



## PARTICIPATION AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE – COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND EMPATHY

### **BUILDING ON STRENGTHS**

Before we can understand how some particular conflict can be solved (e.g. some historical conflict that the students are familiar with), each person must first understand his or her general approach to conflict. In this way each person become better equipped to choose the approach, words and gestures that are most helpful to preventing or solving conflict in a given situation.

### **WHAT THE EXERCISE IS ABOUT**

- Time: 10-15 minutes, with some time for discussion at the end
- The students use different animals as metaphors for identifying and examining their own attitudes towards conflict.
- By developing new metaphors of the same type, students can begin to improve on their attitudes to conflict

### **THE GOALS OF THE EXERCISE**

Each person normally has some specific approach or attitude to conflict that's most characteristic of him or her. Very often this attitude has been learned and developed since early childhood. As we mature and age, we become increasingly capable of explicitly identifying and critically examining this attitude in ourselves. We can then work on adjusting, supplementing or even replacing it as needed. This exercise makes use of different animals as metaphors for identifying and examining each student's own approach towards conflict.

### **HOW THE EXERCISE SHOULD PROCEED**

The exercise can be carried out either as a discussion among the whole class, or by asking the students to consider the topic independently first before discussing it together.

Encourage each student to take a moment to consider whether one or more of the following animals describes his or her own approach to conflict:

- The ostrich: I avoid confrontation and unpleasantness by hiding my head in the sand until the conflict is over, or has passed on by.
- The dog: when caught in a conflict, I creep away and chew on the furniture when nobody is looking.
- The hawk: I glide high above the others and choose my time to swoop in for the kill.
- The coyote: I use my wits to win.

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- The dolphin: I stick around to fight if I really have to, but wherever possible I swim away.

Ask the students to list the characteristics they would most closely associate with an elephant, lion and fox, and / or three or four other animals of their choice. Each of these animals have strengths that can be put to constructive use in solving conflicts. Ask the students to mark the characteristics that they recognize in themselves. For instance:

- The elephant: supportive, trusting, good at adapting and optimistic.
- The lion: is ambitious, competitive, powerful and has unshakeable self-belief.
- The fox: is analytic, cautious, systematic, fair and just.

### **FOR DISCUSSION AT THE END OF THE EXERCISE**

The students should conclude the session by describing how each of these strengths can be best used in conflict resolution. How could they be applied to everyday situations?

*Adapted from work by Joy Pople and Akiko Ikeno*