

Activity 1: Which technologies?

An easy-to-organise opener that allows learners to explore what they already know about how emergency services use technology.

This activity is fun, flexible and learner-centred. It should help your learners understand that individual contributions are visible and valued during co-operative learning, allaying the common fear that individual work will be appropriated by others or remain invisible. It will also help newly formed co-operative learning teams find their feet.

Learning objectives

Learners should be able to:

- identify the various technologies used by the ambulance service
- begin to understand how co-operative learning differs from simply working in a group
- identify things they would like to know more about.

Resources required

- Large sheets of paper, pencils or crayons.

Starting points

Prior to this activity, learners will need some awareness of why working co-operatively is important and to have agreed team ground rules. You may like to show them the multimedia introduction to co-operative learning found in the Co-operative learning area of the IT resources.

This opening activity taps into prior knowledge or experience that they may have gained, but their level of knowledge does not matter. The opener itself provides the starting point – both for co-operative learning and the IT topic.

Suggested approach

Stage 1: Introducing the task

Learners should already be in a co-operative learning team of three. Explain that their task is to produce a graffiti wall on the following topic: 'Information and communication technologies used by the ambulance service.'

Leave the topic quite open and allow learners to interpret what they think it means.

Invite one learner from each group to act as team facilitator (you can find out more about defining roles within the Co-operative learning area of the IT resources). This person is responsible for ensuring the team completes the task. Announce a time limit for the task of about 15 minutes.

Stage 2: Individual work

Each team has a large sheet of paper and each learner takes an area of the sheet on which to draw pictures and write words, phrases or questions they associate with the topic. It does not have to be logical or structured. Avoid the temptation to intervene – watch and listen.

Stage 3: Peer explaining

After about five minutes they stop drawing and each person takes a turn at explaining what they have drawn to the rest of the team, enabling them to begin to structure their thoughts on the topic. The team facilitator is responsible for ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to speak.

Stage 4: Plenary

Each team displays their graffiti wall. Teams may walk around and look at the other teams' work.

Avoid giving explanations at this stage, but you might like to stimulate a plenary discussion by asking questions about the words and pictures on the graffiti wall.

- Is there a difference between a radio and a mobile phone? Is there a difference between a text message and an email?
- Do emergency vehicles have aerials? If so, what do they do?
- Why do emergency service headquarters often have big masts nearby?
- Why do emergency control centres have computers?

Listen to your learners' answers. Do not worry if they know very little at this stage. Ask them to identify things they would particularly like to know more about.

Stage five: Group processing

It is important that teams constantly review how well they are working together. You may find it useful to focus on a specific aspect such as: 'What did the rest of the team do when one of the team got stuck?'

This should provide an opportunity to highlight one of the key principles of co-operative learning, 'promotive interaction'. This occurs when team members encourage each other, coach each other and generally communicate in ways that create a positive environment. Negativity and undermining other team members goes against co-operation. Teams may like to revisit their ground rules to check they cover such issues. You can find out more about the principle of promotive interaction in the Co-operative learning area of the IT resources.

Assessment for learning

By observing learners during this activity you will be able to see how well the teams are settling into working together. Their graffiti walls and answers to questions will help you assess their existing knowledge of the topic. This information enables you to plan your approach to the next activity and how much time to allow.