

# **Build Bridges, Not Walls: 97 Exercises in Human Rights, Multicultural Understanding and Peaceful Conflict Resolution**

*Name of organizations:*

**Human Rights Academy (Menneskerettighetsakademiet)  
The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Den norske Helsingforskomité)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fundamentally, “Build Bridges, Not Walls” reflects a humanist perspective whereby freedom, dignity and responsibility are central values, and where the aim is to develop the “whole” person. The fundamental principle is that all participants are of equal worth and that individual differences and requirements shall be accepted and valued. Each individual shall seek to be understood on his or her own terms. No one shall have an elevated position in comparison with others, not even the leader, who should instead take the role of organizer and “the first amongst equals”.

Participatory pedagogy is a suitable method of training from a humanist perspective. The method emphasizes communication and cooperation and minimizes one-sided arrangements and lectures from the leader. Learning takes place in a group setting where the individual’s experience and skill are not only relevant but also actively used. Community learning builds on an acceptance of learning as a social process. Knowledge, values, attitudes and responsibility are assimilated through group-based activities and ideas are learned in context, not only through individual processes.

Because every person experiences the world in his or her own way, seeing things from others’ perspectives is an important part of community learning. It forms a mutual dependency where knowledge is shared and people learn from each other. The training thus develops themes of communication and awareness and mutual responsibility. Community learning should therefore be used in contexts where the aim is for people to get to know one another, as is most often the case in a multicultural context.

In order for education based on participatory pedagogy to function optimally, it must be valued as relevant and meaningful by those who take part. Therefore, certain perspectives should be emphasized and integrated into the exercises. When training is experience-oriented, one learns from participating directly in the exercise, whether it is group work, role-play, investigation, discussion, reflection, energy charging or other activities. When personal competence is made relevant, it becomes easier to gain new understanding. The training should also be reality-oriented as much as possible and make clear connections to participants’ everyday life. Finally, it should be future-oriented as it forms readiness to act. Even difficult themes such as racism, discrimination, prejudice, war, conflict, hunger and poverty can be linked to possibilities for positive change.

Learning gained from the training can lead to self-realization and identity building and thereby contribute to maturity. People become mature when self-experience no longer is dependent on how others define them but is managed by themselves. It is often said that formal education aims to prepare young people for the future. But it is

also important to remember that children and young people should learn for the present and to master their everyday life.

## **THE FIGURE EXERCISE**

Participants form two concentric circles, with an equal number in each. They stand facing one another, with a gap of one metre between them. Those standing in the innermost circle will stand perfectly still at the start, while those standing in the outermost circle will “shape” the others by rearranging their arms, legs, hips, heads and so on. When one participant has made a figure out of the other, he or she walks to the next participant and continues the exercise. Those who are shaped must freeze in position until the next participant comes and shapes them differently. After about five minutes the participants will change places, so that those who stood innermost shall now stand outermost and be those that will shape the figures. The exercise continues for approximately another five minutes.

Questions for summary and analysis: How did the participants feel while shaping the others? How did they feel being shaped themselves? What did they take the most care over: shaping others or being shaped themselves? Why? What conclusions can we draw from this?

The exercise illustrates that people, through contact and being together, shape each other. We are affected by others and to a large extent are “products” of other people. Therefore, we should take care of each other and influence each other in positive ways. The exercise can readily be adapted to themes dealing with identity and multicultural practices.

# THE NEW PLANET

## ***Theme***

Introduction to human rights

## ***Aim***

To think about what rules are necessary to safeguard our world and form good societies. Awareness that human rights are rules that exemplify these objectives.

Rules are often thought of as things that set limits on our development. With further thought, we discover that rules are important in order to safeguard human justice and give protection. Throughout human history, laws and rules governing how people should conduct themselves in society have existed. Without rules and law, societies would be abandoned to the law of the strongest. Power, not the community's best interests, would dominate. Laws and rules are therefore necessary to ensure stability, predictability and peace. Some philosophers have called such rule a "social contract", whereby the individual person gives up some of his or her rights in exchange for protection and stability. But what kind of rules do we really need?

