

# Why Do Good People Do Bad Things?

Reasoning  
Wisdom

Critical Thinking



## Following Orders



Critical thinking: thinking clearly and rationally, reflecting on things, asking questions, and considering things independently.



Practical wisdom: knowing how to do the right thing in the right way.

### Activity 1



#### Aim(s)

- To explore why people may act to hurt others.



#### Resources

- Paper, pens and other craft materials as needed.
- Post-it notes and pens. **OPTIONAL**
- Internet connection to watch videos. **OPTIONAL**
- *Why do Good People Do Bad Things?* Power Point **OPTIONAL**



### Delivery Guide



This activity involves destroying a piece of work young people have put time and care into, and therefore may need to be modified and carefully managed. Rather than allowing participants to spend time on work, you could just ask them to make a very quick drawing or doodle, and then proceed using that. You may also want to use a pre-prepared picture that the young person has found on the internet.

#### Part I

Ask the young people:

Would you harm an innocent person?

Answers might include:

- Definitely not.
- Not if they were innocent.
- It would depend on the situation.
- What does it mean to be innocent?
- If it was to save myself.

Generally, it is expected that the young people will answer that they wouldn't hurt an innocent person, but it may require some exploration of different situations.



This activity works best with a small group. However, it can be done on a 1-2-1 basis, with the young person told to destroy the facilitator's work. This could be done by writing the instruction on a piece of paper or as an official looking letter, and putting it in an envelope. After they've created their piece of work, they are told to open the envelope and read the letter which tells them to destroy the work.



Facilitators can do the utopia exercise and take part in the rest of the activity alongside the young people.

## Part II

### Step 1

Depending on how in-depth you want to make this session, you could either introduce the concept of utopia to the young people, or you could just go straight to the next step. If you want to introduce the concept of utopia, you could start with these two videos:

#### Utopia – The Perfect World (a bit of a history)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=peSpUDMcGR8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peSpUDMcGR8)

#### What is Utopia?

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2360dXXJXs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2360dXXJXs)

(both available 8/16)

Utopia is the idea of a perfect society or world. It's been represented and explored in literature and paintings throughout the ages, and there are a million different visions of what utopia could be.

### Step 2

Ask the young people to create a picture or model of their 'perfect world,' or to write a detailed description of it. Stress that you want them to take care over their work and create a really great representation of it; they can use any craft or paper materials they can find.

After a certain amount of time (perhaps 20 or 30 minutes, although you may decide to shorten this considerably) ask young people to leave their work and move to someone else's work. When every Utopia work is being viewed by a person that didn't create it, ask them all to destroy the work in front of them. You may decide not to use something the young person has created.

### Step 3

Clear up the destroyed work and ask the young people to sit down again.

Ask them how they felt during the last part of the activity. Possible prompt questions are:

- What did you think and feel when told to destroy someone else's work?
- What did you think and feel when you saw your work destroyed?
- Did you see any of the following virtues present in the classroom: courage, justice, empathy, compassion, gratitude? (for instance, someone may have shown compassion or kindness in not destroying someone's work completely, saving something particularly precious, or been visibly uncomfortable doing so, showing empathy.)
- Has your answer to the question at the beginning of the lesson changed?

Ask the young people why they followed the instruction to destroy the work. Some things that might come up include:

- We're supposed to do as we're told.
- You're the one in charge – we have to do what you say.
- You would have told us off/given sanctions etc.
- I trusted you to know what we were supposed to be doing.
- We're just kids, you have the power.
- The work was rubbish anyway.
- I wanted to.
- It was fun.

It may be appropriate to pause and explore a bit about how the people felt who saw their work destroyed, and the importance of displaying empathy towards those who may feel upset.

If some of the young people resisted destroying the work, ask them why. Things that might come up include:

- I didn't want to hurt my friend by ruining their work.
- It was a really good piece of work.
- Why should I do that?
- People put in lots of time and effort.
- I couldn't bring myself to do it.

