Living together with kindness

After a few weeks of being inside the house tensions can start to rise. A tense atmosphere can make it difficult to stay focused and motivated, this can affect wellbeing. Working together as best as possible can only be achieved if any tensions are resolved constructively.

When resolving tensions and defusing conflict key things to consider are how to make things 'C.A.L.M.E.R' and be kind. This stands for:

- Consider: The need for respect and kindness about how others are feeling. Learn to empathise and see things from each other's point of view.
- Acknowledge: The time needed to address every person's problem. Let each person speak.
- Listen: To how everyone feels, their worries and fears and how they can feel better. This includes listening to and understanding body language.
- Manage: Provide support and empathy to each other.
- Enable: Support and help each other in the future. Establish some house rules for behaviour.
- Resource: What did you learn? Use your skills and knowledge to defuse conflict in the future.

For more guidance on defusing conflict you can read our Defusing Conflict resource.

In these quick activities suitable for all ages we can learn how to develop these skills to better communicate with each other. The activities focus on developing empathy and understanding. Suggested ages for each activity are for guidance. Resources have been designed to be adaptable and suitable for multi-generational learning.

Learning objectives

Learners will:

- develop empathy by thinking about others
- learn simple ideas to resolve tensions and defusing conflict
- develop active listening skills
- consider other people's perspectives and feelings
- learn how body language can show how we are feeling
- explore how listening and resolving tensions can be an act of kindness

Starter activity: Helpful and unhelpful things you can say (ages: 7-19)

When someone is upset or angry the first thing we do or say can make a big difference. It can make them feel better and solve the problem quickly. Look at the situations below. Think about the most unhelpful thing you could say, which would make the person feel worse. Now think about the most kind and helpful thing you could say, which would make the person feel better.

You can act out the situations with your household or you can write a script for the different scenarios to talk through.

- Situation one: Your parent or guardian points out that the living room is a mess. There are books, shoes, clothes and dirty dishes scattered everywhere. They have told you to clean up many times, but it is not the first thing on your mind – mess really does not upset you.
- Situation two: Your family member or friend is upset because they bought a prom outfit they were looking forward to wearing, but now their prom has been cancelled.

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Someone close to them tells them to stop being upset about something that they think isn't important. They both want you to agree with them.

- Situation three: You have been gaming/watching TV for a few hours and no one else has been able to use the TV. Your family member wants to watch their programme now.
- Situation four: Your parent or guardian is working from home and you and your family members are listening to music loudly and having fun in the living room. They are in an important meeting in the next room. They come in and tell you all tthat they need some quiet time to focus.
- Situation five: Your family member just wants to spend some time alone. They are not used to being around people for so long. You are bored and want to play with them. They are in their room and you burst in.

Reflect on this activity. Imagine the scenario from the different people's perspectives. How might they feel if they hear an unhelpful comment? What about a helpful, kind comment?

Why do you think it is important to say something helpful and not something unhelpful in these moments?

How can kindness and understanding help us to resolve everyday tensions?

Does it help to see a situation from another angle?

Active listening: Tell me about it (ages: 12-19)

Active listening is a useful way of understanding someone else's point of view and can help with resolving tensions. The term active listening means that you are *really* listening and paying attention to and thinking about what someone is saying.

When someone is tense or upset it can make them feel much better to know someone is really listening to them and cares about their problem. It will also help you to understand what the problem is.

Take turns with someone, either over a video call or in your house, telling a story. It can be a problem that is on your mind or it can be a story of a trip you went on. The first person will tell their story and the listener will just listen. They will talk for 5 minutes and then you swap over.

Whilst you are listening, think about:

- What are they talking about – what topic is it?
- What are the main points of the story – what do they emphasise?
- What do they want you to hear – why might they be telling you this story? How might they feel?
- Think about their expressions, the sound of their voice – how do they feel?

After you have both spoken, talk to each other about what you noticed and learned. Ask them any questions you have about the story or what they said.
How do you feel now you have been listened to?
How is listening a kind act?
Do you think you understood the story better? If so why?

Movement activity: Into the mirror (ages: 7-11)

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Body language is an important part of communication. Body language means the way we use our face, voice and body when we speak. Often, people show emotions they are feeling through body language rather than words.

To learn how to understand people's body language we first must learn how it feels to move our body in certain ways.

This is a copycat activity. With someone in your house, or someone on a video call, stand opposite each other and look at each other in the eye. Play some happy music. Choose who moves first. They will start moving to the music, and the other one should copy as if they are a reflection in the mirror – they are not allowed to speak. After 2 minutes switch roles.

Reflection:

- How did you feel during the exercise? Why?
- How was the interaction and relationship with your partner? Why?
- Were you able to follow the movements? If not, why?

Repeat the activity again but this time imagine you are feeling a different emotion. Move as if you were sad. Change the music to a slow, sad song to help you. Reflect again.

- How did you feel now? The same or different?
- What movements did you or your partner choose?
- Why do you think they chose these movements to show this emotion?

Repeat the activity a third time. This time imagine you are worried. Play some music to reflect this. Maybe you have a song you listen to when you feel angry. Reflect again.

Now think about the whole activity.

- What did you learn about how people move to show emotions?
- Think about how you use your body in everyday life when you are talking to people. Why would it be important to understand that people show emotions through body language?
- How could you use your body language to show kindness and support to others?

Reflective activity: House rules (ages: 7-19)

After you have listened and understood each other, work with the people in your house to create a set of 'House rules'. Decide on some shared rules that everyone in the house must follow to show kindness and support for one another. Think about situation from everyone's perspective.

Some ideas of house rules could be:

- Show kindness and support for one another
- Respect each other's opinions
- Treat communal areas (living room/ kitchen) with respect
- Spend time together listening and talking each day
- Understand if someone needs time alone

Once you have come up with some ideas, discuss what each one means to each person so you have a shared understanding. You could create a poster and display the rules somewhere in the house where everyone can see them.

You can also make ground rules for group chats you are a part of with your friends.

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