



**READY FOR  
DIALOGUE  
READY FOR  
POSITIVE  
CHANGE**

**A guide to interreligious dialogue in youth  
work and beyond with toolbox of  
non-formal activities**

# Content

Introduction	1
Religiosity, atheism and spirituality	2
Dialogue vs debate	5
Interreligious dialogue in youth work	7
How to engage in dialogue	9
Toolbox	9
Surviving in desert	10
Reflections	11
Chocolate game	13
Religious biography	14
Religious symbols	16
Where is my shoe?	18
Circle exercise	19
PMI exercise	20

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## Introduction

This guide is a result of Erasmus+ Training Course “Ready for Dialogue, Ready for Positive Change” held in October 2017 in Zadar, Croatia. As well as the TC, this guide reflects the growing need for raising the quality of dialogue in Europe. In this context, interreligious dialogue stands as an important cornerstone of creating healthy democratic societies consisting of various personal and cultural worldviews. If we live together, then we should try our best to get to know each other. Dialogue is not just the most efficient way to do achieve this, but also the most human one.

Transferring values of inclusion, democracy and dialogue to the youth is essential for securing a strong future for Europe and the world. Besides formal initiatives, this endeavour can be pursued through the practice of non-formal education. Therefore, in the toolbox provided here you will find games and activities which foster critical thinking, inclusion and development of dialogical skills. These have met a favourable response in our experience with youth, but you can modify and adapt them to suit different needs and situations arising in dynamic reality of youth work. Finally, at the end of this brochure you can find recommendations and additional materials which we find useful to include in youth work.



## Religiosity, atheism and spirituality

Three main attitudes can be discerned in the way people structure their relationship towards the metaphysical. Religiosity denotes being a believer or a follower of a certain religion. Major world religions are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. They gather their adherents into a community of shared values and according behaviour. Believers follow rules and commandments grounded in their religious tradition. In monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, one omnipotent, good and just God stands in the centre of individual and collective religiosity. This is the God of history, who revealed himself to mankind through prophets, saints and mystics. God has conversed with special people and entire communities. Out of these dialogues and revelations, written in holy scriptures, spring out moral and ritual rules adhered to by believers. Symbolism also plays a significant role since the deepest religious truths cannot be completely logically expressed.

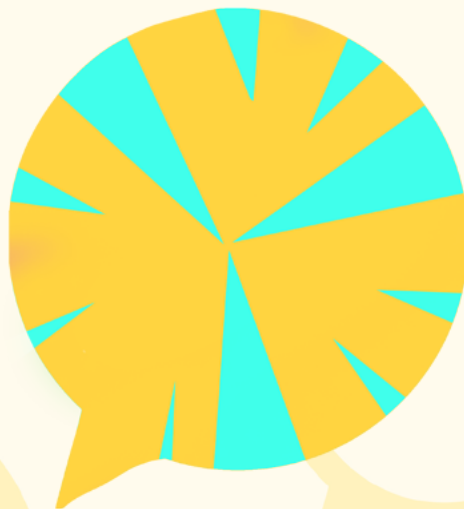
Hindus believe in many gods although all of them are often interpreted as manifestations of one Absolute Reality called *brahman*. In contrast to monotheistic religions, Hindu approach is more individualistic since there is no unified code of belief, but many coexisting traditions, ideas and practices. Original Buddhism is agnostic regarding the existence of God, even though later developments in Buddhist tradition included belief in many deities. Buddhists focus mostly on the practice of meditation and living an ethical life. In fact, striving towards an ethical life is the common theme of all religions.



On the other side, atheists are of the opinion that supernatural beliefs are not required to live an ethical life. They trust their own reason or common sense, hence rationality is the crucial tool in the quest of understanding. Atheists consider God as a redundant idea in explaining the human condition and rely on scientific methods of acquiring knowledge. Being an atheist doesn't implicate belonging to a specific community, even though there are atheist organizations who differ from religious ones by putting less emphasis on ritual and hierarchy, while focusing on advancing rational arguments and refuting religious claims.

