

VOV ACTIVITIES
Learning Nonviolent Conflict Resolution Skills
Grades 7-12

Concentric Circles – Anger and Power Topics

Purpose: To reflect on personal experiences of anger and power.

To practice communication skills.

Time: Approximately 20 minutes (varies with number of questions).

Materials: Selected questions.

Directions: Follow the directions for the Concentric Circles activity.

Power

1. A time I felt powerless.
2. A time someone used power against me.
3. A time I discovered that I had more power than I realized.
4. A time I used power destructively.
5. A time I used power constructively.
6. A time I shared power and achieved something that would have been hard to achieve alone.

Anger

1. A time I was not in control of my anger and it hurt me and/or others.
2. A time I was in control of my anger and channeled it into constructive action.
3. A way I react another person expresses anger at me.
4. I find it hard to handle another person's anger when...
5. A time I used humor or some other positive technique to transform someone else's anger.
6. A way I have of expressing anger without hurting myself or others.
7. A time when VOV helped me to deal with my anger.

Conflict Escalator

Purpose: To identify behaviors that escalate conflict and to practice de-escalation.

Time: 30 minutes.

Materials: Newsprint and markers.

Directions:

- Explain that there are behaviors which escalate conflict and other behaviors which de-escalate conflict. When we have started up the conflict “escalator,” it’s hard to get off. The AEIOU vowels can help us remember the difference between escalating and de-escalating behaviors.

Escalating Behavior

- A - *Attacking Behavior*: hitting, name-calling, you-messages.
- E - *Evading Behavior*: avoiding, escaping, ignoring, running away. Note that in some cases, such as when you are immediately faced with a violent situation, evading can be a de-escalating strategy.

De-escalating Behavior

- I - *Informing Behavior*: telling the other person how you are feeling without attacking; I-messages are examples of this informing behavior.
- O - *Opening Behavior*: asking a question that encourages the other person to open up, to explain where he or she is coming from, to give his/her point of view, etc.
- U - *Uniting Behavior*: statements that encourage working together to get all needs met.

- Draw a set of stairs (an “escalator”) on newsprint, with the steps ascending left to right.
- Present a role play or scenario, like the one described below.
- Ask the group to identify the moments in the plot where the conflict escalated or got more intense.
- Write each moment on the top of a step.
- Ask what participants think the characters were feeling at each escalating moment, and note the feelings underneath that step.
- Discuss what could have sent the conflict down the escalator. What would need to change and when? In what ways could other people intervene.

Escalator Story

The characters:

Dave and Jim, two high school students.

The Setting:

Lunch time, in the cafeteria.

The Scene:

Jim accidentally bumps into Dave while they are standing in line. Dave says, “Watch where you’re going, asshole.” Jim ignores Dave. As Jim is walking

back to his seat, Dave trips him, and says, "I told you to watch where you are going, bitch." Jim gets in Dave's face, and says, "You got a problem?" "Yeah, you're the fucking problem," Dave responds, and shoves him. They start to fight.

Source: Adapted from William J. Kreidler, *Conflict Resolution in the Middle School*. Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility, 1997

Cornering

Purpose: To consider behaviors that escalate problems or make them harder to solve.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Materials: Newsprint and markers.

Directions: Label two pieces of newsprint, "verbal" and "nonverbal." As a group brainstorm ways that people can verbally and non-verbally "corner" someone and escalate a conflict. Explain that cornering is anything that makes someone feel as though they were being backed into a corner and have no options. Record the answers on the newsprint.

Notes: This activity can be used as a basis for setting up hassle lines or role plays.

Dealing with Anger

Purpose: To identify anger warning signs and look at ways of handling anger.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Newsprint and markers.

Directions: Ask the group to brainstorm the warning signs that we are going to lose control of our anger. What do we say, feel, think or do when we are getting really angry? How can we tell when we are about to lose control of our anger? Record the responses.

Ask the group to brainstorm how they act when they are angry, and how they have seen others act. Record the responses. Have the group evaluate the list: which of the responses help you to avoid hurting yourself or others, physically or emotionally? Circle the responses the group comes up with.

If the point doesn't emerge in conversation, make the point that dealing with anger in a nonviolent, healthy way doesn't mean ignoring it, trying not to feel angry or never expressing anger. It means expressing anger in a way that doesn't cause more harm to yourself or others. Everyone can get to a point where they feel like they are going to lose control. If we recognize our own warning signs that we are going to "lose it," we can avoid trouble.

Fishbowl

Purpose: To explore in-depth a controversial or meaningful topic.

Time: 20-30 minutes or open-ended.

Materials: Chairs, newsprint and markers.

