

# LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

## **The Opinion Continuum**

This exercise gives students an active way to consider and express their opinions, listen to others' opinions, and begin discussing the issue.

Designate different corners of the room as “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” with “not sure, don't know or no opinion” occupying the middle distance between the two. Because this is a continuum, between the polar opposites lie many degrees of an opinion. For instance, I might agree with a statement, but not agree strongly, so I would place myself accordingly along the continuum — that being a particular spot within the boundaries of the classroom. After the directions are given, start with an easy statement and ask the students to move to the part of the room that reflects their opinion.

Try “chocolate ice cream is the best.” Once students have allocated themselves to a space along the continuum, ask for volunteers to share why they are standing, where they are standing. Now that everyone has the idea of how this works, move on to substantive statements.

Here are some possible opinion continuum statements for high school students. Remember that these are statements of opinion, not questions or facts. Keep the opinions simple and easy to understand.

1. It may be necessary to use nuclear weapons to fight terrorism.
2. Using nuclear weapons is terrorism.
3. We will never be able to get rid of nuclear weapons, we just have to live with them.
4. The total abolition of nuclear weapons is the only way to keep us safe.
5. It is important for young people to be fully aware of current nuclear dangers.
6. I am afraid of nuclear weapons.
7. Boys are more interested in nuclear weapons issues than are girls.
8. Nuclear weapons are more dangerous in some countries than in others.
9. Using nuclear weapons is terrorism.
10. It works better solving conflicts without violence

Ask students representing different points of view to state several reasons why they hold their particular opinion. Get a wide range of opinions throughout the room. It is helpful to summarize what students say to make sure all students understand and can hear each

perspective. It is also helpful to ask open, probing questions to get more information or clarifying questions to help students think more deeply about their own perspective. A variation is to have each speaker summarize the opinion of the previous speaker before expressing his/her own views.

After several students with different opinions have shared their thoughts; ask if anyone would like to change their opinion based on new information. It is important to acknowledge the value of remaining open to new information and being able to change one's mind when presented with new information. This is a way that we all learn.

Once you've presented a number of opinions for students to react to, reconvene as a group. Hold an informal discussion, and ask for volunteers to share their thoughts or feelings about the exercise and what they experienced.