

What is Sustained Dialogue[®]?

Sustained Dialogue (SD) is an intentional process used by citizens around the world to **transform relationships** and **implement sustainable change** in intergroup conflicts, especially intergroup identity clashes. It is rooted in the conflict resolution methodology developed by Dr. Hal Saunders, a senior U.S. diplomat and founder of the Sustained Dialogue Institute (SDI). During his involvement in international negotiations, including the Camp David Peace Accords and the Iran Hostage Crisis, Hal observed that participants' relationships evolved through a recognizable pattern that he distilled into a 5-stage dialogue-to-action process. In 1999, the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network formed as a student-created branch of SDI and has since spread to over 60 campuses worldwide.

"Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concerns into their own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up their identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims so that they will act differently toward the other."

--Dr. Harold Saunders, Founder of SDI

Applying SD within the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network

SD organizers gather participants from diverse backgrounds into small groups that meet regularly to build relationships and develop informed strategies to improve their campuses and communities, especially around the following dimensions of identity:

<i>Mental Health</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Socioeconomic Status/Class</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sexual Orientation</i>
<i>Political Affiliation</i>	<i>Sex & Gender</i>	<i>Race & Color</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Disability</i>

While SD looks different on different campuses, most groups incorporate the following elements:

- Multiple dialogue groups of 8 to 15 participants meet for a semester or year.
- Some campuses have an SD course or incorporate SD aspects into a current course.
- Two trained peer moderators lead each dialogue group
- SD is sustained in three ways:
 1. **Participants:** Each SD group maintains the same participants and moderators.
 2. **Agenda:** Each meeting is designed to continue where the last ended.
 3. **Time:** Dialogues meet consistently at an appointed weekly time for at least an hour.

Campuses learn the **five-stage process of Sustained Dialogue** from SDI trainers:

Stage 1: The group comes together

Stage 2: They discuss personal experiences that relate to community concerns

Stage 3: They pick an issue to focus on and work to analyze the root causes

Stages 4 & 5: They plan and execute action/advocacy around their chosen issue

After participating in Sustained Dialogue, respondents are:

Significantly more likely to:

- Think critically about the experiences of others and how they can be improved
- Feel comfortable talking about their experiences and identities in front of a groups of their peers
- Try to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective
- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue
- Raise awareness about local or campus issues
- Organize others to work on local or campus issues, as well as on state, national, or global issues
- Have discussions with people who are different from them in terms of: Religious beliefs and economic background

Significantly more able to:

- Resolve conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, and prejudice
- Lead a group where people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included
- Explain the college climate towards diversity, issues that arise between students, and why issues persist

Impact internationally:

Sustained Dialogue is used at over 20 campuses across Sudan, Zimbabwe, Mexico, and Ethiopia. In a randomized field trial* conducted comparing two-term SD participants at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia with students who did not participate, the study found statistically significant attitudinal change:

- A decrease in mistrust
- An increase in trust between people of different ethnic origin
- An increased sense of ethnic identity
- An increased perception of being ethnically discriminated
- An increase in accommodative feelings towards students of other ethnicities leading to resulting positive relationships

*Svensson, Isak and Karen Brounéus. "Dialogue and interethnic trust: A randomized field trial of 'sustained dialogue' in Ethiopia." *Journal of Peace Research* (August 20, 2013): 1-13. Available at: <http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/08/19/0022343313492989>

Where can I turn for more information about Sustained Dialogue?

For more information on the campus application, please contact info@sustaineddialogue.org. The tenets of SD work have also been described in Hal Saunders' books, including *A Public Peace Process* (2001), *Politics is about Relationship* (2005), and *Sustained Dialogue in Conflict* (2012).