Directions: Identify a topic that needs to be addressed by the entire group. Invite two volunteers to be the initial “fish.” You can either ask for volunteers at the start of the activity or invite people with strong opinions about the subject to be the initial speakers. If you invite particular people, let them know in advance so that they can decide what they want to say.

Set three chairs in the middle of the room, and arrange the remaining chairs in a circle or half circle around them. Invite the volunteers to sit in the middle chairs.

Directions:

1. The volunteers are “fish” and the rest of the group are observers.
 2. The first two “fish” will each address the topic at hand, based on their personal experience with it and then discuss their ideas with each other.
 3. The rest of the group are observers and cannot join the discussion.
 4. Observers may become “fish” by taking an empty chair in the fishbowl, or by replacing one of the “fish” by touching them on the shoulder. Either way, the new fish enters the conversation, already in progress.
 5. Fish may leave their seat at any time and become an observer.
- Announce the time limit, if any, and begin the conversation. Let the fishbowl discussion run its course, or stop at the time limit. With people still in place, invite the observers to direct questions or comments to any present or former “fish.” Then, regroup for the general debriefing and discussion.

Some debriefing questions are:

- What have we learned about the subject?
- What do we still need to explore and think about?
- What have we noticed about the ways in which people communicate their feelings and ideas? Which ways were more effective? Which were less effective?

(It may be helpful to write comments on newsprint in debriefing this exercise.)

Notes: Since the Fishbowl Activity takes a substantial block of time, it should be reserved for topics of interest and importance to the majority of the group.

Hassle Lines

Purpose: To explore what behaviors escalate conflict.

To practice conflict resolution skills.

Time: 30 minutes.

Materials: Just people.

Directions: Count off by twos and form two lines, with each person facing a partner in the other line. Explain that each line will have a different role to play in a conflict scenario, which you will describe.

Rules:

They can gesture and wave their arms as much as they want to, but there can be absolutely no touching. Stress that there must be no physical contact. Some facilitators walk down the aisle between the two lines, to stress that there should be space between them. If you call "freeze," they should freeze in their position so that you can all observe their body language.

Describe the scenario twice, and begin. Give participants 2-3 minutes to enact the scene. Watch for any striking body language that make a good "freeze frame." Also, watch the action for any signs that the acting has turned real, and a potentially violent situation is arising. If a dangerous situation arises, end the scene immediately.

End the scene, and give the participants a moment to debrief with each other. Ask participants how the scenario felt. Let them diffuse their emotions. Ask each group to report on the outcome of the scene, or ask whether there were any especially good solutions. If energy and interest levels warrant it, repeat each scenario, switching roles.

Hassle Line Scenarios:

1. Your dog, who you love, is in the habit of digging up plants in your neighbor's garden. Your neighbor, who hates your dog, decides to teach the dog a lesson and hits him with a stick. You rush over, angry and worried that your dog has been hurt. Try to de-escalate the situation, and resolve it without violence. Those in Line 1 are dog owners. Those in Line 2 are neighbors.
2. You are watching your favorite program on TV. Your sister comes up, without asking you, and switches the TV to another station. Try to find a compromise that you are both satisfied with. Those in Line 1 are watching the program; those in Line 2 have switched it off.
3. A bully is standing in the doorway which you have to pass through. He refuses to move out of your way and let you through, challenging you to

fight for the privilege. Try to deal with the situation non-violently. Those in Line 1 are the bully; those in Line 2 are the person needing to pass.

4. You are accused of cheating on a test. You didn't cheat and you will fail the course if you fail this test. You must convince your teacher that you didn't cheat. Line 1 is the student accused of cheating, Line 2 is the teacher.
5. You come across someone going through your locker (purse, backpack, car). Try to deal with the situation without violence. Line 1 is the person going through the locker; Line 2 is the person whose locker it is.
6. You are having a big party at your house. During the party, a car drives up with people who you know are trouble. How can you get them to leave without violence? Line 1 is the person hosting the party. Line 2 is one of the people in the car.
7. You have been to a party where your friend, who drove you has been drinking a lot. You know from the past that he gets angry very easily when he's drunk. It's time to leave, and he is getting ready to drive. You think he's too drunk to drive. How can you get him not to drive without getting into an argument with him and risking violence?

Variations: See "Two Sides to a Conflict"

Have the participants begin to play out the conflict. Stop them halfway and ask them to look for nonviolent ways to solve the conflict.

Have one team member observe changes in body language and noise levels and reflect what they observe back to the group. It's a great opportunity to demonstrate how much we communicate with body language.

Notes: Some facilitators don't find that Scene 4 is successful, but others find it a good opportunity to look at differences in power and how power affects conflict. The team can add others as appropriate. Sometimes participants will want to suggest a scenario.

