

## 29. Take a Step Forward

We are all equal – but some are more equal than others.

Themes	General human rights, Discrimination, Poverty and social exclusion
Complexity	Level 2
Age	10 – 13 years
Group size	10 – 30 children
Type of Activity	Role play, simulation, discussion
Time	60 minutes
Overview	Children imagine being someone else and consider inequality as a source of discrimination and exclusion
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote empathy with others who are different</li> <li>• To raise awareness about the inequality of opportunities in society</li> <li>• To foster an understanding of possible consequences of belonging to minority groups</li> </ul>
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt the roles and 'situations' to your group. Make a role card for every child.</li> <li>• Copy the sheet of roles, cut out the strips and fold them over.</li> </ul>
Materials	Role cards List of situations Optional: art materials to make name tags and/or pictures



### Instructions

1. Introduce the activity by asking the children if they have ever imagined being someone else. Ask for examples. Explain that in this activity they will also imagine that they are someone else, another child who may be quite different from themselves.
2. Explain that everyone will take a slip of paper with their new identity. They should read it silently and not let anyone know who they are. If a child does not understand the meaning of a word in his/her role card, they should silently raise their hand and wait for the facilitator to come and explain.
3. Discourage questions at this point. Explain that even if they don't know much about a person like this, they should just use their imagination. To help children get into role, ask them to do a few specific things to make the role seem real to them. For example:
  - a. Give yourself a name. Make a name tag with this name to remind you of who you are imagining yourself to be.
  - b. Draw a picture of yourself
  - c. Draw a picture of your house, room, or street.
  - d. Walk around the room pretending to be this person.
4. To further enhance their imagination, play some quiet music and ask the children to sit down and close their eyes and imagine in silence as you read out a few questions such as these:
  - a. Where were you born? What was it like when you were little? What was your family like when you were little? Is it different now?
  - b. What is your everyday life like now? Where do you live? Where do you go to school?
  - c. What do you do in the morning? In the afternoon? In the evening?
  - d. What kind of games do you like playing? Who do you play with?
  - e. What sort of work do your parents do? How much money do they earn each month? Do you have a good standard of living?

**Source:** Adapted from *COMPASS: A Manual on Human rights education with Young People* (Council of Europe, 2002), p. 217.



- f. What do you do in your holidays? Do you have a pet?
  - g. What makes you happy? What are you afraid of?
5. Ask the children to remain absolutely silent as they line up beside each other, as if on a starting line. When they have lined up, explain that you are going to describe some things that might happen to a child. If the statement would be true for the person they are imagining themselves to be, then they should take a step forward. Otherwise they should not move.
  6. Read out the situations one at a time. Pause between each statement to allow the children time to step forward. Invite them to look around to see where others are.
  7. At the end of the activity, invite everyone to sit down in his or her final position. Ask each child in turn to describe their assigned role. After the children have identified themselves, ask them to observe where they are at the end of the activity.
  8. Before beginning the debriefing questions, make a clear ending to the role-play. Ask the children to close their eyes and become themselves again. Explain that you will count to three and then they should each shout out their own name. In this way, you conclude the activity and ensure that the children don't stay caught up in the role.

### Debriefing and evaluation

1. Debrief the activity by asking questions such as these:
  - a. What happened in this activity?
  - b. How easy or difficult was it to play your role?
  - c. What did you imagine the person you were playing was like? Do you know anyone like that?
  - d. How did you feel, imagining yourself as that person? Was it a person like you at all? Do you know anyone like that person?
2. Relate the activity to issues of discrimination and social and economic inequality asking questions like these:
  - a. How did people feel stepping forward – or not?
  - b. If you stepped forward often, when did you begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as you were?
  - c. Did the person you were imagining move ahead or not? Why?
  - d. Did you feel that something was unfair?
  - e. Is what happened in this the activity anything like the real world? How?
  - f. What gives some people in our community more opportunities than others? Fewer opportunities?

### Suggestions for follow-up

The concept of the stereotypes is not easy for many young children to grasp. Reinforce the learning of this activity with others that also develop this idea, such as 'PICTURE GAMES', p. 130; 'WHO'S BEHIND ME', p. 195; 'WORLD SUMMER CAMP', p. 205; and 'ZABDERFILIO', p. 209.

### Ideas for action

Discuss with the children who in their community has more or fewer opportunities. What first steps could be taken to make opportunities more equal for everyone? Are there inequalities in the group or community that the children can address?



## Tips for the facilitator

- Make your own role cards! Those offered here are meant to serve as samples. The closer your role cards reflect the world in which your children live, the more they will learn from the activity.
- Also adapt the roles to avoid embarrassing any child whose personal situation may too closely mirror that of one of the roles.
- Because the facilitator cannot always be aware of every child's personal life situation, a child may be very disturbed or emotionally caught up in one of the roles. The facilitator needs to be very sensitive in this exercise, and to pay particular attention to children who don't manage to drop the role afterwards or who display unusual behaviour. In such a case, the facilitator should try to speak to the child individually.
- It is very important that the children keep silent as they receive their role, imagine the life of the person they will represent, and move forward according to the life of this person. Not only is suspense created about the children's identities, but keeping silent helps maintain the concentration on the role and avoid distractions, and acting out of roles.
- Make sure every child gets a chance to speak during the debriefing. This activity can call up strong emotions, and the more the children can express themselves and their feelings, the more sense they will get out of it. Spend more time on the debriefing if needed.
- This activity can easily be run outside or in a large room. Keep the children in their final positions when they reveal their roles, as young children need visual reinforcement to recognize the disparity and associate it with the person's role. However, to make sure that the children can hear each other in the debriefing discussion, either draw them into a circle or move inside.
- The power of this activity lies in the impact of actually seeing the distance increasing between the participants, especially at the end. To enhance the impact, choose roles that reflect the realities of the children's own lives. Adjust the roles so that only a few of people can take steps forward (i.e. can answer, "Yes").
- During the Debriefing and Evaluation especially explore how the children knew about lives of the person whose role they had to play. Was it through personal experience or through other sources of information (e.g. other children, adults, books, media, jokes)? Challenge them to question whether their sources of information were reliable. In this way you can introduce how stereotypes and prejudice work.
- Children are generally aware that others have materially more or less than they. However, children are often unable to realize their own privileges. This activity can help the children to put their lives into a larger perspective.



