

Nonviolence Spectrum

Purpose: This exercise explores what we think we mean by nonviolence and to hear the range of people's understandings. Also it usually brings out most of the dilemmas of nonviolence.

Time: 30 minutes (and can run for as long as the facilitator thinks is useful; if short on time the minimum amount to give the exercise for it to be useful would be 20 minutes)

Preparation: You'll need a clear space in the room between opposite walls. Choose one wall to represent '10' and the other '0'. You may wish to put up papers with these numbers on them to help people remember. Think about the group you're working with and choose scenarios (more on that below) that will be most meaningful for them.

Directions: Explain to participants that the purpose of the exercise is to explore what we mean by nonviolence and to hear a range of people's understandings. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, just different opinions. An important part of the exercise is listening to each other and trying to understand others' perspectives. As such, if someone says something that sways participants' opinions, they should feel free to move to a spot on the spectrum that reflects their new opinion.

Explain that participants should imagine a line representing 'nonviolence' running between the two walls. '10' is most nonviolent and '0' is least nonviolent.

Description of Exercise:

- Read out one of the scenarios and ask participants to what degree they would describe it as a nonviolent action (fully, they stand as close they can to 10; not at all, stand close to 0, and sort of, somewhere in between ...)
- After reading a scenario and people position themselves, ask them why they are standing where they are, making sure that each distinct position is covered. Ask very open questions, eg, '*Could you tell us why you are so close to the wall?*' or '*I see you are shifting back and forth slightly, why?*'
- Try not to make comments (unless you think they are completely going off in the wrong direction) about people's responses, or if so, link them non-judgmentally to other participants' comments. If possible (or necessary because no one in the group is bringing up important related points) try to make your comments as questions e.g., '*Perhaps some property should not exist?*' If there are two facilitators, the one who is not taking part can put in points no one else has made.
- Read out the next scenario and repeat.

Optional Add-on: During the exercise the facilitator not leading the exercise can list on flipchart the issues that are dividing the group on the spectrum, e.g. property damage, law-breaking, (non)accountability, humiliation, context, effectiveness. And this can be referred to in the follow up exercise 'An Action is Nonviolent if ...' or for further discussion in small groups.

Please Note: Some people interpret violence very narrowly (violence can be a destructive activity, but it's OK if used for a 'good' end) and others very broadly (violence is anything which damages people or planet). Neither is right or wrong, but it is good to bring out the difference. Some people confuse confrontation to mean aggression which they equate with violence; usually others in the group will dispute this, but if not be prepared to question it.

You can make up scenarios to suit the group, but here are a few to get you going:

- Bombing the British National Party headquarters
- A public vigil about the arms trade with leafleting
- Eating meat or wearing fur/leather
- Living a life luxury without regard or concern for millions living in poverty
- Breaking into an RAF base and damaging a plane due to be sold to country involved in a conflict
- Trees are going to be cut down to clear a site for a supermarket; activists sit in them to prevent this happening
- Activists opposing a new motorway sabotage the builders' work, e.g., let down the tyres and fill up holes that have been dug
- Getting cross with a family member and giving him/her the silent treatment
- A character on the TV police programme is shown murdering other people.
- A recent study found that working-women in the UK earn only 73p for every £1 a man earns

Think about the group you are working with and the objective of the exercise. You may want to use very general and vague scenarios, like those listed above, and let the group dig around and uncover all the threads to the issue. Or you may want to give very contextualised, specific examples, such as:

- In 2002 women from the Ugborodo and Arutan communities in Nigeria occupied Chevron Texaco's oil terminal. They wanted the company to make greater contributions to the local community by developing infrastructure, better conditions for existing jobs and more jobs. The women, aged 25 to 90 and some carrying their children, threatened to take all their clothes off if the company refused to negotiate or sent in security forces. After ten days of negotiations an agreement was reached benefiting the local community. From your perspective how nonviolent were the women's tactics?
- A café owner gives customers who bring in publicity or a menu from another restaurant a 10% discount on their bill. From your point of view, how nonviolent is this business practice?
- A bus company will raise fares for all passengers, including under-18s. Previously under-18s rode for free, now young people under-16 will ride for free and 16 to 18 years pay 1/2 of the adult fare. Groups of students decide to lie about their age to avoid paying the new fare. From your perspective how nonviolent is the students' deceit?
- Two sisters, Aziza and Amina are talking about how to celebrate their father's 60th birthday party. They can't agree, the conversation turns into an argument, both are convinced that they have the best suggestion. They say horrible things to each other. Knowing her older sister will get her way, Amina stops speaking to her sister. From your point of view how nonviolent is the 'silent treatment'?