### Step 4

Ask them if it's always a good idea to follow instructions from authority? When may it be a good idea? Answers may include:

- At school.
- The police.
- Parents.
- In an emergency.

Even then, maybe blind obedience is not the right response.

Ask them what they think they could do if they are unsure whether to follow the orders they've been given.

Answers may include:

- Ask questions.
- Think about if you trust this person.
  - Think about why they are asking you to do something – is it to help you? Is it to help them? Is it because there's an emergency and people are in danger?
  - Think about what effect your actions will have on other people. Will it harm them?

## Points to highlight

- We can end up doing something we wouldn't normally do, just because someone told us to.
- Sometimes it's important to follow authority, but just blindly doing something we are told to is not good. We need to think critically about the situation we're in and use wisdom to make a good choice.
- It's useful to ask questions and to think about why someone is telling us to do something, and what effect that action may have on other people.

# Activity 2

## Aim(s)

- To look at a situation where people carried out harmful acts influenced by their surroundings.
- To apply the learning from the previous activity to a real life context.

## Resources

- *Why do Good People Do Bad Things?* Power Point.
- Internet connection to play videos, or the *Stanley Milgram Summary Sheet*.
- Flipchart paper and pens.

## Delivery Guide

Ask them if anyone can think of a time or situation where people have done terrible things because they were told to or were 'following orders'. Answers may include:

- the Holocaust
- in the Army
- Derren Brown's TV show 'The Experiments'

Ask the young people if anyone has heard of the Stanley Milgram experiment. Explain what it is – you can use the *Stanley Milgram Summary Sheet*, the video (available on the Power Point slide: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g1MJeHYIE0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g1MJeHYIE0) available 8/16) and/or ask the young people to act it out (without electric shocks!).

You can also refer to Derren Brown's programme 'The Heist', where he recreates the experiment to select the people who are most likely to follow authority and orders.

Clip from Derren Brown's 'The Heist': [www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GxluljT3w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GxluljT3w) (available 8/16)

Prepare 4 pieces of flipchart paper, each with one of the questions below (in bold):

- **If you were the volunteer in the Stanley Milgram experiment, what would you have done? Would you have given the electric shocks? Why?**

*The initial response might be that they would never do it, but encourage deeper thinking to see whether they might have done.*

- **What things in the experiment encouraged people to do something they know was causing harm to another person?**

*Answers might include:*

- The authority of the person giving the orders.
- Feeling like they have no exit (the researcher tells them that they must continue).
- Taking part is 'doing good' by helping research about teaching and learning.
- The electric shocks gets worse very slowly so it builds up.

- **Which of those things led to you destroying someone else's work (if they did!)?**

Answers might include:

- The authority of the facilitator telling them to do it.
- The idea that there must be a reason behind it or they wouldn't be asked to do it surely they're going to learn something by doing it.
- They didn't feel they could just leave the class.

- **Can you think of another situation that you could be in where this might happen?**

*This may open conversation about peer pressure (if other people are doing it, I have to), particularly those who are older, and how you may be able to deal with this.*

Put each piece of flipchart paper on a different table or space in the room. Give the young people some time to go round and write any thoughts or responses they have to each question – you can even give them 2 or 3 minutes at each table before moving on to the next. You can then come together to discuss the answers. This has the advantage of being reasonably anonymous.



The facilitator can also answer these questions.



This can also be done as a simple discussion.

## Points to highlight

- We can all be in situations where we feel under pressure to do something, or believe somebody else knows better.
- This can open conversations about peer pressure. How often do the participants do something because their friends have told them to?



## Further Resources

Derren Brown's TV show also explores this theme:

[www.channel4.com/programmes/derren-brown-the-experiments/episode-guide/series-1](http://www.channel4.com/programmes/derren-brown-the-experiments/episode-guide/series-1)

(available 8/16)



## Links to Other Areas of the Curriculum

### English and Art

Utopia section links to studies in English and Art, with room to explore how artists and writers have represented utopia (or the search for it) in their work throughout the years.

### History and Psychology

Details of the Stanley Milgram experiment may link into these subjects.



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