

Where Do You Stand?

Vote with your feet!



Complexity



8-13 years



30 - 40 minutes



4-30



Democratic
Citizenship



Participation



Human Rights

Type of activity

Discussion, with some movement

Overview

Children take a physical position in the room in response to a statement and then explain and justify their opinions.

Objectives

- To deepen understanding of participation
- To develop listening skills
- To develop discussion and argumentation skills

Preparation

- Divide the room into two sections and put up signs AGREE and DISAGREE at either end. Use string or chalk to mark the line halfway between the two signs.
- Optional: write the discussion statements on a flipchart, each on a separate page, and place them on the line down the middle of the room.

Materials

- Flipchart or board and pens
- String or chalk
- Paper and markers
- Copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Instructions

1. Tell the children that you are interested in their opinions on some important questions. Explain that you will read a statement, and everyone has to decide whether they agree or disagree with it, and then stand in the part of the room with the relevant sign. The aim of the activity is for them to express their point of view and to try to convince other children to change their opinion and position.
 - No-one should speak until everyone has taken a position.
 - The more strongly you agree or disagree with the statement, the further away from the centre you should stand.
 - No-one can stay on the middle line, but if you cannot decide, or feel confused about a question, you can stay near the middle, on either side of the line.
2. Show the children the first statement and/or read it aloud. Then ask them to decide on whether they agree or disagree and take a position.
3. Wait until everyone has taken a position. Then ask individuals from both sides why they stood where they did. Allow them to explain and discuss their views. Encourage a few different children to express their opinion.

4. After a few minutes, ask any children who have changed their mind as a result of the discussion to move closer towards the sign that best represents their opinion. If several children change positions, ask them which arguments made them change their minds.
5. Continue this process for all the statements.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity using questions such as these:
 - How did you feel doing this activity?
 - Was it difficult to take a position on some of the statements? Which ones?
 - Did you ever alter your position? What made you do so?
 - Are there any statements you are still uncertain about?
 - Would you like to discuss any of these issues further?
 - Did you learn anything new from this activity? If so, what?
2. Relate the activity to the right to participation by asking questions such as these:
 - Are your opinions and ideas taken into account in decision-making at home? What about at school? What about in your community?
 - Point out that every child has the right to participation and read out Article 12 of the CRC.
 - Why do you think the right to participation is important for children?
 - Are there any areas of your life where you would like to have more of a say? Is there anything you can do to change this?

Suggestions for follow-up

At the end of the discussion, divide the children into groups of three or four and give each group copies of the statements used in the activity. Ask each group to reformulate the statements in a way that they all can agree upon. Compare their revised statements.

The activities 'A Constitution for Our Group' and 'Every Vote Counts' explore further the idea of active participation in democratic processes.

Ideas for action

Encourage the children to find ways of participating, for example, voicing any concerns at the school or in their peer groups, or writing letters to local political figures on issues in the community that concern them.

Ask the children to write short articles about participation in their lives (e.g. in the family, in clubs, at school, in the community). Publish these articles as a group newspaper. Print it out and display it for others or post the articles online as a newsletter, blog or social media page. Ensure you have parent or guardian permission before publishing children's work online.

Tips for the facilitator

Make sure that all the children, even the quieter ones, have a chance to express their opinion – you may want to call on them directly. You could use a fake microphone to improve discussion and communication.

Discussion time on each statement should be limited so that the activity does not become too long. Use fewer statements, if necessary, or ask for only one or two opinions on some of the statements.

Simplify the statements, if necessary, so they are appropriate for your children.

To keep the children alert, encourage stretching or do a quick energiser between questions.

You may want to create a mock TV show with special jingles, fake microphones, a clock for keeping the time, a bell for the changing statements, and/or a poster of clapping. Children like it when activities are played as a game, and will take the challenge in a more committed way.

The human rights themes can be adapted according to the statements and the questions you want to focus on in the debriefing.

Adaptations

For older children:

Use four corners to incorporate more gradations of opinion (e.g. Completely Agree, Mostly Agree, Mostly Disagree, Completely Disagree).

Variations

Simplify the statements or make them relevant to the children's local context.

Develop statements on other children's rights themes (e.g. rights to association, equality, information, environment, Family and Alternative Care).

Sample statements

All children, even the youngest, have the right to express their opinion on matters affecting them.

Parents know what is best for children. Children have no right to make decisions concerning the family.

It can be dangerous for children to express their views on school issues.

Only older children should be able to take decisions relevant to their lives.

Every child has an equal right to participate in the school parliament / student council.

Children who misbehave lose their right to decide about issues relevant to their life.

To participate at school means to talk a lot in class.

If a child's parents are separating or divorcing, the children should have the right to express their views during the legal process.

Children should be consulted on questions that impact the environment and nature.

All children in school should be consulted about when school should start and when the holidays should start.