

Black Friday

Defusing and Staying Safe in Crowds



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Introduction

Black Friday is the day when thousands of people head to the shops looking for a bargain, but the rush for the best buys can lead to crowds and chaos. Last year you might have seen the news reports of bargain hunters fighting over reduced TVs and other goods in supermarkets.

This workshop uses images of the chaos last year to start a conversation with young people about staying safe in crowds. It looks at what can make a crowd dangerous, tips for staying safe and how to defuse potential conflict with other individuals in the crowd. The learning from this workshop can be applied to all crowds such as festivals, sports events or public gatherings.

The learning outcomes are:

- To understand what can affect how a crowd behaves
- To recognise the potential for a crowd to become dangerous and understand basic principles for staying safe
- To understand how to defuse conflict with others when in a crowd.

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Activity One: Black Friday Film (10 minutes)

Show the video within this BBC news article (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30247481>) and ask for general reflections. Ask the group what behaviours they saw in the film. Why do they think people act in that way? How did the crowd go from happily queuing outside the shop to frustration, anger and violence inside?

Cover the following points in the discussion: Outside the store the shoppers had something in common, they were looking forward to getting a bargain. There is nothing anyone can do until the shop opens, but wait. Once the doors open their motivation changes, now they want something. Reasonable people can often act differently when they want something, especially if they feel they are competing for it with those around them. This might also apply to getting to the front at a festival or a crowd of fans wanting to get a selfie with a star.

This BBC news article (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-30241459>) reported:

- 200 shoppers refused to leave a store in Middleton "despite being told stock had all gone"
- Fights broke out between shoppers in Stretford, and a woman suffered "minor injuries" after being hit by a falling television. The store was closed at 00:36 GMT
- A man was arrested in Salford after he threatened to "smash a staff member's face in"
- A woman broke her wrist in a crush in Manchester
- In Wigan, Police were called to reports of "several hundred people trying to enter the store".
- There were reports of fighting in a store in Hattersley, where a man was arrested for a public order offence
- A man was arrested for assault at a store in Green End

Activity Two: Crowds (10 minutes)

Ask the group if they can think of other situations where crowds might form? They might think of a public event such as the Royal Jubilee, a visit from a President religious figure, a protest march, a football match or a music festival. All of these events will attract crowds – the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton attracted over one million people along the procession route.

Many crowds form and disperse without any incidents, but all have the potential to become dangerous, given the right conditions.

Break the group into smaller groups and ask each to note down on a piece of paper all of the things that might make a crowd dangerous. Encourage them to think about the behaviours of individuals as well as the crowd as a whole: where it is and how big it is. They might also want to consider the environment, location of the crowd and where it is going.

Ask each group to feedback their thoughts and discuss these with the rest of the group. Record their thoughts to come back to later. Their suggestions might include:

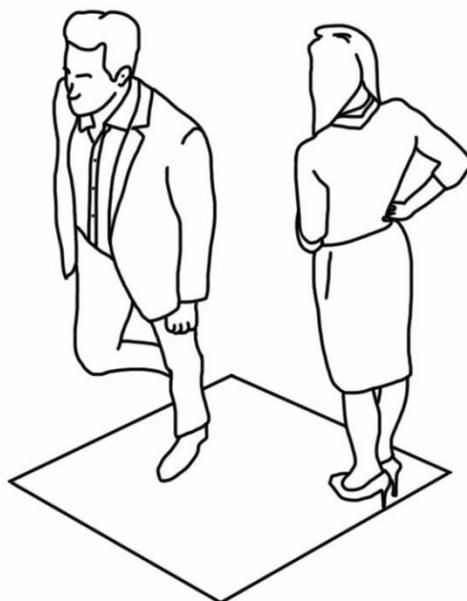
- The reason for the crowd forming (are they protesting?)
- People fighting and others joining in
- People getting angry or annoyed with each other
- An external influences such as a fire causing the crowd to suddenly move.
- Not enough room for the crowd in the space
- The crowd moving too fast

Activity Three: Crowd density (10 minutes)

After exploring the suggestions from Activity Two highlight that the key issues which lead to problems in crowds are crowd density (the number of people in a given space) and crowd movement.

Highlight crowd density by marking out a one metre square on the floor using chalk or tape. Ask one volunteer to stand in the square. Then add another person into the square one-by-one until they can no longer (whilst keeping their feet on the floor) fit anyone else into the square.

Ask those in the square how they felt as the square filled up. They might be starting to feel uncomfortable, hot or irritated by others.



