

Sex and language

Activities exploring language have many benefits, including:

- gauging the level of the group's knowledge and understanding
- introducing medical words
- coming to an agreement on what words you will use during your work
- clarifying what words mean to you and to the young people
- skill development – encouraging young people to ask for explanations for words they don't understand.

Aims/purpose

- Explore the participants' level of knowledge about sex and language.
- Explore the participants' level of knowledge about parts of the body.
- Place all the words out in the open so that the participants can see you are not shocked and are there to deal with issues not 'bad language'.
- Gauge the level of explicitness of the group.
- Have a laugh!

Explanation

Don't use this exercise as an ice-breaker. Young people will need to feel comfortable before they engage fully with a group.

Ask participants to get into three groups and give each group a piece of flip chart paper with the headings 'Male sexual parts', 'Female sexual parts' and 'Sexual activities' on them. Ask participants, in their groups, to brainstorm all the words for sexual parts/activities they can think of. It is a good idea not to make any suggestions to the participants about words they can include – this ensures that the work is the participants' own.

After a few minutes rotate the sheets until all three groups have some words under each heading.

When they have finished bring the participants back to a large group and ask them to read out their lists.

Clarify words that participants don't know and discuss meanings.

The facilitator can ask:

- How are cultural, social and sexual attitudes revealed in language?
- How did you feel about doing the activity?
- What do you notice about each list?
- What kinds of words are there?
- How could you group or classify them?
- What does the use of language show us about our attitudes to sex?
- What differences are there between words for males and females? Would males and females use different words? If so, why?
- Are any of the words insulting? Which ones?
- Are any of the words more aggressive than others?
- Has anyone put down words such as skin, brain or lips for sexual parts and/or kissing and cuddling for sexual activities?

Word meanings: What do we mean by ...?

For a full explanation of this grid see How to use Jiwsj exercises at the start of this publication.