It may be helpful to coach the group through the win/win steps after completing one or two scenarios.

Before using this activity develop the group tool box.

Methods of Nonviolent Action

Purpose: To give concrete examples of how people have used nonviolent action to address societal injustice.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Copies of the "Methods of Nonviolent Action" List (Below)
Adapted from Gene Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, Boston 1973

Directions: Go around the circle with participants reading 10-15 things from the methods list. Then ask if anyone has seen actions like these used. When? What was the outcome? What are the strengths of nonviolent action? What are the weaknesses? It's helpful for facilitators to have several examples of successful nonviolent protest to bring up.

Notes: This activity is appropriate for a mature group that wants to look more closely at nonviolent social change.

Methods of Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent Protest, Persuasion, Noncooperation and Intervention

- Statements and communications
- Public speeches
- Letters of opposition or support
- Petitions
- Banners, posters and displayed communications
- Leaflets, pamphlets and books
- Newspapers and journals

Group Representations

- Group Lobbying
- Picketing
- Public assemblies of protest or support
- Teach-ins
- Vigils
- Public Mourning
- Marches
- Parades
- Pilgrimages

Symbolic Public Acts

- Mock awards
- Mock elections
- Mock funerals
- Homage at burial places
- Prayer and worship
- Wearing of symbols
- Delivering symbolic objects
- Protest disrobing
- Fasting for the sake of moral pressure

Drama and Music

- Performances of skits, plays and music
- Guerilla theater
- Singing

Withdrawal and Renunciation

- Walk-outs
- Silence
- Renouncing honors

Social Noncooperation

- Suspension of social and sport events
- Boycott of social affairs
- Student strike
- Withdrawal from social institutions

Economic Boycotts

- Consumer boycott
- Selective patronage
- Stay-in strike
- Policy of austerity
- Rent withholding
- Withdrawal of bank deposits
- Refusal to pay fees, dues and assessments
- Refusal to pay debts or interest

Worker Strikes

- Protest Strike
- Quickie walkout (lightning strike)
- Work slowdown
- Work-to-rule
- Sick-in-strike (mass group calling in sick)
- General strike (multi-industry strike)

Political Noncooperation with the Government

- Boycott of elections
- Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
- Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- Civil disobedience of “illegitimate” laws
- Overloading of administrative systems

Physical Intervention

- Sit-in
- Stand-in
- Ride-in
- Wade-in
- Pray-in
- Speak-in

- Hunger strike
- Nonviolent obstruction
- Nonviolent occupation
- Nonviolent land seizure

Creation of Alternatives

- Dual sovereignty and parallel governments
- Alternative markets and economic institutions
- Alternative transportation systems
- Alternative social institutions
- Alternative communication system

Perspectives On Nonviolent Social Change

Purpose: To raise awareness of what others have said about nonviolence and social change.

Time: 10-15 minutes.

Materials: Copies of the “Perspectives on Nonviolent Social Change” List (Below)

Directions: Go around the circle and have participants each read a quote aloud. Ask if there are any that really appeal to anyone and why. Explain that these are the words of people who have successfully used nonviolence to change unfair, unjust and oppressive conditions in their lives and their words help remind us of the power of nonviolence.

Notes: This activity is generally used to set the tone for more mature groups interested in exploring nonviolent social change.

Positions and Needs

Purpose: To understand the difference between positions and needs and show how that understanding can help conflict resolution.

Time: 15 minutes.

Materials: Scenarios below or other scenarios.

Directions: Discuss with the group the difference between “positions” and “needs.” If it does not emerge in conversation, explain that in conflict resolution terms, a position means a statement of what someone wants, demands or will accept in order to resolve a situation. Positions are often firm pronouncements, made in opposition to the other side. Underlying the position are the needs, often unexpressed. Separating the stated position from the underlying need is an important skill in conflict resolution, because it can help people see new and creative possibilities for meeting the real needs of everyone. Explain one or more of the following conflict scenarios, without reading the possible positions and needs. Ask the group to draw out the difference

between what each person says they want (their position), and what their real needs are. Ask for the group to suggest how the characters could work together to meet both of their underlying needs. The positions and needs identified below are some ways of looking at the situations, the group may come up with others. Note that it is not always obvious what the underlying need is. The best way to find out is to ask the person, and to listen carefully.

Scenario 1

Two little girls were arguing over an orange. "It's mine," said one girl. "No it isn't. I had it first," said the second girl. Their argument got louder, and their mother came to see what was wrong. She listened to each girl's position, and then she took a knife and cut the orange in half. She gave each girl half of the orange.

