# Humanitarianism in action

Learning objectives

Young people will be able to:

* explore the term humanity
* consider dilemmas and consequences when faced with situations where a humanitarian response is possible
* explore social pressures and barriers to action around helping others
* reflect on what motivates people to act to help others.

Age range: 14–19

*This resource covers some content that is sensitive, and could be upsetting for some learners; therefore consideration needs to be given to the age and ability of the group.*

## Introduction

­Humanity is one of the Fundamental Principles underpinning the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The activities in this resource consider how humanitarianism can be put into action, by placing learners in the position of decision makers, enabling them to explore the choices surrounding helping people in need.

The activities go on to investigate the factors that might limit or support the choice of individuals to act as humanitarians. Role-play, real-life examples and opportunities for self-reflection are all used to develop the learning and deepen learners’ engagement with the concept of humanitarianism.

## Starter: A humanitarian vision

­Share the definition of ‘humanity’ as defined by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:

**Humanity**

The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours – in its international and national capacity – to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Humanity is one of seven Fundamental Principles underpinning the work of the Red Cross Movement. The full set of Fundamental Principles is available [here](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Fundamental_principles_of_the_Red_Cross_cards.pdf) or you can use this session plan to explore the principles of the Red Cross Movement and how it was founded [here](http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/Lesson-plans/Humanitarianism-and-the-Red-Cross).

1. Lead an initial discussion with learners exploring the idea *‘how might the principle of humanity be applied to our own lives? What does it mean to act or behave in a humanitarian way?’*

You could use the following questions to support learners:

* How can we reflect on the Red Cross Movement’s definition of humanity to understand how humanitarianism is applied in the context of helping others?
* What are the key factors contributing to this principle – outlined in the definition of humanity?

## Raising awareness: Everyday humanitarian dilemmas

­Having explored what learners might identify as ‘humanitarianism’, this next activity seeks to deepen engagement with this idea through dilemma scenario cards that place learners in the position of having to make a choice. Learners can consider what they have learnt about humanitarianism before making their choices.

There are three dilemma [cards](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Humanitarianism%20in%20action-%20Dilemmas.docx). Learners can be given a dilemma in small groups of around four-six [use multiple sets of dilemmas for larger group sizes]. Although each dilemma is different they are all related, so by the end of the activity, learners will have explored a single ‘event’ and considered it from a range of different perspectives in their groups.

Once you have familiarised yourself with the dilemmas you may choose to use them in your own way, but a suggested process is as follows:

1. Provide each group of learners with their [dilemma card](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Humanitarianism%20in%20action-%20Dilemmas.docx).
2. Ask learners to study the dilemma, perhaps with one of them reading it out to the others.
3. Once familiar with the dilemma, ask them to consider the different choices given for their particular scenario. Which one would they choose and why? Maybe they can come up with their own? [To deepen their thinking and discussion they should be encouraged to look at each of the options for the action they could take and work through the possible consequences of that choice for the different parties involved in their dilemma. A worksheet ‘[thinking through a dilemma](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Humanitarianism%20in%20action_thinking%20through%20a%20dilemma%20worksheet.docx) is available to help learners.]
4. Once the group have agreed on an action for their dilemma, ask them to work out how to present their choice (to include the action taken AND the possible consequences of that action) as a short one to two minute role-play where different members of the group take on the role of people within their dilemma. [They could begin their role-play with a freeze frame (frozen live-action) that is held whilst one of the group read out the dilemma to the audience. When they get to the point of the decision the freeze frame is undone to perform their chosen response and consequences as they imagine them to be.]
5. After each group has performed their response, the alternative choices could be given to the audience and the audience given a chance to ask questions to the group (perhaps still in role) as to why they decided not to choose the other options.

As each group presents their dilemma, the wider group should begin to realise that they are building a different perspective on the same event and that in each case there is an opportunity for a humanitarian response to help.

There are a number of questions you could use with the whole group once the three different dilemmas have been acted out. These have been designed to:

* develop critical thinking, and
* provide an alternative perspective.

**Choose from or use all of the following questions:**

* Thinking about what we understand by humanitarianism from the previous activities, which actions and responses to the dilemma could be viewed as more humanitarian? Which were less so and why?
* Did your group come up with any alternative actions or think of different ways you might respond if faced with such a scenario? What might the consequences of those actions or inactions be?
* Given the three stories come together to create different perspectives on one scene, do you think that one person had a greater responsibility to act than another? Who might that have been and why? What could they have done differently? Is there anyone you think should have acted but did not?
* What might be the consequences of not acting in a humanitarian way? Think of the people in the scene and the impact these events may have had on them. These could be practical or physical consequences, or emotional ones. You could look at the three different dilemma sheets to explore these consequences.

This dilemma could be considered a rather personal crisis compared with some of the larger scale crises affecting hundreds of people that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement normally works with - such as conflicts, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, major accidents etc. Many of the core qualities (skills, values, attitudes) needed to respond to a personal or international crisis can be similar however. What do you think these humanitarian qualities might include? You could link back to the definition of humanity to discuss how someone might act in a humanitarian way, whatever the scale of the crisis.

