

CONFLICT RESOLUTION SIMULATION

CMI (Crisis Management Initiative) is a Finnish conflict resolution organization. We work in many parts of the world to help solve conflicts. One of the most important ways we do this is by encouraging dialogue between different sides. Dialogue, as an alternative to violence, offers a way to build confidence between people in conflict. In this way, those who disagree can learn to trust each other. Then it's much easier for them to work together to solve their problems in ways that's fair to everyone. This simulation exercise provides an excellent opportunity for the students to experience first-hand a realistic situation of tense community conflict and to personally attempt to use dialogue as a tool to address a conflict situation.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO

- Time: 45 minutes preparation (this can be done by assigning the roles as homework a day or two before), 45 minutes for the roleplay plus 45 minutes for talking about how it went (closing discussion)

PURPOSE OF THIS SIMULATION


This roleplay provides students an opportunity to experience first-hand a realistic situation of tense community conflict and an idea what it's like to try to solve it through back-and-forth discussion.

Dialogue, as an alternative to violence, offers a way to build confidence and trust between people in conflict, by bringing them together on an equal footing, in a safe space and with the help of a mediator or facilitator several mediators who the sides of the conflict feel are not so biased that they would take anyone's side.

Once a sense of trust is developed between the sides of the conflict (of which there may be many, not just two sides) then it becomes possible for them to search together for solutions to their conflict, which help each side to properly address their needs and fears. This is also enabled by good mediation, as misunderstandings will often occur and emotions can run high. There is rarely a perfect solution to a conflict, but the better the quality of the process that the sides use to search for a solution together, the more chances there will be of finding a good one in the end.

HOW THE ROLEPLAY SHOULD BE DONE

The job of the teacher is to ensure that the exercise is organised smoothly and in a structured way. Before beginning, it's essential that each student knows what his or her role is,



and what must be done. Students must concentrate on following the teacher's directions throughout the exercise.

For best results, the closing discussion should be held right after the dialogue. The ultimate objective is that the simulation exercise serves as a rich and conscious learning opportunity for the participants, and this is where both preparation and debriefing are key components.

Assign the roles to the students, or allow them to choose for themselves. Either way, try to find a balance between each student's presentation skills and his or her role.

The materials provided describe only nine different roles, so each role will most likely have to be shared between two or three students. This can create interesting results, since different students may interpret the same role in different ways.

For everyone to get the most from the whole roleplay it's important to make creative use of the classroom or other spaces even outside the school available. Given that the opening scene takes places on an urban sidewalk outside a school, you may want to think about how to set up symbolic markers for such things as a school gate, sidewalk, bus stop etc.

The following materials are intended as a guide only. The teacher is best placed to adjust the materials to each particular group of students. Depending on age, the language used might in some cases need to be simplified or made a bit more challenging. Similarly, the level of detail in the instructions may need some adjustments. All in all, the materials are designed to leave room for customization and improvisation.

About 45 minutes should be enough for preparations and giving out the instructions and roles. The roleplay itself will take at least 45 minutes. This time is needed for the participants to think for themselves (whether separately or in groups) about their roles and what they might say in their next contribution to the dialogue. The dialogue can be broken down into several stages, with preparatory breaks like this between each phase.

Depending on the class size, the closing discussion will take from 45 to 90 minutes. It's good to have a short break between the roleplay and the closing discussion. The closing discussion is just as important as the roleplay itself. It gives the students time to "leave" their roles and to examine them with more critical distance. There are several ways of getting the students to step out of their roles. For example, the closing discussion could begin with a quick round of introductions between the students as their real selves. You can also lead participants, while standing in a circle, through a pretend undressing out of their role - encouraging participants to together make the movements of the taking off, one by one, of each person's role's hat, shoes, shirt etc.

Roleplay materials

Give the general instructions (Handout 1) to all the students. This should give them a good idea of the main parts of the entire roleplay (including the closing discussion) and the purpose of each. Before the simulation starts, students should present the roles they are playing to each other.

HANDOUT 1

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Each of you will be given a role that you'll play in this exercise. Because there are many more students than there are roles, two or more of you might have to share the same role. That's fine!

Each role gives a short description of the character you'll play, and what that person thinks and feels. You have 10 or 15 minutes to think about the role and about how you'll play it. If this seems difficult, a quick internet search might help. But make good use of your preparation time!


You'll be given a bit of the dialogue, describing a difficult disagreement in some part of Finland in the present. Some students will be playing characters that distrust or fear each other. These characters might be aggressive and angry at the beginning. Other students will be playing characters that are more relaxed and more willing to reach agreement with the others and play a more bridging role. Just as in real life, in this roleplay each person has to make the best of the situation.

