



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

Preventing and resolving conflict by communicating clearly

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Communicating appropriately Resolving conflicts Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Communicating appropriately Solving problems Using creativity Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand the role that perceptions play during conflicts; • Become aware of their own attitudes and behaviours that worsen conflicts; • Use an approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication; • Use positive strategies for listening to others and expressing themselves.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the following worksheets (1 copy of each worksheet for each student): Conflict resolution and Emotions and needs.
- Print out the supplementary Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise sheet (1 copy for yourself).
- Print the *Communication is the key!* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



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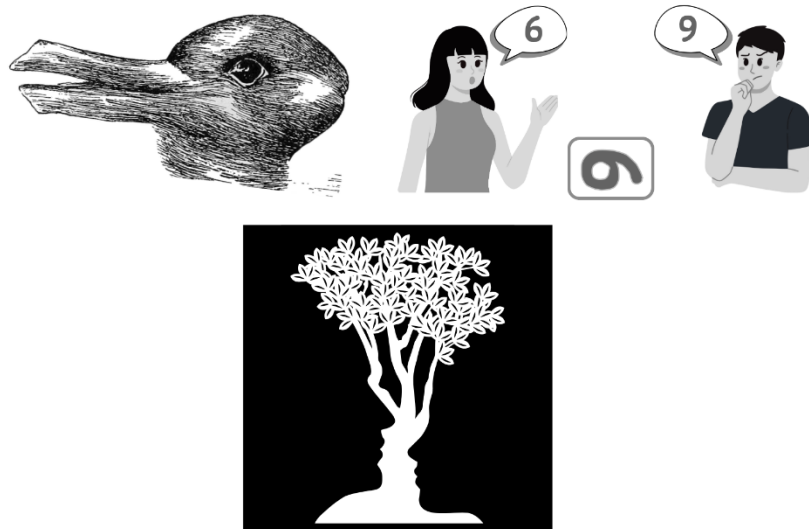


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A. Perceptions (10 minutes)

1. Begin the workshop by presenting a series of ambiguous images that can be perceived differently depending on the person.
2. For each image, ask the students to raise their hands and say what they see at first glance, without thinking too hard about it or looking for anything specific.



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3. After presenting the images, continue the discussion with the following questions:
 - When looking at the images, did everyone see the same thing at first glance? Why or why not?
 - Can you change your perspective to see how others interpreted the images differently?
 - Has there ever been a time where you and another person had different perceptions of the same situation?
 - What might this exercise teach us about our perceptions?
4. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



The purpose of this exercise was to make you aware of how **there might be multiple perceptions, perspectives or points of view about a single situation**. There's no point trying to figure out who's right and who's wrong, because it's all a matter of perception!

But these **differences in perception are often at the root of interpersonal conflicts** (Eberhardt, 2019). No two people have the exact same life experience, which means that no two people will perceive a thing, a person or a situation in the exact same way. Everyone has their own "filters" (prejudices, stereotypes, sensitivities, past experiences, etc.) through which they perceive and interpret situations. These "filters" can distort the intended message, a bit like static on a phone line. These distorted or scrambled messages may unfortunately create conflict (Eberhardt, 2019; Fiske & Macrae, 2012).

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Not right or wrong: it's a matter of perception! –Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip—Part 1](#)



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C. Communication is the key! (15 minutes)

1. Segue into the next section by mentioning that, as the clip shows, how a conflict is managed can determine whether it is **helpful or harmful**.
2. Ask the students the following questions:
 - Can you think of any examples of conflicts that got out of hand or ended up harming your relationships?
 - Can you think of any examples of conflicts that were resolved positively and ended up helping your relationships?
 - What do you think explains why the outcomes of these conflicts were different?
3. The goal here is to help students understand that their reactions influence the outcome of their conflicts.
4. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



Some of our **spontaneous reactions** (attitudes and behaviours that we take on without really thinking about it) can **make conflicts worse**, while **other, more positive strategies** would help resolve conflicts in a **helpful** way (Baker & Exner-Cortens, 2020; Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Burger, 2022). No matter the situation, **communication is the key to preventing** conflicts or resolving them **effectively and positively**!