## HANDOUT: ROLE CARDS

**Note to facilitator: Make your own cards! The closer they reflect the experiences of your children, the more effective they will be! These are intended only as samples.**

<p>You are eight. You and your two brothers live in a nice house with a big garden and a swimming pool. Your father is the manager of a bank in your town. Your mother takes care of the house and family.</p>	<p>You were born in this town, but your parents moved here from Asia. They run a nice restaurant, and you live in rooms above the restaurant with your sister. You and she help in the restaurant after school. You are thirteen.</p>
<p>You are ten years old. You live in a farmhouse in the country. Your father is a farmer and your mother takes care of the cows, geese and chickens. You have three brothers and one sister.</p>	<p>You are an only child. You live alone with your mother in an apartment in the city. Your mother works in a factory. You are very good at music and dancing. You are nine.</p>
<p>You are a Roma child of twelve. You live at the edge of a small village in a small house where there is no bathroom. You have six brothers and sisters.</p>	<p>You were born with a disability and have to use a wheelchair. You live in an apartment in the city with your parents and two sisters. Both your parents are teachers. You are twelve.</p>
<p>You are eleven. You have lived in an orphanage since you were a baby. You don't know who your parents were.</p>	<p>You are nine years old and have an identical twin. You live in an apartment in the city with your mother, who works in a department store. Your father is in jail.</p>
<p>You are nine years old and an only child. You live in an apartment house in a town with your parents. Your father is a construction worker and your mother delivers mail. You are very good at sports.</p>	<p>You and your parents came to this country to find safety from the war going on in your home country in Africa. You are now eleven and have been here for three years, since you were nine. You don't know when you can go home again.</p>
<p>You are thirteen, the oldest of six children. Your father drives a truck and is away a lot, and your mother is a waitress who often has to work at night. You have to babysit a lot.</p>	<p>Your parents divorced when you were a baby. Now you are twelve. You live with your mother and her boyfriend. At the weekends you visit your father and his new wife and their two small children.</p>



## HANDOUT: ROLE CARDS

You are eleven. You have lived with different foster parents since you were a small child because your parents couldn't take care of you. Your foster parents are nice. Four other foster children also live in the same small house as you.

You are eight. You and your sister live with your grandparents in a small town out in the country. Your parents are divorced and your mother works as a secretary in the city. You rarely see your father.

You have a learning disability that makes you two classes behind in school. You are ten and taller than all the other kids, who are only eight. Both your parents work so they don't have much time to help you with homework.

Your mother died when you were born. Your father remarried and you live with him and your stepmother and her two daughters. You are eight and they are teenagers. Your father is a lawyer.

You are eight and the youngest of three children. Your family lives in a small apartment in a big city. Your father is a mechanic but he is out of work right now, so you don't have much money. But your father has more time to play with you.

You immigrated to this country when you were a baby. Now you are ten. Many other immigrants live in your neighbourhood, where your father has a shop. You speak the languages of both your new and old countries and often translate for your mother and grandmother.

You are eleven years old. You live in a village in the country with your parents and a younger brother and sister. Your parents run a bakery. You are sometimes teased because you are rather fat.

You have asthma and have to miss a lot of school because you are sick, especially in winter. You spend a lot of time at home in bed watching TV, surfing on the Internet and playing with Gameboy. It's lonely because both your parents go out to work. You are thirteen.

You are the child of the American ambassador in your country. You go to the international school. You wear thick glasses and stammer a little. You are eleven.

You and your older brother are very talented at mathematics, physics, languages and, in fact, most things. Your parents are university professors. They send you to special courses and training camps all the time to prepare for competitions.



## STATEMENTS

### Situations and events

Read the following situations out aloud. After reading out each situation, give the children time to step forward and also to look to see where they are, relative to each other.

1. You and your family always have enough money to meet your needs.
2. You live in a decent place with a telephone and television.
3. You are not teased or excluded because of your different appearance or disability.
4. The people you live with ask your opinion about major decisions that concern you.
5. You go to a good school and belong to after-school clubs and sports.
6. You take extra lessons after school in music and drawing.
7. You are not afraid of being stopped by the police.
8. You live with adults who love you and always have your best interests at heart.
9. You have never felt discriminated against because of your or your parents' origins, background, religion or culture.
10. You have regular medical and dental check-ups, even when you are not sick.
11. You and your family go away on holiday once a year.
12. You can invite friends for dinner or to sleep over at your home.
13. When you are older, you can go to university or choose any job or profession you like.
14. You are not afraid of being teased or attacked in the streets, at school or where you live.
15. You usually see people on TV or in films who look and live as you do.
16. You and your family go on an outing to the cinema, the zoo, a museum, the countryside or other fun places at least once a month.
17. Your parents and grandparents and even great-grandparents were all born in this country.
18. You get new clothes and shoes whenever you need them.
19. You have plenty of time to play and friends to play with.
20. You have access to a computer and can use the Internet.
21. You feel appreciated for what you can do and encouraged to develop all your abilities.
22. You think you are going to have a happy future when you grow up.

