

dfuse

Defusing Anger

A single session for young people



Communication in conflict

Contents

Introduction	p3
Activity One – Attitudes to Anger	p4
Activity Two – Signs of Anger	p5
Activity Three – Defusing Anger	p6

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Introduction

Young people regularly face conflict in their communities, schools and homes and can involve family, friends, strangers, bullies or people in authority.

Many young people have difficulty managing conflict. Simple situations such as misunderstandings or wanting different things can escalate to become confrontational, destructive or violent. Factors such as attitude, values and perspective can influence how individuals respond to conflict, anger, frustration and fear.

An inability to communicate in conflict may lead to poor decisions, which may lead to poor outcomes, for example violence, crime or being coerced into doing things they do not want to. Young people who can manage anger and communicate effectively in conflict will better manage the influences on them. They are more likely to be able to talk themselves out of trouble, rather than making things worse.

This session provides three activities to help explore defusing skills with young people:

- Activity One - Attitudes to Anger looks at attitudes to conflict and how factors, particularly anger, can escalate a situation.
- Activity Two - Signs of Anger explores how emotions affect the ability to communicate effectively and how anger can be managed and reduced.
- Activity Three - Defusing Anger asks students to explore conflict situations creatively and provides highlight the behaviours which can escalate conflict and which can defuse it.

Activity One - Attitudes to Anger

This is a quick, icebreaker-style activity based on agree-disagree statements. It is designed to help students reflect on their feelings about conflict, aggression and anger. It encourages them to discuss with others which behaviours are likely to help defuse conflict and which are not.

The activity also helps teachers, and those running the session, to assess students' attitudes towards conflict and their understanding of approaches for defusing.

What to do

1. Choose a method for an agree-disagree activity suitable to your group. The usual procedure is to designate one side of the room as agree, the opposite as disagree. Students can position themselves somewhere in the space according to their views on the statement - whether they agree strongly, or mildly, or are neutral about it, for example. You could also use a show of purpose-made cards or even hands to get the same effect, or any other method that suits the space and situation.
2. Read out a statement from the list below and invite students to respond, by positioning themselves in the room, or some other method, how strongly they agree or disagree about it.
3. After each one, invite discussion. Asking one student who agrees to explain why to someone who disagrees, and vice versa, can be useful. Ask for examples to support or elaborate on opinions. Encourage changes of mind for anyone who has reconsidered after hearing discussion.
4. This is a journey of exploration and learning, not about staying fixed in a position you no longer believe in.

The statements

1. If an argument is going to happen, there is nothing much anyone can do to stop it.
2. A lot of arguments are caused by misunderstandings.
3. If I'm annoyed or angry, being told to calm down usually helps a lot.
4. It is easy to annoy someone without meaning to.
5. If a fight is starting, I want to leave.
6. It is hard to think clearly when you are angry.
7. Some people get into fights because of their personality.
8. You can get someone who is angry to see reason if you speak logically and calmly to them.

Activity Two – Signs of Anger

This is a photo based activity looking at signs of anger. It is designed to help students identify the physical signs of anger and high emotion and the circumstances which can lead to tension or inflame it. It explores ideas for reducing tension and lowering the emotional level of a situation.

The activity also helps teachers, and those running the session, to see how skilled students are at recognising the signs of anger and rising tension and to identify areas of strength and weakness in empathising with different parties to a conflict or disagreement.

What to do

1. Ask students: can you tell how someone is feeling by looking at them? Discuss briefly. Then explain that they are about to see a series of photographs. They are all attempts to convey one emotion. The students' first task is to identify the emotion.
2. Show the pictures in turn (available to download by logging in to dfuse.org.uk/MyDfuse). After each pause for reflection, check that students recognised the emotion of anger. Ask how does this emotion shows itself. What are the noticeable bodily changes that go with the emotion. What are the physical signs of this emotion? Record the words students use to describe the physical appearances. After a while, compare with the following:
 - Muscle tension - especially in the face, teeth grinding/clenched jaw
 - Clenched fists
 - Intimidating or threatening glare
 - Shaking or tremor.
3. Ask the students to suggest changes that might not be visible. Other physical or physiological changes might include increased heart rate, sweating or 'seeing red'. Ask the students to consider the effects of anger on people's minds and their ability to think clearly? Explore this by focusing on one picture and imagining what the person is thinking. This can be done in groups or pairs.
4. Finally ask students to imagine they were there, faced with one of these angry people. What would they say to them? Ask them to suggest what might have made them feel like this. What would make them feel angrier? What would make them feel calmer, and less angry?

Activity Three – Defusing Anger

This is a creative activity to explore escalating and de-escalating conflict. It is designed to help students identify the causes of conflict and why conflict escalates and to explore ideas for defusing conflict situations through communication.

The activity also helps teachers, and those running the session, to assess how able and willing students are to defuse conflict. It may highlight issues which are likely to create conflict and behaviours which escalate situations, this could identify areas for future exploration.

What to do

1. Ask students to produce an improvised drama, role play or written story using the following guidelines and for inspiration and motivation for a drama - written or acted.
2. Finish by asking what students think they have learned about what makes people angry and defusing anger.

- Conflict is often caused by differences - in what people are trying to achieve or the way they think it should be done. It could also be caused by difference in personalities.
- Sometimes conflict is the result of misunderstandings.
- Conflict can become confrontational when one person does something which angers or threatens the other person. This could include being disrespectful or rude.
- Other ways to escalate conflict include causing embarrassment, making threats, being aggressive or confrontational.
- Conflicts can grow and grow if two people deliberately or accidentally continue to wind each other up.
- Often conversations about conflict become more concerned with the way people treat each other and are no longer about the original issue, for example, being rude can add a new area of conflict.
- To calm an angry person it helps if you can show that you understand their point of view or their feelings. So listen, and show that you are listening.
- Avoid passing judgement on someone who is angry or on the cause of their anger. It will not help.
- Do not take what an angry person says personally. They probably don't mean it, and if you get angry too it will probably make things worse.