Highlight that more people could fit into the square. Look for any gaps between people. If that square were at the front of a concert and pressed against the barriers then the people behind could easily push more people into the gaps, by squashing those already in the square together. Even with low barriers people can get pinned against them being unable to escape.

The absolute safe upper limit is nine people per metre, but at five people the risk of tripping and falling is much higher – especially if the crowd starts to move.

Point out that crowds do not stand evenly. People will congregate near the action or run away from danger. Remind the group of the film. There was plenty of room in the shop for all of the people, but the crowd became too dense as people rushed through the door and those who fell were trampled on.

Use Worksheet One (page 9) to highlight some basic principles for staying safe in a crowd.

Activity Four: Communication in Crowds (20 minutes)

Ask the group to think back to the activity in the square. How many people were they communicating with? For example if you got to six people in a square then there were fifteen different possible relationships.

We have already seen how people in crowds can sometimes behave unreasonably when they have strong motivations, but there are many reasons for conflict to occur. An argument between two people can easily disrupt a crowd. Other people may join in or they may get annoyed at those arguing. If a fight breaks out people may run to get away, others may join in.

Ask the group (if it hasn't already come up) to suggest what might cause conflict between individuals in a crowd. Their suggestions might include:

- People being impatient when queuing
- A feeling of injustice (people pushing in)
- People feeling threatened (maybe they are being crushed or are claustrophobic)
- Stepping on someone's toes
- Bumping in to each other, knocking someone over
- Spilling drinks on each other
- Dancing too energetically and bumping others
- Smoking in someone's face

Discuss each group's ideas with the rest of the group and highlight that all of the situations can escalate into confrontation if not well managed.

Break the group into small groups and give each one of the scenarios on Worksheet Two (page 10). Ask the groups to think about what would make this situation worse. What response or behaviours could turn an accidental nudge or simple misunderstanding into a confrontation? For example: giving a dirty look, shouting aggressively, pushing someone back, trash talking, calling someone rude names.

Ask the groups to choose defusing behaviours from Worksheet Three (page 11) which might help to prevent the situation from becoming confrontational.

The scenarios are:

- You have a good spot near the front of a music festival and someone taller than you has just pushed in and stood in front of you – now you can't see.
- You are watching a football match and the person next to you keeps shouting really loudly and waving their arms about. Each time they do they bump into you.
- A couple are standing in front of you. One of the couple looks out of it and the other starts pushing you, and those around you, and shouting "back, get back!"
- You are queuing to get into an event and a crowd has gathered around the entrance. The doors aren't open, but the person behind you keeps pushing you forwards.

Ask each group to feedback their thoughts and discuss this with the rest of the group. Use the notes on page 12 to help discuss the defusing behaviours.

Follow up Activity: Make a Poster (20 minutes)

Break the group into smaller groups and ask each to think of a crowd situation, it could be a Black Friday shop or another crowd that is relevant to the group. Ask them to design a poster giving advice on how to behave to keep people safe and stop the crowd from becoming dangerous.

Ask each small group to show and explain their poster to the rest of the group.

Questions you might get asked

What is Black Friday?

Black Friday was originally an American tradition on the day after Thanksgiving when shops would cut prices to tempt customers. It started in the UK in 2010. Last year £810 million was spent in one day. This year Brits are expected to spend £12,384 every second.

Why is it called Black Friday?

It's not known. Some think it's the point at which retailers financial 'books' come out of the red and into the black for the year. Others think that it is because so many people went out to shop that it caused traffic accidents and violence.

Haven't lots of stores pulled out of Black Friday this year?

There has been some trouble in recent years – hence the film within this workshop – and some stores have opted not to have a big sale on Friday. Others are spreading their deals out over the week so as to manage demand. There are still lots of bargains on offer on Friday though.

Isn't it the responsibility of the shops to manage the crowds?

There are guides to help organisers plan to manage crowds and how much space they need, however crowds don't use space evenly. For example you'll see more people (higher crowd density) at the front of a festival audience than the back. People don't always react predictably, so keep aware.

