.e. after the actors had been given the Clues for finding a solution.
- What kinds of arguments were put forward and were they based on fact, reason or emotion?
- Was it easier to find arguments for or against the students?
- Where did people get their arguments from?
- Was the problem resolved and was everyone happy with the outcome?
- Was it a fair solution or did one side have to give up more than the other?
- What alternative solutions could there have been?

2: The situation in real life

Once everybody has had a chance to speak, you should help the group to analyse and reflect about the issues involved. You can launch the debate by addressing questions such as:

- Did the roleplay reflect any reality in daily life? What were the similarities and what were the differences? Did anything seem to be exaggerated?
- Which of the characters most faithfully reflected attitudes common in our society?
- When we face a conflict involving people from different cultural backgrounds do we look for a solution that may satisfy everybody, or do we rather try to impose our point of view and neglect those who think or feel differently from ourselves?
- To what extent is the conflict actually related to differences in culture rather than to other things such as personal or economic interests?
- Has anyone experience of this sort of conflict? What were the circumstances? If this hasn't happened to you, why is that?

Tips for the facilitator

Pay careful attention to how the role play is going because what happens will affect the way you facilitate, for example you may not need to use the clues

for finding a solution cards and afterwards when you lead the discussion you will have to decide how to balance the discussion between analysing the group dynamics, group decision making processes and relating the issues to real life.

Note that there are two different “clues for finding a solution” cards; card 1 for the “chair” and card 2 for the other players. Who gets card 1 will depend on what has happened in the roleplay so far. If it has already been democratically decided that a particular person should chair the meeting then give card 1 to that person, otherwise give it to the Leader of the resident's committee.

Finding solutions to problems and making decisions are difficult processes. People need to have good communication skills, to be sensitive to the needs of others and to show imagination and trust so that they can explore the issues honestly.

It is easier when people argue about their interests and try to find some common ground or consensus for mutual gain so that each person has some of their needs met and a stake in the outcome.

Unfortunately all too often people argue from a position which they then reluctantly have to abandon and compromise so that in the end everyone feels they have lost something rather than gained.

It is important that during the evaluation you try to make the group aware of and distinguish between the attitudes we often adopt to foreigners or people who are different and the ways in which we deal with the concrete, everyday problems involving interpersonal and communication skills.

Suggestions for follow up

Ask the participants to consider, in the light of what they have learned from doing this activity, what practical steps they can take to improve the relations between different groups who live in the local community. Put the plans into action.

If you want to follow up issues about national identity, you could use the activity ‘National Holiday’ (page 131). Alternatively, if you are interested in exploring prejudice and conflict within the family, try ‘Guess who's coming to dinner’ (page 88).

Young foreigner

You speak and understand the language of the host country very well but do not understand why your neighbours are upset. In your opinion, both you and your student friends behave perfectly normally. You will not leave the apartment under any circumstance.

Leader of the residents committee

Your apartment is far away from the one the foreign students live in. Personally they cause you no bother. But you do not like foreigners and you don't want them living in your building.

Young woman (25-30 years old)

You live alone and are afraid of the young students because they seem very strange and different from you.

Young person

You are also a student. You do not have any clear opinion about the problem but you would like to move into the apartment where the foreign students live.

Refugee

You are also a foreigner, although from a different country than the students. You and your family do not have much to do with other people in the block. You have never had any problems with anyone despite the fact that you feel rather isolated.

Elderly couple (this role should be played by two people)

You are both aware of the problems that force many people to leave their home country and try another life elsewhere. You support an organisation which provides aid to developing countries.

Unemployed neighbour

You strongly disagree with policies that allow foreigners to come to live and work in your country. You think that foreigners should only be allowed in as tourists.

The owner of the building

The young foreigners always paid their rent punctually and you don't want to lose the income from that apartment. But you don't very much like foreign people and you see this conflict as a possible opportunity to raise the rent for the foreign students. On the other hand, you also have the possibility of renting them another apartment on the outskirts of town.

Observers' notes

Your job as an observer is to watch what happens very carefully and to make notes to feedback in the discussion at the end of the roleplay.

Things to note are:

- Do the players respect each others turn to speak or do some people but in or does everyone try to speak at once or do one or two people try to impose their point of view?
- Does anyone try to take a lead and to facilitate the meeting?
- What kinds of arguments did players use?
- Was there any change in the attitude and behaviour of the players after they received the “clues for finding a solution”?

CARD 1 - CLUES FOR FINDING A SOLUTION

This card is for the person who is chairing the meeting.

Note: If, so far in the roleplay, no one has been democratically elected to chair, then this card is for the Leader of the Residents Committee.

- 1) **Chair:** You have already been democratically elected to chair the meeting continue to do so. Follow the tips below.
- 2) **Leader of the Residents committee:** So far in the role play no one has been elected to chair the meeting so suggest that the meeting needs a chair and that it should be democratically decided who it is. Propose that you be chair because of your position as leader on the residents committee. If the others agree keep this card and follow the tips for the chair below. If someone else is elected pass this card to them and take their card in exchange.

Tips for the chair of the meeting

It is your job to keep order and facilitate the meeting. You should try to make sure that:

- Everybody has a chance to speak
- People respect each others turn to speak
- If necessary, set a limit of time for each contribution and do not let the players go beyond that limit
- Do not allow abusive language and make sure people keep to the issue and don't deviate
- Try to move the discussion on and keep it positive
- Keep people on track; the aim is to find a solution to the problem.

CARD 2 - CLUES FOR FINDING A SOLUTION

To be given to each player except the Chair.

Think about what you can do, within your role, to try to find a solution:

- Listen actively and respect the right of everyone to have their say
- Try to relate what you have to say to what has been said previously.
- When it's your turn to speak start with a summary of what the person who spoke before you has said.
- Try to distinguish between the facts and your opinions
- Try not to divert the discussion but keep to the point, focus on the problem of the students and the need to find a solution, do not bring in other facts, opinions or ideas that you might have.