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5. Next, suggest students learn a new **approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication**. This approach is inspired by the stages of conflict resolution according to Crawford & Bodine (1996) as well as the principles associated with conscious or nonviolent communication [NVC] according to Rosenberg (2015).
6. Summarize the **four steps** of the conflict resolution process.
 - Step 1: Calm yourself and refocus;
 - Step 2: Communicate with compassion;
 - Step 3: Look for solutions;
 - Step 4: Choose and implement a solution.
7. Before continuing, inform students that they will have to apply these steps for conflict resolution later in the workshop. Hand out the two *Conflict resolution* and *Emotions and needs* worksheets to the students.



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8. Next, explain each of the four steps in the resolution process, along with the corresponding strategies, using the slideshow:

- **Step 1 – Calm yourself and refocus**



When trying to resolve a conflict with another person, it's crucial that you calm yourself beforehand. If your emotions are running high, it's probably not the right time to talk! It's better to refocus and take care of what's going on inside yourself *first*, and wait for the dust to settle. Here are a few strategies to do so (Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Gascon, 2011; Tuval-Maschiach & Shulman, 2006):

- Stop and take a break;
- Remove yourself from the conflict and go somewhere quiet;
- Take a deep breath;
- Take a look at what's happening inside yourself;
- Identify your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Release your emotions in a healthy way (exercising, drawing, writing, listening to soothing music, etc.);
- Refocus your attention on what is important to you and your values.



A quick reminder: Our emotions speak to us! They send an important message: **“There's a need that requires your attention!”** To help identify your own emotions and needs, use the *Emotions and needs* sheet.

- **Step 2 – Communicate with compassion**



Once you've calmed down, you can begin a respectful discussion with the other person to talk about what each of you experienced and perceived during the conflict. The idea here is for each of you to have a space to express yourself and to listen to the other person with compassion. Here are some strategies to do this (André, 2009; Burdick, 2014; Greenland, 2016; Rosenberg, 2015; Weger et al., 2014; Willard & Salzman, 2017):

Listening to the other person:

- Use nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice) that shows your interest;
- Be open and receptive to what the other person has to say;
- Give the other person time to speak without interrupting them;
- Try to understand the other person's point of view without judging them;
- Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and be sensitive to their emotions and needs;
- In short, listen to the other person just like you want them to listen to you!

Expressing yourself:

- Describe the facts of the situation without making judgments or interpretations;
- Avoid making assumptions about the other person's intentions;
- Use “I” statements about yourself, rather than “You” statements about the other person;
- Clearly express your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Don't blame the other person for your emotions and feelings;
- Admit your own faults in the situation and be able to apologize.



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- **Step 3 – Look for solutions**



Now that each person has had the opportunity to express themselves and has listened to the other person with compassion, you can move on to “looking for solutions.” Any proposed solution is welcome as long as it is respectful. Here are some strategies you can use to achieve this:

- Propose realistic ideas, solutions or actions that would meet the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Come up with a range of solutions.



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- **Step 4 – Choose and implement a solution**



Lastly, work together to choose one of the proposed solutions. The idea here is to identify the solution that works best for everyone and implement it. Here are some strategies you can use to achieve this:

- Consider the pros and cons of each proposed idea, solution or action;
- Work together to choose the solution(s) that best meet(s) the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Implement the solution.



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9. Explain to students that, even though there is a logical order to these steps, they don't follow a strictly linear sequence. For example, the strategies for compassionate communication (expressing yourself and listening to the other person) should be used throughout the conflict resolution process. And if your emotions start to get the better of you at some point, it's best to go back to step 1 and give yourself time to calm down again. Also, don't hesitate to ask for help whenever you need it.