The third attitude is most elusive because it's hard to define what does it mean to be spiritual. Different people and groups subscribe to different beliefs and practices (meditation being the most prevalent), but they all consider themselves spiritual in contrast to being religious. The focus of modern spirituality is achieving inner peace, fostering personal growth and being free from religious authorities and fixed rules, although in doing so specific rules are set. Spiritual worldview often combines ideas and practices from various religious traditions, forming a sort of personalized "do it yourself" approach. It's important to note that all religions evolve from the core of a spiritual experience of their leading figures, therefore modern search for spirituality is the search for the experience of the sacred upon which all religions are based.

All three groups, atheists, religious and spiritual people, believe in something in order to explain the human condition - even though this belief can be stated in a negative way, like in atheism. These three worldviews are constantly interacting on the personal, interpersonal and cultural level. Our world is shaped by the way we see it and by the way we treat those who see it otherwise. In such a world, dialogue is most needed.



## Dialogue vs debate

People often think they are in dialogue, but mostly it's a discussion or a debate. The goal of most discussions is to prove some point to others, like in philosophical discussions where the speaker (or writer) uses various arguments to prove his point and to refute the opposing view. Discussions are part of our daily interpersonal communication because we share our ideas and beliefs with others who often don't completely agree with our view. It's in our nature to stand for personal beliefs, therefore discussion is one of the activities that make us human. Debate is a regulated formal discussion of a proposition between two or more matched sides, like in a political debate between presidential candidates. However, sometimes a discussion or a debate is not the best approach, for example, in highly sensitive topics such as religion.

Dialogue means being open towards learning from our interlocutor and not just trying to convince him/her or to reach a conclusion. Although we can be absolutely sure about our beliefs, there is still a possibility of gaining new insights from the other person. Actually, sometimes our most deeply held views come into question in dialogue and then we arrive to a new level of knowledge, more integrated and more encompassing. Besides learning, there is a relational dimension in dialogue between persons who encounter each other as equals. In other words, in dialogue we don't just get to know people's opinions and beliefs, but also get to know them as human beings because our nature reveals itself in relationship with others. Also, in dialogue we have an opportunity to know ourselves better since our personality traits emerge in the presence of others.







## Interreligious dialogue in youth work

Cultural varieties are increasing in our communities. Meeting people with different religious worldviews has become inevitable. However, we hardly know much about them despite availability of information through digital means. Poor knowledge of religions and spreading of misinformation in the media often create prejudice and stereotypes that cause conflicts on personal and social level. Human rights and the freedom of movement are brought into question by rising intolerance and devaluing of virtues taught by religious traditions. Therefore, this is a time when knowing and understanding religious teachings is most needed. It is essential to integrally reflect over the importance of religion in order to create a coherent community, that is a society united in difference and based on understanding, acceptance and cooperation.

Youth often form their attitudes and develop prejudice based on misleading assumptions and ignorance. Such attitudes are formed due to uncritical acceptance of media information without trying to gain a deeper insight into the actual issue. Our time demands approaching religion from an integral perspective - as a dialogical challenge and as a challenge of coexistence. Critical thinking and dialogical skills can encourage youth to accept personal and cultural differences.

Critical thinking includes processing of information, learning, decision making and problem solving. It consists of research, dialogue and integration. Developing critical thinking can bring our prejudice and stereotypes into consciousness, thereby enabling a more objective perspective and leading towards positive solutions. Dialogue is the key, be it on the personal or on the social level. Although dialogue is a popular catchphrase, it is rarely signifying its true meaning of open engagement in understanding others, but, on the contrary, an aggressive rhetorical practice focused on persuasion. We have noted the difference between dialogue and debate in the preceding chapter. Here it will suffice to repeat and emphasize that youth should be encouraged to develop listening as well as critical thinking skills.

