

# Life Skills Education

**DISCRIMINATION**



## Why Life Skills Education?

Difficulties and challenges are an inevitable part of life. It is important for an individual to be able to adapt to these challenges and efficiently cope with them. For this purpose, Prerana conducts Life Skills Education sessions with all the children in its care. The sessions help to prepare the children for the realities of life by equipping them with a value system. The World Health Organization defines life skills as **"the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life"**. Life Skills Education aims to equip individuals with the necessary skill set to meet the rising needs and demands of the present society while promoting an individual's mental wellbeing.

According to the WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO the ten core life skills are: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions.

Prerana believes that education is an important tool to empower children to become independent and self-sufficient. In line with Prerana's philosophy, regular life skill education sessions were initiated in one of the Children's Homes that we work with. These sessions covered a range of skills such as effective communication, decision making, self-awareness and maintaining healthy interpersonal relations.

## Rationale for Session

Over a period of time, the facilitator had observed the group dynamics among the residents of the Home through the sessions. The facilitator noted the existence of smaller groups among the residents. It was observed that these groups were often unfriendly with one another. Subtle forms of hostility such as eye rolling, not sitting together, unkind comments about each other abilities and knowledge would be exchanged. The facilitator believed that it was necessary to address the same to encourage healthier interpersonal relations among the residents. Thus, in January 2020, sessions on understanding discrimination and peer pressure were scheduled. The session has been discussed in detail in this document.

Life skill education session: Understanding discrimination

Number of participants: 22

Age group: 12 - 18 years (all girls)

Aim: To build an understanding of what constitutes discrimination and how it can affect people.

The facilitator began the session with the activity '**Discriminatory practices**'. The activity can be conducted with a group of seven or more participants. At the start of the session, the facilitator identifies one attribute among the participants based on which an allocation of desired resources takes place. For example, only participants wearing blue would be allowed to take water breaks.

For the current session, the facilitator gave the instructions that only girls who were wearing red would be allowed to sit and speak during the session, whereas the rest of the girls would have to stand quietly. The facilitator observed that the girls who wore red were excited and immediately sat down. While the girls who were not wearing red began to question the rationale behind the instruction and the purpose of the division. Significant group dynamics were also observed. Girls, especially those who were not wearing red, attempted to convince the facilitator to allow them to join the seated group. The girls stated that they were wearing a red band or a maroon scarf which should also be counted as wearing red. It was noted that the seated group provided assistance or support to their friends who were attempting to convince the facilitator. However, the facilitator asserted that only girls wearing red would be allowed to sit.

As the activity progressed, the girls questioned the sudden change in rules and if this would be the status quo for all forthcoming sessions. The facilitator assured them that this was just for the current session and it was because she was also given these instructions to follow. While the seated group relaxed and laughed, the standing group was not pleased. The facilitator noted that she never had to reiterate the instructions, instead the seated group took it upon themselves to continuously remind the standing group that they were not allowed to speak. The facilitator began a generic discussion with the group about the activities that took place in the Home during the past week. The standing group constantly tried to respond, however, the seated group interrupted them and reminded them to not talk. Soon most girls in the standing group accepted the new rule and stood quietly but two girls from the standing group continuously expressed their displeasure and anger. They exchanged words of anger with the seated group whenever interrupted, like '*you keep quiet*', '*who is talking to you?*'. The facilitator allowed the interaction to take place but remained alert and present to pacify the situation when required. Eventually, the two girls in the standing group stated that they did not want to be a part of the session and were stepping out. The facilitator, sensing that the situation could become volatile if allowed to continue, stepped in, and explained that this was an activity and requested everybody to sit down. Stabilizing the situation took some time with the two girls in the standing group refusing to participate in the session and the seated group encouraging the facilitator to allow them to leave. The facilitator attempted to pacify the situation by explaining that this process was a part of active learning where participants are directly involved in the situation, making way for richer experience and discussion.



The activity is quite sensitive, and if not moderated well it can turn volatile and inflammatory. A strong rapport between the facilitator and the group, along with reiteration of group rules (such as no abusing and fighting) may offer a buffer against the possible adverse effects of the activity. The facilitator must remain alert and mindful of all the interactions taking place during the activity and be ready to step in to pacify any overwhelming emotions. It is best to keep the activity short to avoid causing undue stress to the children.

Once the group had become more stabilized, one participant from the seated group shared that she felt that regardless of the intention, the activity was 'wrong'. The facilitator used this as a way of encouraging the girls to talk about how they felt during the activity. Most of the girls in the seated group shared that they were happy. However, most of the girls in the standing group were furious and stated that the activity was '*unfair*', and they felt '*left behind*' and were '*uncomfortable by the taunting*'. The facilitator asked whether anyone from either group had taken the feelings of the other group into consideration. Most of the girls remained silent, and then the facilitator then asked if anyone from the other group was their friend and how they felt seeing their friends left out. A few girls from the seated group shared that they were uncomfortable watching their friends stand and be unable to participate in the session. Once both the groups could understand the feelings of the other, the facilitator encouraged them to reflect on what they would like to change about the activity. A few girls expressed that they would have either requested the facilitator to change the rules or would have left the session along with their friends. However, most of them agreed that activities that differentiate between the residents should not be conducted. The facilitator asked the girls to elaborate and one girl shared that because it 'made some people feel bad', while another girl stated that it could make the situation at the Home worse because the girls might continue to taunt them. The girls were appreciated for their input.

Subsequently, the facilitator used these inputs to explain the process of discrimination and its adverse effects on an individual. Through the technique of self disclosure, the facilitator shared some of her personal experiences of being discriminated against as well as its negative effect on her self-esteem and personal relations. Some of the girls also shared their personal experiences of being discriminated against. One of the girls shared that due to speech difficulties not many girls would include her in activities. The facilitator appreciated the girls for sharing their stories and acknowledged their feelings of distress. The facilitator also encouraged the girls to be mindful of the direct and subtle forms of discrimination around them and to reflect on the action they would like to take in such a situation.

A brief discussion on the strategies to fight discrimination took place. Most of the girls stated that they would demand fair treatment or leave the situation. However, one girl pointed out that standing up against discrimination was 'easier said than done'. The facilitator agreed with the point, and she explained that while the process may be difficult, it was essential to speak up. She reminded them of their own insights and how they had pointed out earlier that it was wrong. The facilitator reminded the girls to look out for acts of discrimination around them and encouraged them to ask persistent question about the rationale behind such an action. The facilitator ended the session by reminding the girls to be active and supportive allies to individuals being treated unfairly.

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