

Confrontation with a “dilemma story”

Short description	Finally, continuing their work the participants deal with a real “dilemma story” and a situation involving many challenges for the observance of the humanitarian principles. They take into account the connection established between their personal values and the principles.
Topics	Humanitarian Principles, Humanitarian actions, personal values, reflection
Learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of group exchanges • Recognition of the challenges involved in application of the principles
Setting	Small group, 2 participants
Time frame	30 - 45 min.
Materials	Selection of “dilemma stories” (see annex), personal project diary
Instructions	<p>These activities can also be rescheduled, for example before or immediately after the intensive exchange with a humanitarian aid specialist (exercise 3.3). The aim is to achieve a clearer or more solid understanding of the fact that, while it is of crucial importance, respect for and observance of the humanitarian principles is often also extremely challenging. While in their reflection on the principles the participants should indeed develop optimistic impressions, they should not come away with their minds filled with unrealistic and overly harmonious images. The differentiated approach adopted throughout the learning process enables the participants to deal with this ambivalence. Behind these testimonies is the idea that through serious confrontation with the realities one can reach “genuine” personal standpoints, opinions and even intentions. The two participants read the selected or assigned “dilemma history” to each other, so that the history is read and heard twice over. Subsequently they discuss the situation described, focusing on the roles and behaviour of the actors. Their findings are recorded in the project diary. Conclusion with short presentations in the plenum is optional.</p> <p><i>Outlook:</i></p> <p>This sequence also serves the desired purpose of individualization and consolidation of the mental preparation for Module 4 (opinion forming and intention development) which applies to personal opinion forming.</p>

<p>Annex (Source: ICRC EHL)</p>	<p>Introduce the concept of dilemma</p> <p>Use familiar sayings to illustrate the concept of a dilemma.</p> <p>For example, “I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t” or “Between a rock and a hard place;” add something from your students’ local culture.</p> <p>Encourage students to suggest what a dilemma is. Ask them to give examples, and explain why certain examples are dilemmas.</p> <p>Identify the main features of a dilemma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a situation that requires making a choice among alternative actions (including choosing to do nothing); • all options have advantages and disadvantages. <p>Point out that in a dilemma, even “making the best of a bad situation” may seem impossible because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every option seems likely to cause problems; • the consequences of all available options are uncertain. <p>Use one of the stories in the module or a dilemma contributed by the students themselves. Have students propose several actions in response to the dilemma. Then, for each action, use these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the desired consequence of your proposed action? • Might there be other consequences? (Explore the chains of consequences that might result.) • What are the unknown or unpredictable elements in the situation? <p>Who else is involved? How will they be affected by your action? How will they view your action? How will the views of others affect the outcome?</p> <p>Example: “He was having some fun”</p> <p>During apartheid in South Africa, Wendy, who is white, was trying to visit a black friend who had been imprisoned for his political activity. She was told by the whites in charge of the prison that whites are never allowed to visit blacks there. She went to the prison’s commandant, who invited her into his office. Perhaps because her husband was the editor of one of the city’s newspapers, he agreed to let her see her friend. She returned to the entrance passage of the prison to wait for the friend she hoped to visit. This is her account of what happened next.</p> <p>As I waited, I noticed a young black prisoner in prison khaki shorts and overshirt standing a little way down the passage. He looked anxious and submissive – the look of someone waiting to accommodate the mood or whim of the white ‘Baas’.* He stood there as if he had been told to stand there and wait. A white warder appeared, and as he strolled past the prisoner, he suddenly made a threatening lunge at him and started shouting at him.</p>
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There was no anger in this warder – he was merely having some fun. The prisoner's arms lifted at once to shield his body from the blows he expected from the warder. One arm curved around the stomach and the other rose to the head, and the prisoner stammered out answers to the questions and taunts being thrown at him.

Then the warder strolled on, walking toward me. He saw me staring at him and, as he looked at me, I realized that not only was there no shame, but that in his eyes, my white skin made me an automatic accomplice in what he had just done.

He strolled past, bored, disappeared for a few moments and then came back toward the black man. As he got near, the black man started cringing, his arms taking their protective positions again. The warder was enjoying himself hugely. The audience (me) was making it that much more pleasurable for him.

* 'Baas', the person in charge, came to mean 'oppressor' in the context of apartheid.

Source: Donald Woods, *Biko*, Paddington Press Ltd, London, 1978.

Related Question:

What do you think Wendy should do?

Possible point of view to consider:

- The guard's
- The prisoner's
- Wendy's imprisoned friend's
- The prison commandant's

Key ideas

- A bystander's dilemma
- In many humanitarian acts, people face a dilemma of choosing whether or not to protect someone's life or human dignity when doing so may involve personal risk or cost to themselves or to those they are trying to protect.

Either choice can have complex and long-term consequences for all involved.

Dilemma Worksheet

Situation:		
Problem:		
Possible action:	Reasons for choosing it:	Reasons for choosing it:
Possible action:	Reasons for choosing it:	Reasons for choosing it:
Possible action:	Reasons for choosing it:	Reasons for choosing it:
The action we took:	Reasons:	