

My Childhood

There is a child inside each of us and surely we have all had a childhood. How was it? Looking at one's childhood is a very exciting way to understand and respect others.

This is a discussion activity particularly suited to multi-cultural groups but it can also be used with any other group.



Issues addressed

- Equality and diversity
- The cultural similarities and differences between people
- The so-called “cultural differences” are not only cultural, but also economic, social and political.

Aims

- To learn about the different ways each of us has grown up.
- To understand the social and economic differences which underlie each person and society.
- To generate empathy and understanding between the members of the group.

Time: 45 minutes

Group size: Any

Preparation

Nothing special, but the group should have already been working together.

Instructions

1. Explain the purpose and aims of the activity.
2. Ask people to get into groups of 4 to 6 to talk about what they did during their childhood. Suggested questions include:
 - At what age did you first go to school?
 - Who else lived in your family?
 - Did you attend Sunday school or have some other kind of religious education?
 - Did you work when you were a child?
 - What kind of tales or games did you like to play?
 - Which were your favourite?
 - Did you have to take care of your brothers and sisters?

Debriefing and evaluation

Ask the participants to say what they found interesting in this exercise and then to compare the different sorts of childhoods they had and the relative influences the prevailing social and political environment had on them.

Ask people to reflect on their own childhood and say whether they think all children in their own neighbourhood had the same childhood experiences?

Tips for the facilitator

The main purpose of this simple group activity is to make participants realise that not everybody has the same chances in life and that even though they are perhaps neighbours they were growing up under different conditions. Furthermore, it fosters the understanding that difference does not come only from the colour of skin or religion.

Beware! This exercise should not be turned into a session for false psycho-analysis. Its purpose is simply to notice that, because of our families' background, the social and economic conditions, the place where we were born or where we moved to, we have different experiences and perceptions of life and the world around us. These conditions may influence the difference as much as culture does. In fact they are a part of our culture, just as much as religion, language or skin colour.

The type of questions addressed in the evaluation and debriefing have to be adapted to the type of people in the group, for example, there is no point asking how did it feel having a different colour of skin if everyone is white!

No one should feel under pressure to disclose anything that would make them feel uncomfortable.

The activity can be made livelier if the participants illustrate their comments with photos or drawings.

Suggestions for follow up

“My Childhood” combines very well with the activity “My Story” (page 129) which involves identifying key public events and asking what were you doing or where were you living when this or that event happened?

If you want to look further at relationships within the family and how attitudes may vary according to role and age try Guess who's coming to dinner (page 88).