

Labels

Does it make any difference what others think and say about you?

Issues addressed

- The effects of stereotyping

Aims

- To explore the relationships between what is expected of us and how we behave
- To raise awareness of the effect of our own behaviour on others
- To start discussion about the effects of stereotyping people

Time: 45 minutes

Group size: 10+

Preparation

- Plain white sticky labels about 5 cm by 2 cm one per person in the group.
- Write one characteristic on each label e.g. irresponsible, witty, stupid, clever, clumsy
- Decide on a task for the group e.g. design a poster co-operatively, plan an event, move furniture or have a discussion (for example ask: 'if a big name pop group could play in our town who would we want to come?')

Instructions

1. Place one label on each player's forehead, but don't let them know what's written on it.
2. Explain the task to the group. Make it clear that as they undertake the task they must treat each other according to the labels. For example, if someone has a label - lazy - on their forehead everyone else must treat them as if they are always lazy (but without ever using the word on the label! Don't tell them!).
3. Players should put their efforts into completing the task and treating the others according to the stereotype on the label.
4. At the end of the activity players may guess what their own label said, but this is not the main object of the game.

Debriefing and evaluation

This is very important so make sure you leave time for players to have their say. Start by asking people if they could guess their label and then go on to ask about the other aspects of the activity:

- How did each person feel during this activity?
- Was it difficult to treat people according to their labels?
- Did anyone begin to 'prove' their label i.e. did someone labelled 'witty' begin to tell jokes and behave more confidently? Or the person labelled 'lazy' stop helping or participating?



- What sorts of labels do we put on people in real life? How does it affect them and how does it affect the way we think about them?
- In real life who, are given some of the labels that you used in this activity?
- Are they valid?

Tips for the facilitator

Be sensitive about matching people with characteristics. For example if a member of the group is rather lazy it may not be appropriate to also give them that label. The aim of the game is not bring out into the open personal opinions about others in the group. Indeed this could be very destructive and should be avoided.

Be aware that this game can raise powerful emotions.

Suggestions for follow up

Look again at who does what in your group or organisation, try rotating the roles and responsibilities and don't make assumptions about who is going to be good at a particular job.

You might like to move on to the role play activity 'In our block' (page 93) and examine a common problem caused by labelling and stereotyping and to try to explore ways of finding an effective solution. Alternatively, if you discussed the labels we put on the refugees and immigrants who come to live in our communities you may like to go on to use 'The refugee' (page 151) to find out more about the reality of their situation.



This activity is based on an idea found in the Curriculum Resources Pack: Cultures and Lifestyles, Dorset Education Service, Dorset, England.