

WORK SHEET – EXERCISE 7E

Story: The nails in the fence.



Here's an old story that might help you think together about the consequences of hurtful behaviour and the words you use when you're angry.

Once upon a time there was a child with a temper. When he was angry – something that, of course, happens to everyone – he was unable to control himself.

His father gave him a bag full of nails and a hammer and told him: "Listen up kid, you have the right to get angry. Anger is a normal emotion in situations where you don't feel respected. But, in this house, in your school and in this country, violence is forbidden. So now you have to learn to express your anger in a different way. Every time you see red and you're about to vent on someone, take this hammer and drive a nail into the wooden garden fence."

On the first day, the child drove 37 nails in the fence. In the following weeks, he learned to control himself better and the number of nails in the fence became fewer day by day: He had discovered that it was easier to control himself than to keep on pounding nails into the fence.

Finally, there came a day where the child didn't need to drive a single nail into the fence. So he went to his father and told him: "I didn't hammer any nails today".

His father answered: "Good work, my child! Well, now that you've succeeded, I can give you these tongs. Every time you managed to control your anger and didn't behave in a violent way for a day, you can remove one nail with these tongs".

The days passed, and finally the boy could tell his father that he had removed all the nails from the fence.

The father took his son to the fence and said: "Congratulations, my child! I'm proud of you. You've learned a fantastic skill, one that allows you to make friends, as you now know how to experience anger without becoming violent. No one is afraid of you anymore, and I can see that the others like spending time with you now."

"But look at all these holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you fight with someone and tell them something mean, you leave a wound just like that one. It doesn't matter how often you say sorry; the wound will remain. A verbal wound hurts just as much as a physical wound. Verbal wounds can heal, just like wounds on your body, but there will always be a scar. That's how life goes."

Here are some questions that can be part of a discussion or debate with the group.

1. What do you take from this story?
2. Are you sometimes like that child?
3. What happens in your body? Who else feels that in their bodies?
4. What do you think of the father's idea?
5. What do you think the child has learnt?
6. How can you help someone to calm down after they become angry?