

Lets open the debate

Key message

Critical thinking is a core skill to recognise populist, extremist and persuasive speech. Stimulate debate among young people is probably the best way to strengthen this ability, by making them demystifying, deconstructing and reconstructing their arguments through peer-to-peer dialogue, active listening and exchange of ideas from different points of view.

Key words: critical thinking, preconceptions and stereotypes

Summary

Create spaces of debate addressed to young people is not an easy task. However, it is an essential step in developing their listening skills and ability to argue bringing up preconceptions, prejudice and stereotypes. This activity is a starting point to develop these skills on social problematics that can be extended to aspects and concepts relating to violent and extremist positions.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Prevention	• small • medium	• 16 - 19 • 20 - 24	• 30 min • 45 min • 1 hour

Purpose

- Promote a space for dialogue and open debate as a forum to expose, exchange and question opinions without judgements.
- Improve active listening during a debate
- Develop the ability to argue and expose arguments and counter arguments.

Description

Step 1: Brainstorm: *What are social values? What values do you know? Are there values common to all people? What values prevail in our society?*

Step 2: Ask participants to designate the three most important values for them and to write them on a sheet. In pairs, they will compare if they have set the same values and if they are similar to the social values collected in the previous step. Make a pool with the whole responses.

During the reflection, emphasize the differences and individual similarities that may exist between people living in the same society.

Step 3: Make small groups (4-6 persons). Encourage participants to have a brief discussion. In addition to arguing their own opinion, they will have to indicate if they agree or not and write two arguments in favor and two against. Depending on the level of participation and experience of the group, they can be guided so that they themselves raise the topics on which to "debate" by asking general questions and giving them a few minutes to think about a controversy about it.

(For example; *Have you lived in a situation where these values were not fulfilled? Is it necessary to show solidarity with the whole world or depending on the situation?...*)

Alternatively, each of them can be provided a random "statement" (see handouts) so they can analyse it.

Step 4: Make a pool to debate on the different opinions and arguments. Focus the discussion by asking for examples of own experience, showing alternative strategies or divergent information, etc.

We recommend to continue the debate in later sessions. Motivate the participants to seek information from different sources (news, social networks, articles and papers, etc.) to expose and controvert their arguments and broaden the scope towards the questions that emerged during the dynamic.

Materials needed

Paper, pen, handouts: »list of statements« and further information related with each of it (these statements are orientative).

Methodology

Discussion board, debate

Advice for Trainer

- Adjust the complexity and the number of assertions to the age and size of the group.
- This dynamic is recommended to initiate group debates and value the level of flexibility and participation (e.g. active listening) of participants, especially for young people engaged in a process of de-radicalisation.
- This dynamic makes possible to assess the inclination of ideas and flexibility of participants when exposing and exchanging arguments.

Source / Literature

Sources of support material for argumentation (in spanish):

- Related with non-violent social action:
http://www.ugr.es/~mariol/files/publicaciones/capitulos_de_libro/noviolencia/41.pdf

Related with juvenile citizen participation:

- http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_es.htm

Handouts

“Statements proposed”(see literature):

1. Change the rules only benefits to a few.
2. The end justifies the means.
3. In the face of injustice there are only two ways of doing: to tackle the roots of the problem with violence, or to look away.
4. Sometimes violence is needed to defend yours.



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Lets open the debate. Retrieved %s, from %sWednesday May 6, 2026 from
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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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