

General exercises for single sex groups

Introduction

Sometimes this kind of youth work is done in single sex groups that meet on a regular basis. Sometimes, at one-off residential seminars, single sex activities are organised. Some of the advantages, benefits and specificities of non-formal educational (youth) work with single sex groups have been outlined in Chapter 3.

In the following section we present a variety of activities that can be used to begin working in a single sex group. In particular, these activities are aimed at setting the scene for more substantial and in-depth work on the sensitive subjects outlined in this manual. A lot of them focus on self-esteem and trust building, and creating conditions for open, honest and respectful discussion in a group. Most of these activities are relatively easy and do not take longer than one hour, so they are well suited to short sessions which are not intended to have a deep emotional impact on participants.

It should be noted that many of these methods and approaches are also suitable for working with mixed sex groups, but in this case the facilitator should think carefully about any adaptations that might be necessary to cater for the specific character of the mixed sex group (cultural composition, age, etc).

Getting started

Sitting in a circle, in which all participants have equal space and can see all other participants, creates both security and a sense of closeness. This is a useful way to begin activities with a group, and is particularly good for all introductory activities, including the introduction of participants to each other. It also a good setting to conduct group discussions after an activity is completed. For such discussions, the act of sitting in a circle is a first step to providing everyone with space to express themselves. The second step is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak, if they want to, and to draw out those who may not have a lot of confidence speaking in public settings. You can also use a speaking gadget to help the process along. Only the person who holds the gadget can speak. The others have to listen. The gadget gets passed from person to person.

Easy ways to present oneself in a group

Emancipation

Everyone stands in a circle. One person takes a step into the circle and says something s/he is good at. The rest of the group takes a step into the circle and repeats the name and what the person is good at. Repeat for all members of the group.

Empowerment

Everyone stands in a circle. One person says their name and the rest of the group thinks of positive adjectives that start with the same letter as their name. The person chooses one (if there is more than one). The next person, in turn, presents the previous one, e.g. beautiful Benjamin, and then says his/her name, e.g. lovely Leila. Continue around the circle with each new person repeating the names and positive adjectives of all the previous ones. It is important to remember that the focus is on positive adjectives that start with the same letter as the name of the person, rather than adjectives that are fitting to the person. It is up to the person themselves to choose among the adjectives suggested by the other participants as to whether they feel it is fitting to them. As facilitator, you should be prepared to suggest positive adjectives for any of the names, in case no one else has an idea.

Learning names

Sitting in the circle, ask participants to say their name out loud using the pronunciation that is 'right' according to where they come from. After each participant has said their name, the rest of the group together should say "Welcome," and repeat the person's name, for example, "Welcome, Martin!" Once you have completed this first round, continue in further rounds asking participants to answer the following questions. You don't have to use all of them; only use the ones you think will be appropriate, and help people to get to know each other better. Your decision on which questions to use also depends on how much time you have for this exercise.

Questions about names:

- What does your name mean?
- Why was it chosen?
- Do you like your name?
- Do you have a nickname?

Finding common ground

Participants form pairs. They are asked to find three things they have in common. These should be presented to the rest of the group. In addition, or alternatively, you can focus on three things that differentiate the partners in the pair.

Introductory exercises on the subjects of this manual

Unfinished sentences about gender equality

Each participant receives a piece of paper on which are written a series of unfinished sentences. Their task is to think of their own ending for each of these sentences. Starting with the first sentence, ask participants to say their finished sentence to the group. Repeat for all the sentences.

Possible sentences:

- The best thing about being a girl/young woman is ...
- The best thing about being a boy/young man is ...
- Gender equality means that ...
- It is important with gender equality because ...
- To achieve gender equality we (all citizens, this group) need to ...

Note that this activity can also be conducted as individual reflection. In this case you do not ask participants to read their sentences out to the rest of the group.

If this is done at the beginning of a series of meetings to be attended by the same group of young people and during which you will explore in more depth issues related to gender equality, you can collect the results written on the papers and keep them. At the last meeting, you can distribute the original pieces of paper and ask the participants to re-read their own sentences. They should re-think how they would end the sentences, taking into account their participation in the activity. At this point, you can ask participants to say their new sentences, if they have changed, to explain why.

Group building / dynamic feel good activity

Everyone stands in a circle. One person steps into the middle and says something s/he is good at, for example, "I am good at dancing". Those who also think they are good at dancing change places with the other participants as quickly as possible. Another person steps into the middle, and says something she/he is good at. Continue in the same way, repeating as often as desired. It's best if people are chosen, or volunteer randomly.