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10. Finish up the activity by reminding students:



When a conflict is poorly managed, it can affect and weaken relationships between those involved (e.g., friends, families). Try to avoid running away from conflict, and ignoring or trying to control the other person (Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Gascon, 2011; Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). Conversely, when conflict is managed properly, it can strengthen your relationship with the other person, allowing you to know and understand each other better and find new solutions (Baker & Exner-Cortens, 2020; Brion-Meisels & Selman, 1984; Sikorska et al., 2024). In short, **communication is the key!**



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11. If time permits, explain to students the difference between conflicts and situations of violence and bullying:



Remember that a **conflict** can be resolved between **two people acting honestly and in good faith** who are willing to meet each other halfway. If a situation involves a **power imbalance** or some form of **violence** from one person toward another (such as bullying), **it is not a conflict** (Burger, 2022; Oyelade & Adebayo, 2023). If you're a witness to or a victim of such violence or bullying, it's best to distance yourself from the situation to protect yourself and, importantly, **to ask for help and support from someone you trust**.



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D. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Next, present the students with the following scenario:

“You get home from school and notice that the books on your desk have been moved. Right away, you assume your sister went into your room *yet again* without asking for permission. You run to her room, barge in without knocking, and loudly 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. A conflict breaks out between you and your sister...”

2. Now have the students apply the strategies they learned for helpful and effective conflict resolution, using an approach based on compassionate communication.
3. Resolve the conflict together as a group. If necessary, guide students through the steps and supplement their answers using the associated strategies.

E. A dramatic turn of events! (20 minutes)

1. Explain to the students that the next exercise involves acting out two different conflicts between two characters, as an interactive theatre piece: an artistic method that asks audience members to intervene throughout in order to encourage the search for solutions.
2. Introduce the students to the different roles needed for the interactive theatre exercise.
 - **The actors:** two students volunteer to play the characters and make the scene come to life.
 - **Directors:** the other students in the class play director. They can intervene on behalf of the characters and change the course of the story by proposing behaviours and interactions for the characters to take, using the right strategies to remedy the situation.
3. Explain that to play the role of director, all that you need to do is:
 - Raise your hand and shout, “CUT!”, putting the actors on pause.
 - Then give recommendations on how to help or correct the scene.
4. Explain that both characters will then resume acting, adjusting their roles to the director’s cues and continuing along those lines. Specify that there can be multiple audience interventions for the same scene.
5. Make sure the students understand the instructions for the interactive theatre exercise, then ask the first two volunteers to come to the front of the classroom.
6. Choose, or have the students choose, two scenes from the *Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise* supplementary worksheet. Using the slideshow, read out loud the first scene that was chosen. Then give the actors a few minutes to divvy up roles and prepare to act out the rest of the scene.



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7. Meanwhile, invite the other students in the class to reread their worksheets ([Conflict resolution](#) and [Emotions and needs](#)) so they can prepare themselves to intervene in the situation, following the steps and strategies discussed previously.
8. Next, begin the first scene that was chosen. Each scene should last around 5 minutes.
9. Ask students these questions to encourage them to jump in as director:
 - What's your perception of the characters' nonverbal communication (expressions, gestures, etc.)?
 - What attitudes or behaviours would you have one of the characters change in order to de-escalate the situation and help resolve the conflict? How?
 - How could you help one character listen better to the other?
 - Could you guide a character to reword their statement to clearly explain their emotions and needs?
10. Let the situation unfold, either until the conflict is resolved, you feel that the scene has been sufficiently fleshed out, or the time runs out.
11. Thank the students who volunteered to play the characters; then, invite two other students to volunteer to come to the front of the classroom.
12. Proceed with the second scene that was chosen, following the same steps and again relying on the approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication and corresponding strategies.
13. Once both scenes have been resolved, congratulate the students on their participation.



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F. Educational clip — Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Not right or wrong: it's a matter of perception! – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



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G. OFF-TRAIL Challenge

This week, ask the students to think about how they react to and handle their conflicts. Ask them to identify: 1) a spontaneous reaction (attitude or behaviour) they often adopt without really thinking but which may make their conflicts worse, 2) a positive conflict resolution strategy that comes naturally to them and that they already tend to use, 3) a new strategy of compassionate communication (to listen better to others and express themselves better) that they can apply in the near future so as to resolve conflicts in a helpful way.



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Conflict resolution

- **Step 1 – Calm yourself and refocus:**

- Stop and take a break;
- Remove yourself from the conflict and go somewhere quiet;
- Take a deep breath;
- Take a look at what's happening inside yourself;
- Identify your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Release your emotions in a healthy way (exercising, drawing, writing, listening to soothing music, etc.);
- Refocus your attention on what is important to you and your values;
- Ask for help if needed.

