

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/web-of-life>

### **Overview**

In this activity, participants brainstorm links in a global food web.

They explore:

- The interdependency of living and non-living things
- The inevitable impact of all human activity on the environment, and the consequences

### **Related rights**

- The right to life, liberty and personal security
- The right to freely dispose of their (the people's) natural wealth and resources
- Freedom of belief and religion

### **Objectives**

- To learn about the interdependence of living and non-living things
- To develop skills to work co-operatively and think critically
- To foster respect for the intrinsic value of life

### **Materials**

- A ball of thin string or strong wool

### **Instructions**

This activity is divided into 3 parts: part 1 – building the web of life; part 2 – its destruction; part 3 – a brainstorming activity of actions to protect the environment.

#### **Part 1**

1. Ask participants to stand in a circle.
2. Explain that they are to build a model of the web of life.
3. You start. Hold the ball of string in your hand and name a green plant, for instance a cabbage.
4. Hold onto the end of the string and throw the ball to someone across the circle. They catch it! There is now a straight line of string between the two of you.
5. This person has to name an animal that eats cabbages, for instance, a caterpillar. They then hold onto the string and throw the ball to a third person across the circle.
6. This third person has to think of an animal that feeds off caterpillars, for instance, a bird, or if they know one, they can say a species of bird, such as a thrush. They then throw the ball to a fourth person.
7. Continue the game so that the ball of string passes back and forth across the circle until you have created a criss-cross mesh that represents the "web of life".

#### **Part 2**

8. Now ask each participant in turn to give a specific example of what is damaging this web of life, (for instance, motorways being built over farmland, over-fishing or burning fossil fuels). When they have spoken, they let go of the string.
9. When everyone has spoken, ask participants to look at the heap of tangled threads lying uselessly on the floor. Tell them that this will be our world if we do nothing, but that it doesn't have to be like this; there are simple things that we can all do to rescue something out of the

present situation.

### Part 3

10. Invite participants in turn to make a promise to take a simple, practical action to rescue the world. For example, to save electricity by shutting down their computer rather than leaving it on stand-by, eat less meat or fly less.

11. As each person makes a promise, they pick up a thread at random from the floor.

12. At the end, look for a minute at the new web and point out that it isn't the same web as they had before; it is too late for that; true recovery is impossible because extinctions are irreversible.

### Debriefing and evaluation

Start with asking how participants felt first seeing the web destroyed and then creating the new one. Then go on to talk about the issues involved and what needs to be done to protect the environment.

- What did you feel as you saw the web gradually being destroyed?
- Was it easy to name animals and plants in different food webs? How good is people's knowledge of natural history?
- Does it matter to you if, for instance, polar bears become extinct in 10 years time?
- How did you feel as you saw the new web forming?
- Was it easy to think of personal actions that reduce our impact on the environment?
- How effective are individual actions?
- Whose responsibility is it to protect the environment? The UN, governments, NGOs, individuals?
- The balance of nature is very complex and it is not easy to predict what the global consequences of any particular action will be. How then is it possible to make decisions about how we use the earth's resources?
- How should decisions about how to use a resource be made? For example, whether to cut down a forest so that the land can be used for growing crops? The people who gain their livelihood from the forest will suffer at the expense of those who make a profit from the agriculture. There is a principle of equity at stake.
- Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights states that "all peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources." Does this mean that people have a right to damage the environment?
- We rely on our environment to provide us with food to eat and clean air to breathe. Without a healthy environment we could not live. It is a condition for life. Do we therefore have a paramount duty to respect the environment that limits our rights to use it (in the same way that we have a duty to respect rights and freedoms of others, which limits our own rights as individuals)?
- Do we need any new human rights to protect us from the consequences of climate change?