

## Sample session - Initial group meeting

Time: 2 hours

### Aims:

- to introduce the participants to each other and create a comfortable, open atmosphere
- to set ground rules and a framework for future meetings
- to begin sharing personal beliefs and values and to start thinking about living in a multi-faith society

You will probably need to run two or three introductory meetings, before beginning to plan action projects or discussing very sensitive or controversial issues. Take a look in the 'Ice-breakers', at the DVD, or in the 'Working in a classroom or established youth group' sections of the website. These supply additional ideas for warm-up activities and discussion starters.

These initial sessions will need to be flexible and should be tailored to the group's size and the age and confidence of the participants. Below we set out a sample session, which we hope will provide a useful starting point.

### Activity one: Welcome

Time: 5 minutes

- Introduce the session by welcoming the young people to the group.
- Explain that this session will mainly focus on introducing the participants and setting up the group for the future.
- Explain that you would like the group to be led, as far as possible, by the participants themselves. In future meetings, group members will set the agenda and help to facilitate activities.

### Activity two: Ice-breaker - Character drawing

You might ask participants to begin this exercise as soon as they arrive at the meeting. This can help to avoid awkward initial silences.

Time: 15 minutes

Equipment: flipcharts stuck to the wall, or white board and coloured pens

### Method:

- Give each participant a pen and ask them to draw a picture of themselves with their name beside it.
- Then ask them to write down ten words to describe themselves, around the picture.
- These can be words that describe their identity (eg, Jewish, Chinese, northerner, footballer), physical attributes (eg, short, skinny, ginger) or characteristics (eg, funny, shy, bossy).
- The participants should then stand by their portrait and introduce themselves. Everyone can then look at all of the portraits and find out a bit more about each other.
- If participants haven't identified their religion on their portrait ask them which religion, if any, they identify with.

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- If possible, leave the pictures up on the wall for at least the duration of this session. They will help the participants remember each other's names and can act as a conversation starter.

## Activity three: Setting ground rules

Time: 5 minutes

Equipment: flipchart, pens

### Method

- It is useful to set ground rules at the start of the meeting.
- This is a code of behaviour that the group should agree on and provides a point of reference in case of arguments or if some participants don't listen to others.
- Ask participants to shout rules out.
- These might include: 'Listen to each other', 'No swearing', 'Don't get personal', 'respect each other's points of view' and so on.
- If possible, display these ground rules in the meeting venue. The group can add more rules as their relationships develop.

## Activity four: Group Identity warm-up

This is adapted from a JCORE activity, please see [www.jcore.org.uk](http://www.jcore.org.uk).

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: none

### Method:

This activity gets participants moving and talking. It also raises issues about group identities and about different factors that can unite and divide.

- Clear some space in the centre of the room.
- Tell the group that they need to divide themselves into groups of at least 3 people. You should let the group work this out themselves but make sure they follow the rules
  - All members of the group need to share something in common. This could be something visible, or something invisible. It could be something from taken from the descriptions in the 'Character drawing' activity.
  - Everyone must be part of a group. Nobody is to be left out.
- When the young people have formed their groups, find out how they grouped themselves. Eg people wearing jeans and people not wearing jeans, or by the football team they support.
- Then ask participants to split themselves in a different way. Each group should have at least one new member. Repeat twice more.
- Afterwards bring the group back together into a circle.
- Discuss the following questions with the group. Try and encourage every member of the group to contribute.
  - Was it easy or difficult to split into groups?
  - How did you feel when the group was dividing?
  - Did you feel part of an 'Us' or a 'Them'?
  - Did you include any of the factors you put on your self-portrait to describe yourselves?

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- Did you choose visible or invisible factors?
- Ask the young people to think about some of the things that the whole group has in common? How would they describe their youth interfaith group?

## Activity five: View finders

Time: 30 minutes

Equipment: Paper and clipboard (if possible)

Method:

This exercise asks participants to gather opinions from other members of the group. It aims to help find out about the young people's aspirations for the group and gives insight into their views on wider issues. It uses one-to-one conversations to ensure that less confident members' points of view are also heard.

- Each participant should be given a piece of paper with between one and three questions on it (on a clipboard if possible).
- Challenge the participants to collect answers from 5-10 different group members each. This will encourage the participants to talk to others in the group.
- After about 15 minutes, bring the group back together and ask participants to summarise their findings. Answers remain anonymous.
- Other participants can now input their views on questions they were not asked.
- Use this information to make some decisions about the group's meeting formats, venue and make-up.
- It should also let the young people get to know a little more about each other.

## Sample questions:

Some of these questions address practical aspects and others ask the young people to talk about their personal views. Perhaps give each participant one of each type of question. Also add questions relevant to your particular situation and give participants the opportunity to add their own ideas.