Hot chair – value statements

Everyone sits on a chair in a circle. One chair should remain empty. The facilitator reads out one statement at a time. After the reading of each statement, participants who agree with the statement change places and sit on another chair. Those who disagree remain seated where they are. If a participant cannot decide, they have to stand up and turn around once. This should be done quickly.

Examples of possible statements

- To have a bad reputation is worse for girls than for boys.
- It is acceptable for young women not to remove their body hair.
- It is wrong that shops sell string panties for children.
- It is acceptable for young women and young men to be good friends.
- Women are better at cooking than men.
- Gays and lesbians should have the right to marry.
- If my friend told me s/he was homosexual, I would still be friends with her/him.
- Only thin girls can be beautiful.
- Beauty comes from within.
- Already in childhood, girls are better at sewing and boys are better at mechanics.

- Sometimes rape is the fault of the girl/woman.
- It is masculine to have muscles.
- Men are good at showing their feelings.
- Ballet is not an occupation for men.
- It is natural for men to take control and to lead.
- A male president / prime minister is better than a female one.
- A husband should not earn less money than his wife.
- Telling your friends if you are afraid of something reveals weakness.
- Talking about feelings is not a masculine thing to do.
- Love fades with time.
- Sex requires love.
- Adults' views about sex are old-fashioned.
- You can find good advice about sex in pornographic magazines.
- You can find good advice about sex in teenage magazines.
- All people are equal in value.

You do not have to use all the statements on this list: they are just examples of the kind you can use. You may also ask participants to write anonymously their own statements to be included in the exercise. In this case, ask participants to write them on pieces of paper that can be put in a hat or in a box. The facilitator should read these out randomly, along with other statements prepared by the facilitator or the team.

After all the statements have been read out, you can initiate a discussion on the different reactions to the statements and where participants think they come from.

Group work about relationships

Divide participants into groups of three. Give each group two statements to discuss for about 20 minutes. Each group should be given 5 minutes to report about their discussion on the statements to the whole group. This should be followed by a general discussion in the group as a whole for about 30 minutes, or for as long as there is time and interest for further discussion.

Some possible statements

- It is good to have had several relationships before one gets married.
- Girls sometimes say 'yes' to sex, even if they don't want to have sex.
- It is best to have a relationship with someone from your own culture.
- It is best to have a relationship with someone from the same kind of background.
- Girls wait for boys to take initiatives on relationships and sex.
- Most people find it difficult to approach the person they want to have a relationship with.
- Looks are more important than other characteristics when you fall in love.

- You can end up unhappy from love.
- You need more courage to start a relationship than to end it.
- There are different kinds of love.
- You don't decide who to fall in love with.
- There is such a thing as love at first sight.
- Friends are more important than partners.

You can also run this exercise as a 'hot chair' statement exercise. In this case, you read out a statement and anyone who wants to express themselves, either in favour or against, has to sit on a chair placed in the middle of the circle. Other participants may show their appreciation or dislike of an argument made by the person sitting on the 'hot chair' by coming very close to that person (to show their agreement) or by moving as far away as possible (to show their disagreement). For each statement, make sure you ask several participants standing in different positions to explain why they stood there and why they agree or disagree with the arguments made by the person sitting on the 'hot chair'.

Nicknames¹⁸

There are lots of different words used for boys and men and girls and women. In this exercise, the group makes a list of the different terms applied to the different groups. Form two groups, one to work on the words used for males, and the other to work on the words used for females. Each group should make a list of all the words that are used for each sex. The groups should be given 15 to 20 minutes for this task.

Ask the groups to present their list to each other. They have just 5 minutes for this so they should keep the presentation focused on the words on the list.

Discuss the results of the group work. You can use the following questions to initiate the discussion:

- When are boys/men or girls/women called these words and why?
- How do you react when you are called (any of) these words and why? How do people of the opposite sex react?
- Who uses these words?
- What do you want to be called and what not?

Closing activities

This is a good activity for closing a session or regular meeting of a group. It can also be adapted to the purpose of evaluation:

Everybody gets a chance to finish the sentence (or abstain):

- A person I admire of my sex is...
- A person I admire of the other sex is...

¹⁸ Adapted from 'Project Isabell' with young women from immigrant backgrounds, run by the Employment and Family Department of the Municipality of Eskilstuna in Sweden, www.eskilstuna.se.

- Something I would like to change about the situation for young men... / young women is...
- I feel really happy when...
- Somebody I love and why, is... because ...
- I think everybody should...
- No one should be forced to...
- An occasion when I was proud to be a woman / man was ...
- An occasion when I wished I was of the other sex was ...
- Something I long for is...
- If I was in power I would...