

Appendix C-1: What We Mean by “Dialogue”

What dialogue is

The dialogues that PCP designs and facilitates are conversations in which the participants' primary goal is to pursue mutual understanding rather than agreement or immediate solutions. As participants pursue this goal, they sometimes decide to pursue other goals. For example, dialogue groups sometimes decide to become better informed together or to build consensus about ways that they can act on shared values.

What dialogue is not

Dialogue is distinct from debate; in fact, participants in dialogue often explicitly agree to set aside persuasion and debate so that they can focus on mutual understanding. Dialogue is also different from mediation, conflict resolution, and problem solving although it may serve as a prelude to or aspect of such processes.

What participants do

- They listen and are listened to with care.
- They speak and are spoken to in a respectful manner.
- They share airtime so that all speakers can be heard.
- They learn about the perspectives of others.
- They reflect on their own views.

What participants gain

- Mutual understanding, which may stimulate new ideas for learning and action
- Communication skills that can be used in other difficult conversations

What it takes

Dialogue is present any time people genuinely seek mutual understanding, setting aside for that time the urge to persuade or the pressure to decide. It can occur spontaneously, among friends, in classrooms, in organizations, or even among strangers. When people are experiencing polarized conflict, however, we have found that it is helpful if they

- have clarity and consensus about the purposes of the conversation.
- make communication agreements that will help them to achieve their purposes.
- have a facilitator whose sole responsibility is to help the participants honor their agreements and reach their shared purposes.

Appendix C-12: Self-Help Tools for Participants

1. ***If you feel cut off***, say so or override the interruption. (“I’d like to finish...”)
2. ***If you feel misunderstood***, clarify what you mean. (“Let me put this another way...”)
3. ***If you feel misheard***, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say and affirm or correct her statement.
4. ***If you feel hurt or disrespected***, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings in you. (“When you said x, I felt y...” where “x” refers to specific language.) If it is hard to think of what to say, just say, “OUCH” to flag your reaction.
5. ***If you feel angry***, express the anger directly (“I felt angry when I heard you say x...”) rather than expressing it or acting it out indirectly (by trashing another person’s statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question).
6. ***If you feel confused***, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information. You may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. (“Are you saying that...?”)
7. ***If you feel uncomfortable with the process***, state your discomfort and check in with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. (“I’m not comfortable with the tension I’m feeling in the room right now, and I’m wondering how others are feeling.”) If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. (“How about taking a one-minute Time Out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?”)
8. ***If you feel the conversation is going off track***, share your perception, and check in with others. (“I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focusing on y. Is that right?” [If so] “I’d like to get back to x and hear from more people about it.”)