



PARTICIPATION AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE –
COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND EMPATHY

SHORT BRAINSTORMING ROLEPLAYS AND EXERCISES TO GATHER IDEAS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By learning to identify and acknowledge his or her own ways of acting and thoughts, each person can improve themselves and the world around them. Conflict and argument are inescapable parts of human life. And although they cannot always be avoided, they can always be handled so that peace is made and everyone is treated fairly. For this reason, conflict resolution is an essential part of life, and (with the appropriate adjustments for age) can be learned by anyone.

WHAT THE EXERCISE IS ABOUT

- Time: 5-15 minutes per roleplay
- Through group discussion, students describe and examine their own ideas about arguments and conflicts that go on around them
- The discussion can be deepened with various short roleplays

THE GOAL OF THE EXERCISES

These short exercises help students get a better understanding of their own attitudes. This makes it easier to deal with conflicts and disagreements in the world around them.

HOW TO DO THE EXERCISES

This exercise consists of several short segments. Pick and choose from them and arrange them any way you want to suit the time available.

IMAGINE YOU'RE A CONFLICT

This aim of this roleplay is to help students figure out how they behave in arguments and other conflict situations. This allows them to work on improving their approach to disagreements, and to help others solve theirs in ways that are fair to all sides.

The teacher stands in the middle of the room and tells the students:

- Imagine that I'm a conflict. Think about how you usually react when you see



an argument going on, or when you get into an argument yourself.

- Now take a position that shows what your first reaction is to a conflict. Remember that I'm the conflict, so show how you react to me!
- Think about what your body language says about your reaction – do you look afraid, angry, or what? Do you keep your distance from a conflict, or do you get close?

When all the students have taken up their positions as you've asked, ask each one to explain his or her choice of position. For example, one student might want to get as far away from the conflict as possible, whereas another might rush towards it to help sort it out – and some students might even rush to join in! Whatever their choice, this is their chance to talk about it.

The teacher could also ask:

If this were your first reaction, what would be your next reaction now that you've started to think about the conflict?

If there are twenty or so students in the class, this roleplay would take at least half an hour.

MAKE AN ARGUMENT

The goal of this exercise is to help students to understand what different conflicts and arguments are about. Walk in a group and ask the students:

What do you have that you would be ready to fight for if somebody tried to take it away? In other words, what's more important to you than anything else? (This could be some object or something less concrete, such as a relationship or the student's own reputation, etc.)

Then follow up by asking of each student:

Why is this thing so important to you?

Then get the students to name some conflicts that they've heard about (for instance some war that's been mentioned in the newspapers or other media), and ask the group to discuss what these conflicts are about. What things, concrete or otherwise, are being fought over in that situation?

WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH PEACE PROCESS

With the whole class, watch this very short video (4 minutes) about the peace process in Nagorno-Karabakh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3DxALDuBJI>. The video is part of the Peacefall series.

After watching the video, ask the students the following questions:

- What was the message of the video? After the students have responded to this, you can fill them in: the makers of the video are young people who live in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and are living through the conflict. They are the second generation to suffer from that unsolved conflict. They feel that the ongoing conflict has destroyed their parents' lives and their families' livelihoods. They're afraid that if the conflict is allowed to continue, it will do the same to them.
- Get the class to come up with examples of conflicts – at any level, be it personal, local, national or international – that have dragged on (or did drag on, if they are not solved) for longer than they should have been allowed to continue. How did it start, and what's happening in that situation now? Have a discussion with the students about the fact that all conflicts, no matter how big or small, should be solved as quickly as possible. Discuss also the idea that wherever possible conflicts should be prevented from happening – how might this have been done in the examples the students just gave? What sorts of things happen if a conflict is allowed to drag on and worsen?
- Get the students to discuss the idea of stereotyping, and how stereotypes can worsen conflicts and can even cause them. What are some examples of stereotypes? How are stereotypes created and kept "alive"? Get the students to consider the stereotypes that might have been involved in some conflicts that they've been part of. How does a stereotype affect how you see and behave towards the person or people that the stereotype is about? Does it make you – or others – treat that person unfairly, or in a way that you would not like to be treated yourself? With that effect of stereotypes in mind, how do stereotypes affect the ability to solve or prevent conflicts? What examples of international conflicts can you think of that might involve stereotypes? Describe these stereotypes. Are they right or wrong? What stereotypes are common in Finland? How do these affect conflicts or arguments that go on in Finland? How might these stereotypes be avoided or corrected? What stereotypes do you believe in? How does this affect how you treat the people that those stereotypes are about? How could you get yourself to stop believing in this stereotype? How might this change your behaviour?

VIDEO: FIGHTING MATCHSTICKS

With the class, watch this short video (7 minutes) that uses matchsticks to demonstrate how conflicts develop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZDCjIhGJe0>.

Here are some possible topics for discussion after watching the video:

- At what point did the conflict start? What's it about? Get the students to consider the differences between conflict, peace, and violence. (Here you could draw on the ideas of the Norwegian sociologist and peace activist Johan Galtung. His main ideas include the distinction between that Galtung calls negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (cooperation and the relationships that create and maintain the conditions for peace).
- How could the conflict have been stopped? What could have been done to



prevent it from getting worse? Discuss with the class the fact that conflict resolution and conflict resolution can be done at any point in a conflict. But the sooner the conflict resolution process can begin, the better and easier it will be. The longer an argument or other conflict is allowed to drag on, the more likely it is that it will become violent.

- What real-life conflicts did the matchstick animation bring to the students' minds? What real-life conflicts – whether in their own lives or on a larger scale – have developed in this way? Discuss with the class the idea that all conflicts, no matter how big or small, have some important characteristics in common.

The following are some other short exercises that would help students to become more aware and constructively critical of their own ideas on arguments and other conflicts, and their reactions to these.

- Self-defence: Get the students to describe (either orally or in writing) a situation in which they are or have been treated badly in some way. How do they respond to the person or people mistreating them? If the students have difficulty in offering their own examples, some well-known example from the past or present will do fine.
- What would you do if? Ask each student in turn: If you saw a row breaking out between two people who you don't know, what would you do? How would you act?
- Having an argument: Ask each student in turn to complete the following statement: When I have a disagreement or get into an argument with someone, I usually