

“Safe place” | Establishing a good working atmosphere

Short description	The participants discuss, negotiate and reach an agreement on the rules of conduct for interaction within the group. In the course of the project they will frequently be called on to express their personal opinions and there will be many discussions. Adopting a critical but constructive and respectful attitude towards one another will make it easier for the participants to stand up in front of the group and express themselves.
Topics	The group and me, assuming responsibility, showing consideration for others
Learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing personal needs and concerns • Showing consideration for other people and their needs when interacting with them
Setting	Whole group
Time frame	30 - 40 min
Materials	1 rope, paper slips, flip chart paper, flip chart markers (different colours)
Instructions	<p>The establishment of a good culture of discussion and what is termed a “physically, emotionally and intellectually safe place” is a subject to which Hawaiian professor of philosophy for children Thomas Jackson has devoted a great deal of attention. The importance for children and young people of feeling physically and emotionally secure is something that is undisputed. Jackson uses the term “intellectual safety” to mean that no one should have the feeling that his or her contributions are too small or unimportant to be imposed upon the discussion group. A place that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe thus provides a forum for creative, unbiased and unconventional thought and expression. And it is precisely this kind of thought and expression that allows participants in this project to get to the bottom of questions that are important for humanitarian aid and, in particular, for understanding the Humanitarian Principles. Or, to put it in Jackson’s words: “To scratch beneath the surface”.</p> <p><i>How does this exercise work?</i></p> <p>The whole group, including the teacher, sit in a circle (without tables). In front of the participants’ feet there is a rope on the ground, which serves to mark out more clearly the circle that has been formed. Each of the students says what he or she would need in order to feel as safe and as uninhibited as possible when standing before the class. The use of a symbol that is passed from one participant to the next to indicate who has the floor at any given time (e.g. a ‘talking stick’) can be helpful in this context. The different personal needs and concerns that have been expressed are then written down on small (green) slips of paper and placed in the centre of the circle. These then serve as the basis for coming to an agreement on the rules of conduct in the group. The rules are to be written out on a large poster, which will be hung on the wall in the classroom and</p>

signed by all of the participants. The activity can be concluded by having each of the participants take his or her place alone in the centre of the circle and telling the group with as much self-confidence as possible something that he or she considers important.

Outlook:

Particularly in the second module, in which the students will be called on to reflect upon their own values and the values of the other participants, it can be helpful and very instructive for the students to refer back to the rules of conduct that were discussed and agreed on in this earlier learning stage. In addition, this exercise can be brought into connection with any other development topics that may have already been dealt with in the class/group at an earlier time.