




8. NOT RIGHT OR WRONG: IT'S A MATTER OF PERCEPTION!

Preventing and resolving conflict by communicating clearly

Targeted competency(ies) (ÉKIP, WHO)	COMMUNICATING PROBLEM-SOLVING
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	COMMUNICATING APPROPRIATELY PROBLEM-SOLVING USING CREATIVE THINKING COOPERATING ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL
General workshop objectives	<p>AT THE END OF THE WORKSHOP, THE STUDENT WILL BE ABLE TO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand how conflicts develop • understand how their own attitudes and behaviours affect their conflict management style • use positive conflict management strategies, including communication and compassionate listening

Total duration

60-MINUTE version, follow all steps

40-MINUTE version, DO NOT do the activities marked with the  icon

Materials and preparation

Print the *Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise* worksheet (1 per student)

DIGGING DEEPER

Perceptions

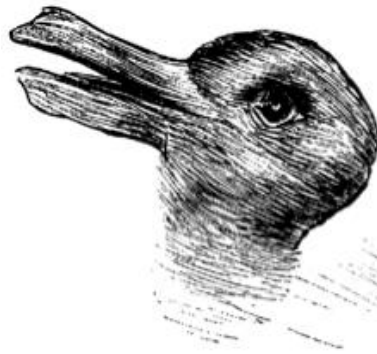
Our experiences are seen through the filter of our perceptions. Since no one has exactly the same life experience, no one perceives things, people, or situations in exactly the same way. The natural human tendency to categorize things (good vs. bad, pleasant vs. unpleasant, safe vs. dangerous) sometimes leads to stereotypes and prejudices. Also, when we communicate with others, our “filters” can distort the messages, a bit like static on the phone line, which risks creating misunderstandings and conflicts.

(Fiske and McCrae, 2012; Eberhardt, 2019)

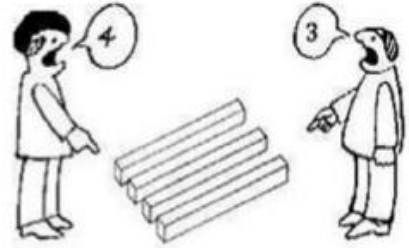


A. Perceptions (10 minutes)

- Using the PowerPoint presentation, show ambiguous images that can be perceived differently by different people. Lead a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What do you see in these images?
 - Does anyone see anything else?
 - Why do you think you might see something different from your classmate?
 - Can you think of situations in your life where people might perceive things differently?



(Jastrow, 1899)



(Psychobabel, 2017)

Point out the possibility that people may perceive several different things for a single image, and stress that differences in perception and decoding can lead to misunderstandings and sometimes interpersonal conflicts (Eberhardt, 2019). These differences also mean that it's often pointless to try to figure out who's right and who's wrong; instead, it's important to know that there can be two different perceptions of the same situation.

- Ask the students for examples of interpersonal conflicts they've experienced because of a difference in perceptions. Ask two or three students to share their answers.

B. Video: Sacha and conflicts - Part 1

C. The communication wire (15 minutes)

- Briefly recap the video. Obviously, a conflict seems to have broken out between Sacha and his parents!
- Ask the students the following two questions:
 - Can conflicts, like the one between Sacha and his parents, be helpful?
 - Can you think of any examples?



Explain that conflict can be positive. Depending on how it's managed, it can be helpful or harmful. When managed properly, a conflict between two people can help them get to know each other better, understand each other better, and even develop their creativity and find new solutions (Scholtes, Joiner, Streibel and Lalanne, 2002).

3. Illustrate this using the following examples:

- **Example of a helpful conflict:** Sacha loaned his snowboard to his friend Max last week, and Max still hasn't given it back. Sacha says to Max: "Thanks to you, I can't go snowboarding tonight because I don't have my board!" Max answers: "Whoa, man! Chill! What's wrong with you?" Sacha takes a minute to refocus. He realizes he's disappointed that he can't go snowboarding tonight. He feels like this isn't the first time Max hasn't returned something he's borrowed. He decides to tell Max how he feels. Max understands that Sacha doesn't like waiting on him to return his things. Max also tells Sacha that he wasn't sure when he should give the snowboard back and was waiting for Sacha to ask for it. Max reminds Sacha of all the times he loaned him things without expecting anything in return. Sacha admits that he wasn't clear and that Max has often been generous with him in the past. Max admits that he wasn't thinking about what Sacha needed and apologizes.
- **Example of a harmful conflict:** Nadège gets into a fight with her friend Megan, who also has a crush on Justin, the boy that Nadège likes. Nadège calls Megan stupid for trying to get between her and Justin. Megan calls Nadège selfish and says she has the right to talk to whoever she wants. Nadège and Megan haven't spoken for a week.

