

The Dialogue Process

Establishing and Preparing a Dialogue Process

The purpose of dialogue falls within one or more of the following three categories: 1. Generating awareness 2. Problem-solving 3. Building relationships. A successful dialogue process requires clarity about its purpose, the goals, and the kind of answer we seek. ¹

As in every activity, good preparation is critical within the process. It is essential to think about the methodology and approach in dialogue design and facilitation. Preparing with the team or other Dialogue Trainers or Facilitators will ensure you consider all the necessary components for dialogue. Working in partnership with the NSO or event where the dialogue or training is requested is also crucial.

What does this mean?

- Identify the need for dialogue.
- Determine if the dialogue is appropriate and will engage the right people and if all are open to it.
- Ask yourself why this dialogue is important.

To help you prepare, ask yourself questions like:

- Who are the participants in the dialogue?
- What is the context of dialogue?
- Why is this dialogue taking place?
- How many Dialogue Facilitators will be there?
- What is the purpose of the dialogue?

Be prepared	<p>When preparing for dialogue, the Dialogue Facilitator can have the purpose and topic already prepared to be discussed or let participants choose the subject they are interested in. This depends on the situation and the identified need. If, for example, we have a conflict situation in our Scout group, we design a dialogue in such a way that our purpose is to resolve conflict situations. Then we invite participants who are relevant stakeholders in resolving that conflict. Place and time are defined for each session. Participants are aware of the purpose and are committed to the process.</p> <p>Dialogue is not limited to situations where there is conflict. It is a crucial skill for all young people to have. Within a group of Scouts, we can have a dialogue for a better understanding of a specific topic of their choice or a situation in their community. In that way, they can share knowledge, learn from each other, and build stronger relationships.</p> <p>There are many different situations and opportunities for dialogue. When designing a dialogue, you can always reach out to your dialogue mentor or dialogue team for support. <i>More info on dialogue design can be found in the Guidelines for Dialogue Ambassadors and other resources in the toolbox.</i></p>
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¹ *Building bridges - guide for dialogue ambassadors.* World Scouting. (n.d.).

<p>Create the space</p>	<p>After successful preparation, make sure to create a safe space for participants, both literally and figuratively. First, prepare the physical space: outdoor or indoor, quiet, with no interruptions, inviting, with enough light, comfortable, etc.</p> <p>Then consider how to create a safe space by building trust in the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure everyone understands the purpose and the topic of the dialogue. - Establish ground rules with the group. Emphasise the importance of the 10 principles of dialogue and go through them with the group. - Make sure they all agree to give their best and participate in the dialogue by following the ten principles and respecting the group's ground rules. - Write the ten principles and ground rules on a whiteboard, flipchart, or poster so participants can see them. - Help the group relax. Emphasise the positive tone of the dialogue and be inclusive in all your approach. - Make sure everyone is ready for the dialogue. <p>Preparing and establishing the suitable space will ensure that participants are in a safe space, both physically and mentally and emotionally.</p>
<p>Develop the dialogue process</p>	<p>After the initial phase is done, your role as Dialogue Facilitator is to develop the dialogue process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare starting questions and let the group reflect. - Encourage equal participation by everyone. - If at some point participants are moving away from the dialogue, remind them about the process and its objectives to keep them focused. - Keep track of time and make sure ideas and outcomes are summarised and documented (this work can be divided if there are two or more facilitators). - Suspend judgment. <p>Remain impartial and objective to both participants and the dialogue topic. Dialogue Facilitators need to put aside their own biases and serve the process, purpose, and people involved who trust them. Dialogue Facilitators need to make appropriate use of personal skills to help the group achieve the objectives of dialogue. They are role models.</p> <p>To help understand how to suspend judgment, check out the materials provided in the Dialogue for Peace Toolbox.</p>
<p>Navigate the dialogue</p>	<p>Help the participants journey through the dialogue, its phases, and their zones</p> <p>Dialogue Facilitators should create a trusting environment and set a tone for the dialogue that allows all participants to present their perspectives. As a Dialogue Facilitator, you can summarise statements, reframe points, or ask guiding questions to ensure participants understand each other and</p>

	<p>acknowledge opinions while remaining neutral.</p> <p>As a Dialogue Facilitator, you should move the dialogue forward and support the group to a deeper understanding and sharing of perspectives. It is important to ask more questions and try to understand the sources of each other's way of thinking.</p> <p>Acknowledge the underlying feelings, concerns, fears, and needs of all participants and encourage mutual understanding. Tools that can be used include open-ended and circular questions, reframing, and mirroring.</p> <p>More detail on dealing with conflict can be seen in the other Dialogue for Peace Toolbox.</p>
<p>Conclude the dialogue</p>	<p>The Dialogue Facilitator needs to make sure everybody has finished sharing within the given time frame and concisely recap what was said during the dialogue session. Invite participants to share their feelings about the session. Have they learned something new? Have some of their opinions changed? Have they recognised some misperceptions in their views? Have their expectations been met?</p> <p>Be aware that some of these questions are sensitive and that not everybody will share such private discoveries. That is why we need to work constantly on creating a safe space. There is time for each phase of dialogue, and sometimes it doesn't need to be within one session. If that is the case, explain to participants what will happen next and set a time and date for the next dialogue session.</p>

Tips And Tricks

There are real benefits to be gained from good preparation before the dialogue process. These tips will help you as an individual to prepare and facilitate the dialogue.