For a youth worker to support youth in engaging in dialogue, especially of interreligious type, as well as to tackle extremism and radicalization, one needs to have knowledge about different religious traditions, their beliefs and practices, as well as appreciate the relationship between religion, culture and art. Without intercultural and especially interreligious knowledge and dialogue, there is a high risk of emergent extremist attitudes. Youth workers are in a perfect position to reach out to marginalized young people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, and to transfer knowledge, skills and fostering attitudes which opens young people to civilizational values that our society strives - openness, tolerance and democracy. Therefore, we believe youth worker should be equipped with knowledge about

different religions and their traditions, develop skills to effectively support dialogue process and understand key elements of interreligious dialogue to support youth in their development.

Better mutual understanding, intercultural and interreligious cooperation and effective combating of prejudice and stereotypes are necessary conditions of creating an inclusive and tolerant intercultural society.

Youth workers should develop soft skills and master non-formal tools and methods to better support their work with youngsters in intercultural environment. They should share knowledge and practices to foster and support a true culture of dialogue. We bring you some advice for engaging in a healthy dialogue and a toolbox of non-formal methods useful for developing and encouraging dialogue in youth work.



## How to engage in dialogue?

Listen carefully. Don't just think of what you will say while pretending to listen. People do this unconsciously. They want to listen, but thoughts overwhelm them and the focus shifts from the person talking. A lot of meaning gets lost because we just don't listen. It's natural that thoughts arise when we hear something being said. However, it is deeply beneficial to be aware of this process in order to carefully listen to others while they speak. Right after they finish, we can get back to our thoughts and comments. Then, after hearing the whole story, we'll be able to truly understand and respond.

Come with an open attitude towards learning from others. Dialogue cannot happen if both sides aren't open to learning. Learning doesn't have to include some new facts, it can also include gaining new insights about the



people we talk to - the way they think, feel or see the world in general. Getting to know people better will enable us to familiarize with their views and arrive to a deeper understanding.

Show respect. Take very seriously what people say. They surely take themselves seriously, so try to respect them as persons who hold beliefs and entertain ideas of great meaning to them. This doesn't mean that you can't disagree, rather it points towards a civilised way to disagree - without judging the person, focusing on what is being said.

Don't react so quickly. There is a big chance of misunderstanding if we react right away after hearing something that rings our bell of disagreement. Instead, why not ask for a clarification? A lot of misunderstandings can be avoided by asking for clarification because it often turns out that we have heard something very different from what was being said.

Let others present themselves instead of clinging to your outside perception of them. For example, let a Muslim define what does it mean to be a Muslim for her. Then, after listening, try to express your understanding of the stated. The interpreted should be able to recognize herself in your interpretation if you have understood well.

Try to agree with the dialogue partner as much as possible without going against your beliefs. There are many more points of agreement than we usually think. It is beneficial to bring these into mutual awareness before tackling difficult areas of disagreement, thereby establishing trust.

Resist comparing your ideals with partner's practice. Ideals can be compared only to ideals and practices can be compared only to practices. For example, Christian ideals of universal peace and love shouldn't be compared to Muslim practice of holy war. Instead, we can compare ideals of love towards mankind expressed in the Bible and the Quran, as well as compare practice of both Christian (medieval) and Muslim (medieval and modern) waging of religious war.

# Toolbox

## Surviving in desert

**Aim:**

To develop communication skills  
To develop different ways of expression, body language reading and expression  
To raise cooperation in a group

**Time:**

30-60 minutes

**Settings:**

Outdoor or indoor, with possibility of both

**Type:**

Group activity, team building

**Resources:**

Paper and pencil

**Description:**

Do you remember a game you probably played as a kid, the broken phone? Well, we've upgraded it. This activity serves to understand the way we get in communication, how we handle problems in communication and how we understand each other. To accomplish a goal as a team, or transfer a message, we have to cooperate and communicate. Each group has to explain and transfer message to the other group by different means. Each group has a different way of expression. Last group has to transfer the message to the boss. After the game it's debrief time. Collaboration is always possible, even when we don't speak the same language.

