

# Take a Small Step Forward

*We are all equal – but some are more equal than others!*



Complexity



9-13 years



60 minutes



8-30



Discrimination



Poverty



Family and Alternative Care

## Type of activity

Role play, simulation, discussion

## Overview

Children imagine themselves in the role of other children around the world, and compare the difficulties involved in daily life.

## Objectives

- To promote empathy with others
- To raise awareness about equality in dignity as a basis of universal human rights
- To foster an understanding of the challenges often faced by members of minority groups

## Preparation

- Make a role card for each child: copy the page of role cards, cut out the strips and fold each one over.
- Select the roles and cases which are most relevant to your group. Create new roles, if necessary.

## Materials

- A large space so the children can line up next to each other, and take steps forward in a row
- 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 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 what is on their paper. If a child does not understand the meaning of a word in his/her role card, they should 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 their person seem real to them. For example:
  - Give yourself a name. Make a name-tag with this name to remind yourself of who you are imagining yourself to be.
  - Draw or imagine a picture of yourself.
  - Draw or imagine a picture of your house, room, or street.

- 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 the following:
    - 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?
    - What is your everyday life like now? Where do you live? Where do you go to school?
    - What do you do in the morning? In the afternoon? In the evening?
    - What kind of games do you like playing? Who do you play with?
    - What sort of work do your parents do? Do you have a good standard of living?
    - What do you do in your holidays? Do you have a pet?
    - 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 their role.

## Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity using questions such as these:
  - What happened in this activity?
  - How easy or difficult was it to play your role?
  - What did you imagine the person you were playing was like? Do you know anyone like that?
  - How did you feel, imagining yourself as that person? Was the person like you in any way? Do you know anyone like that person?
2. Relate the activity to issues of discrimination and social and economic inequality, asking questions such as these:
  - a. How did you feel stepping forward – or not stepping forward?
  - b. If you often moved forward, when did you begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as you were?
  - c. Which people moved furthest or fastest? Why? Which ones barely moved?
  - d. Did you feel that this was unfair?
  - e. Why do some people in our community have more opportunities than others? Why do some

have fewer opportunities?

- f. Who in your community is likely to stay behind more often? Why?
- g. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) asks governments not to separate children from their parents against their will. In which cases do you think this is acceptable or needed? What can we do to support children with no parents to enjoy all the rights in the CRC?

## 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', 'World Summer Camp' and 'Zabderfilio'.

## Ideas for action

Discuss with the children whether there are groups in this community or country who have more opportunities than most people. Are there groups with fewer opportunities? How could we make opportunities more equal for everyone?

## 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.

Make sure you adapt any roles which might embarrass any of the children, for example if their personal situation mirrors that of one of the roles.

Because the facilitator cannot always be aware of every child's personal life situation, there is a possibility that 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 pay particular attention to children who do not manage to drop out of the role afterwards, or who display unusual behaviour. In such a case, the facilitator should try to speak to the child individually. You could also have a fewer roles in reserve, in case a child does not feel comfortable with his/her assigned role.

It is very important that the children keep silent as they receive their roles, and that they understand the importance of imagining the life of the person they will represent, and then move forward as if they were that person. Not only is suspense created about the children's identities, but keeping silent will help them to maintain concentration and makes distractions less likely, such as people acting out of role.

Make sure that every child gets a chance to speak during the debriefing. This activity can evoke strong emotions, and the more the children can express themselves and their feelings, the more they will gain from 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 recognise the disparity, and associate this with the people behind the roles. 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 but don't mirror them exactly. Adjust the roles so that only a few of the people can take steps forward (i.e. can answer, "Yes") in the majority of situations and events.

During the Debriefing and Evaluation, explore how the children knew about the lives of the person whose role they had to play. Was it through personal experience or through other sources of information, such as other children, adults, books, the media, or 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 have. However, children are often unable to recognise their own privileges. This activity can help the children to put their lives into a larger perspective.

## Variations

The cards and situations can be adapted to address any issues you want to discuss with the children. You could focus more on gender, for example, giving similar cards to a boy and girl. You could also give two similar cards to different children, to explore how each child imagines their role and any differences in the way they deal with the situations.

You could also have a second round of statements after the debriefing to illustrate that children with fewer opportunities may become more competent at certain tasks. Compare the differences between the first round by marking the children's positions after the first round, and then using statements such as the following. You can also ask the children to add their own suggestions to the list.



## 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.



**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 13 years old.**

**You are 10 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.**

**You are an only child. You live alone with your father in an apartment in the city. Your father works in a factory. You are very good at music and dancing. You are 9 years old.**

**You are a child of 12 years old. Your family belongs to the local Roma community. You live at the edge of a small village in a small house where there is no bathroom. You have six brothers and sisters. You have to walk 4 km to school every day.**

**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 12 years old.**

**You are 11 years old. You have lived in an orphanage since you were a baby. You don't know who your parents were.**

**You are 9 years old and have a twin. You live in an apartment in the city with your mother, who works in a department store. Your father is in jail.**

**You are 9 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.**

**You and your parents came to this country to find safety from the war going on in their home country, Somalia. You are now 11 years old and have been here for three years. You don't know if you can go back to Somalia again.**

**You are 13, the oldest of six children. Your father drives a truck and is usually away from home. Your mother is a waitress who often has to work at night. You often have to take care of your younger siblings.**

**Your parents divorced when you were a baby. Now you are 12. You live with your mother and her girlfriend. At weekends, you visit your father and his new wife and their two small children.**

**You are 11 years old. 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 8. 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 has kept you two classes behind at school. You are 10 years old and taller than all the other kids, who are only 8. 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 8 and they are teenagers. Your father is a lawyer.**

**You are 8 years old 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 moved to this country from another country when you were a baby. Now you are 10. Many other immigrants live in your neighbourhood, where your parents have a shop. You speak the languages of both your new and old countries and often translate for your mother and grandmother.**

**You are 11 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 overweight and your colleagues often make fun of you about it.**

**You have asthma and have to miss a lot of school because you are often sick, especially in winter. You spend a lot of time at home watching TV and playing online. It's lonely because both your parents go out to work. You are 13 years old.**

**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 11 years old.**

**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.**

## Situation and events

Read the following situations out loud. 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. Your family always has enough money to meet your needs.
2. You live in a decent apartment, with your own room and easy access to the Internet.
3. You are not teased or excluded because of your appearance or disability.
4. The people you live with ask what you think about major decisions that concern you.
5. You go to a good school and belong to after-school clubs where you can do 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 where you come from, your 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 will be able to go to university or choose any job or profession you like.
14. You are not afraid of being teased or attacked at school or in the streets where you live.
15. You usually see people on TV or in films who look like you and live the same sort of way that 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 are proud of having a really expensive smartphone.
21. You feel appreciated for what you can do and are encouraged to develop all your abilities.
22. You think you are going to have a happy future when you grow up.