- **Step 2 – Communicate with compassion**

Listening to the other person:

- Listen to the other person fully and be present in the moment;
- Use nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice) that shows your interest;
- Be open and receptive to what other person has to say;
- Give the other person time to speak without interrupting them;
- Try to understand the other person's point of view without judging them;
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes and be sensitive to their emotions and needs;
- In short, listen to the other person just like you want them to listen to you!

Expressing yourself:

- Describe the facts of the situation without making judgments or interpretations;
- Avoid making assumptions about the other person's intentions;
- Use "I" statements about yourself, rather than "You" statements about the other person;
- Clearly express your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Don't blame the other person for your emotions and feelings;
- Admit your own faults in the situation and be able to apologize.

- **Step 3 – Look for solutions**

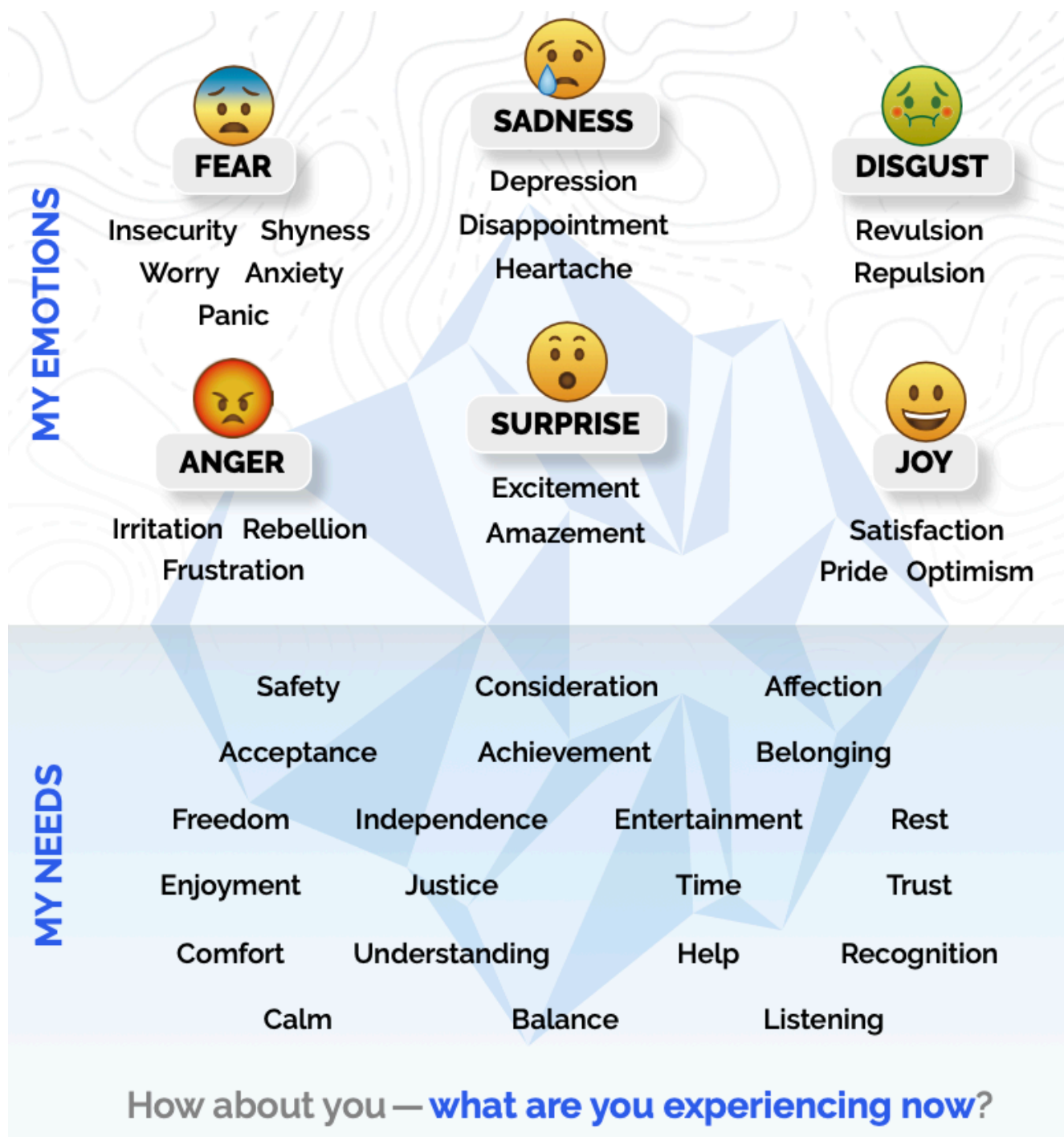
- Propose realistic ideas, solutions or actions that would meet the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Come up with a range of solutions.