## ***Practical exercise***

The activity starts with a brief introduction by the leader followed by the initial exercise. When completed, the small groups reassemble for a large group session, including a lecture and additional group work. Although it is possible to do the constituent parts separately, it is recommended to do them together.

**Time** three hours

**What is needed?** A large room with ample space for group work, large sheets of paper, pen and paper, a copy of the Universal Declaration for each participant

**Preparation** A lecture on the history of human rights and the Universal Declaration's origins and content (20-40 minutes.)

## ***Method***

1. The leader organizes small groups and introduces the task:

A catastrophe has happened on Earth and all life has been wiped out. You are the only lucky people to get a place in a spaceship that is on its way to an entirely new planet. The planet strongly resembles Earth, with mountains, water, plains, oceans and an atmosphere you can breathe in. There is nature, forest, grass, fruit trees, vegetables and animals. The only thing that is not there is people. So you are the first. But afterwards, you will settle there and multiply. As the first people to occupy this planet, you have the privilege to decide what rules shall be in force. This is your task: to agree on 10 rules that will apply to all people on the planet so that they can live a good life. It is important that in your group you discuss and agree upon the rules. The rules will be written on a big piece of paper; you can assign a name for the new planet. (30 minutes.)

2. Everyone comes together in a large group session. At this time, the small groups will present the rules they developed and the rationale they used to construct those rules. During the presentation, the leader should encourage reflection. The groups will probably have chosen some rules that are the same. To reduce repetition the leader can choose to let the groups only present some of their rules and defer a more in-depth discussion of them for later. This allows for all groups to have input and avoid unnecessary repetition.
3. The leader lectures on the history of human rights and presents the Universal Declaration; everyone receives a copy. (20-45 minutes.)
4. The participants shall now work in their small groups again. The task is to compare their own planet's rules with the articles in the Universal Declaration. Which articles regulate the same things as their own rules do? The number of the articles should be written alongside the rules, preferably with a different color pen. (30 minutes.)
5. When the break-out groups have finished, everyone returns to the large group for a summary presentation. The participants will probably have discovered that many of their own rules are in accord with the contents of the Universal Declaration. This is a good opportunity to look in more detail at different articles in order to be more familiar with them.

## ***Conclusion***

Human rights represent values and norms that are common to human society the world over. When the Universal Declaration was adopted in 1948, human rights became a universal responsibility for the first time. The UN member states then declared that they would work to protect and promote human rights for all people. The Universal Declaration formed the starting point for building an expansive system of human rights.

**“Human rights are the foundation for humanity’s existence...Human rights are what makes us human.” Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General.**

## **THE DIALOGUE EXERCISE**

### ***Theme***

Dialogue, argumentation, formation of opinions

### ***Aim***

Awareness that we form our opinions through conversation, reflection and argumentation with other people. Communication with others leads to self-development.

Opinions determine behavior. We acquire opinions through learning, reading, seeing and experiencing, and not least through dialogue with other people. Meeting people who have particular competencies is an opportunity to learn. Likewise, meeting people who have opinions different from ours provides an invitation to think and perhaps to reevaluate our own point of view. With that, changing your mind can mean that you have learned something new – that you have become wiser. When did you last change your mind?

How do I know that I am right before I have listened to all your arguments?

Dialogue between two people is the smallest unit in a society where cultural exchange takes place.

### ***Practical exercise***

This is an exciting task where participants take positions on and argue for a variety of assertions. In the course of the discussion, they have the opportunity to change their position. The task is recommended for participants who already know each other a bit and have developed a certain confidence in the relationship.

**Time** 45 minutes

**What is needed?** A large room, three large sheets of paper (on the first a big YES is written, on the second is a big NO and on the third is a big DON'T KNOW.)

