

Confidence in the Face of Violence

Goals

- to help participants develop confidence even in the face of violent situations;
- to increase participants range of comfort with being physical, fear and nonviolent action.

Time

2-2 1/2 hours

Special materials

- extra socks (for sock wrestling)
- blankets or mats for wrestling

How it's done

In this series of exercises, fear and anxiety will likely show up at various points. When led thoughtfully, these exercises can allow the feelings to show up without any danger of being hurt. Because anxiety can show up, the introduction can set an important tone. In the introduction, explain that participants are now going to look at tools for dealing with physically dangerous situations. Remind participants that they can rely on their buddies and other people for intentional support.

On flipchart write up the three options to explore: flight, fight, and nonviolence. Explain participants will go through some interaction of each in turn. (gandhi used to say: "if people can't nonviolently stand up for themselves, then at least violently stand up for themselves." this process follows something of that attitude.)

Flight (30 minutes, including debrief)

In this section, participants will go through a series of tools to "practice" flight. These will include several forms of "tag." in tag, one (or a few) person is "it" and has to touch or tag another person. Everyone else runs away and tries not to be tagged. If they are tagged, they become "it" and the game continues. (other forms of tag can be added.)

In the middle of playing tag, encourage participants to get in touch with their fear. Ask them to identify for themselves, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being lots of fear and 1 being no fear at all) how much fear they can access. It may not be a very scary situation, but accessing some level of fear

which may show up as excitement at being chased, for example, is perfectly normal (even though no real danger will show up in this tool).

Continue tag and then debrief around fear. The main purpose is for people to access fear, and to notice what it does to their body and their self. The goal is to practice running from fear. No major theory needs to be introduced, just increased self-awareness.

Fight (1 hour, including debrief)

In this section, participants get to practice fighting. In the face of danger, fighting is about running towards it.

The wall - one tool for the practice of fighting is "the wall". In the wall, participants get in a line to prepare to receive a person. They stand close together and several yards out from any wall. One participant, several yards away from the line, faces the line and, as fast as they are willing, runs straight (no changing direction - that's a safety issue) into the line of participants. The participants try, collectively, to absorb the runner without any injury.

When explaining this exercise, it's important to try to decrease people's immediate fear and allow people to not join the wall if they do not want to (there are many hidden and visible physical disabilities that will make this a particularly hard exercise to do). The goal of the exercise: physical contact. Keep a good eye for safety, since this is not about being hurt.

After running, the facilitator should check-in with each person about how that experience was for them (offer them a chance to do it again, if they want). Again, the main goal is not theory but to increase people's self-awareness. What was it like running into the wall? If it was scary, what about it was scary for you? (or easy, or hard, or challenging?)

Sock wrestling - begin by having participants get with one other person in the group who is approximately their physical size and height. Have them sit on the floor together spread around the room with lots of space between them (several feet around each). (have mats available if at all possible.) Explain that participants are going to play a little game: called sock wrestling. Hand out socks to participants who do not have any socks on. Tell them to put on socks.

Have them check-in with their partner for this exercise regarding any physical disabilities, old injuries or other physical things they should be aware of (e.g., sensitive knees, bad back). And finally, the task: grab the other person's socks off before they take yours off. And go! Debrief for feelings (how was the experience? What was easy/what was hard?). Keep participants in their pairs (for the next exercise).

Wrestling - after participants sock wrestle, they have another task: wrestling. In this case, the challenge is not to steal their socks but to pin their partner's shoulders to the ground. Obviously, the goal is not really about winning but about learning: so remind participants to 1) stay on the ground for safety's sake and 2) negotiate any physical concerns they want to share beforehand.

This is a challenge, and the more participants can engage in the challenge the more learning will likely show up for them (outside their comfort zone!). As facilitator, be okay with participants

choosing to opt out of the exercise, but have them come up with some way to be physically engaging. (we have had success with really physically-frightened participants when they leg wrestle, arm wrestle or even "cooperatively" wrestle where one pins the other then the other.) Let participants negotiate for themselves and provide options only if they get stuck.

During this series especially, there will be a number of people who will inevitably not participate. That's fine: it's okay for people to set their limits around physical interactions (it's important and a form of empowerment, in fact!). Do not let them ignore their own feelings and just become passive spectators (such as at a sports game). They can work on their fear while others are physically wrestling or running into human walls. Encourage participants to internally note their own feelings as they watch others interacting. (remove chairs and instead have people who are able stand- chairs can be such a comfort zone.) Encourage laughter.
Nonviolence (1:30 hours)

In this phase, participants practice responding to potentially violent situations in nonviolent ways: without either physically resorting to violence and without fleeing the scene. In this role-play, participants need to actually step into the conflict.

The scenario is 2 participants arguing loudly with each other and beginning to get physically violent with each other (pushing/shoving). The third participant has to step into the conflict and try to de-escalate. The 2 participants' reactions are to physically push the intervenor away and turn angry on her/him.

Rotate so each participant has a chance to share the experience of stepping into the conflict. Then debrief, allowing participants to step out of their roles (participants often need a chance to laugh, no need to rush the debrief). Help participants notice what works for them, especially with regards to their internal reactions (did fear show up? How did you relate to it or handle it? Did you get angry or want to hit one of the participants? How did you handle that?).

Where tool comes from:

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