- About the group
  1. Why did you come to this meeting today?
  2. What do you hope to learn from being part of this group?
  3. What do you think this group can achieve?
  4. Do you think anyone is missing from this group? (eg. a certain gender, a certain religious group, non-religious people)
  5. How should we decide who is part of the group?
  6. How often should this group meet and what day and time?
  7. Where should this group meet?
  8. Name three things that you would like to talk about in this group.
  9. Name three things that you would like to do in this group.
  10. Do you have any worries about getting involved with this group?
- About the participants
  1. Do you think different religions get on well in your local area?
  2. Do you think it is easy to make friends with people who have different beliefs?
  3. Do you like living in a place with lots of different religions? Why or why not?
  4. Name something you like about your local area.
  5. Name something you don't like about your local area.
  6. If you could change one thing about your area what would it be?
  7. What do you think is the most important issue facing the world today and why?

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8. What would you do on your ideal day?
9. Name three people who you are influenced by.
10. Name something that you have done in the last month that you are proud of.

## Activity seven: Articulation

Time: 10 mins

Equipment: paper, pens, container or hat and a watch.

Method:

This is an energising activity that asks participants to describe abstract concepts and values. It aims to demonstrate that they can be difficult to articulate. It should not be played as a serious or competitive game.

- Divide participants into two or three teams. Each should choose one person to be the first 'talker'.
- Write some of the concepts below on pieces of paper, fold them and put them into a container.
- Ask the first talker to pick a piece of paper from the container and start the timer.
- The talker has one minute to describe the word written on the paper. They must not say the word itself, or anything that rhymes with it. Neither can they spell it out.
- Their team has to guess the word. If they succeed the talker should take another word and continue until a minute is up.
- Any unguessed words should go back in the container. Guessed words should be kept by the team.
- Then the next team have a go and so on. Participants take turns to be the talker.
- Once all of the words have been used up, the team with the most pieces of paper wins.
- It is also possible to play follow up rounds, using the same words. In the second round, participants can only use three words to describe what's on the paper. In the third round they can only mime.

Sample concepts:

Love, Charity, Faith, Loyalty, Friendship, Obedience, Hope, Respect, Wealth, Work, Modesty, Equality, Peace, War, Anger, Embarrassment, Beauty, Jealousy, Pride, Happiness.

## Activity six: Golden rules

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: strips of paper, container, chairs

Method:

This activity asks the participants to start thinking about their values and the framework that they live their lives by. It is also a good way to show the young people that they have a lot in common.

Explain that this activity is not talking about rules that they have to follow, such as going to school in the morning or putting out the rubbish. It is asking them to think about the morals that guide their actions and decisions.

- Challenge each participant to write down two or three rules on separate pieces of paper. These should be rules that they always try to follow, no matter what the situation.

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- If they struggle, ask them to think about religious rules, such as the 10 Commandments, or some of the laws of this country, such as not committing murder, or not stealing.
- Here are some examples of rules. These could be included in the following discussion activity, or used as prompts:
  - Never kill any living thing, unless it endangers your own life.
  - Treat other people how you would like to be treated yourself.
  - Respect the environment you live in.
  - Always remember that everyone is equal.
  - Don't forget that love is worth more than money.
  - Respect the will of God.
  - Always be proud of who you are.
- Ask the participants to fold up their rules and put them into a hat, or bowl in the middle of the group.
- Now ask the young people to take it in turns picking out the folded paper and reading out what has been written.
- Go round the circle until everyone has read out a rule.
- Discuss the rules as a group, focussing on the following questions:
  - Where did you find your inspiration for these rules?
  - Are they taken from religious texts?
  - Where else did you find inspiration?
  - Does everyone follow the same rules? (divisions might occur over eating meat or religious observances, for example)
  - Are the rules similar? Could they be put into groups?
- It may be interesting to talk to the participants about the Golden Rule. This is 'to treat others how you would like to be treated yourself.' This concept appears in all the major religious and secular traditions. Many interfaith groups use it to show the similarities between different religions. For example, see [http://www.conexuspress.com/catalog/golden\\_rule\\_workshopweb.htm](http://www.conexuspress.com/catalog/golden_rule_workshopweb.htm)
- Ask the group to decide on a few rules that they all agree on and which they find most inspiring. The group might decide to make their 'Golden rules' into a poster and display them as an expression of the group's values.

## Activity seven: The applauding chair

Time: 10 minutes

Equipment: chairs

Method:

- Ask the participants to sit in a circle of chairs. One chair should be placed in the middle of the circle.
- Ask a volunteer to sit in the chair. As soon as s/he sits down the rest of the group should begin clapping and cheering.
- They must continue until the volunteer stands up.
- Someone else from the group should then sit in the 'applauding chair'.
- Repeat until everyone who wants to has had a chance to sit in the chair.

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## Activity eight: Conclusion

Time: 5 mins

Thank the group for taking part in the session and make arrangements for the next meeting.

Ask the young people to bring two objects with them to the next session. One should be an object that illustrates something about their religion or their values. The other should be an object that symbolises something else that is important to them.

Share these objects as a starting point for the next meeting.

## Subsequent meetings

In the next meetings you might want to watch the DVD 'Living in a Multi-faith Society' and run some of the activities in the accompanying booklet. You can intersperse more serious discussions with more warm up and communication skills building activities.

Once the group feels more established, you can bring in the idea of running a social action project or campaign.

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### PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:

