



Be Peace. Choose Peace. Create Peace.

CHOOSE DIALOGUE GROUPS

What are Dialogue Groups?

Dialogue (and deliberation) groups are convenings whereby people with different life experiences and perspectives gather for the purposes of culture exchange, idea exchange, mutual appreciation, and/or reaching common understanding. Dialogue groups encourage meaningful, diverse, and inclusive conversations that seek to improve how individuals and groups address critical issues, share perspectives, and work collaboratively towards common goals. They cultivate deeper, richer connections and provide people with insight into themselves, their peers, and the shared challenges they face together. Through establishing and nourishing relationships based on trust and mutual understanding, dialogue groups activate people to address significant (and often controversial) contemporary issues without compromising their core values and identities.

While dialogue groups generally address polarizing public issues, this method can be applied to situations characterized by “chilly disconnection” and “suspicious silence” as well as in heated and noisy conflicts. Dialogue processes effectively reduce stereotypes and promote mutual understanding. Despite holding oppositional or even confrontational viewpoints, people who engage in dialogue often change their perceptions of one another. That said, dialogue groups do not intend to undermine or minimize people’s core beliefs, but rather, this process aims to encourage the discovery of shared values and concerns. In doing so, dialogue groups can invigorate new collaborative actions and community engagements.¹

In Dialogue Groups, participants express their perspectives, experiences, and values without resorting to personal attacks or dismissing opposing viewpoints. They discuss the underlying experiences and values that shape their own views, asking genuine questions and listening attentively. In consideration of the variety of values represented, dialogues do not seek to force “compromise” or establish a contrived sense of “common ground.” Participants are encouraged, however, to enter a safe container that strives toward connection, inclusivity, and trust. Dialogue processes play an essential role in strengthening a civil and resilient democratic society, bridging divides within and between different communities.

How do people learn Dialogue Groups?

Dialogue groups enact an inclusive container that intentionally aims to change the ways that people communicate and interrupt dysfunctional cycles of polarization. Firstly, participants formally or informally agree to engage in a discursive collaboration that strives for greater resilience, trust, and understanding. While the term “Dialogue Process” can refer to a broad array of dialogue methods developed by various nonprofit organizations seeking to address distinct social problems, this peaceful practice universally relies on listening skills as a prerequisite for healthy public discussion and communication across differences.

There are several organizations in the US and across the globe that offer their own training for individuals and groups that want to use dialogic approaches in their daily lives. Interested parties can explore a variety of dialogue group methods and training organizations, including the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, Art of Hosting and Harvesting, Authentic Relating Games, The Circle of Trust Approach, Essential Partners, Jefferson Dinners, One

¹ Herzig, Maggie, and Laura R. Chasin. (2019, December 11). Fostering Dialogue Across Divides. *Essential Partners*. <https://whatisessential.org/resources/fostering-dialogue-across-divides>

Table, Sacred Discourse, and Safe Conversations. Training can be done in person or virtually and then shared further with one's organization or community.

The resource list below includes links to other dialogue training organizations as well as to worksheets and exercises to practice the methods.

How do people implement Dialogue Groups?

The dialogic approach acknowledges that no two communities are the same. Individuals and groups can implement dialogue groups in civic and community settings, higher education institutions, secondary and middle education contexts, workplace and organizational structures, faith and religious congregations, and other social environments.

Firstly, participants and facilitators identify important community issues or conflicts that seek resolution or discussion. Facilitators should then invite stakeholders and community members to engage in the dialogue. The inclusion of diverse voices and vantage points can give rise to more fruitful outcomes as dialogue participants are given the opportunity to challenge and be challenged by oppositional or disparate viewpoints.

While each dialogue method may require different levels of facilitator input, most dialogue groups require an appointed facilitator or moderator who can help to lead the discussion and uphold the group norms. That said, individuals can apply dialogic approaches to their places of work, home, and worship by incorporating opportunities for multi-directional discussion and reflection.²

Dialogic approaches can be implemented in personal, professional, and organizational settings. While organizations can retain trainers to teach facilitation to their employees and then create policies and practices that facilitate their use of civic dialogue skills, simple adjustments can also be made to ongoing practices that incorporate increased opportunities for discussion, reflection, and mutual understanding.

For what types of circumstances are Dialogue Groups suited?

Dialogue groups aim to support the resolution of disputes, improve community relationships, and promote social cohesion. Dialogue groups can be particularly useful to generate stakeholder input and collaboration as communities grapple with policymaking decisions. Similarly, dialogic approaches can support institutions and public services as they address the complex needs and social challenges presented in their communities. While dialogue groups can promote understanding and give rise to new collective solutions, they can also work to restore, repair, and reconcile pre-existing conflicts between divided groups.³

Do Dialogue Groups work for preventing or controlling aggression or violence?

Dialogue groups can help mitigate, prevent, and control aggression or violence by providing a peaceful platform for conflict resolution and bridging across differences. Although dialogues can cultivate mutual understanding, build social bridges, and establish common ground, facilitators and participants must stay vigilant to ensure that dialogues do not become explosive or volatile petri dishes for dysregulated conflict. This method requires sensitivity from both facilitators and participants to disagree while maintaining an orientation towards shared understanding and connection. Dialogue processes can support participants to explore differences, interact with

²Braver Angels. (n.d.) *Our Mission*. Retrieved October 12, 2023, from <http://www.braverangels.org/our-mission>

³Dessel, Adrienne, et al. "Using Intergroup Dialogue to Promote Social Justice and Change." *Social Work*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2006): pp. 303–15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23721215>

Choose Dialogue Groups

diverse cultures and backgrounds, build confidence in interactions, and develop respect for the values of people from different walks of life. In doing so, dialogue groups have the power to de-escalate tensions in both the early and later stages of conflict.⁴

Where else might I go to learn more about Dialogue Groups?

- Explore this Resource Library from [Essential Partners](#) that provides in-depth research studies, blog posts, classroom exercises, and informational videos about their Reflective Structured Dialogue process.
- [The Center for Courage & Renewal](#) provides programs, resources, and connections that nurture deep integrity and relational trust through dialogue in order to build the foundation for a more loving, equitable, and healthy world.
- Survey dialogue groups and events offered by organizations such as [Braver Angels](#) and [Living Room Conversations](#) that work to promote social cohesion among people across the political and cultural spectrum.
- Select a conversation subject from this [list of topics](#) prepared by Living Room Conversations to connect and build better communication with people in and beyond your network.

[Peace Through Action USA](#) activates and equips Americans to implement practical peaceful solutions to aggression and violence in their communities and our country. We are a national-scope, charitable, civic and social capital-building organization.

Have a suggested addition to this information sheet? Send it to inbox@peacethroughaction.org.

[Sign up for our email](#)

[Post our website to Facebook](#)

[Tweet our website](#)

[Post our website to LinkedIn](#)

[Subscribe to our YouTube channel](#)

[Give](#) money to support Peace Through Action's mission delivery activities

[Choose](#) opportunities to take part in our #PeaceBeginsWithWe campaign

⁴ Froude, Jack, and Michael Zanchelli. (2017). What Works in Facilitated Dialogue Projects. *US Institute of Peace*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12250>