**Method:**

Step 1. Choose one person who will be "boss"

Step 2. Count people and split them in groups with equal number of participants if possible.

Step 3. Give a way of expression to groups separately (for ex. Your group can't speak, you can only explain with hands; you can't speak but you can draw, etc. Be creative!)

Step 4. Invite 1st group inside and let boss transfer the message to the group.

Step 5. Invite 2nd group inside and let 1st group transfer the message to them

Step 6. After last group receives the message they have to give it to the boss back.

Step 7. Debrief

**Debrief:**

How did you feel?

How did you receive the message?

How did you find collaborating with others?

How was the communication?

## Reflections

### **Aim:**

To develop self-awareness and self-esteem  
To accept yourself and others  
To develop the ability of finding/seeing positive things in yourself and others

### **Type:**

Group work, exercise

### **Time:**

30-45 minutes (depending on size of the group)

### **Settings:**

Individual or group work, indoor or outdoor

### **Resources:**

Box, mirror (that fits in the box)

### **Description:**

It's an activity aimed to develop empathy and acceptance of yourself in order to be able to accept others.

### **Method:**

Step 1. Put a mirror in a box and leave the box where people can come and look inside it.

Step 2. Form a circle

Step 3. Explain the rules:

- One by one go to the box and have a look what is inside;
- Come back to the circle and explain to the group what did you see.
- Be quiet. No one in the circle can speak except the person who had a look into the box.
- When you speak, speak positively about what you saw.

Ask participants one by one (no specific order) to go out of the circle and to have a look into the box

Ask participants to speak positively about what they saw

Debrief

### **Debrief:**

How did you feel as a listener and as a speaker?

How did you feel when you found out what is inside the box?

How did you feel when you had to talk about yourself?

# Chocolate Game

**Aim:**

To develop team work and improve communication

To foster group and self-reflection on topics such as equal opportunity, decision making and process, rules, participation, justice, dialogue, etc.

**Type:**

Group activity, board game, debate, dialogue

**Time:**

60 min

**Settings:**

Indoor or outdoor

Clean and flat space for the board

**Resources:**

Papers, tape, object to represent a team on the board, sweets and a prize (for ex. candy, chocolate, toy car or a 1 million dollar check)

**Description:**

Fostering group or self reflection on mentioned topics through this activity can raise awareness of a person showing how we behave in conflict situations and how we handle them. Through reflection we focus on one's motivation, feelings and needs in connection with others. This activity can show mechanism and relations of inclusion and exclusion, justice and injustice, can show how majority opinions can overcome opinions of minority, teaches non-violent methods of conflict resolutions and promotes awareness of stereotypes. It as well questions the notion of power and obedience and importance of a leader.

**Method:**

Step 1. Create a board by placing papers numbered from 1 to 25 and add a finish line in a way you like it (circle, box, serpentine, etc)

Step 2. Place prizes on step no. 16, 20 and 25.

Step 2. Form two teams

Step 3. Explain the game and main rule at the beginning and then remain outside of the game area to observe and do not intervene (Important! Give as little guidance and rules as possible).

Main rule:

- Rules can be created and changed by the participants at specific times.

Specific rules:

- To win this game you have to get to the step number 25.

- To win prizes you have to get to no. 16, 20 and 25., or cross them.

- To move forward throw a dice, one team after the other.

- When you get on or over the steps no. 16 or 20, you will be able to set one new rule.

- The game ends as soon as one team wins.

**Debrief:**

How do you feel after the game?

How did you feel during the game? Did you like it?

Did you agree with the rules of your team?

How did you decide about setting the rules? Communication, mechanism of decision?

What do you think of the rules of the other team?

What did you think about the different starting positions?

Do you know different and unequal positions in your life or in the society?

Do you know any rules or laws that exclude others?

Do you know fair/unfair rules or laws?

What makes a rule or law fair or unfair?



