

Principles of DIALOGUE

These principles help create a safe space to collectively explore the polarizations that divide our communities. They help us learn different ways to give space to each other – something most of us are not very good at. Although there are no “rules” for dialogue (since it is not a game), these principles will make our interactions more helpful.

Practice Empathy

- Attempt to imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes – to feel their feelings and to think their thoughts
- Understand that empathy is the *intention* to know what another person is experiencing, and not necessarily to *respond* to that experience in any concrete way
- Acknowledge that as human beings, we always have *limited capacity* to understand the entirety of another’s experience

Celebrate diversity

- Encounter difference with openness and acceptance in order to facilitate a welcoming position to the other
- Reflect on how our assumptions might be tied to our identities and why there is discomfort when we are challenged with a new perspective
- Get to know individuals as people rather than carriers of a position

Promote curiosity & learning

- Encounter difference with curiosity rather than defensiveness by asking thoughtful and open questions
- Focus on understanding a different perspective. Our intention is to learn from one another, not to determine who has the “best” view
- Assume that many people have pieces to the puzzle and that together we can craft long-term solutions

Expose assumptions & suspend judgement

- Become aware of our own assumptions and recognize how they shape our thinking, our conclusions and our way of seeing the world
- Practice patience and suspend judgement when engaging in conversation with others
- Pause our desire to prematurely jump to a solution and take time to explore the possibilities together

Put power in its place

- Engage in dialogue as peers rather than as representatives of an organization or profession
- Give space so all voices may be heard and no one voice dominates the conversation
- Understand that power is ubiquitous – we cannot simply pick it up and put it down like a tool
- Reflect on the ways unequal power relations influence our everyday social interactions

