



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

### **KNOTTED OR NOT?**

The world is a complicated place, and people must live coexist despite their differences of outlook and opinion. At all levels – between friends, in the family, in one’s community, nationally, and internationally – conflicts are more complicated than they might first appear to be. There are usually several parties to a conflict, and several goals, motives and ways of thinking involved. And sometimes the situation can be filled with fear. But if all those who are part of the conflict are willing, they can with the necessary time and effort arrive at a common and peaceful solution.

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

- Time: 15-30 minutes, plus time for discussion afterwards
- The students must work together to guess whether a heaped-up cord or rope contains a knot. To make things more interesting, they must also decide on the consequences of a wrong answer.
- Both the answer and the consequence must be decided on unanimously by the whole class.

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

This exercise can be used to raise questions related to cooperation and problem-solving. If done right, the learning benefits of this simple exercise can be very impressive. The exercise requires the students to reach unanimity on a simple, right-or-wrong matter. As such it exercises their ability to negotiate and compromise towards a common goal.

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

Place a rope or cord (about 6-8 metres long) in a roll or heap on the floor where the students can’t see it at first. If available, a rope with more than one colour is preferable, as it makes the task a bit more difficult. The task is that the students must guess whether the rope has a knot in it. (The answer will be revealed after the class has made its guess by having them pull the rope from both ends).

Before letting the students examine the rope for various angles – without touching it – get them to agree on what the consequence will be for the wrong answer. It could be something that the entire class has to “suffer”.



The group's answer must be unanimous. In most groups, there is at least one person who has an especially strong opinion in one direction or another. You should constructively focus most of your attention on this person or persons.

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

It could happen that the group reaches a unanimous decision by vote. If someone changes his or her mind during the vote, ask why. If the teacher questions the decision of the group, it may even happen that the whole group changes its position.

If someone in the group has a view on the matter that diverges strongly from the rest, ask this person to explain his or her stance. Also ask how this person's position would change, if at all, of you were to appoint him or her group leader with the final say on the decision.

With this exercise, the group usually chooses a fairly minor consequence for the wrong answer. When the students have made their decision, ask any students who have changed their mind the following question. How serious could the consequence have to be for you to stick with the majority opinion and continue to defend it? For example, would a fine of 100 euros be enough to make you do this? Or 1000 euros? How about if the possibility of the majority opinion being wrong would result in someone getting hurt – how would this affect your wish to dissent from the majority view?

*This exercise was developed by Larry Riggs.*