



Nonviolence spectrum

Time

30 minutes

Materials

Flipchart, marker

Related tools

An action is nonviolent if...

Purpose

To explore what we mean by nonviolence and the range of different understandings.

It is useful to follow this exercise with *An action is nonviolent if...*

Preparation

Review the scenarios below. Make sure you choose ones that will be most meaningful for the group. You may need to write your own.

Prepare two signs, one YES and one NO. Place on opposite walls.

Description

Explain the purpose of the activity. Indicate the opposite walls with 'Yes/ 'No' signs and ask the group to imagine a line between the two.

Say that when you read out a scenario you will ask: *is this is nonviolent?* Then invite people to place themselves along the line according to how nonviolent they think it is. Emphasise that there is no 'right' or 'wrong', just different views, and you can move your position if you are persuaded by someone's view.

Check that everyone understands. You might do a trial run.

Read out a scenario Invite everyone to place themselves at a point on the line that is true for them. If you agree 100% go to the 'Yes' wall; part agree go to somewhere in the middle; totally disagree go to the 'No' wall.

After each scenario, ask someone nearest to a wall why they've placed themselves there. Then someone at the other end, then someone in the middle. If someone moves position during the discussion, ask them why. An important part of the activity is listening to one another and trying to understand other perspectives.





Scenarios

- Campaigners breaking into the empty office of an arms company at night and trash computers and office equipment. *Is this nonviolent?*
- Occupying trees to prevent them being cut down to clear a site for an out-of-own supermarket. *Is this nonviolent?*
- Lightly hitting a child as a disciplinary method is nonviolence.
- Entering a military base by dressing as security or medics. *Is this nonviolent?*
- Standing in front of a branded clothing store handing out leaflets and shouting at customers not to shop there because the company is a tax-avoider. *Is this nonviolent?*
- After years of trying to get a response from their MP, a group of local campaigners finally win an appointment and blockade the room until the MP gives them a commitment to take action on their issue. *Is this nonviolent?*
- Indian women in Andra Pradesh campaign to get the sale of alcohol banned. They attack the shops, pour the alcohol into the streets and shave the heads of men found drunk there. In some villages where shops refuse to close, they seize drunken patrons, wrap skirts round them, place them backwards on donkeys and parade them. *Is this nonviolent?*
(You can follow up with the scenario that the state government prohibited the sale of any alcohol on paydays. Does that change anyone's position?)

In the discussions, listen out for the issues that people disagree on, eg property damage, deception, humiliation, context, effectiveness, structural and cultural understandings of violence. Write them up.

Debrief

Ask the whole group: How was that? What did you notice?
Share what you noticed about areas of their agreement and divergence.

One option is to follow this up with the tool, *An action is nonviolent if..*

Say that Turning the Tide does not have a definition of nonviolence because we've learned there are so many different views. But we have identified some [characteristics of nonviolence](#). Share these.

