



COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND EMPATHY - PARTICIPATION AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN PEOPLE AROUND YOU FIGHT?

Most matters that people disagree over are complex, involving many different things that may influence each other in different ways. It's important for each of us to become more aware of our own attitudes towards a given conflict, and to examine the conflict from different perspectives. Behind every behaviour there are needs, either fulfilled or unfulfilled. Many of these are universal human needs. Nobody should be forced, and things need to be given time.

WHAT THE EXERCISE IS ABOUT

- Time: about 30 minutes
- Ask each student about each one felt in some conflict that arose in his or her life.
- After this first question, ask follow-up questions to help the student better understand the needs that the various parties to the conflict were trying to satisfy with his or her actions.

THE GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

The purpose of this exercise is to help students become more conscious of their own internal dialogue when they see a conflict going on around them. Increasing one's consciousness in such situations makes it easier to choose the course of action that's most appropriate for that setting. The questions below should help the students to think constructively. It's a good idea for them to write their answers.

HOW THE EXERCISE SHOULD PROCEED

Ask the students to examine the thoughts they had when people around them were in conflict. Encourage them to scrutinize with particular care any thoughts that made them hesitant about trying to resolve the conflict without being explicitly asked to intervene.

These could be along the following lines:

"Sorting this out is their business, not mine!"
"I shouldn't get involved"
"As long as they leave me out of it, they can carry on fighting"

Ask the students what need or needs they tried to meet in this way. For instance:

- the need for acceptance

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- the need to not be interfered with
 - the need for protection
 - the need for safety

Then ask the students which of the needs of those involved in the conflict due to your relating to them in this way. For instance, the people involved in the conflict may have been motivated by the need for:

- respect
- honesty
- understanding
- peace
- self-expression
- promotion of their wellbeing

Next ask what needs of those involved in the conflict you tried to fulfil by thinking about and relating to the conflict situation in this way. Examples are the need for:

- autonomy
- freedom from interference
- respect

Then ask which of their needs might not have been met due to your having acted as you did. Examples are the need for:

- protection
- safety, security
- freedom from interference
- encouragement
- support
- empathy
- recognition, acknowledgement

Finally, ask: In light of this exercise, how do you hope to react to similar situations in the future?

FOR DISCUSSION AT THE END OF THE EXERCISE

Although there are no absolutely right answers in an exercise like this, it should nonetheless help the students to become more sensitive to the different perspectives involved in any given conflict. Why do different people act as they do? The students could also consider whose needs should take priority in a given situation.

Be careful to avoid blaming. Adjust your questions and approach to the dynamics and maturity of the specific group.

Based on ideas from Liv Larsson's book Skapa möten och kontakt genom medling (A Helping Hand: Mediation with Nonviolent Communication).