4. Add to the discussion by stressing that different attitudes, emotions, and behaviours influence the way a conflict is managed. When faced with a conflict, we can either **react** or **respond** (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

- We react when we **immediately fire back** at someone who says or does something that we don't like, **spontaneously, without thinking first**. This reaction can make the situation worse.
 - Has this ever happened to you?
 - Did you notice any times in the scenarios involving Sacha and Max, or Nadège and Megan, when they reacted spontaneously, without thinking?
- We respond when, faced with the same situation, we **take a few deep breaths, put ourselves in the other person's shoes, or consider the situation from another angle**. This strategy increases our chances of a positive outcome to the conflict.
 - In the conflict scenarios we just saw, did you notice any times where Sacha, Max, Nadège, or Megan used this strategy?



TIP FOR FACILITATORS

Interactive theatre is an art form that gets the audience involved; it's focused on finding solutions in order to resolve conflicts. So, we encourage you to let the students experience a conflict situation in their own lives; you can guide them through it, as needed, using listening and communication strategies conducive to positive conflict resolution.

- Continue by explaining that sometimes, **our emotions overwhelm our body and our mind**, preventing us from seeing the situation clearly (Peacock, 1999). Our feelings then push us to escalate the conflict. Incidentally, this is what seems to have happened with Sacha and his parents in the video.
- Lead a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like escalating the conflict instead of resolving it?
 - Why do you think that is?
 - What were the consequences?
 - What is the point of resolving your conflicts?
 - What things help you manage your conflicts?



Finish by explaining that even though it can be tempting to escalate a conflict—for fun or to be dramatic or because it makes us feel powerful—there are always more positive sides to handling conflicts better.

DIGGING DEEPER

Compassionate listening

Compassionate listening helps with communicating effectively, building trusting relationships, and strengthening ties, while also reducing the risk of conflicts or misunderstandings. We all have examples of times when we didn't really listen to the other person, or when we didn't feel heard, for example, trying to talk to someone who's looking at their smartphone, parents watching their TV shows while we're trying to talk to them, someone who answers "uh huh, yup" for the whole conversation while looking elsewhere, etc. Compassionate listening involves refocusing your attention on the speaker and trying to be fully present in the moment.

(André, 2009; Burdick, 2014; Kaiser Greenland, 2016; Scholastic Inc., 2019; Uco, 2006; Weger, Castle Bell, Minei and Robinson, 2014; Willard and Saltzman, 2015).

D. A dramatic turn of events! (25 minutes)

- Explain to the students that the next exercise involves acting out three different conflicts between two characters, as an interactive theatre piece.
- Introduce the students to the different roles needed for the interactive theatre exercise. For each scene:
 - two students will play the characters (be respectful!);
 - at any time, a third student can break into the scene as the director, changing how the scene unfolds. The director helps guide the interactions and rectify situations using the right strategies.
- Any student can jump in as the director along the way, by raising their hand and calling out "CUT!" The student then "pauses" the actors and gives them instructions on how to fix the scene. Then, both characters resume acting, adjusting their roles to the director's cues.
- Before starting the interactive theatre exercise, briefly explain the conflict resolution strategies using the PowerPoint presentation (Motoi, 1995; Motoi and Villeneuve, 2006).

