



# THE BIG RED BUTTON

## THINKING ABOUT RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY

### Session by Peter Worley.

The emphasis throughout this lesson plan is on risk and responsibility, however you may want to include a discussion around self control and desire. If so, during the first enquiry (around TQ1) have the class explore how much they want (or would want) to press the button and how difficult it is to resist. This discussion links well with The Diary in *40 lessons to get children thinking* (page 84).

### Equipment needed and preparation:

Something to act as a button, it could just be a 'button' drawn onto a small A4 whiteboard - just above the 'button' write 'DO NOT PRESS'. It is also possible to get hold of 'Big Red Button's' commercially. Some of them have inappropriate comments when pressed; if so, either get the right one or take out the batteries. I prefer to use a real 'Big Red Button' as the visceral pull (if managed well by the facilitator) adds to the experiential dimensions of the session. However, a real big red button can be distracting so sometimes a drawing of one works better.

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Key controversy: that responsibility always equates with doing something

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## SESSION PLAN:

Do: Place the 'button' on the floor in the middle of the talk circle.

Say: You walk into a room. There is no one else in the room. Then you see this [point] button in the middle of the room that says, just above it, 'DO NOT PRESS' in big writing.

### Task Question 1a:

- ✓ Would you press the button?

### Nested Questions:

- ✓ If so, why would you press it?
- ✓ *Should* you press it?
- ✓ If you press it, who's responsible for your pressing it?
- ✓ Are there any risks involved?
- ✓ When is a risk worth taking? (This is a good TQ)
- ✓ What is risk?

For a secondary discussion around self-control and desire:

### Task Question 1b:

- ✓ Is it always possible to control yourself?

### **Nested Questions:**

- ✓ What is desire?
- ✓ What is self-control?
- ✓ How powerful is the desire to press the button?
- ✓ If you were to be overcome with desire to press the button would you be responsible for pressing the button?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

There are lots of things one can do to extend this starter. Here are a few suggestions, but the key thing is to respond by improvising scenarios around whatever it is the children say (which is how most of these came about). You may also want to make use of some of the children to act out the scenarios below as you describe them. (See *40 lessons to get children thinking*, 'Instant dramatisation' on page 153)

## FIRST OF ALL, ON THE THEME OF RISK

### GOOD OR BAD?

I sometimes put some whiteboards/paper on the floor and draw two arrows coming from the button: one pointing the phrase 'good thing' and the other to the phrase 'bad thing'. I am not specific about what the 'things' are. I then put a question mark at the base of the two arrows, indicating that it is unknown whether the outcome of pressing the button will be a good thing or a bad thing: (download 'resource' at bottom of this page to see how to arrange these whiteboards)

### **Task Question 2: If you don't know what the outcome will be – good or bad – would/should you press it?**

### HEADS OR TAILS?

You could have the good/bad outcome determined by a coin flip. If anyone chooses to press the button then flip a coin to determine whether it is good or bad. E.g. heads = left and tails = right.

You may also want to insert some known outcomes. Some good outcomes could be:

- ✓ Get an ice cream
- ✓ Rid the world of diseases
- ✓ Get 10 million pounds

And some bad outcomes could be:

- ✓ Lose a favourite item
- ✓ Blow the world up
- ✓ Go to prison

Mix and match them for discussion starters.

### **TQ: Would you press the button?**

### ALL OR NOTHING

Now imagine that if you press the button you will get one of the following outcomes: either, you will:

(a) Get everything!

Or,

(b) Lose everything!

### **Task Question: Would you press the button?**

Begin this discussion with the open concepts first ('get everything' / 'lose everything') and perhaps start to fill these in later, such as 'get everything' = 'get 10 million pounds' and 'lose everything' = 'be sent to the moon'

## ON THE THEME OF RESPONSIBILITY

## THE SLEEPER

Person X comes into the room and wants to press the button but doesn't want to get into trouble. However, near the button they find person Y sleeping peacefully. Person X decides to lift person Y's hand and presses the button down with the sleeping person's limp hand.

### Task Question 3:

- ✓ Who pressed the button?

### Nested Questions:

- ✓ Who actually did it?
- ✓ Who is responsible for pressing the button?
- ✓ If something bad happens who should be punished?

## THE TODDLER

Explain (and have two children act out) that there are two children: Jimmy and his little sister, Jenny. Jimmy is 10 and his sister is a toddler, so about 1 and a half. She can walk but she can't speak very well. Jimmy has entered the room and seen the button, but he doesn't want to get into trouble for pressing the button. But he REALLY wants to press the button. So, he goes to get his sister, Jenny. He opens the door and lets her play her way into the room. Jimmy simply waits. When Jenny eventually enters the room, she sees the button and does what any toddler would do finding themselves in the same situation: she presses the button.

### Task Question 4:

- ✓ Who's responsible for pressing the button?

### Nested Questions:

- ✓ Who actually did it?
- ✓ Who is responsible for pressing the button?
- ✓ If something bad happens who should be punished?

## THE ADULT

This time there is a young person and an adult, such as a teacher. The young person really wants to press the button. The adult says the young person may press the button and that he or she (the adult) will take full responsibility for the consequences. The young person presses the button. A bad thing happens as a result.

### Task Question 5a:

- ✓ Who pressed the button?

### Task Question 5b:

- ✓ Who is responsible for pressing the button?

## ON THE THEMES OF RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY

### PAIN IS SO CLOSE TO PLEASURE

(For older students)

Imagine that if you press the button it gives you a huge pleasure boost (just think of the times when you have felt at your happiest), but someone somewhere else on the planet experiences a small pain, such as a small electric shock, or tripping over.

### Task Question:

- ✓ Would you press the button?

### Nested Question:

- ✓ If you would, then what kinds of increase in the pain would get you to stop pressing the button?

# CHANCE WOULD BE A FINE THING

(Also for older students)

Do the above but with the following variation: this time the 'someone somewhere else on the planet' will receive the following chance outcome: roll a die. If the roll is a 1-5 then they will receive a pleasure too, but if it is a 1, they will receive a pain.

## Task Question:

- ✓ Would you press the button?

(If you do, then roll a die to see what they receive!)

# NEIGHBOURS

This time the scenarios are the same as above but this time it'll be someone you know.

...Someone in your family.

...Someone in the room with you now.

## Task Question:

- ✓ Would you press the button?

(If you do, then roll a die to see what they receive!)

## Related Resources:

- ✓ 40 lesson to get children thinking: The Diary, The Instant Success Switch,
- ✓ The If Odyssey: The Singing Women, Happiness and Forgetting, Choices
- ✓ Once Upon an If: The Promise Slippers,
- ✓ Thoughtings: It Wasn't Me, Bite, Do it
- ✓ TPF Website: Who turned out the lights? By Steve Hoggins