Further support can be seen in the challenges section and throughout the support material on hosting a dialogue

Be Prepared	What?	How?
<p>Make a to-do list.</p>	<p>What do you need to have/ need to know before the dialogue? A discussion with the organisation leaders will help you prepare and establish what is needed to accomplish the identified group's needs.</p>	<p>Develop a detailed agenda of what you need, the structure of your session, and any other key materials.</p>
<p>Take care</p>	<p>What do you need to give your best? Learning your own</p>	<p>Get enough sleep. Prepare all the material the day before. Be comfortable with the</p>

<p>of yourself.</p>	<p>delivery needs will help you provide the best environment for a dialogue.</p> <p>Ensure you've had a meeting with the team about your needs and any session needs, so you feel comfortable with the plan.</p>	<p>room. Remove distractions and be sure to have enough water.</p>
<p>Know the group.</p>	<p>Before a dialogue circle, try to read more about the participants' backgrounds or the reason they are there, so you can build relationships and form a picture of the potential triggers and tensions points that might appear during the dialogue facilitation.</p>	<p>If you don't know everyone, make sure to provide readable name-tags or make a seating chart during introductions. Share with participants that you are making a "cheat sheet" so you can call people by name. Give them time to get to know each other as this supports the safe space and mutually agreed ground rules.</p>
<p>Understand the context of a dialogue.</p>	<p>All that we do needs to be grounded within the particular context that is unique to each dialogue encounter, session, activity, or process.</p>	<p>Before the session, explore why this dialogue is taking place. Explore the history of the subject. This will help you prepare and summarise more easily.</p> <p>Remember to share the 10 principles of dialogue.</p>
<p>Ensure a safe space throughout the dialogue process.</p>	<p>Establish and maintain a safe space for people to understand themselves, learn, surface their assumptions, and question their previous perceptions and judgments. What can you do or what needs to be provided or present for a safe space?</p>	<p>Prepare yourself for facilitating a session. Get familiar with the space, arrange the chairs, have the ground rules visible.</p> <p>During the dialogue make sure you can be seen by all participants. Make regular eye contact. Maintain the ground rules. Be aware of participants' behaviour and reactions and support them to be active in the process. Invite active participation. Ensure participants know they do not have to contribute if they do not wish to.</p>
<p>Set a positive tone for dialogue.</p>	<p>The energy within the space and the tone for the dialogue support the entire journey. How do you maintain this</p>	<p>Allocate time for participants to understand and reflect on the purpose, the ground rules, and their contribution. Let the participants know how much time they have for each intervention (1-1½ minutes). Describe the</p>

	throughout the dialogue?	process for them. In this time, you can manage expectations and set the tone by finding out what participants are most excited about and what makes them more anxious.
Prepare questions.	Be prepared for every eventuality. It is always good to have few tricks up in your sleeve. Make note of good questions or reframing techniques.	<p>Before the dialogue, practise or prepare a few questions or prompts to help guide the discussions, fill silence, or engage all participants in the dialogue. This will help in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All participants will have the opportunity to voice their perspective. - It will refocus the group on that agenda. - It will lead the group into a deeper dialogue. <p>Focus on open questions that help participants to think more deeply.</p>
Respect the silence.	Silence is inevitable, but it's nothing to worry about.	<p>Give time to reflect. Ask questions and new sharing will begin. You can also summarise, move the topic on, or start a recap of the dialogue objectives to initiate the dialogue again.</p> <p>It's helpful to allocate time in your session plan/agenda for participants to reflect in silence, to get comfortable with it, and to help them think about what they would like to share with the group.</p>
Keep participants connected to the purpose.	The purpose is the whole point of the dialogue. Are all participants clear on the purpose? Are you as a Dialogue Facilitator confident in the purpose?	<p>Remember to share the purpose and objectives of the dialogue. Allow time for any questions and answers. Reframe and connect the dialogue throughout with the purpose.</p> <p>Summarise what has been said and suggest a consensus proposal for the group to discuss or ask someone in the group to suggest a proposal. For example, "What I hear everyone saying is..." or "A rough consensus might be..." Do not hesitate to ask the group for help to move forward.</p>
Make time for	Dialogue is a learning journey that is further shaped by reflection time. How much	Plan to close the session with a summary and a reflection session that participants are aware of before the dialogue begins. Invite