To really get the most out of this exercise, try your best to meet these four goals:

- In your role, express yourself as clearly as you can. Think hard about what your character wants, and doesn't want. How can you communicate this to the other characters? It's okay for your character to show his or her feelings (such as anger, fear, disappointment). But try to think about why your character feels this way, and about how the other characters must be feeling.
- Try to put yourself in the shoes of the other characters in the roleplay. Ask them questions, refrain from violence including personal verbal attacks, practice empathy and listen to them.
- Make good use of the description you were given of your character. Think of how your relationships can help you – use the positive relationships which you already have. Try also to develop new relationships during the simulation – conflicts can only be resolved if there is trust and people are interconnected.
- Look for solutions. Don't say no to anybody's ideas or suggestions before giving them a chance. This goes for your own ideas, too! Be creative. It's actually fun to try to come up with solutions that will work for everybody.

HERE'S THE OPENING SCENE OF THE SIMULATION

A young man who is walking past the school gets into a verbal confrontation with this person, trying to defend Islam as a religion, and tries to tear down and rip up the poster. As students come out of the school gates and parents arrive to meet them on the sidewalk, more people gather to observe and possibly take part in the argument. Tension rises in this small crowd, some people raise their voices and start talking over each other. The school teacher comes outside to see what is happening and is also drawn into the conflict. After the confrontation goes on for a few minutes and emotions start getting out of control, the




away in different directions, shouting accusations and insults at each other and anyone else who has upset them, as they walk away.

Now it's up to you what happens from this point on..Each person's actions as an individual or as a group will affect the outcome of your simulation i.e. whether you are able to find a resolution to this conflict.

You can use the space which you are provided for your simulation as you would a normal urban space – feel free to walk away from other people, to find places to sit and talk, to search for and meet others. You can also use communications tools such as mobile phones and internet to talk to each other (if you have access to them in your school).

After the roleplay there will be plenty of time to discuss how things went, and to talk together about what you can learn from it.



Teacher: Give the following role descriptions to the students. Each role will most likely have to be shared between two or more students. Note that some adjustments to the roles might be necessary beforehand. For example, the role of “young Muslim fundamentalist” might not be appropriate for a particular class.



HANDOUT 2

ROLE 1: A SYRIAN MOTHER WHO'S NOW A REFUGEE IN FINLAND

You're a Syrian woman who came to Finland just a few months ago. Your journey here through Turkey and several other countries was long and exhausting, and dangerous. You have several children, and they travelled with you. But the children's father (your husband) stayed in Syria, and you haven't been able to contact him since you left. You know that he might be fighting in the war in Syria, but you're afraid to mention this to anybody. You've already learned some Finnish, but you still have problems understanding how Finns talk. And you find it hard to understand how things are done in Finland. Everything is so different than in Syria. You had never travelled much before. You and your children have a place to stay in Finland, and receive social security benefits. Your kids have started going to school here. But you don't trust any government anymore and suspect that in future you may be asked to leave Finland, even if now the authorities say that you can stay. You think that it's important for you to be socially active and be helpful at your children's school and with your neighbours so that people will like you and maybe support you in case the government wants to send you back.

You are the mother of "Refugee teenager from Syria" who now studies in the class of the "School teacher".

At the start of the roleplay you're just on your way into the school to pick up one of your younger children. Suddenly you hear shouting. One of the people shouting is clearly from the Middle East, maybe even from Syria. You wonder: should you get involved? After all, you might understand the situation better than most Finns might. At the same time you are also concerned about not getting drawn into a situation where you may be stereotyped.



HANDOUT 3

ROLE 2: A YOUNG ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST

You are a 19-year-old man whose parents came to Finland as refugees from Iraq. You were just a baby when your family moved here. You feel strongly that the wider world doesn't really care about the continual human rights violations in the Middle East. As you see it, the world cares far more about terrorist events in Brussels and Europe than in Muslim countries. It seems that when bombs explode in Europe it forces people to care!

You have no real way to express your anger and sadness about the unfairness of the world. So you turn to the internet to find people who think like you do about the Middle East and the uncaring attitude of European countries. Through Google you've found a Muslim fundamentalist preacher. Listening to his talks makes you feel that your life finally has some meaning. These sermons have also put you in contact with many other young men who share your ideas. Some of these guys have said they want to carry out bombings in different parts of Europe. Others have gone even further, and are already planning attacks. You start to wonder: could this make your life seem more worthwhile? You might be killed, but surely Allah would reward your sacrifice in the next life?