The first girl peeled her half of the orange, threw away the peel and ate the inside. The second girl grated her half of the orange and threw away the inside-she was making orange cookies.

Position:

Each girl wanted the entire orange.

Needs:

One needed the rind, while the other needed the fruit.

Scenario 2

A teenage son asks his mother if he can borrow the car. His mother responds that he can't, because last time he didn't replace the gas he used. The son insists that he should be able to use the car anyway, because he has an important game to go to. His mother refuses, saying that he should have thought of that earlier, when he failed to take care of the car. The two continue to argue.

Positions:

The son's position is that he should be able to borrow the car. The mother's, that he cannot borrow the car.

Needs:

The son needs transportation. The mother needs to know that her son will take care of the car, and that the car will have gas in it when she uses it next.

Scenario 3

A teacher turns his back to the class to write on the chalk board. While his back is turned, someone throws an eraser full of chalk. It hits him on the shoulder, leaving a big chalk mark. The teacher is furious and says, "No one is going home until someone tells me who threw that." The students sit in silence. The teacher gets angrier, threatening them all with suspension. None of the students say anything.

Positions:

The teacher's position is that the students must tell who threw the eraser. The students' position is that they won't tell.

Needs:

The teacher's need may be to be shown respect by the students and have a disciplined classroom. The students' need may be to not get in trouble with the others by telling on someone, to protect one another, or to not be held responsible for other students' behavior.

Scenario 4

There has been some vandalism on Main Street lately, and the police have no suspects. The police announce that as a result of the vandalism, there will be a mandatory curfew for all youth under 18, from 10 PM to 6AM. Many young people say that they will defy the curfew, because it unfairly punishes them for the actions of a few people, and assumes that the vandals were youth.

Positions:

The position of the police is that the curfew must be observed.

The young people's position is that they will not obey the curfew.

Needs:

The police's needs may be to end the vandalism, or to show the public that they have taken a step to end the vandalism.

The young people's needs may be to go out when they want to, to be seen as individuals rather than a group, to be trusted and respected by adults.

Notes: For young groups, the first scenario, the orange story is the easiest to understand. For older groups, the more complex scenarios may still be challenging. Keep with it, because this concept is central to the creative resolution of conflict. As the facilitator, be prepared to give more examples that your group is likely to understand. Once they have caught on, you can analyze any conflict using the position and needs concept.

Source: The concept of positions and needs (or interests) was articulated by Roger Fisher and William Ury in *Getting to Yes*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981

Quick Decisions

Purpose: To practice thinking quickly as a group to address an act of violence. To explore creative ways to address violence.

Time: 30-45 minutes

Materials: The scenarios described below, or other scenarios.

Directions: Form teams of three. Explain that you will describe several real-life problems. Working together, each group needs to come to a quick decision on how they, as a group, would respond. They will have 15 seconds to consider the problem individually, and one minute to reach an agreement together. Explain that the time limit may seem difficult, but they are real. On the street, there is no time to pull out the newsprint and brainstorm.

After one minute, have each group report. If there are dissenting individuals, they may give their “minority reports.” After each of the small groups has reported, discuss the problem as a whole group.

Quick Decision Scenarios

1. You are at the mall. A mother and her toddler are standing nearby. The toddler is having a temper tantrum. He is lying on the floor crying. The mother slaps him and screams, “Stop crying.” She looks like she is getting angrier. What do you do?
2. Walking down the street at night, you notice that across the street a man and a woman are struggling. They don’t appear to have weapons. What do you do?
3. You have attended a meeting in a tough part of town and are the last people out of the building. The door closes behind you and locks. It is a city block, with no alleys or side streets visible. You look to the left and see a group of youth, armed, coming toward you and occupying the whole width of the street. You look to the right and see another group advancing. They will meet at about where you are standing. What do you do?
4. The three of you live in a large apartment building, on the same floor. For the past few nights, you’ve each heard your neighbors, a man and a woman, fighting loudly with each other. Tonight, they are screaming at each other, and you hear furniture being thrown around. The man is threatening the woman, and she is screaming for him to stop. You have each come to the doors of your apartments, and see each other in the hallway. What do you do?

In debriefing, stress that often a little distraction can defuse a situation. Letting people know that other people are watching can be enough to change the situation. (This is the principle that Amnesty International operates on.) Debriefing scenarios #2 and #4 can lead into a discussion of domestic violence. It can be a good time to introduce the domestic violence handouts below.

Variations: Give participants more time to think on their own and to reach a group agreement. More time may not mirror real life as well, but it may allow for more creative solutions to emerge.

During discussion, ask participants to describe their dilemmas they have faced. Ask for the group to come up with solutions to the new problem.

Notes:

