

Parallel lines (also known as ‘hassle lines’)

Time: 20 minutes (as an introduction or warm-up), 45 minutes (as a full exercise).

Goal or purpose:

- To give people an opportunity to solve a hassle or conflict using nonviolence.
- To experience a conflict from various viewpoints.

Preparation:

A series of role plays are needed, each focusing on a conflict between two people, with a clear protagonist (see the sidebar for ideas of scenarios).

How it’s done/facilitator’s notes:

The facilitator asks people to form two rows of an equal number of people facing one another (you can use another row, which will play the role of observer and then comment during the debriefing on what the person saw during the exercise – the ‘observer role’ is also useful to give to those who do not wish to participate in the exercise.) Ask the participants to reach out to the person across from them to make sure they know who they will be relating to.

Explain that there are only two roles in this exercise, everyone in one line has the same role, the people opposite them have another role. Each person relates only to the person across from them. The facilitator explains the roles for each side, describes the conflict and who will start it. Encourage creativity and spontaneity.

Examples of roles:

- Conflict between two activists; perhaps someone new wants to join an action after the planning and training process.
- Someone planning to engage in nonviolent action/someone close to them who is opposed to their participation.
- Blockading a weapons or government facility/frustrated or angry police officer.

In some cases it may help to brief the two sides separately – as the role plays develop, you might want some to play the role of angry or belligerent police or security – so that the other ‘side’ responds as naturally as possible.

Feel free to change the rules without letting the whole group know – for example, brief the ‘police line’ to target one individual (perhaps someone they identify as an ‘organiser’), ignoring the others. How does the rest of the group respond in this situation?

Nonviolence
Conflict
Nonviolent actions
Working in groups Coping with the stress and strain of taking a stand Maintaining nonviolence during an action
Training
Role playing

Training

Allow for a few seconds of silence and then tell them to begin. Depending on the situation, it may be a brief hassle (less than a minute) or you can let it go longer, but do not let it extend beyond 3 or 4 minutes. Call 'stop' and debrief.

Debriefing questions might include:

- what did people do?
- how did they feel? What did you notice about your body language, voice, or other ways your body responded to conflict?
- what ways did you find to solve or deal with the conflict?
- are there things you think you could have done differently to respond more constructively to the conflict?

Replay the role play (perhaps add another element, or develop the situation), switching roles around. Moving one line up and having the person at the end go to the other end of that line is a quick and easy way of mixing up the lines.

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Brainstorming

Time: 15 minutes, or longer

Goal or purpose:

- Brainstorming is a group technique designed to generate a large number of ideas in a limited amount of time.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

The facilitator gives the group a question (for example, 'what is nonviolence?') or an issue you want to come up with more ideas ('developing a fund-raising strategy'), then asks the group to come up with as many ideas and responses as possible. The following guidelines will help produce an effective brainstorm.

- Focus on quantity: The more ideas generated, the more to pick from.
- No criticism: Criticism, challenges and discussion should be put 'on hold' until the brainstorming is done.

Nonviolence brainstorm

Try coming up with a single definition to answer 'What is nonviolence?' Through the brainstorm the participants can share many answers to that question – try to find enough commonality to reach a final definition that everyone can agree on. It can be enlightening to do a 'What is violence' brainstorm at the same time, again, trying to reach a definition. The facilitator should pay attention to key words, and check to make sure that words like 'power' and 'anger' don't only appear in the violence brainstorm. This can be used to support and inform other exercises, such as the spectrum game (p213).