

Play the game!

“Life is like a game in which God shuffles the cards, the devil deals them and we have to play the trumps.”

Yugoslavian Proverb

THEMES



SPORT



PEACE AND VIOLENCE



GEN. HUMAN RIGHTS

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 3

GROUP SIZE



10-15

TIME



45 MINUTES

- Themes** Sport, Peace and Violence, General human rights
- Complexity** Level 3
- Group size** 10-15
- Time** 45 minutes
- Overview** This is a simulation based on the idea of playing a game of cards. However, not all the players are playing the game fairly. It deals with issues about conflict and conflict resolution.
- Related rights**
- The right to participate in decision making processes
 - Equality in dignity and rights
 - The right to fair treatment under the law
- Objectives**
- To develop insights into how to identify problem and their roots
 - To develop conflict resolution skills
 - To promote participation, co-operation and respect for others.
- Materials**
- A pack of standard playing cards, or other cards, for example for playing “happy families”
 - Role cards
- Preparation**
- Read the information on conflict resolution given below and be clear about the process.
 - Make one copy of each role card, either by hand or with a photocopier.
 - Secretly, and one at a time, choose four participants to take a special role during the activity. Give each of them one of the role cards. Tell each of them that it must be a complete secret

Instructions

1. Call the participants together and ask if anyone would like to join you in a game of cards. Ask them to choose a card game that is simple and generally known, for instance, “snap” or “pontoon”.
2. Check that everyone knows the general rules of the game and if not, go through them briefly (do leave options open for the “rule maker” to play his/her role!).
3. Begin the card game and leave it to run for as long as possible. (Let the players try to develop a mediation process themselves. You should intervene only if the players don’t take the initiative and if things get very heated. Then you should intervene as tactfully as possible and preferably between one round of the game and the next.)
4. After the game has finished, give people time to calm down and get out of role before going on to the debriefing.

Debriefing and evaluation

There will already have been a lot of discussion during the various attempts at reconciliation. Now let people talk about how they feel about the activity and what they learned about mediation and the process of conflict resolution.

- Did they enjoy the activity? What was going on during the game?
- Four people had special roles; who were they and what were their roles?
- What happened when someone disrupted the game the first time? Ask each player in turn to say what they noticed and what they did.
- How did the ideas given to solve the conflicts emerge? And how were they applied?
- Was it frustrating that the facilitator tried to mediate, rather than putting his/her foot down and declaring how the game was to be played?
- Can people identify the steps of the conflict resolution process?
- In real life, what are the pros and cons of trying to solve problems by negotiation rather than by decree?

Tips for facilitators

If the players are themselves trying to develop a means of conflict resolution, then allow them to do so with as little intervention from you as possible! After all, that is the objective of this activity and if participants can develop the skills by themselves, great! If that happens, then be sure to evaluate their approaches during the debriefing.

During the game, try to guide the participants to find their own procedures and solutions bearing in mind the process of conflict resolution, or principled negotiation as it is sometimes called. There are three main stages:

1. Becoming aware of the conflict
 - *Don't argue over positions.* (In this case don't argue over who is right and wrong.)
 - *Identify the problem* (Clarify what happened)
 - *Separate the person from the problem.* (Don't let players exchange insults, but focus on the behaviour that is the problem.)
2. Diagnosing what is wrong and finding possible solutions.
 - *Focus on interests, not positions.* That is, seek common ground. (Do they want to play the game or not?)
 - *Invent options for mutual gain.* Propose solutions that are seen to be fair and will satisfy everyone. (For instance, play the last round again. Ask if it would help to clarify the rules? Should we have a discussion about this? Should we stipulate penalties? Any other ideas?)
3. Applying the appropriate solutions.
 - *Insist on objective criteria.* (In this case define the rules and penalties)
 - *Participation.* Ensure that the disputing parties participate and take responsibility for resolving the problems themselves. Solutions which are imposed are far less likely to work; it is much better for people to be fully involved in finding their own, mutually acceptable solutions.

Be aware that, even though there are three stages in the process of conflict resolution, in practice it is not possible to completely separate them and that it is normal for there to be overlap!