**Preparation** The leader must have prepared a list of statements.

### ***Method***

1. The leader places the sheets with YES and NO at either side of the room. The sheet with DON'T KNOW goes in the middle. The leader asks the participants to prepare to take positions in relation to the statements that the leader will announce. Those who agree with an assertion position themselves near the YES sheet. Those who disagree position themselves near the NO sheet. Those who are uncertain position themselves near the DON'T KNOW sheet. The

leader then reads the first statement, and participants group themselves according to their opinions, as directed. The leader creates the opportunity for reflection and asks some of those who agree with an assertion to give their reasons. This, in turn, gives the other side something to argue against. Participants can change their minds whenever they like and go from the one standpoint to the other. All sides must have the opportunity to explain why they think as they do, including those who don't know. When someone has changed sides, it is important for the leader to ask why. Discussion of individual assertions should last for as long as participants are interested (often between 5 and 15 minutes. This time allotment generally allows discussion of between four and six assertions). Agreement is not an objective. The leader concludes the exercise when he/she senses participants are satisfied with overall discussion and sharing of differences.

### ***Thinking points***

- What do you think of this exercise?
- What was it like to change sides? Was it difficult?
- Were you able to formulate your point of view clearly?
- Did you think about going over to the other side because you were alone or almost alone on your side?
- Did you manage to convince anybody else to come over to your side?
- Why do we want to have others in agreement with us?
- How do we influence each other through dialogue and discussion?
- Is dialogue the best way to resolve disagreements and problems? Why or why not?

### ***Conclusion***

Through dialogue and discussion we learn from each other, about each other and about ourselves. We influence each other collectively. Just as I myself am influenced, so I can influence others. In everyday life, conversation is the tool we use to exchange knowledge, experience, ideas and even nuances of culture. Dialogue is the best way to resolve conflict.

### ***Suggestions for statements to discuss***

1. Marriage between two people who belong to different cultures cannot be recommended.
2. The individual's happiness is more important than the family's happiness.
3. Mothers should be at home for the first three years of a child's life.
4. Homosexuals should have the right to marry (and/or to adopt children.)
5. When a war is over, all refugees must return to their own country.
6. Torturing terrorists should be allowed.
7. Freedom of expression should always be restricted.
8. Islam and democracy are incompatible.
9. A society ought to use the death penalty.
10. Women should have the right to abortion on demand.

### **The exercise's second stage (optional)**

If everyone agrees with the conclusion from the first part of the exercise (that dialogue is the best way to resolve conflict), the game can be continued, preferably after a fifteen-minute break. The objective is to become aware that attitudes must be followed up with actions.

### ***Practical exercise***

1. Participants arrange themselves in two rows, face to face. The distance between them is about a metre. The leader explains the task. Everyone who is standing in the first row shall move the others to back up against the wall. The second row shall do exactly the same. Movement will start when the leader counts to three: one, two, three! If all goes as expected, the task ends in chaos, with people trying to shove one another against the wall using force.
2. After a few minutes, the leader signals the exercise to a close. When participants have calmed down, the leader takes one of them, and in a calm and pleasant manner, moves the person selected (perhaps using "a dancing approach") first towards one wall and then toward the other wall.
3. Participants then come together to reflect on the last exercise. Why did they use not dialogue, but instead power and strength to complete the task? The previous exercise led to the conclusion that we should resolve challenges with dialogue and not strength. Why didn't we do that this time?

### ***Conclusion***

We usually act inside the boundaries to which we are accustomed. We don't always rise above the authorities and raise questions about orders. We are obedient and, as a rule, do as we are asked without asking "why?" These two exercises show that there is a vast difference between being *aware of* an idea or value on the one hand, and on the other hand of so *integrating* this idea or value into our personality that we practice what we have learned. We must constantly work with ourselves and practice the values that we stand for.

### ***Variation***

The discussion exercise that follows is well suited to taking up particular themes of interest. It is important that the leader has prepared relevant statements for reflection beforehand. The statements included below pertain to immigrants and their rights and responsibilities.

### ***WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGES?***

- In a multicultural society it is sometimes necessary to limit the opportunities for seeking residency permits.
- Immigrants should be allowed to uphold their culture and way of life even though they live in Norway.
- Immigrant women should be given priority when they look for work in Norway.

- Norwegian media are unfair towards immigrants.
- Immigrant cultures lead to positive diversity in Norway.
- Religion simplifies meeting people from different cultures.
- Muslims should have the right to have their own schools in Norway.
- Religion and the state should be separate.
- All religions should have an equal place in school education.
- Religious texts should have priority over the laws of state.

