

Normalising Nonviolence

Purpose: This exercise aims to get participants thinking about everyday actions and cultural practices that embrace or prop up a culture of violence and then to imagine a world upside down, where nonviolence is the norm. The purpose is to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of violence in our lives and to stimulate creative thinking about normalising nonviolence as an integral part of building the alternative.

Time: 30 minutes, or can be amended to be longer or shorter

Preparation: Flip chart paper, pens and blue tack. You could ask participants to read the Paths through Utopia hand-outs prior to the exercise to get them thinking about 'the alternative'.

Explanation for facilitators: This exercise is based on the idea that today's social problems are rooted in the system we've built, a system based on greed rather than an Earth-community based on our heart-unity (or common humanity). If we really want to live/be the alternative that means slowing down and looking at our own lives and identifying what is at the root of our feelings. Are we separate material creatures doomed to conflict and competition? Or are we connected through our common humanity? When politicians talk about 'clash of civilisations' what they really should say is clash of systems that we've built that are suppose to meet our needs.

Description of Exercise:

- You can begin this exercise with an idea shower about our everyday actions and cultural practices, which embrace or prop up a violent culture. If you are short on time, you could prepare a set of topics to use, e.g., violent video games; eating factory farmed foods; police practices; social isolation – not knowing your neighbour, etc.
- Once you have a list divide the participants into groups of 3 or 4 and divide the topics on the list amongst the groups. If you have 24 topics and 3 small groups, give each group 8 different topics from the list.
- Give each group flip chart paper and ask them to think about their 8 topics from our contemporary violent world and to discuss and come up with their counterparts in a world where nonviolence is normal.

Example

<i><u>Violence is normal</u></i>	<i><u>Nonviolence is normal</u></i>
* violent video games	* nv reconciliation video games
* factory farmed foods	* organically grown local foods
* police	* community safety teams
* social isolation	* strong sense of community
* 'father knows best' attitude	* democratic family-structures
* media focused on violence/'bad news'	* media reports on 'good news'

Rotate the topics amongst the groups once they have completed the 'nonviolent norm'. Once done all groups have worked on all the topics, display the flip charts around the room, clustering the like topics and allow participants some moments to walk around and look at all the responses.

To wrap up, ask participants how the exercise was for them? Did anything in particular come up for them? Evaluate the NV norms – of what was suggested are any actually in practice?

Are they effective? How could they be more widely used? To name a few from the examples given above,

- 'A force more powerful' the video game
 - <http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/game/index.php>
- community safety teams projects like Pt'chang and Nonviolent Peace Force
 - <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ptchang/>
 - <http://www.turning-the-tide.org/node/334>
 - <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/en>
- 'Good News' – local Indy Media sites, debate stirred up by 'Peace Journalism' and other examples specific to your local area or the group's interest