# What is humanitarianism

Learning objectives

Learners will:

* Consider what makes us human
* Explore the concept of humanitarianism and what it means (to them and others)
* Explore the idea of human dignity
* Explain what it means to be a humanitarian

Suggested age range: 11–14

## Introduction

­The Red Cross is a humanitarian organisation, but what does that mean? The activities in this resource have been designed to help learners unpack the concept of humanitarianism, beginning with what it means to be human and building on this in sequential stages. The idea of human dignity is introduced as a particularly important aspect of humanitarianism and the resource concludes by looking at what it means to be a humanitarian.

## Starter: What makes us human?

1. This is a discussion-based starter that encourages learners to begin their exploration of humanitarianism by starting with the simpler notion of ‘what makes us human?’ It uses a co-operative learning approach called ‘hand, pair, share’ that works as follows:
   1. Makes sure the room is safe for learners to move around *[this could be done outside if space/weather allows]* and explain that in a moment they will begin to move around quietly whilst thinking about a question or idea (prompted by the educator).
   2. Once they have thought of a response they should raise one hand in the air and look for someone else who is ready to share (they will also have their hand in the air) and walk over to them and pair up.
   3. Once paired up they share their thoughts about the question or idea with each other.
   4. The Hand, Pair, Share’ cycle is then repeated with learners encouraged to pair with someone new in each cycle. In this activity the following could be used as suggested prompts for each Hand, Pair, Share cycle:
      1. Think about ‘what makes us human?’ with a focus on our basic needs – needs that we all share.
      2. Think about ‘what makes us human?’ this time with a focus on feelings and emotions.
      3. Think about ‘what makes us human?’ and this time focus on actions (these could be positive and negative).
      4. This final time, share anything else that you think makes us human?
   5. At the end of each cycle interview the room by asking some of the learners to share their discussion, perhaps choosing a few pairs in each case. This should enable learners to develop a shared understanding of what it makes us human.

[Note: until learners are familiar with this method of sharing ideas you might need to manage it more directly through a series of instructions e.g. “Ok, begin to take a walk and think of a response to the question. Now HAND – raise one hand in the air and keep gently walking looking for someone to pair with. Now PAIR with that person and once you have a pair, SHARE your thoughts with each other.”]

## Raising awareness: Humanitarianism is…

1. This activity builds on 1 above, by taking learners’ ideas and using them as a basis for developing an understanding of the related concept of humanitarianism.
   1. Organise learners into groups of 4-6 and provide each group with a large sheet of paper and share the **‘Humanitarianism is…’ template** with them.
   2. Explain that humanitarianism is about “***kindness, benevolence or empathy towards other human beings”***. Using this understanding of humanitarianism *[you may want to display the above definition for learners to refer to]* ask learners to think about their responses to ‘what makes us human?’ in activity 1 and turn these ideas into statements or examples that help describe humanitarianism. *[The key at this stage is to encourage thinking around the term/concept ‘humanitarianism’ and not about right or wrong answers – encourage learners to think for themselves].*
   3. Suggest learners use the template to record their ideas, organizing them into the three segments:
      1. actions that could be said to demonstrate humanitarianism,
      2. emotions/feelings that would demonstrate humanitarianism, and
      3. how meeting people’s basic needs would demonstrate humanitarianism.

Learners can record additional ideas around the edge of the circle if they wish.

* 1. Once each group has completed their own ideas, invite them to explore the ideas of others in the wider group. This could be done by passing on the finished sheets from group to group, by letting the learners move from group to group whilst playing some music perhaps, or by feeding in as a whole group with the educator in the lead.

## Raising awareness: Unpacking humanitarianism

Having looked at their own ideas of ‘humanitarianism’, this next activity ‘unpacks’ some existing perspectives on humanitarianism to help them dig a little deeper into its meaning. It should be made clear at this point that it is more usual to find definitions of humanitarian acts/principles etc than it is to find definitions of humanitarianism. These descriptive forms of the concept are still useful in helping to build understanding however.

1. For this activity young people should work together in pairs. Download the four perspectives on humanitarianism *(humanitarianism unpacked.docx)* and cut out to give one perspective per pair *[duplicate the sheet so that all pairs have one perspective each – it does not matter if several pairs have the same perspective within larger groups].*
   1. Ask learners to carefully read their humanitarian perspective and highlight or underline key words or phrases that they think define humanitarianism.
   2. Give learners the opportunity to compare the perspective they have been given with their own ideas on humanitarianism from activity 2. How do they compare? Were their similar ideas? Are there any major differences?
   3. Show learners the short film ‘Our world, your move, for humanity’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCdD5LjppvE> and ask them to look for evidence of the key words or phrases identified in their humanitarian perspectives. *[Please check the film yourself before showing to learners. There are one or two scenes that may be upsetting, but it is hard to show the reality of humanitarian actions without a degree of suffering that reflects reality.]*
   4. Encourage learners to share their developing ideas about humanitarianism based on the different perspectives and the film.
   5. As an extension you could challenge learners to come up with their own definition of humanitarianism that combines their ideas and thinking.

## Raising awareness: Human dignity

An important idea within humanitarianism is ‘human dignity’.

***Human dignity is about respecting people and ensuring they still have a sense of worth or pride – it is about treating other people as a human being in a way that we would wish to be treated, no matter what the circumstances.***

1. It is sometimes easier to begin thinking about ‘human dignity’ by looking at ways in which it can be taken away or denied. This activity encourages learners to explore this idea (maybe in relation to their own lives) before developing an understanding of how humanitarianism respects or restores people’s human dignity.
   1. Begin by sharing the definition of human dignity above and ensuring all learners understand this, giving time to discuss its meaning if required.
   2. Working in groups of four, ask learners to think about instances of when people’s dignity might be denied or taken away.