Do not be scared of the level of skills necessary to facilitate this activity: it is necessary neither

Key dates

1st Saturday in July
International Day of
co-operatives

to have a degree in conflict resolution nor to have been able to solve all the conflicts that you have been involved in! To help you develop your own skills, why not do a thought experiment? Think through some of your own personal experiences of conflicts. Reflect on what happened and then try to analyse them within the framework of the three stages described above.

Variations

If the group that you are working with is more than fifteen people, you may split them into subgroups and run two or three games at the same time. But you can only do that if you have the assistance of several co-facilitators! Alternatively you can arrange for some of the group to observe. These people can either act solely as observers and give feedback on what happened in the debriefing at the end, or they can act as mediators, in which case they will probably need some prior guidance from you on how to mediate.

Why not make it a game of pool or snooker? The activity does not have to be run as a card game; other games will do just as well.

Suggestions for follow-up

If the group want to put their skills in principled negotiation into practice, they could do the activity “Let every voice be heard”, on page 153, which is about setting up representative structures in an organisation, for example, a school or club council.

Ideas for Action

Focus on personal change. Encourage people to keep the three stages of conflict resolution in mind when faced with any conflict – of any scale and with anyone, parents, teachers or friends. Arrange to have occasional, meetings to share experiences and to review people’s progress in developing their skills.

Further Information

Conflict is experienced at all levels of human activity from intra-personal to the international. *Conflict resolution* is a comprehensive approach based on sharing mutual problems between the conflicting parties. Resolution of a conflict implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed, changing behaviour so it is no longer violent, attitudes so they are no longer hostile, and structures so they are no longer exploitative. The term is used to refer both to the process (or the intention) to bring about these changes, and to the completion of the process.

The conflict resolution process is designed, firstly, to diffuse the negative emotional energy that keeps the disputing parties apart and, secondly, to enable the disputing parties to understand and resolve their differences in order then to go on to find or create solutions which are mutually acceptable and which address the root causes of the conflict. In recent years, some specialists in the field have begun to use the term ‘conflict transformation’ as shorthand for the long-term and deeper structural, relational and cultural dimensions of conflict resolution. Thus, conflict transformation may be seen as the deepest level of change in the conflict resolution process.

You can find out more about developing conflict resolution skills at www.brad.ac.uk/acad/confres including a self-study course, which is easy, free and very good. The book, “Getting to

Yes” by Roger Fisher and William Ury (Arrow books 1987) is a classic on the subject and is very easy and entertaining to read.

A conflict is: Disagreement or incompatibility of goals by different people or groups. Derived from the Latin *conflictus*, meaning, “to strike together”, it is used to denote both a process and a state of being. “Conflicts involve struggles between two or more people over values, or competition for status power and scarce resources.” (Moore, 1986).

Conflict resolution is based on co-operation.

It is *focused* on the subjective perceptions and long-term view *aims* at removing the causes of conflict and *improves* communication, to develop win-win situations without using coercion

HANDOUTS

Role cards

The Rule-maker

You try to make up new rules for the game. These are not new rules that you discuss and agree with the other players - you just do it on your own initiative! Generally these rules, of course, are to your own advantage!

The rules that you create can be important or unimportant, but you must be insistent and keep saying that you are right and these are the rules of the game!

The Accuser

You are the kind of person who disrupts the game by accusing others of not playing by the rules, taking too long over their turn, not shuffling the cards well enough - or whatever.

You really enjoy stirring things up. A little fight would not be bad at all, so just try to point a finger at innocent people!

The Cheater

You are always cheating in the game; taking an extra card here or there, counting more points to yourself and fewer to others.

Try to start cheating in a very discrete manner; wait a little while before you make it more obvious and provocative. In the beginning you should deny any accusations, but as time goes on you will have to decide how adapt your role, taking into account the discussions and resolutions which have been made during the conflict resolution process.

The Bad Loser

First make sure that you do not win the game; play very badly in every round! However, you should role-play the type of character who likes to win! If you don't, you are a very bad loser... you get mad, and you say and do things to make those who do win feel bad about it (like throwing cards in the air or screaming).