## Religious Biography

**Aim:**

To get to know each other better in the context of religious background

**Type:**

Getting to know each other

**Time:**

60 minutes (can be adapted to consume less time)

**Settings:**

Indoor or outdoor

**Resources:**

Paper, pens, scotch tape

**Method:**

Step 1. Create pairs

Step 2. Explain activity and hand in questions

Step 3. After each person did an interview, make a circle and let the interviewer present in one or two minutes a person to the group.

Step 4. Stick interviews on the wall.

**Description:**

It's an adapted interview activity. Each person in a pair has 10 minutes to find out and write down about religious identity of another person. After presentation in a group, stick interviews on a wall to be accessible for others to read. Keep in mind to give more time if pairs need it.

**Debrief:**

Were you raised in a religious family?

What was your first contact with religion?

How did you see religion in primary school?

What changed in high school?

And in college?

How did your understanding of your religion change during your life?

Did you find religion helpful in some situations?

Did you have some religious disappointments?

In a scale from 1 to 10, how important is religion in your life?



# Religious Symbols

**Aim:**

To explore the meanings behind a variety of cultural/religious/political symbols  
To encourage sense that difference is normal, different groups can learn from each other and diversity is healthy

**Time:**

60 minutes

**Settings:**

Indoor or outdoor

**Type:**

Getting to know each other

**Resources:**

A collection of different religious/faith symbols, badges, flags, religious dress or clothing, and photos that represent a wide spectrum of religious identities relevant to your local context.

This activity can be done in different ways – for example, with a group that is quite homogenous, so that they can gain an understanding of diversity in their community; or it can be used when bringing together two different groups of young people, perhaps from different backgrounds, as a means of enabling them to share with each other the various symbols that are important to them.

**Method:**

Step 1. Spread out the collection of symbols around the room and encourage the participants to walk around the room.

Step 2. Encourage them to pick them up and have a good look at the various items. Explain that they may feel comfortable with some of them and not others.

Step 3. Ask the participants to each choose a symbol – one that means a lot to them or that they can relate to.

Step 4. Ask each person to describe the object they chose and explain why it is important to them.

Repeat the exercise by asking participants to choose an object they don't know about and would like to ask a question about. Encourage the rest of the participants to answer each other's questions. If a question cannot be answered, suggest that it is something to investigate later.

We all share some parts of our identity with others. There are also lots of different identities.

Young people may relate to some of these and not others. Use this as an opportunity to teach the young people about their own culture and to get a broad understanding of different viewpoints.

(Adapted from Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers. Salto-Youth Cultural Diversity Resource Center)



# Where is My Shoe?

## **Aim:**

To raise awareness of stereotypes and prejudices we have about different religious practices

To tackle ignorance and misunderstanding of religious practices

To understand how in a dialogue only a person of certain religious practice can speak for themselves and describe him/herself and their practice

## **Type:**

Group activity (max. 4 persons per group), role play, getting into the shoes of others

## **Time:**

60 min

## **Settings:**

Outdoor or indoor

## **Resources:**

Paper, pens, beforehand materials (a role and a task, topic and questions for discussion)

## **Description:**

FIFTH PRINCIPLE of “Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue” written by Leonard Swidler states “Each participant needs to describe her/himself. For example, only a Muslim can describe what it really means to be an authentic member of the Muslim community. At the same time, when one’s partner in dialogue attempts to describe back to them what they have understood of their partner’s self-description, then such a description must be recognizable to the described party. Getting into shoes of others sometimes is a shortcut to understand better other person, but it can stimulate development of prejudices and stereotypes too. This activity serves to understand importance of speaking only for ourselves in dialogue.

## **Method:**

Step 1. Pick a topic (ex. gay marriage, cannabis legalisation, life after death, meat eating, etc.) and decide on roles for each person (ex. Muslim, Catholic, Atheist, etc)

Step 2. Create groups of 4 and hand out one topic and share different roles

Step 3. Explain that each person should discuss only from a perspective of a given role

Step 4. After 15-20 minutes of discussing in groups ask each group to explain topic and roles and to present their conclusions to others.

