

Where Do You Stand?

What do we think about racism and discrimination? How capable are we of defending our own points of view and of understanding that of others?



Issues addressed

- Racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia and intolerance.
- Responsibility for one's personal actions.

Aims

- To challenge participants' views and opinions on racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia and intolerance.
- To raise participant's self-awareness of the role they play as members of society.
- To get participants to share their thoughts and opinions.
- To draw out and recognise the differences in thinking in the group.
- To break down communication barriers and encourage everyone to express their opinion.
- To make participants aware of how quickly we sometimes have to come to a decision and then how fiercely we tend defend it unable to accept the other's point of view.

Group size: 10 to 40 people

Time: 1 hour

Preparation

- Flip chart and markers or alternatively an overhead projector
- A list of statements.
- Before starting the activity write down the statements on flip chart or an overhead transparency.

Instructions

- Tell participants that they should imagine that on one side of the room there is a minus (-) sign and that on the opposite there is a plus (+) sign.
- Explain that you are going to read out statements and then those participants who disagree with the statement should move to the side of the room with the minus sign. Those who agree should move to the side with the plus sign. Those who have no opinion or who are undecided should stay in the middle, but they will not be able to speak.
- Read out the first statement.
- Once everybody is standing in their chosen position ask those by the walls, in turn, to explain to the others why they chose that position. They should try to convince the rest of the group that they are right and therefore, that the others should join them.
- Allow between 5-8 minutes for this.

- When everyone has spoken invite anyone who wishes to change their position to do so.
- Now read a second statement and repeat the process.
- Once all the statements have been discussed go straight away into the evaluation.

Evaluation and debriefing

- Start by asking the following questions:
- How did you feel during the exercise?
- Was it difficult to choose? Why?
- Was it difficult to stay in the middle and not be able to speak?
- What sorts of arguments were used, those based on fact or those which appealed to the emotions?
- Which were more effective?
- Are there any comparisons between what people did and said during this exercise and reality?
- Are the statements valid?
- Was the exercise useful?

Tips for the facilitator

In order to facilitate participation you may invite members who are particularly silent to voice their opinion. In the same way ask someone who intervenes too often to wait a bit.

The statements are necessarily controversial. It is important to explain this at the end of the evaluation.

Depending on the group you can develop the discussion on several points:

- Despite their ambiguity, there is also a certain truth in the statements. Explain the fact that in all communication different people understand different things in the same statement. It is also normal that people think differently and differ about what they think. There is not necessarily a right or wrong attitude or position. What is more important is to know and understand the reasons that motivated the position.
- Try to draw out the links with the reality of everyday life. Often we think only about one side of a problem. It also happens that we are sometimes asked to support an issue but not always given the chance to think deeply about why we should do so.
- You could ask the group to consider how this affects democracy.
- How much do we actually listen to other people's arguments? How well do we make our points clear? The more vague we are the more we nourish ambiguity and risk being misunderstood.
- How consistent are we in our opinions and ideas?

Suggestions for follow up

It is not always easy to stand up and be counted, sometimes it is dangerous to do so. But you do not have to feel alone, there are others who are working

for a better world. There is always something you can do. Brainstorm the things you can do to improve the lives of minorities in your community and to support human rights in your own country and abroad and decide to take some action however small it may seem.

If you want a quick activity, which gets people into groups and at the same time raises issues about feeling isolated, try 'Odd one out' (page 133). Alternatively you could think a little more about why it is so hard for people to make what they want to say heard. Who has the power and why won't they listen? 'The rules of the game' (page 154).

SOME EXAMPLES OF STATEMENTS:

'MUSLIMS CAN NOT REALLY INTEGRATE INTO EUROPEAN SOCIETIES'

'NATIONALISM MEANS WAR'

'MEN ARE MORE RACIST THAN WOMEN'

'IT IS BETTER TO BE BLACK THAN GAY'

'ROMA ARE THE ONLY TRUE EUROPEAN PEOPLE'

'YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF RACIST ATTACKS'

'IMMIGRANTS TAKE AWAY HOUSES AND JOBS'

'LOVE CAN SOLVE ANY PROBLEM'