



Effective Norms for Dialogue

LINKING COMMUNITY VALUES TO INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

WHAT IT IS

Norms (aka community agreements or guidelines) are the principles guiding the behavior of the group as they engage in dialogue together.

HOW TO DO IT

Source or craft a set of 3-5 effective norms.

Facilitators can choose to...

- adapt pre-existing norms.
- write their own set of norms (see below).
- create norms as a group (see below + p. 2).

Communicate norms clearly.

- Make publicly visible, e.g. a poster or slide
- Give or generate together examples of behaviors aligned/not aligned with each norm

WHY WE DO IT

- Increases equity + a sense of safety for participants by setting clear expectations.
- Helps the group self-regulate + hold one another accountable to collective values.

Make sure everyone in the group...

- understands the norms.
- has the ability to abide by the norms.
- consents to the norms.

Over the course of the dialogue(s):

- Restate norms regularly to remind participants.
- Refer to norms when offering feedback on behavior.
- Revise + supplement norms in response to the topic at hand, emerging group dynamics, feedback, etc.

EFFECTIVE NORMS ARE. . .

MEMORABLE

Keep norms simple and short.

One clause per norm. One action word. Five to seven norms tops. People can't follow norms that they can't remember!

INEFFECTIVE: "Strive to practice deep and active listening and demonstrate it with your body language."

EFFECTIVE: "Embody listening."

ACTIONABLE

Make norms concrete.

Words like respect, empathy, open-minded, etc, are abstract values. What does that value look like in practice? Frame norms as positive, observable actions: what to *do* (not *not do*).

INEFFECTIVE: "Assume good intentions."

BETTER: "Don't express snap judgments."

BEST: "Ask clarifying questions."

ALIGNED

Match norms to purpose.

Think about what makes sense given the topic and structure of the dialogue(s) + participants' identities and experiences + the shared dialogue values of the group.

For example, "Everyone gets equal time to speak" might make sense for one topic/group, but not another.

COLLABORATIVE

Do norms together.

Whether the group adopts existing norms or creates them together, they should be:

- universally understood
- unanimously agreed-to
- collectively, recalled, revised, reinforced over the course of the dialogue(s)





Values-Aligned Dialogue Norms

AN ACTIVITY FOR CREATING NORMS TOGETHER

STEP 1.

What do you value in dialogue? What do you believe in? What do you want from dialogue (that is, what makes “good talk”)? What do you NOT want, value, or believe in? Write your thoughts here:

(Large dotted rectangular area for writing)

STEP 2.

Pick 3 of your most core values for dialogue. Brainstorm one or more actions for each value: how might you/we live out this value in practice? Remember, these actions should be concrete: something we can observably *do*, not something we merely *intend, feel, think, or believe*.

| Value | Action(s) |
|-------|-----------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

STEP 3.

Share your work in pairs or small groups. Identify shared values that you hold and work together to craft 3 effective norms for dialogue, drawing on the actions you each identified and the guidelines on p. 1.

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STEP 4.

Each pair or group will share the norms they've crafted with the whole group. Work together to consolidate all norms into a final list of 5-7 norms that all can agree to upholding, based on points of overlap and shared values. Workshop the phrasing to make norms as memorable, actionable, aligned, and collaborative as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION + DIALOGUE

- Where do your values come from? What have you experienced or witnessed in previous conversations that led you to them?
- What are situations or circumstances you can imagine that might make it difficult to uphold each of these norms?
- How can you help yourself uphold these norms? How can you help others uphold them?
- What steps should the group take when norms are violated? What will repair look like?