



## The Tree Exercise

### Key message

This activity will encourage young people to reflect on how they perceive society in general, the roles of different people, the different types of groups in society and to also reflect on common stereotypes which are deemed 'socially acceptable'

**Key words:** challenging perceptions, civic engagement, challenging stereotypes

### Summary

This exercise looks at the young people's perception of the society they currently live in and exposes a little about the roles they feel different people and groups play within it.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Prevention	• medium • large	• 12 - 15 • 16 - 19 • 20 - 24	• 1 hour

### Purpose

- To examine if young people believe there is a hierarchy of different interest groups in today's society and if so to map out what this looks like from their perspective
- To unearth any stereotypes and hidden messages relating to the different groups presented by the participants

### Participants

Suitable for use with a wide variety of diverse groups; non-gender specific.

### Description

#### Step 1:

The facilitator distributes a blank page and marker to each individual participant and asks them to sketch the outline of a tree with some matchstick men/women sitting on the branches at different heights on the tree.

#### Step 2:

The facilitator tells the participants that the tree represents society and the different people on the tree are the different groups/races that make up our community.

Based on their own personal experiences participants are to decide which groups they feel currently occupy the space at the top of the tree (symbolising that they are doing well) and then identify those

groupings that they feel are struggling at the bottom. Who takes the middle ground?

### **Step 3:**

After a few moments the facilitator invites participants to share their sketches with the rest of the group and to say a little about why they placed particular people/groups where they did.

### **Step 4:**

Group discussion covering the issues raised.

### **Step 5:**

Split the main group into small working groups. Give each group a flipchart sheet and ask them to sketch out a large tree and collectively create their version of what a balanced harmonious society should look like.

### **Step 6:**

Each group presents their tree at the end of the session and says a little bit about how it came about and the thinking behind it.

The facilitator then reads through the handout 'Dialogue cannot exist without humility' and distributes a copy to everyone in the group.

## **Materials needed**

Blank pages, Markers, Flipchart sheets, Dialogue handout

## **Methodology**

Individual reflection, Small working group discussions and negotiations, Large group feedback and discussion

## **Advice for Trainer**

For the group discussion in Step 4, include the following questions:

- What needs to happen to make it a more balanced and fair society?
- Do we have a role in contributing to this and if so how?

## **Source / Literature**

Adapted from Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' -  
[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/41108.Paulo\\_Freire](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/41108.Paulo_Freire)

## **Handouts**

[Dialogue Cannot Exist Without Humility](#)



CC - Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

*The Tree Exercise.* Retrieved %s, from %s Thu January 22, 2026 from  
<https://toolbox.ycare.eu/courses/YCARE196/>

<https://www.ycare.eu>

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein