

Responses to Violence

Purpose: To illustrate and experience different responses we might make in a potentially violent situation, and to encourage people to examine their feelings in order to highlight the differences between violent and nonviolent responses. The other important part is the insights it gives to being an assailant. TTT uses this exercise with groups intending to take action in potentially violent situations; it can be helpful in deciding whether or not someone plays a 'frontline' role.

Time: 30 minutes (minimum)

Preparation: This exercise can reach some deep places in a person and needs to be sensitively facilitated. Pay particular attention to de-roling and getting feedback from everyone. You will need enough sheets of newspaper for each person to roll up into a baton. You'll also need a large, clear space for running around.

Description: Distribute newspapers for rolling into batons, just stiff enough not to be floppy. The facilitator can oversee a 'weapons inspection' by asking participants to test weapons by hitting each other's arms to check pain levels.

1. Divide the group into two and identify one group as the Assailants, the other as the Assailed. The Assailants get a newspaper baton. Explain that the roles will change during the exercise.
2. Line up the Assailants side by side with enough space between to stretch their arms.
3. Explain that there will be different scenarios and, before each one, you will secretly brief the Assailed group what their response is to be when the Assailants attack. Each exercise will start and end on your signal. Alternate the roles each time so that the Assailants in one exercise become the Assailed in the next. Emphasise the importance of all starting together.
4. Gather the Assailed group around you and brief them, out of earshot of the other group. When they are hit, ask them all to respond in one of the following ways:
 - run away
 - hit back
 - do absolutely nothing
 - maintain eye contact and smile
 - protect self
 - approach their assailant with outstretched arms and try to embrace
5. Line up the Assailed group opposite the Assailants, one on one. Give a moment for everyone to be ready, then give the start signal.
6. Give the stop signal when sufficient time has passed for the participants to have absorbed the experience (1-2 minutes), and de-role by asking each pair to greet each other by their name and shake hands/hug.
7. Ask each group in turn what they felt in the exchange. Was the Assailant surprised by the fighting response? How did they react? What did they want to do/ happen? How did the Assailed feel?
8. Swap the group roles and repeat the exercise, perhaps using a different response

This exercise can demonstrate the "fight or flight" responses, as well as their alternatives. Interestingly, Assailants often interpret the outstretched arms response as a threat.