

"We want a church community that is an inclusive and safe space."

PROVIDING AN INCLUSIVE AND SAFE SPACE

Below are a number of creative ways of exploring, with your children and young people, how you can create an inclusive and safe space.

Setting ground rules

To create a space where safe, open-minded conversation can take place, your group will benefit from clear ground rules (or agreed ways of behaving together as a group). Young people are more likely to keep to these rules if they have been involved in creating them. Spend some time setting out the ground rules for the times you are together – how you will speak to each other, how you will behave towards each other, what you expect of each other. Try to use positive language for these ground rules, rather than making a long list of don'ts. Finally, agree where the ground rules should be displayed so you are reminded of them each time you meet.

Thinking about language

Try this warm-up exercise with your group, to start them thinking about the language we use when describing people. Ask one person to stand with their back to the group, then ask another to describe someone else in the group. They must describe the person in a positive way and not be derogatory. Ask the person with their back to the group who they think is being described. Continue in this way, encouraging different people to be the describer and the guesser. How does it feel to be described in such positive language?

Demonstrating the value of diversity

This exercise shows the value of diversity in a visual way. Before the session, make a batch of play-dough but don't colour it (www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/things-to-do-with-your-child/messy-play/ offers a recipe). Give

everyone a piece of the dough and ask them to feel it, smell it, look at it. Using food colouring, allow everyone to add a drop of colour to their dough and mix it up. Look at everyone's play-dough now. They are the same bits of dough and they all came from the same original play-dough mix. They just look different. Talk together about how people can all be different (they may have different skin colour, be a different gender, a different religion, dress in a different way) but we are all still people.

A story to help discuss prejudice and discrimination

Read *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss as a group. This is a great way to start a discussion about the issues of prejudice and discrimination with young people. The Star-Bellied Sneetches treat the Plain-Bellied Sneetches disrespectfully, just because they have no stars on their bellies. When Sylvester McMonkey McBean arrives with a machine to add and remove stars the Sneetches are sucked into a silly and expensive battle. But eventually they begin to question if either Sneetch is better and start to value and celebrate uniqueness.

Different, but still friends

Start with your group stood in a large room, with plenty of room to move around. Ask them to stand on one or the other side of the room to indicate their preference in a series of 'would you rather?' choices (if they have no opinion, they can stand in the middle of the room). You can make these up to suit your group, but some suggestions could include:

- Chocolate (left side of room) or crisps (right side of room)?
- Maths or English?
- *Love Island* or *The Voice*?
- Dogs or cats?
- Ed Sheeran or Bruno Mars?
- United or City? (insert your own rival football teams in this one!)
- Coffee or tea?
- Coke or Pepsi?

Feel free to invite people to defend where they have chosen to stand. After you've set a number of these questions, ask the young people whether they think that standing on opposite sides of the room, and disagreeing strongly, means that they cannot be friends. You can also ask follow-up questions:

- If you disagree with someone, what steps can you take to make sure that the difference doesn't come between you?
- How can we create a space to talk about differences between people, so that everyone feels safe and included?