reflection.	reflection time will you need for the dialogue? What outcome does the organisation expect?	participants to express their feelings about the experience. Explain what will happen next. Check to see if their expectations have been met. Treat the reflection session as an integral part of the dialogue process and invest sufficient time in it.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time. While respecting silence is the skill of a Dialogue Facilitator, it's also essential to keep an eye on the time. Try to ensure each person has had the opportunity to contribute if they wish to do so. Equally, be mindful of how much time individuals spend sharing, moving on the discussion where necessary. • Bias. Do not show your side as a Dialogue Facilitator. It's important to maintain engagement, interaction, and flow. You can respond to participants but never take sides. • Flow. Mention who follows whose comments, so people can lower their hands and focus on the discussion. "OK, first Omar, then Ana, and then ..." Make eye contact. When a person raises their hand, acknowledge them to let them know they have been noticed and added to the list. Eye contact is important. It establishes a relationship between the facilitator and participants. It allows you to read faces and know if anyone appears confused, restless, or unhappy, and should be called on to speak. • Mutually agreed meeting ground rules for participation also support your knowledge and mutual understanding within the group. A tactful, early application of ground rules strengthens your role as Dialogue Facilitator and helps everyone be more self-disciplined. 	

Challenges

Any dialogue opportunity will bring together individuals from a variety of backgrounds and these backgrounds bring many different challenges with them.

A good Dialogue Facilitator will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to engage safely, at their level, within the dialogue. Depending on the topic of the dialogue, you may encounter power dynamics that can harm and affect the dialogue process.

Where possible, it is advised that you have prior knowledge of those participating and are up to date with the detail of the subject matter in the given dialogue. The number of factors to balance in a dialogue can be seen in the [Guidelines for Dialogue Ambassadors manual](#) (page 68).

Accessibility to training also impacts the further development of the Dialogue for Peace programme at a national and local level. As a Dialogue Facilitator, you are also equipped to support your peers, other Dialogue Ambassadors, and young people and influence dialogue skills at a local level. Create opportunities, lead activities, and empower local leaders to lead the Dialogue for Peace Challenge.

More detail on facilitation challenges can be seen in the Guidelines for Dialogue Ambassadors manual (page 73) and other resources annexed.

Participants

We see or experience a variety of participants in dialogue, for example:

1. Quiet Person

You can generally invite 'those who have yet to contribute, if you have anything to add or you can make someone feel safe and included by saying 'XXX, is there anything you would like to add at this point'?

2. Talkative person

Use the ground rules to remind all participants that this is a shared experience, and we need to give space to hear and learn from others.' You could say 'thank you, let's move the dialogue forward and here from XXX'

3. Polite person

Encourage the use of I statements, and a key principle of dialogue is to 'take risks', ensure participants explore their stretch zones - this is where the learning happens, the place where people move from what they know to having too much to handle and stop paying attention/engaging in the learning process.

4. Political person

A political person has the potential to destroy a dialogue by keeping their statement on the surface without going deeper to find the root cause. It's important to mitigate or avoid this where possible. One way this can be achieved by asking the individual if they would like to re-phrase their point. If the individual is unwilling, then refer back to the ground rules and the subject matter of the dialogue. It is also important to offer to take the points outside of the dialogue.

5. Disengaged person

Regularly reframing the dialogue or using questions can help bring people back into the dialogue. You can also invite them directly to share their thoughts/feelings.

6. 'Know-it-all' person

Use the ground rules to remind all participants that the purpose of the training is to learn; it is an experience that requires every member to be open to change and prepared to learn.

7. Interrupting person

Use the ground rules to remind all participants that this is a shared experience, and we need to give space to hear and learn from others.' You could say 'thank you, we are still listening to XXX, you can contribute in order of XXX.'

As the Dialogue Facilitator, it is important to be able to read and manage the diverse people in the group and model a safe and inclusive dialogue.

Some examples when dialogue Facilitation is not managed correctly

The dialogue aims to overcome misunderstandings and dispel stereotypes to increase mutual understanding. However, this better understanding never means that participants must necessarily agree with a specific point of view. The dialogue facilitator needs to avoid practices and behaviour that look like:

- ❌ Pushing participants to reach an agreement on a specific topic arguing this is beneficial for both parties.
- ❌ Imposing your perspective and use your position to explain the participants the situation from your point of view.
- ❌ Giving more opportunities of participating in the conversation to the ones you think have more knowledge or better use of the
- ❌ Allow the dialogue to become a debate where parties are not listening to others point of view but only interested in convincing the others.
- ❌ Allow one or two people to take over the conversation time and make the dialogue space a presentation setting.
- ❌ Letting the quiet or disengaged person avoid taking part in the discussion.
- ❌ Avoid asking the difficult questions missing the opportunity to go deeper and finding the source of the conflict. Ask them gradually and give space for people to respond.

Source

Building bridges - guide for dialogue ambassadors. World Scouting.
(n.d.). https://www.scout.org/Guide_for_Dialogue_Ambassadors.