# QUIZ ABOUT TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SOCIETY

## ***Theme***

Culture

## ***Aim***

Awareness of differences between “traditional” and “modern” society

In the Norwegian multicultural reality, people from so-called “traditional” and “modern” cultures are brought together. Modernization is a concept that is often used to describe the development a society goes through when large changes happen as a consequence of industrialisation, communication technology, secularization and so on. It is possible to express the traditional within modern society, while expressions for the modern may be found within the traditional. Clearly, not all people in a society have the same way of life and practice the same traditions and customs. Many variations exist. How do differences between the traditional and modern cultures express themselves in practice?

## ***Practical exercise***

The exercise is particularly aimed at groups that are partly from a minority background. First, participants will fill in a questionnaire. Then the large group will discuss how questions were answered. The exercise should not become a “competition” between cultures.

**Time** 1 and ½ hours

**What is needed?** A large room, a questionnaire for each participant, writing materials and a blackboard

## ***Method***

1. The leader distributes the questionnaire, which deals with typical, difficult features relative to traditional and modern cultures (an example questionnaire form is included below). Participants fill out the form as best they can and answer as honestly as possible. The leader emphasizes that no answer is “more correct” or “better” than others. While completing the form, talking is not allowed. (30 minutes)
2. The entire group comes together to reflect.

## ***Thinking points***

- What was it like to answer the questions? Were there particular questions that you could not answer? Why?

- Did people from the same cultural background always give the same answer? What does this show? (Even though people belong to the same society, they can have different opinions and live differently within it.)
- What do you identify as the most positive and negative features of the traditional societies? Why?
- What did you find to be the most positive and negative features of the modern societies? Why?
- In what ways are we influenced by the expression of both modern and traditional society in Norway? At school, the workplace, in free time and otherwise in daily life?
- Are there elements within the traditional culture that were widespread in Norway in earlier times, for example 200, 100 or 50 years ago?
- What does this explain to us?

## ***Conclusion***

Large variations between cultures, especially between so-called “traditional” and “modern” societies, can be found. Moreover, there can even be wide variations within a single culture. In Norway many immigrants come from a traditional society and whose values and customs are different from those of their new country. It could be said that they stand with a foot in each culture. All human cultures have fine and exciting elements within them, but they can also have negative aspects.

The following questions can further the discussion:

The typical nuclear family in my homeland consists of:

Father, mother, child

Father, mother, child, grandparents, uncles and aunts

When I, as a young person, meet someone that I haven't met before, I address him or her:

By name

As uncle or aunt

For us, the elder brother has more responsibilities at home than the younger children:

Yes

No

To disagree with an adult is:

Quite all right

Shows a lack of respect

When somebody is late for a meeting:

They will telephone and let us know

They probably won't do anything

When someone is buying a house, he or she:

Gets a mortgage or a loan from the bank

Borrows money from family or friends

When someone is ill, they get assistance from:  
The health insurance provider  
The family

When parents get old and ill they live:  
In an old people's home or a nursing home  
With their family

In my homeland, the most important thing is:  
The individual  
The family

In my homeland:  
There is equality of status between old and young  
The elderly get the most respect

In my homeland:  
Young people decide for themselves and are listened to  
Young people must be obedient

In my homeland, girls and boys are:  
Of equal status and can freely choose what they want to do  
Not of equal status and cannot freely choose what they want to do

In my homeland, girls and boys:  
Can have gym together  
Cannot have gym together

My parents (and sometimes aunts and uncles):  
Do not choose whom I will be together with  
Choose whom I will be together with

Homosexuality is:  
Accepted and respected  
Not accepted

Girls:  
Can have sex before marriage  
Cannot have sex before marriage

Boys:  
Can have sex before marriage  
Cannot have sex before marriage

The housework is done:  
By both men and women  
Only by women

When I am 17 years old:  
I will be able to go where I want and to be out late at night

I will have to ask permission from my parents to be able to go out

If I get married and have marital problems:

We will go to professional counselling

We will go to the family for help

When I am an adult, I:

Do not have responsibility for my parents

Have responsibility for and must take care of my parents

## **CONFLICTS- ONLY NEGATIVE?**

### **Theme**

Conflicts

### **Aim**

Awareness that conflicts can have positive aspects and involve possibilities for growth and development for both individuals and society.