Worksheet 1: Staying safe in crowds

When in a crowd your priority must be to stay safe, here are a few tips:

- Arrive in plenty of time so that you can assess where the exits, toilets and officials are. This will allow you to take a direct route when you need them later.
- Always know where your nearest emergency exit is and use this one in an emergency – remember that the main exit will be very crowded, so if you can, use an alternative.
- Keep an eye on what the crowd is doing:
 - How many people are in the crowd and how densely packed in are they?
 - What is the mood of the crowd, are people becoming aggressive or angry?
 - Is the crowd moving? How fast? Where is it going? Does the space ahead narrow, is the crowd likely to get squashed together?
- Always know the quickest route out of the crowd in case it gets too dangerous.
- Do not rush, be patient. Pushing, shoving and rushing only makes the situation more difficult for everyone and increases the possibility of accidents.
- Stay in groups. Check your mobile is charged so that you can find friends and family if you get separated. Organise a meeting point in case you get lost.
- Be considerate to people around you. If you bump them, say “sorry”. If they bump you, don’t get annoyed, don’t take it personally – move away if you need to – and carry on enjoying your day.
- Talk to people around you as doing so increases the chances of them helping you if you get into trouble. But never go off with strangers.
- Think, is it worth is getting to the front?
- If you are asked to move by the officials then do it, they might be able to see problems in the crowd that you cannot.
- If the ground is muddy or uneven then remember that you are more likely to fall over and you should therefore be more cautious about going into dense crowds.
- Crowd surfing is not just dangerous, but is likely to annoy those around you and may get you kicked out of the venue.
- When it’s time to leave there will be a rush for the exits. Consider leaving a little early or hanging back a bit to avoid the crush.

Worksheet 2: Crowd Scenarios

Scenario 1

You have a good spot near the front of a music festival and someone taller than you has just pushed in and stood in front of you – now you can't see.

Scenario 2

You are watching a football match and the person next to you keeps shouting really loudly and waving their arms about. Each time they do they bump into you.

Scenario 3

- A couple are standing in front of you. One of the couple looks out of it and the other starts pushing you, and those around you, and shouting “back, get back!”

Scenario 4

You are queuing to get into an event and a crowd has gathered around the entrance. The doors aren't open, but the person behind you keeps pushing you forwards.

Worksheet 3: Defusing Behaviours

Start a conversation about how crowded it is	Smile and look friendly
Focus on enjoying your own day	Move away if possible
Don't worry about it	Apologise
Take a few moments to think before reacting	Remember that your mood might affect how you react
Calmly ask them to stop and explain why	Talk to them to find out why they are doing what they are doing

Worksheet 3: Defusing Behaviours – Teaching Notes

Start a conversation about how crowded it is

Whilst it might be an obvious topic of conversation, talking about the crowd will help you create common ground with someone else. It acknowledges that the bumps may be difficult avoid, and allows you to talk about 'the crowd' rather than appear to criticise the other person's behaviour.

Focus on enjoying your own day

Think about what is important. 30 seconds before this started you were looking forward to your day. Where do you want to be in 30 seconds time – still enjoying your day or in a miserable argument with someone?

Don't worry about it

Ask yourself how important is it. You are in a crowd and people will bump into you and do things that seem inconsiderate. Is it personal? Most likely not. Check your own mood too. Are you more sensitive than usual because you are stressed, hot or anxious?

Take a few moments to think before reacting

If you are annoyed or angry then take a few moments to cool down and think before acting. If you don't then you are likely to convey your mood through what you do or what you say, and that is likely to get a similar response and the situation could get worse. Anger breeds anger.

Calmly ask them to stop and explain why

Asking someone to do, or to stop doing, something in a calm and friendly way gives you a better chance getting what you want than being aggressive. Also give a good reason for why it is important to you. A good 'why' helps the other person to choose to help you.

Smile and look friendly

You might be really annoyed by the behaviours of others, but to show this will not help you. If you show your anger then they will be less likely to want to help you and the situation is more likely to become confrontational. They might carry on just to annoy you.

Move away if possible

Moving away may be difficult but possible. You might lose your position in the crowd, but you will be away from the person causing you difficulty. It might not seem fair, but it is safest. If they are aggressive, threatening or violent then the priority is to get away as quick as you can.

Apologise

If you have done something which annoys others then apologise. Even if they have told you about being annoyed in an angry or rude way. Apologising can often stop an argument emerging.

Remember that your mood might affect how you react

How are you feeling? Hot, tired, annoyed, stressed, ill, anxious. All of these can affect how you communicate with others. Your tolerance of other people's behaviours might be lower and your responses may be more extreme than usual.

Talk to them to find out why they are doing what they are doing

Talking to others helps to break the ice in a crowd. Don't make assumptions about why they are behaving the way they are. Find out why they are doing what they are doing then you will better understand their behaviours. This might help you accept their behaviour or to suggest an alternative.