An example, if needed, might be ‘laughing at someone when they slip and fall over on the ice’ or ‘calling somebody names because you had a disagreement with them about something’. *[Learners may wish to use examples relating to their own lives and experience. If so then they should be reminded to treat each other with care and respect.]*

* 1. After a few minutes ask learners in their groups to choose one example of dignity being denied or taken away and ask them to turn it into a short (1 min max) role play to demonstrate their idea to the wider group.
  2. As each group perform their scenario/example, the wider group should observe and then be asked about how they could have maintained or restored human dignity in each case. *[You may need to support them as an educator in this – focussing on how embarrassment, shame, denial, persecution, stigma, impoverishment etc could have been avoided in order to sustain human dignity.]*

1. Human dignity is at the core of the work of British Red Cross as a humanitarian organisation. This short film called ‘Power of Humanity <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIWMyojzx8Y>’ celebrates the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and provides many examples of treating people with dignity.
   1. Ask learners to watch the film and to look for:

(i) situations that may deny or compromise human dignity; and

(ii) examples of human dignity being respected or restored.

*[You may wish to show the film through twice to give greater opportunity for this, perhaps focussing on one of the above on each viewing. This will depend on the ability of your learners.]*

* 1. Once the film has finished ask learners to share their observations with a partner. After a few minutes draw ideas together from the room. Among the ideas you might look for are the following:

(i) Situations that may deny/compromise human dignity…

* + - …can include conflict (war), natural disasters, accidents and diseases, lack of basic needs, disputes, injuries, loss of livelihood, separation from or loss of loved ones.

(i) Examples of human dignity being restored/respected…

* + - providing people with shelter (gives them privacy and security)
    - helping with people’s basic needs (shoes, clothing, food etc)
    - caring for those who may have suffered personal loss or separation from loved ones
    - assisting where people are weak, injured or vulnerable (healthcare, medicines etc)
    - helping to restore livelihoods (ability to care for oneself and family)
    - providing communication or reuniting with loved ones
    - Giving information about the missing/dead

## Taking action: Being a Humanitarian

1. This activity gives learners space to reflect on the values and skills that might be needed to be a humanitarian. It is suggested that learners do this in groups of around 4-6 though you may wish to vary to suit your own setting and learners.
   1. Provide each group of learners with a copy of three of the fundamental principles[[1]](#footnote-1) which guide the humanitarian work of the British Red Cross *(fundamental principles.doc*). Give them a moment to read them through and clarify any language that is unfamiliar to them at this point.
   2. Introduce the idea that these are called humanitarian principles, but that they are made up of a series of values and skills (abilities). Remind them that they may have seen examples of these values and skills in the Power of Humanity film used in Activity 5 above.

Ask the groups to imagine they are recruiting new Red Cross staff/volunteers to help with their humanitarian work. They have to think about the skills and values that might make a good humanitarian.

* 1. Provide each group with a large sheet of paper (A3 at the least) and introduce them to the concept of head (the ways you might need to think or communicate) heart (the ways you might need to feel or show feeling) and hands (the ways you might need to act and do). Ask them to represent in whatever way they wish the values and skills needed to be a humanitarian and to use the head, heart and hands idea to organise their response.
  2. Give groups the chance to feedback and positively assess each other’s ideas. Encourage them to recognise the shared skills and values that have been identified across the groups.
  3. As an extension to this activity you could provide learners with access to a blog written by a doctor working for the Red Cross during the Ebola outbreak of 2014-15 in Sierra Leone. This blog <http://blogs.redcross.org.uk/emergencies/2015/01/living-death-ebola-doctors-diary-part-one/> provides a real insight to the life of a humanitarian working for the Red Cross. It alludes to many of the skills and values necessary to perform such a role, but is at times ‘very real’ and may be disturbing for some learners. Educators are strongly advised to check the content themselves before sharing with learners *[the link above is for part 1 of the blog, but there are 5 parts to the blog in total]*.

## Closing reflections: I am humanitarian

1. This final activity uses the very short animation ‘Our world, your move’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShgBMTC82Tk> to convey two very simple ideas. Firstly that humanitarianism (showing kindness, concern, care and empathy for others) is one of the things that ties us together as humanity – connecting us all. The second is that humanitarian actions need not always be dramatic. They can start with simple gestures, even a simple smile to show kindness and understanding.

This is a powerful message because it enables everyone to think about themselves as humanitarians and not to be daunted by some of the examples (disasters, conflicts etc) they may have encountered during the learning.

1. Show the short animation to learners. Ask them to think about the simple humanitarian acts that it shows.
2. Thinking about their own day-to-day life in their own community can they think of five simple acts or gestures that they could take to be humanitarian. Explain that these need not be grand gestures but could be very simple. Examples could include showing concern and empathy for someone who is upset or hurt, not standing by when someone is in need, or standing up to someone who is bullying or stigmatizing others.
3. They could record their ideas by drawing around their hand and writing one idea in each of their five fingers. *[If learners are struggling for ideas they could refer to their earlier learning around skills, values or concepts of humanitarianism.]*

1. Note: In this teaching resource learners explore three of the fundamental principles. However, as a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement the British Red Cross is committed to, and bound by, its seven fundamental principles. For details of all seven fundamental principles please see: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/The-international-Movement/Fundamental-principles> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)