Step 5. Debrief

**Debrief:**

How did you feel wearing other people's shoes?

Did you recognize any stereotypes and prejudices you have?

Do you have to experience something from within to be able to speak about it?

Is it fair to speak instead of others based on our presumptions or knowledge we gained from books?

What is more important for a person to have for a dialogue, knowledge or experience of certain religious practice?



## Circle Exercise

### **Aim:**

To experience how it feels to be part of majority/minority groups.

### **Type:**

Group activity

### **Time:**

30-60 min

### **Settings:**

Outdoor or indoor

### **Resources:**

None

### **Description:**

This activity will help groups to explore the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

### **Method:**

Step 1. Divide the group so that three quarters of the main group are on one side and one quarter is on the other. Ask the minority group to go outside so they can't hear.

Step 2. Explain to the majority group that they are to stand in a circle, facing inwards, linking arms. They must not let anyone join the circle unless they ask first. If someone asks, they are to let that person link arms in the circle.

Step 3. Explain to the minority group outside that they are to try to join the circle in whatever way they can.

Step 4. Send one person in while the rest remain outside. Let this person try to join the circle. If he/she fails to ask the group, give him/her hints. Eventually they should make it in.

Step 5. Ask the remainder of the minority group to come in and try to enter the circle.

Step 6. Debrief

### **Debrief:**

What was it like to be the first person trying to get in?

What was it like for the majority group when the remainder of the minority group came in?

What was it like for the minority group?

What lessons might this teach us about the experience of different ethnic minority groups and their relations with the majority community?

Resource: Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers. Salto-Youth Cultural Diversity Resource Center



## PMI Exercise

**Aim:**

To engage young people in a critical thinking process

**Type:**

Group activity

**Time:**

60 min

**Settings:**

Outdoor or indoor

**Resources:**

Pens and paper

**Description:**

This technique encourages young people – individually or in groups – to explore a variety of possibilities, generate ideas and new ways of thinking about a particular issue and to create the outline of an action plan. It can be applied equally to formal or non-formal settings, and can also be adapted by youth workers to help develop their own creativity, analytical skills and problem solving.

**Method:**

Select a topic that the group of young people you are working with are interested in and wish to understand more deeply. Ask each participant to draw a table with three columns on their page – one for 'plus', one for 'minus', and one for 'interesting'.

Step 1. For two minutes, ask the young people to write down all of the possible positive things about a subject or action in the plus column.

Step 2. For two minutes, ask the young people to write down all of the possible negative things about a subject or action in the minus column.

Step 3. For two minutes, ask the young people to write down all of the interesting things about the subject or action (including implications and possible outcomes – whether positive, negative or uncertain) in the interesting column.

Step 4. Debrief

**Debrief:**

Did you gain any fresh insights or different ways of thinking about the subject or action?

What questions remain for you on this issue and what you can do to find out more?  
Has the activity produced any ideas about actions you could take to address a particular issue?



## Additional resources

Declaration Toward a Global Ethic - Parliament of the World's Religions  
Interfaith dialogue: seven key questions for theory, policy and practice - Religion, State and Society: Vol 44, No 4.

Resources for Inclusion, Diversity and Equality "RIDE" - Croatian Youth Network  
Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Inter-religious, Inter-ideological Dialogue - Leonard Swidler

Handbook For People Working With Youth Groups: Non-formal education practice in Lithuania - Ž.Gailius, A. Malinauskas, D. Petkauskas, L. Ragauskas

Salto-youth resources:

Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers

Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers. Additional material.

The Sky is the Limit: an interactive guide for youth projects on interfaith dialogue  
Discover yourself; the personal companion to understanding youth.

Understanding Youth: Exploring Identity and its Role in International Youth Work

Value the Difference: Resource pack

We Are All Europeans: Your guide for projects with migrant, minority and multi-cultural youth groups

A Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally