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Name: Roleplaying

Time: minimum 20 minutes

Goal or purpose of the exercise:

Role playing is a simulation exercise in which participants take on roles in a given situation as preparation for encountering a similar situation or evaluating a past one. Roleplaying is used to develop a sense of tactics, individual competence, and group cohesion. The main advantage of roleplaying over other tools is that by its nature it involves people's emotions as well as their intellects in the experience. Because participants are more deeply engaged in roleplaying than they are in discussing a situation, they learn more, and probably more quickly. Roleplays are a versatile tool that can be used for many different purposes, for example: to analyze situations, theories and tactics; to understand people and their roles; to develop insight into the thoughts and feelings of ones "opponents"; to anticipate new situations; to reveal fears and anxieties and other feelings people have about an action; to develop individual and group competence and confidence; and to develop group morale.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

Although roleplays can be very complicated with many participants, they often are designed to look at a limited situation and not the entire action. Consider what the group needs to practice in order to prepare for an action. See [roles during action](#) to determine roles that may be needed.

The trainer(s) set the scene, often with a few very simple items to prepare the scene and characterize the roles, so that all participants understand the physical scene in which the roleplay will take place. The participants are given a description of their role especially describing the motives and interests of the role, not a screen play to act out. People are given a few minutes to get into their role, and if they are in a group they might map out tactics. The trainer indicates when the roleplay begins and when it ends. The roleplayers start at the given scene and play their given role as they see it.

After the roleplay is stopped, the participants are given a brief pause to lay down their roles and then the evaluation begins. This is an essential part of the roleplay exercise. It is often advantageous to begin with allowing the participants to share their emotions that came up during the roleplay. If not everyone could see the entire roleplay it helps to have a very brief overview of the events. Participants can share what they learned during the exercise. Observers are asked to share their views about what happened, what went well, what needs improvement, what precipitated increased or decreased tension, etc.

The evaluation should only go on as long as new issues are raised and participants are exploring problems and alternatives.

Trainers notes:

It is best to end the roleplay as soon as enough important issues are uncovered. It is important for the trainer(s) to act to prevent physical or emotional injury to the participants, possibly by quickly stopping the roleplay if situations that endanger the participants develop.

Set the tone for the evaluation, helping the group to share their feelings or tensions, and what they learned or observed about tactics, strategy, goals, nonviolence theory and its application. Discourage evaluating how "well" the participants played a role. There is no one "right" answer to a given situation so it is important to help the group to express its ideas and alternative solutions for that situation. For a short roleplay as described above, usually twenty minutes is enough. It is often helpful to start another roleplay which can

allow the group to try alternatives that came up in the evaluation rather than continue the discussion. One way to do this is to repeat the same basic plot with different people in the roles, or change the situation by bringing in new roles, such as police or crowd reactions in the example given.

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