What do you associate with the word “conflict”? For the majority of us the concept sparks negative associations. We associate conflict with war, difficulties and disagreement, things we really want to avoid. If we think more about it, might we discover that conflict also has positive aspects? Conflicts are a natural part of life. They occur because people are different and have varying interpretations of events, subjects and things. Conflicts can therefore be an expression of our ability to supplement one another at school, at work and in daily life. If we become aware that we have a lot to gain from managing conflicts instead of giving way under them, we can open the way for large personal gains.

### **Practical exercise**

The activity begins with individual thought, followed by conversation and summing up in a large group discussion.

**Time** 45 minutes

**What is needed?** A blackboard or a large sheet of paper and writing materials

### **Method**

1. The leader asks participants what feelings come to mind when they think about the word “conflict”. After one or two minutes of quiet reflection, the participants will discuss this question. It is important to let everyone voice his/her ideas. The answers will probably show that the concept of conflict is for the most part negatively loaded.
2. The leader asks participants to think about whether conflicts can also have positive aspects. Are there opportunities for development; can conflicts lead to anything good? The participants form groups, which will write down five positive things about conflicts.
3. While participants reconvene as a large group and discuss their ideas, the leader will note the positive aspects on the blackboard. If they do not come up with the points below, the leader may supply them. Conflicts can:

### ***Form identity***

Conflicts lead to the formation of people’s identities. When children are growing up, they define and develop their identity through disagreement and conflict with parents, siblings and others. “I want to play outside! I don’t want to visit Grandma! I want the yellow dress, not the green! I don’t want to play with dolls! I want to play football!” Through conflict, points of view are indicated. We have all heard of “the nice girl who is a bit of a wallflower.” It is healthy to mark our identity. From it we can say who we will be!

### *Be a source of personal growth*

Conflicts arise because other people think differently from you. Perhaps their point of view is more valid than yours – because they have another type of knowledge or experience? By being open, humble and listening to others we can learn new things and grow as individuals.

### *Demonstrate strong interpersonal relationships*

We often get the angriest with the persons who make us the happiest. Being honest and saying when we don't agree demonstrates important and strong interpersonal relationships.

### *Form new relationships and friendships*

Individuals and groups that do not know each other can develop common interests and friendships through resolving conflict. Conflicts thereby can create common ground and build new relationships.

### *Positive changes and progress in society*

It is only through experiencing conflicts and problems that new solutions and methods of working are reached. Our whole democratic social law is really just one big conflict-handling mechanism. The Storting, government, courts of law, free press and media are by their very nature neutral tools (rules of the game, in a way) which those with different ideas can use to promote their points of view. In this way, conflict and disagreement are handled in a peaceful manner and give rise to compromises and solutions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is also a result of conflict, namely the Second World War, the largest conflict of the previous century.

### **Thinking points**

- Have you personally experienced conflicts leading to something positive? Explain!
- Have you ever learned something from a conflict? Gained knowledge and competence?

### **Conclusion**

Conflicts can lead to pain and difficulty. But they can also have positive aspects. They can lead to personal growth and contribute to new friendships and relationships. On a societal level, conflicts lead to the development of new laws and rules, and to people finding more peaceful ways to live together. When problems arise and disagreement shows itself, we begin to search for solutions. If we pretend in spite of this that the conflicts do not exist, they will continue to show up at regular intervals. They seldom resolve themselves. It is important to have a condition of awareness of conflicts, so that we manage them constructively.

Conflicts that are managed well lead to better solutions, new developments and progress. It pays to be constructive and look for possibilities.

The following quote from Johan Galtung presents a final and challenging insight:

“ ‘People free from differences exist. They are called corpses,’ say the Chinese. Life, language and difference belong together. ‘Conflict prevention’, to

prevent conflict, is meaningless. ‘Violence prevention’, to prevent violence, has meaning of the highest degree.”