You don't get on well with "the teacher". Until recently you were his / her student, and the two of you were always arguing. You're interested in meeting refugees who have recently arrived from the Middle East. You'd love to learn more about what life is like in Muslim countries.

At the beginning of the roleplay you are walking past the school and see someone outside the school putting up posters warning people of the dangers of Islam. You get into a verbal confrontation with this person, trying to defend Islam as a religion, and try to tear down and rip up the poster. You then engage emotionally in talking with other people who may defend or attack your position. After the confrontation goes on for a few minutes and emotions start getting out of control, the person putting up the posters and you walk away in different directions, shouting accusations and insults at each other and anyone else who has upset you.



HANDOUT 4

ROLE 3: THE TEACHER

You are a native Finn with many years of teaching experience. Several refugee children have joined your class this year. One of the new arrivals is the refugee teen from Syria (role 5). Some of the refugee students speak English well enough, but none of them know any Finnish yet. They seem disturbed and distant, and stick together. Together they speak only Arabic, often very loudly.

As their teacher you have to learn to get on well with these students. You also have to make a connection with their parents so that you can help these kids learn and fit in to Finnish society. The Finnish police have given you instructions on how to spot signs of extremism in teenagers. All this is new to you, and is a lot to cope with.

As this conflict develops, you realise that given the respect you have in the community, you may be expected to act as a mediator dialogue facilitator. You may need to look for allies or supporters in your peace effort, or to support others who will push for dialogue.

You you have neutral relationship with the “aid worker” with “the reporter” and with “the politician”. All three of these have kids in your school. “The Finnish kid” is in your class, and is a good student.

At the start of the roleplay, you’ve just finished your classes for the day and are leaving the school. Suddenly you hear shouting near the school entrance. You look out and see that a small crowd has started to gather. You decide to go out to see what is happening and whether there is anything you can do.



HANDOUT 5

ROLE 4: THE FAR-RIGHT ACTIVIST

You're a native Finnish young adult. You have no job, and have joined a far-right group who hate immigrants and especially Muslims. You're frightened of Muslims, especially refugees who've recently come to Finland. You believe that soon Finland will not be a peaceful country anymore. You feel that Muslims are going to make your home country a dangerous place. You've heard that this has happened in other European countries already, like France and Belgium. You think the only way to stop this happening in Finland is to keep Muslims out. You think that Finnish politicians no longer care about keeping Finns safe. You think it's time for you, and others like you, to take matters into their own hands. You join in anti-immigrant protests, and hand out leaflets warning about halal foods and Islam in general. You write and spray anti-Muslim slogans around the town.

You don't get on with "the teacher" because you used to attend this school and argued a lot with this teacher. You dislike "the politician" . He / she and other politicians are to blame for everything that's wrong with Finnish society now. You think that "the journalist" does pretty good work covering different sides of important stories, but you suspect that the person's private political position is probably different to yours.

At the start of the roleplay, you're outside the school putting up posters warning about Islam. A young Arabic-looking man comes up to you, looking mad. He starts shouting at you that you know nothing about Islam. He tries to tear down your posters. You're not going to put up with this, not in your own country! Foreigners should at the very least have some manners. You then engage emotionally in talking with other people who may defend or attack your position. After the confrontation goes on for a few minutes and emotions start getting out of control, the Arabic-looking man and you walk away in different directions, shouting accusations and insults at each other and anyone else who has upset you.



HANDOUT 6

ROLE 5: A TEENAGE REFUGEE FROM SYRIA

You came to Finland a few months ago with your mother and brothers and sisters. You and your family had a long and dangerous journey from Syria through Turkey and other countries. You've lost contact with your father, who's still in Syria. Your mother thinks your father is fighting in the war there. She's afraid to mention it to anybody, and she thinks you don't know about it. The Syrian war and the long-running distrust between Muslims and Europeans are extremely confusing for you. It's impossible to tell who's right and who's wrong.

The hard journey to Finland left you worn out, and your family's situation is uncertain. This makes you get angry easily. Your family is safe in Finland, but you don't know if you'll all be allowed to stay. You're worried about your father. You don't even know who you are anymore. You speak good English and already have a little bit of Finnish, but Finns are hard to understand. It's not just the impenetrable language – the culture is strange, too.

Before war broke out in Syria you'd never been outside the Middle East. At school you talk a lot with the other refugee kids at school. But usually they don't understand things, and so you usually end up getting into loud arguments with them.

You are the child of “a Syrian mother who's now a refugee in Finland “and you study in the class of the “teacher”.

At the start of the roleplay, you're finished school for the day and have just met your mom outside the school. Suddenly you hear shouting. One of the arguers looks to be from the Middle East.