- **Step 4 – Choose and implement a solution:**

- Consider the pros and cons of each proposed idea, solution or action;
- Work together to choose the solution(s) that best meet(s) the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Implement the solution.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Emotions and needs





SUPPLEMENTARY WORKSHEET

Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise

Scene 1

Emil invites his friend Ophelia to the movies to see a new movie that just came out. Ophelia tells him she can't go with him this evening because she's going to visit her grandparents. That night, before going to bed, Emil sees on social media that Ophelia has posted photos of herself hanging out with other friends at a party. Emil feels his anger rising quickly. He feels ashamed that his friend lied to him. The next day at school, Emil ignores Ophelia when they cross paths in the hall. Ophelia snaps at him and yells, "Hey, you could try saying, 'hi'!" Emil tells her that he doesn't know why he would say "hi" to her when clearly she has better things to do than spend time with him. Seeing the puzzled look on Ophelia's face, Emil tells her that he saw her photos on Facebook and knows that she lied to get out of going to the movies with him. Ophelia tells him that those photos are from last week. Emil doesn't believe her—why would she post old photos? He accuses her of lying again. The tension is building...

Character 1: Emil

Character 2: Aisha

Scene 2

Leo is going out with his friends this Friday for a special occasion. He wants to be able to come home around midnight instead of 10 p.m., his usual curfew. Everyone else has permission from their parents to come home late, but Leo talked with his parents at breakfast this morning and their answer was a big, fat "no." At dinner, he tries to bring up the topic again. The response is still "no." Leo feels a growing sense that this is really unfair. He raises his voice, saying that it's totally unfair and humiliating that he's the only one not to have this freedom. His parents remain firm: it's a no. They tell him that they're still the ones in charge and that he doesn't get to negotiate these kinds of decisions at his age. They go on to say that he needs to learn to take no for an answer and that he can do what he wants when he turns 18. Leo is seething with rage inside. The tension is building...

Character 1: Leo

Character 2: Parents

Scene 3

Thierry sends a private message to his friend Iness to talk to her about a difficult situation he experienced at school. Iness isn't quite sure how to respond, so she takes a screenshot and sends it to someone else to ask for their opinion on the situation. Without Iness's knowledge, the screenshot gets shared in a group chat, where multiple students comment on the situation. The next day at school, Thierry realizes that many people have found out about the experience he went through. He feels betrayed and humiliated. He decides to confront Iness during the break, blaming her for sharing details of his private life with everyone. Iness tries to explain that she was just trying to help him and that she had only shared the situation with a single person in order to get some advice. She tells him that she's not responsible for the information getting shared in the group chat. Thierry disagrees and demands that Iness stop the screenshot from circulating. The tension is building...

Character 1: Thierry

Character 2: Iness

Scene 4

During several rounds of an online video game, Yousef keeps criticizing Mila's mistakes. He tells her she's bad at the game and that she's making the whole team lose. Mila records a sound bite of Yousef's criticisms and posts it on social media along with an insulting comment about him. When Yousef finds her post, he demands that she take it down and accuses her of sharing his voice without his permission. Mila says she wanted to show other people how he acts when they're gaming together. She asks him to acknowledge that his comments are hurtful. Yousef says that he was joking and that what happens during a game shouldn't be shared outside of it. Mila argues that he's just trying to avoid the consequences of what he said. The tension is building...

Character 1: Yousef

Character 2: Mila