

# 7. Boys Don't Cry!

And Girls Are Smarter...



Themes	Discrimination, Gender equality, General human rights
Level of complexity	Level 2
Age	8-13 years
Duration	90 minutes
Group size	8-20 children
Type of activity	Discussion, and statement exercise theatrical presentations
Overview	Children discuss and present their sketch on provocative statements
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss gender stereotypes and gender equality</li> <li>• To promote tolerance</li> <li>• To illustrate how stereotypes create discrimination</li> </ul>
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose 3 statements from the list or create new ones.</li> <li>• Prepare 4 signs: I agree / I don't know / I am still thinking / I disagree.</li> <li>• Place each in corners of the room.</li> <li>• Choose additional statements to use for the sketch and write out on separate slips of paper.</li> </ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Papers for signs, slips of paper for statements</li> </ul>

## Instructions

### Part 1: Taking a Position

1. Explain the first part of the activity to the children:
  - a. The room has been divided into four corners. Each corner is marked with a chart: I agree / I don't know / I am still thinking / I disagree.
  - b. You will read out three different statements, one by one. The children take a position in a corner according to if they agree, disagree, have no opinion, or need more time to think.
2. Read out the first statement and wait till the children have chosen a position. Then ask children from different corners why they choose this position. Invite children to change positions if they change their mind after hearing others' reasons. Repeat this process for all three statements.
3. Bring children back into one group and discuss this part of the activity:
  - a. Did anything about this activity surprise you?
  - b. Why do you think people had different opinions about these statements?
  - c. Did anyone's reasons lead you to change your position? Why?
  - d. How can we know which position is 'right'?

### Part 2: Acting out a Position

4. Divide the children into small groups of no more than five and give each group a different statement. Explain that each group has about fifteen minutes to read their statement, discuss it, and create a short sketch (a mini play) that gives a message about this statement.
5. Ask each group to present their sketch. After each presentation, ask the audience what message they think the presentation was intended to give. Then ask the presenting group what message they wanted to make.



## Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the effects of gender stereotypes, asking questions such as these:
  - a. What was similar about these statements? Do you know of other statements like these?
  - b. Are there different rules and expectations for boys or girls in this group? In the classroom or in school? In the family? Does this make sense?
  - c. Can you think of other ideas about how boys or girls are supposed to be or what they are supposed to do? Do similar ideas exist in other parts of our country? Of Europe? Of the world?
  - d. What happens when a boy or girl doesn't agree with these ideas and wants to be or act differently? Have you ever been in a situation like that? How did you feel? What did you do?
  - e. Do ideas about how males and females are expected to be affect adults as well as children?
2. Relate gender stereotypes to discrimination, asking questions such as these:
  - a. How do these ideas about males and females limit our choices? Can you give some examples?
  - b. How do these limitations affect our human rights?
  - c. What can we do in the future so that boys and girls can act more freely the way they want to?

## Suggestions for follow-up

- The activity 'WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD', p. 182, focuses on appearances and realities.
- The activity 'ONCE UPON A TIME...', p. 125, also deals with gender stereotypes.

## Ideas for action

Develop with the children a kind of personal 'code of conduct' for how people in the group should behave towards each other and how to ensure that girls and boys are treated equally. Mount it on the wall and refer to it when conflicts occur within the group.

## Tips for the facilitator

- Be careful not to reinforce the stereotypes this activity seeks to address. Be aware of your own prejudices and stereotypes relating to gender and how you may convey them to children as a facilitator for the group.
- Choose statements that show how, although girls and boys are physically different, they have equal rights. Choose statements controversial enough to elicit differences of opinions.
- Avoid polarising girls and boys. Depending on the group, you might create single-sex groups or sex-balanced groups for the sketches.
- Parents' attitudes strongly influence those of children. You may hear both positive and negative reactions from parents about this activity.

## Adaptations:

- To shorten the activity run only the part most relevant to your group.
- Rather than creating a sketch, ask the children to make a visual presentation (e.g. a drawing, cartoons, a collage with pictures from magazines, etc).



## SAMPLE STATEMENTS

- Puppets are only for girls.
- Boys don't cry.
- Boys don't wear skirts.
- A girl cannot be the boss.
- Only boys play football.
- Girls are weak and boys are strong.
- Girls help their mothers. Boys help their fathers.
- It is better to be a girl than a boy.
- When something goes wrong, boys are always blamed first.
- Boys can say 'dirty words', but girls can't.
- Girls are smarter than boys.
- Girls win in fights because they fight 'dirty'.
- It is OK for boys to hit each other, but not for girls.
- Boys are lazier than girls.
- Girls are better liars than boys.