1. **Extension activity.** As a written reflection learners could write a fourth dilemma and set of choices related to someone else involved in the event.

Remember that your version of the event has to fit with the three that already exist.

It could be written from the perspective of the group that pushed the boy, or perhaps of Mia who was shooting the film, or one of her friends. Perhaps it was someone we do not know of yet – a motorist passing by in their car for example.

Choose a character and produce a similar dilemma and outline the humanitarian choices modelled on the existing dilemma cards. Share your dilemmas with others in the group and discuss.

## Real life scenarios: Humanitarian action in Syria

­The dilemmas that were explored in the previous activity were fictional but feasible. They were designed to introduce the idea of humanitarianism at a local level, and some of the complex choices that can be associated with helping others.

This next activity uses real information drawn from Red Cross involvement in helping those affected by the armed conflict in Syria.

The [Syrian case studies](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Humanitarianism%20in%20action_Syria%20case%20studies.docx) have been collated with data, text and pictures from the British Red Cross website. They look at the support of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to people affected by the conflict in Syria – personal stories – and a news article about humanitarian aid workers.

The case studies are intended to help learners move their initial thinking and discussions around humanitarianism forwards by applying their understanding to a real life setting.

A suggested use of the case studies is as follows:

1. Provide learners with case study A, [this could be individually, in pairs or small groups (four per group) depending on the size of your whole group] give them time to read and become familiar with the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the Syrian conflict.

* Ask learners to look at the list of items to support those affected by the conflict, and to identify what the needs of people affected by a conflict might be based on the information given.

1. Now provide learners with case studies B and C. Ask them to read these additional perspectives – one of someone in need, and one of a Red Cross volunteer who is helping those caught up in the crisis.

* Based on reading these and imagining you were living locally like Ibrahim, do you think you would be willing to volunteer to help people caught up in the Syrian crisis?
* What would be your reasons for wanting to help?
* What reasons might prevent you from helping, or be a barrier to you helping?
* What would you need to consider before volunteering to help?
* How do the situations of the people in the case studies make you feel? What might you like to discuss with them or say to them?

1. Finally, give readers case study D sharing a news story about the attacks on humanitarian aid workers. Ask learners to read this.

* Does anything in this additional perspective cause you to think again about your earlier responses to case studies B and C?
* What are some of the risks that those working and volunteering for the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement might face?
* Why do you think people still choose to volunteer to help people caught up in situations of conflict, disasters and emergencies, and during health outbreaks (like Ebola)?
* How do the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Crystal emblems help protect humanitarian workers? [please see the text box in case study D with further information on the emblems]
* What preparations and actions could people volunteering to help others take to keep themselves as safe as possible? For example, thinking of their safety, team support, looking out for other volunteers, maintaining hygiene standards to ensure health, etc.

**Closing questions**

* Why might it be important that organisations like the Red Cross Movement exist? What might happen if they were not there?
* Do learners have any other perspectives on what it means to be humanitarian by reflecting on the case studies?

**Optional: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in action worldwide**

*Please note: due to the nature of the content in this film it may only be suitable for the upper age range.* This (13.41 minutes) [film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBRKo_PbqZI) provides a clear and accessible insight to the practical humanitarian work performed by the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in response to conflict around the world. It is a useful follow-on from the Syria case study work. It deals with both the actions on the ground, and the awareness raising and educational role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in ensuring respect for the Geneva Conventions.

## Thinking it through: Exploring personal motivations

­The next activity asks learners to reflect, helping them bring the understanding from their learning in the previous activities – into their own life and locality.

1. Considering what they have learnt in terms of humanitarian dilemmas and actions, explore what might motivate people to act in a humanitarian way, by reflecting on learners’ own motivations. Print out and place a set of [humanitarian motivation cards](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/Teaching%20resources/Lesson%20plans/Humanitarianism%20in%20action_motivations%20cards.docx) around the room in a circle [this activity could be done outside if appropriate, or if you don’t have space, as a worksheet in groups where learners discuss the motivations and choose what motivates them].

* Ask the learners to move around the room, exploring each of these motivations and thinking about what might motivate them to be humanitarian.
* Once they have familiarised themselves with the different statements ask learners to move to the one they think most represents their own motivations. [It is important to stress that there can be multiple motivations and that the activity is to explore these and not to judge anyone.]
* Interview the room asking learners about their choices and model the non-judgemental appreciation of perspectives. Invite learners to comment or further question each other on their chosen humanitarian motivation.
* Close the discussion by reminding learners that there can be a variety of motivations to be humanitarian and that like many other forms of motivation these can change over time, or due to particular circumstances.

## Closing reflections: Sharing thoughts on humanitarianism

1. Close the session by inviting everyone to share a humanitarian reflection. This could be from any of the activities and might be something they’ve been challenged by, something they will now do differently, something they have learnt, etc.

* Give learners 30 seconds of quiet to consider their own reflection.
* Explain that learners can share their reflection one at a time by stepping forwards into the circle, sharing their thought, and then stepping back again. [If you don’t have space learners could write their thoughts on a sticky note and add them to a wall, either grouping ideas together or reading each other’s reflections. They could then share something that stood out to them with the group.]