

Boys Don't Cry!

And girls are smarter...



Complexity



6-13 years



60-90 minutes



4-30 children



Discrimination



Gender Equality



Human Rights

Type of activity

Part 1: Discussion activity
Part 2: Drama

Overview

Children discuss gender-related statements and then create a short drama sketch on gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Objectives

- To discuss gender stereotypes and gender equality
- To promote tolerance
- To illustrate how stereotypes can lead to discrimination

Preparation

Select three statements from the list at the end of the activity or create new ones.

Prepare four signs: I agree / I don't know / I am still thinking / I disagree.

Place each one in a different corner of the room.

Choose additional statements to use for the drama sketch and write them out on separate slips of paper.

Materials

Paper and markers for the signs, slips of paper for the statements

Instructions

Part 1: Taking a Position

1. Explain the first part of the activity to the children:
 - Show them the signs in each corner of the room
 - Tell them that you will read out three different statements, one at a time. They should stand in the corner near the sign which best represents their position. For example, if they agree with the statement they hear, they stand next to the sign saying, 'I agree'.
2. Tell the children that they must be honest about what they believe, and should not criticise others for having a different opinion. Everyone should feel free to stand next to whichever sign they most agree with.
3. Read out the first statement and wait until the children have chosen a position. Then ask the children in different corners why they have chosen this position. Invite children to change positions if they change their mind after hearing others' reasons. Repeat this process for all three statements.
4. Bring children back into one group and discuss this part of the activity, using questions such as these:

- Did anything about this activity surprise you?
- Why do you think people had different opinions about these statements?
- Did anyone's reasons lead you to change your position? Why?
- Is there a right or wrong answer to these questions? How do we know?

Part 2: Acting it Out

1. Divide the children into small groups of no more than five and give each group a different statement. Explain that each group has about 15 minutes to read their statement, discuss it, and create a short sketch (a mini play) that gives a message about this statement.
2. Ask each group to present their sketch. After each presentation, ask the audience what message they think the presentation was intended to communicate. Then ask the presenting group what message they *wanted* to convey.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the effects of gender stereotypes, asking questions such as these:
 - Are there different rules and expectations for boys or girls in this group? In the classroom or in school? In the family? Do you think that's right?
 - Can you think of other ideas about how boys or girls are seen or what they are supposed to do? Do similar ideas exist in other parts of our country? Of Europe? Of the world?
 - What happens when a boy or girl doesn't agree with these ideas and wants to act differently or be seen differently? Have you ever been in a situation like that? How did you feel? What did you do?
2. Relate gender stereotypes to human rights and discrimination, asking questions such as these:
 - How do these ideas about boys and girls, or males and females, affect or limit our choices? Can you give some examples?
 - How do these limitations affect our human rights? Which human rights might be affected?
 - What does the human right "to be free from discrimination" mean? Can you think of any situations when girls or boys may be discriminated against because of their gender?
 - What can we do in the future so that boys and girls can act more freely, in the way they want to?

Suggestions for follow-up

The activity 'What a Wonderful World' focuses on appearances and realities. The activity 'Once Upon a Time...' also deals with gender stereotypes.

Ideas for action

Develop with the children a 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 that this activity seeks to address. Be aware of your own prejudices and stereotypes relating to gender and how you may be conveying them to children as a facilitator for the group.

The children may ask for your opinion: try to avoid influencing them or giving them the 'right' answer.

When choosing statements for the group, try to select statements that will elicit different opinions and stimulate discussion among the children.

Avoid polarising girls and boys. Depending on the group, you might decide to create either single-sex groups, or gender-balanced groups for the sketches.

Parents' attitudes strongly influence those of their children. You might hear both positive and negative reactions from parents about this activity.

Adaptations

To shorten the activity, run only Part 1 or Part 2, whichever is most relevant to your group.

Instead of 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

- Pink is for girls and blue is for boys.
- Girls should play with dolls.
- Boys don't cry.
- Boys don't wear skirts.
- A girl cannot be the leader.
- Online games are best played by boys.
- Football is for boys.
- 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'.
- Boys are lazier than girls.
- Girls are better liars than boys.
- Girls care more about beauty than boys do.
- Girls look better than boys.
- Boys are good at building things.