Compassionate listening strategies

- Show openness and interest through body language: look, tone, attitude, smile, attention
- Try not to interrupt or interject; let the person finish their sentences

- Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes when they're describing how they feel
- Be respectful and empathetic toward the other person
- Refocus your attention on the other person; stay in the moment

Communication strategies

- Take the time to listen to the other person's opinion
- Say what you're feeling, name your emotions
- Use "I" statements
- Express your needs in the situation
- Tell the other person what you expect from them
- Talk openly with the other person
- Stay calm



Other conflict resolution strategies

- Define the problem
- Evaluate the solutions (feasible? realistic?)
- Be respectful (don't judge or blame the other person)
- Be willing to compromise
- Accept your share of the responsibility for the situation
- Evaluate all possible solutions before choosing one that works for everyone involved
- Clarify your thoughts
- Seek social support from peers


5. Make sure all students understand the instructions for the interactive theatre exercise, then ask the first two volunteers to come to the front. Hand out the papers and roles for the first scene (see the *Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise* worksheet), then give the characters a few minutes to prepare.
6. Make sure the slide on conflict resolution strategies is still showing on the screen so the students playing the director can refer to it.
7. Once both characters are ready, start the first scene (you have about five minutes per scene, but this can vary depending on class participation).
8. Ask questions to encourage the students to jump in as director. For example:
 - What do you think about the characters' body language?
 - What attitudes or behaviours in one of the characters would you change to defuse the situation and resolve the conflict? How?

DIGGING DEEPER

Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict resolution strategies are closely linked to communication strategies. They are decided by how the conflict is handled. Another effective conflict management strategy is to use relaxation techniques and exercise as ways to calm down before approaching the conflict with the other person. Harmful conflict management strategies (withdrawal, avoidance, domination, control) should be avoided.

(Feldman and Gowen, 1998; Gascon, 2011; Tuval-Maschiach and Shulman, 2006)

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- Could you get a character to reword what they said by naming their emotions?
 - How could you help a character express their needs better?
9. Once you think the scene has been fully covered or you've run out of time, move on to the next scene (see the *Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise* worksheet) and invite two new volunteers to join you up front. Follow the same steps for all three scenes.

E. Video: Sacha and conflicts – Part 2 and REMINDER: HORS-PISTE challenge (5 minutes)


This week, ask the students to think about how they react to and handle their conflicts. Tell them to notice how they react to a conflict during the week ahead. Specifically, ask them to identify:


- a spontaneous reaction (attitude, behaviour) they often have without thinking and that can escalate conflicts.
- a conflict resolution strategy they already use, that comes naturally.
- a new strategy they will try out soon to help them manage conflicts better.

Worksheet

Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise

Scene 1	
<p>This morning, you asked your friend to go to the movies with you, because there's a new movie playing that you really want to see. He said he couldn't because he has to visit his grandparents. That night before bed, you notice that he's posted pictures on Facebook of himself and other friends hanging out at the mall. You're really angry, but more than that, you're disappointed that your friend lied to you. The next day at school, you ignore him in the hallway. He calls out to you: "Oh, come on, you could at least say hi!" You say that you don't see why you should say hello when he obviously doesn't want to hang out with you. Seeing his puzzled look, you tell him you saw his photos on Facebook and you know that he lied to get out of going to the movies with you. He tells you the photos are from last week. You don't believe him because he never posts old photos. You accuse him of lying again. The tension escalates...</p> <p>ACTION!</p>	
Character 1	Character 2
Teenager	Friend

 Scene 2	
<p>You have a special night planned with your friends on Friday and you want your parents to extend your curfew to 12:30 a.m. instead of your usual 10 p.m. Your five friends have permission from their parents to stay out late, and one of the fathers will pick you up at the designated meeting place. You mentioned it briefly to your parents at breakfast; right away, they said no. Now it's supper time; you bring up the subject again, asking them if you can stay out later than usual. The answer is still no. You're furious! You raise your voice, complaining that it's not fair, that all your friends are allowed except for you, and that you'll have to be home before everyone else. Your parents refuse to hear it, telling you they make the rules and that you're too young to be making these kinds of decisions. They say that you need to grow up and learn to take no for an answer. Then they say you can do whatever you want once you turn 18, but that as long as you live under their roof, you live by their rules. The tension escalates...</p> <p>ACTION!</p>	
Character 1	Character 2
Teenager	Parents

 Scene 3	
<p>You get home from school to notice that the books on your desk have been moved. Right away, you assume your sister has been in your room again without asking. You run to her room, barge in without knocking, and accuse her of snooping around your room. Your sister asks you what your problem is and tells you that you always get worked up over nothing. She says she didn't go in your room, but you don't believe her. The tension escalates...</p> <p>ACTION!</p>	
Character 1	Character 2
Teenager	Little sister