

8. IMPASSE

**Target group:**

Young people aged 16-30
Youth workers aged 18+

**Group size:**

10-20 participants

**Duration:**

90 minutes

**Type of activities:**

Drama exercises
Personal sharing
Active involvement

**Resources:**

Standard

**Atmosphere needed:**

Calm and creative

**Aim**

To explore different ways to “back away” from an impasse.

Learning Outcomes

- Improved awareness of different ways to deal with a major block or “impasse” in communication.
- More confidence in using methods for calming a blocked situation.

Intro to the workshop (5 min)

Welcome the participants. Explain the aim and brief agenda of the workshop. Highlight that the workshop is not about finding solutions to problems but about finding ways to get around complete blockages.

Impassable traffic! (10 min)

Create two “cars” made up of four people in each car (two in the back and two in the front, joined together by locking arms or some other means). Create a “narrow road” using chairs, the other participants or other suitable barriers. The “people cars” are on this narrow road and act out what would happen if they came together with no room to pass.

Other participants can offer ideas about what the cars would do at first. Then ask for ideas about ways to resolve the blockage in the road. Start with immediate, practical suggestions but then get as creative as you like.

Have a debrief about the cars game and explore what happened when everyone worked against each other. Use the discussion and examples to highlight that an “impasse” is where it seems like there is no solution but there is just a total block in communication or relations.

Causes of an impasse (5-10 min)

Have a whole group brainstorming discussion to list some of the causes of the impasse (in small groups if there is time). Next come up with a list of possible solutions for the impasse and use some of the answers in the next exercises.

Forum Theatre “Boxing Match” – outside help (20-30 min)

Now we will use some forum theatre techniques to explore ways to climb down from or calm down a situation where there is an impasse. One way to deal with an impasse is to get outside help. We will explore this idea with the help of Rocky!

Create the scene of a boxing match – fake boxing fighting moves, music from the Rocky films, towel worn like boxers warming up etc. – even a “boxing ring” if you can! The trainers or workshop leaders act out a situation where two “boxers” are at an impasse and are totally blocked

or not listening to each other. If you like, you can prepare other roles that volunteers from the group could play instead.

The role play starts with some arguing or aggressive style acting and then, at a suitable moment, someone rings a bell (like in a boxing match at the end of a round) and then shouts “FREEZE”. Now you can ask for any ideas about who could help in this situation. Who could offer support or advice to these characters to help them back away from the impasse? When there are suggestions, ask for a volunteer to be the “trainer” for the “boxer” and give advice when the bell rings for the end of the round.

The characters can listen to the advice and continue the role play to see what would happen. This can be done a few times with different “trainers” each time.

**Remember the aim is to calm the situation down,
not resolve the conflict.**

Now create some small groups and ask them to talk about some of the big areas of conflict in their family, friend groups, schools, relationships etc., but participants should only share what they feel comfortable sharing within their small group. The task of each small group is to brainstorm ideas about who would help in those situations: you can be realistic or creative!

Debrief and create a list of all the different people that could help and how they would help. Remind everyone to only share personal information from his or her own stories.

A change is as good as a rest (5-10 min)

Another way to help in a situation where there is an “impasse” is to physically change something. There are many different ways to do this and this activity is to get people to show as many ways as they can: change the time, the place, the lights, the sounds, atmosphere, position – anything!

To warm up, get people into pairs facing each other and ask them to memorise what the other person looks like. Now everyone turns round and changes something about the way they look. After a few seconds, everyone turns back and tries to spot the change. This should be done at least four or five times to show how many different ways there are to change.

“Musical chairs?” – Changing the scene (5-10 min)

Now set up two chairs facing each other in the middle of the room to show “an impasse” and ask for ideas about different ways of changing the scene. People can physically move the chairs, change the layout of the room or act out what they would do to change things or just describe a change.

Changing the picture! (15 min)

Get people into small groups and ask them to create a “totally blocked person”. They must show as many ways as possible that the person is “blocked” and can be as creative and imaginative as they like. It could be because of blocked thinking, narrow focus, not listening, being very angry, the history of the situation, emotional baggage, etc. You could either get people to draw the “blocked person” or physically create them using a member of their group and anything they have or any other resources you can provide.

Final debriefing and evaluation (5-10 min)



Have a final session where the group members can share any thoughts, feelings or ideas they have about the impasse, especially if they have discovered any ways to help them deal with their own impasse situations. If there is time, share some of the other ideas below.

Some other possible ideas to help people back away from an “impasse”:

- distract them with something;
- come up with a hypothetical scenario (“If I do this, would you be able to do that?”);
- highlight (or create) some common ground, common enemy or common goal;
- separate the people from the problem;
- challenge the assumption that there is only a fixed pie or only one way to win;
- investigate the possibility of a further exchange of information;
- insist on objective criteria;
- clarify communication (past and present);
- consider if apologies would be appropriate.