HANDOUT 7

ROLE 6: THE AID WORKER

You're a native Finnish adult who has worked with an aid organisation for years. You and your organisation work to help people who are badly off adjust get by in Finland. Up until recently your organisation has mostly helped disabled people, but now you do a lot of work for refugees as well. You believe that Finland, being a well-off country, has a moral duty to take in refugees from countries where there's war, like Syria. You feel that too many Finns have forgotten that Finland was once at war, and there were many Finnish refugees then. You know that helping refugees from the Middle East adapt to life in Finland is far from easy. But you and your organisation do the best you can and you feel it is your responsibility to do your personal best to respond to this challenge in the most effective way possible. You realise that given your professional calling in community development, you are likely to be expected to act as a mediator or dialogue facilitator if conflicts begin to show in the community.

Your child "Finnish Kid" goes to the local school, and is in "the teacher's" class. You get on okay with the teacher. You may need to look for allies or supporters in your effort.

At the start of the roleplay, you've just picked up your kid (role 7) and the two of you are outside the school. Suddenly you hear shouting. One of the arguers looks Middle Eastern.



HANDOUT 8

ROLE 7: A FINNISH KID

You're a student at the local school, in the "teacher's" class. You work hard at school, and have good grades. The teacher's nice and the two of you get on well. Recently several refugee kids have come your class, including the "Syrian teenage refugee". Some of them speak English, but still have very little Finnish. They seem stressed and talk a lot to each other in Arabic, sometimes in raised tones. You have no problem with refugees being in Finland and in your school, but you know that some Finns are against them. One of your parents is "the aid worker", and you often talk about these things at home with your parents. Your parents are well known at the school for being friendly to refugees. You find that a bit embarrassing. You don't want people to expect you to have the same views as your parents but at the same time you want to show your parents you can think for yourself, and can take care of yourself.

Your parents know your "teacher" and have a neutral relationship with the teacher.

At the start of the roleplay, you meet your mom / dad outside the school at the end of the school day. Suddenly you hear shouting. One of the arguers looks Middle Eastern.



HANDOUT 9

ROLE 8: THE REPORTER

You're a reporter for the local newspaper, and you write about many different things. You've been at the same paper for several years, and so you're well known locally. Local politicians respect you, because they know you're honest and are not afraid to tell the truth. You're worried about what's been going on with the refugee situation in the world and in Finland, including in your own town. You believe that Finland should take in refugees from Syria and other countries where there's war. But you also feel that if they're not helped to fit in here and to the Finnish way of life as soon as possible, there could be problems. You think that Finland's politicians are handling this badly. You're angry at all politicians, and especially at the local "politician". You've been reporting on his / her work for years now. You have seen how many Finns are very unwelcoming to refugees, especially Muslims. You think that this anti-immigrant attitude is just as dangerous as the politicians' mismanagement of the large flow of refugees into the country.

Your child is in "the teacher's" class. You and the teacher don't get along well. The reason for this is a misunderstanding, relating to an argument you had on social media, which was read by many people online.

At the start of the roleplay, you're picking up your child from the school at the end of the school day. Suddenly you hear shouting. One of the arguers looks Middle Eastern.

You realise that given the respect you have in the community you may be expected to act as mediator or a dialogue facilitator if conflicts begin to show in the community. You may need to look for allies or supporters in your effort, or to support others who will try to convene dialogue.



HANDOUT 10

ROLE 9: THE LOCAL POLITICIAN

You ran in the last local elections in your town. You got a lot of votes, and are a politician on the town council. You belong to a traditional Finnish political party.

Ever since you were a child you've loved attention. So now you're able to get plenty of it, while at the same time working to make your town a better place. But since the European refugee crisis started in 2015, your job has become much tougher. Many of the people who voted for you are against refugees, especially Muslims, and they want you to do something about it. But many others who voted for you think you and other politicians should be doing far more to help refugees from Syria and other warzones. You can't please everybody! So have to choose your words extremely carefully, which can be frustrating and draining. If you speak your mind you're going to lose voters, and if you do nothing then things are only going to get worse. The "local reporter" has recently been very critical of you, and wrote that you seem incapable of making decisions. This is a very uncomfortable situation and you're not sure what to do about it.

You've always got on well with "the aid worker" . For many years you've been a supporter of his / her organization. Your child is a student of "the teacher" and you have a neutral relationship with the teacher.

At the start of the roleplay, you're picking up your child at the end of the school day. Suddenly you hear loud arguing near the school. One of the arguers looks Middle Eastern. You realize right away that you're going to be judged publicly for how you handle this situation. The local elections are coming soon, and you can't afford to lose votes. Not taking any action is not an option for you.

The following instructions should be given only to the students with these three roles:

- Teacher (role 3)
- Aid worker (role 6)
- Reporter (role 8)

HANDOUT 11

MORE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE THREE MEDIATORS: THE TEACHER (ROLE 3), THE AID WORKER (ROLE 6) AND THE REPORTER (ROLE 8)

You have a special, public position in the community. So you are expected to be able to do more than others to promote peaceful debate. You can do this together with another person(s), or you can seek specific help and support from other people who you think are in a position to offer it, or you can offer your support to someone else whom you want to encourage to be the dialogue facilitator. Remember that to facilitate and support an effective dialogue in a conflict situation, you need to try your best to do the following.

Work together to think about how you could help here. If you can, try to get others (in the other roles) to help you to work out a peaceful solution to the argument that's broken out. It would be a good idea to follow these guidelines:

- Develop individual relationships with the key people taking part on opposite sides in the conflict. Listen to their concerns, find out what they really need, and invite them to discuss those concerns and needs with other people, with your help. Spend time with people separately until they say that they are ready to talk to each other with your support.
- Once the key people in the conflict are ready to talk together, make sure to find a good place for them to have this discussion. It should be some place neutral, where they both feel comfortable and not threatened in any way. Once you've got them to sit down in this place, talk with them to work out the rules of the discussion. The rules should be fair to everybody involved, and nobody should have any serious problem in sticking to the rules. For example, there must be no shouting, insults or other provocations.
- For the discussion to go well, you need other people to be present as well, not just the key people. Who else should be there? Anybody who's affected by the situation in question. And anybody who could help in some way to reach a peaceful solution. This is called the principle of inclusivity. The key people should be allowed to speak first, but make sure that others get a chance to talk too.
- After a while the opposing sides are hopefully starting to understand each other better. Now it's time to steer the discussion towards finding a solution that everyone accepts.
- Remember that the task of the mediators is to help everyone to agree on a set of rules, and to make sure everyone then follows those rules. It's important that the mediators "stay out" of the discussion. That is, the mediators should keep their own opinions to themselves. They should not take sides. The mediators are not there to judge who is right or who is wrong.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CLOSING DISCUSSION: QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

There are the main features of a good closing discussion:

- It gives everyone involved who took part in the roleplay to express themselves. It's a chance to hear what the others have to say, and to think about the exercise together.
- It's an organized discussion that proceeds one step at a time.
- It should help everyone to work out meaningful and useful conclusions. In other words, what did you learn from the roleplay that could be useful to yourself and your friends and fellow students? How might these conclusions be applied in future situations?


USUALLY IT'S BEST IF THE CLOSING DISCUSSION DEALS WITH THE FOLLOWING THINGS, IN THIS ORDER:

Feelings: The teacher should ask each student how he or she felt about playing the role. If more than one student had the same role, did they agree on how that role should be played? What was easiest about that role, and what was most difficult? Allow the students to express themselves here, since this will help them get the most out of the whole exercise.

Outcome of the roleplay: lead a discussion between the participants on the decisions that they reached while playing their roles. Did they manage to resolve the situation peacefully? Was everybody satisfied with the outcome? If some character was not happy, why not? In this part of the discussion it's a good idea for the teacher to present the various possible outcomes of any negotiation. The possibilities are: one side wins and the other loses; both sides win; or both sides lose; both sides make compromises and reach an agreement that works for them both.

The process: get the students to explain how they arrived at their chosen outcome.

Were all affected people involved? Often solutions are only sustainable if they are reached by involving all the groups interested in and affected by the conflict. What things seemed to work best, and what seemed not to work? How did the mediators (the teacher, the reporter and the politician) feel about their part in the roleplay? Did they succeed in keeping their own thoughts to themselves? Did they treat everyone fairly? Did they make sure everyone got a chance to speak? Did they ask open-ended questions and listened actively? If there were several mediators, did they coordinate? It is often important for dialogue facilitators and conflict mediators to work with the sides of a conflict separately, helping them to understand what they want and don't want, and to only bring them together to talk to each other when they feel that they are ready. When bringing conflict sides together for dialogue



it is important to agree on the rules that everyone will follow during the interaction. During the dialogue, the facilitator should make sure everyone has equal rights and time to speak.

To conclude, it's a good idea to get the students to restate the things they learned from the roleplay that could be most useful to them. It is also useful to discuss what key conclusions can be reached about dialogue as a tool and about what skills we need to learn and practice in order to make use of dialogue in our lives.