

How to Use Sustained Dialogue Issue Sheets

NOTE: PLEASE READ THIS SHORT PACKET IN ITS ENTIRETY
BEFORE USING ANY ISSUE SHEET.



Issue sheets are a preparatory resource for those leading dialogue on common topics. Each sheet includes an overview, key questions, common opinions to prepare for, and an activity or homework assignment.

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How to Use Issue Sheets

This curriculum was developed as a supplemental resource for Sustained Dialogue facilitator use **on U.S. college campuses in weekly, ongoing dialogue with the same group of people returning weekly.**

As such, using any Issue Sheet may require adaptation to your setting. Use the tools in this packet to prepare as you adapt. This packet includes:

- **What is SD? & SD Checklist (p.3):** Read for more on the Sustained Dialogue process. These issue sheets are helpful broadly, but often the full SD process is preferable to one-time dialogue.
- **Sample group norms (or ground rules) (p.4):** It is important to establish group norms, or ground rules, before you begin. The sample norms listed here will help your group have productive and meaningful dialogue.
- **Guide to Debriefing a Dialogue (p.5):** When leading any dialogue, make sure to leave time at the end of each meeting to **debrief** with your group. This helps ensure dialogue won't do harm.

Moderating Tips

The moderator, or facilitator, is responsible for managing group meetings, keeping dialogue on track (in terms of time and topic), and ensuring each member's voice is heard. The moderator plays an active and critical role in ensuring that a community taps into its own knowledge. Good moderators value people and their ideas, think quickly, are not there to teach, and are excellent communicators.

Troubleshooting Moderating:

Staying on-task and on time.

- Don't be afraid to directly re-focus the group in order to close on time
- Try to close tangents or set them aside in a "parking lot" for consideration later

Dealing with unproductive behavior.

- Restate the group norms or ground rules directly
- Ask clarifying questions to the individual who said something upsetting
- Ask the group for their reactions to tough moments, but don't let them veer out of "I statements"
- Address issues at a break or one-on-one after the meeting

Stimulating productive inquiry.

- Use probing questions
- Don't single out individuals ("Jen, what do you think?") but instead ask for new voices or perspectives ("I'd like to hear from someone who feels differently" or "I'd like to hear from those who haven't spoken yet").
- Share counterpoints as needed to help remove false consensus

Leave time to Debrief

- Review which parts of the method and content were effective
- Talk about next steps (i.e. how to prepare for the next meeting)

What is Sustained Dialogue? It's Not Just Using Issue Sheets

“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 the Sustained Dialogue Institute

Sustained Dialogue is a dialogue-to-action process that (1) **transforms relationships** and (2) **creates informed community change**. SD is rooted in the conflict resolution methodology of senior Middle East diplomat Hal Saunders, a key drafter of the Camp David Peace Accords. **On campuses**, SD organizers gather participants that use SD methods to improve their campuses and communities.

What Does SD Look Like? A Checklist For Moderating SD

- ☐ SD groups include 8 to 15 participants and are moderated by two fully trained peer moderators who previously participated in a weekly SD group. Many groups run at any given time.
- ☐ Groups can be formed to affect any large community challenge. Most often, they are formed to improve challenging relationships between social identity groups or to approach large-scale intergroup conflicts, rather than to approach issues like parking, weather, or who likes which foods.
- ☐ Dialogue groups start by establishing group norms that create openness to share (examples below).
- ☐ SD meetings are not one-time events but are sustained in three main ways:
 - **Time & Duration:** SD groups meet at an appointed weekly time for at least 1 hour.
 - **Participants & Moderators:** Each SD group maintains the same participants and moderators.
 - **Continuity of Conversation:** Each meeting is designed to continue where the last one ended.
- ☐ Dialogues focus on learning about the real personal experiences of the others in the group to build empathy and relationships across lines of difference. They are not meant to debate issues, “win” people to one side, or impress group members with conceptual thinking.
- ☐ Later meetings should become less focused on experiences and more focused on actions that can improve group relations in the present community in relevant, organized, and strategic ways.
- ☐ Each meeting is closed after moderators lead a thorough process of feedback, called debriefing, to establish how process, facilitation, and content followed SD process. Debriefing also should establish the next meeting’s agenda based on participant interests.
- ☐ SD uses a relational approach to facilitation. The focus is NOT on presenting interesting topics, but rather on how group members share, interact, respond, and understand each other. Adherence to the process allows for improved group relationships and informed, concrete community change.
- ☐ SD is never used for topics that require relevant professional support without that support being present, especially around mandatory reporting guidelines, such as intent to harm others or self, abuse, experiences with sexual assault, etc.

Sample Group Norms

Don't just jump in when the water's warm.

Challenge yourself to share your reactions, even when you disagree or don't relate.

Share airtime.

No dominating the conversation.

Listen with an open mind.

Instead of planning how to respond or thinking about what to say next, think about what was said before formulating a response. Try not to interrupt or have side conversations.

We are all here with the best intentions.

Participants agree that they genuinely want to engage in order to improve their community, not to hurt each other or make each other feel small. If something happens, assume the best intentions.

We are all experts on our own personal experience.

Acknowledge the validity of others' experiences.

Address the statement, not the person.

Participants may make statements that will offend or oppose the beliefs of others. The group should agree that they should react by addressing what was said, not **who** said it.

Participants represent only themselves, and are not representatives of social groups.

Though they may reflect views in their communities, in dialogue, group members are not expected to represent organizations or groups.

Use "I" statements.

Beginning statements with "I believe," "I think," or "I feel" avoids generalizations and confusion, and also makes participants own their statements and not hide behind the safety of numbers.

Note: Saying "I feel like" or "I feel that" dilutes this. That states something as a fact, rather than a personal perception. Consider the difference: "I feel like you were aggressive" vs. "I felt scared."

Don't substitute "all" for "some," or "some" for "one."

Our experiences don't expose us to everything there is about a topic, even when we feel like experts.

Challenge yourself to say what you really mean.

Reflecting on your statements so as to communicate directly and honestly helps the dialogue. Avoid being politically correct in favor of being genuine. Avoid using sarcasm in favor of being honest.

Honor confidentiality.

What happens here stays here. Take learning out of the room, and leave the names in.

Practice empathy.

Put yourself in the other people's shoes.

Try to acknowledge, not correct, the generalizations and stereotypes in your own contributions.

Be comfortable if others challenge them or ask you to be more specific about them.

Listen harder when you disagree.

If you find yourself wanting to revise what someone else is saying and how they're saying it, try to listen, and ask, for what experiences might be behind the difference in framing.

Guide to Debriefing a Dialogue

These are the kinds of questions you should learn the answers to at the end of each dialogue meeting. Try asking a few of them from each of the 4 categories below to clarify whatever you and your co-mod aren't sure about.

With Your Group

Debrief the **CONTENT**

- ☐ Was the content interesting, thought provoking, and relevant to the mission of the dialogue?
- ☐ Did this dialogue cause you to reconsider any of your beliefs or actions?
- ☐ What stage(s) was this dialogue in?

Debrief the **METHOD**

- ☐ How could we (as moderators) do better next time?
- ☐ How well did we follow our ground rules/community norms?
- ☐ Did the activity/structure/process improve the dialogue?

Debrief **PARTICIPATION**

- ☐ Who is someone here who you really want to recognize for helping you feel included in the dialogue OR who you want to hear even more from?
- ☐ Have you felt heard and understood?
- ☐ Which important perspectives were missing?

Decide on **NEXT STEPS**

- ☐ What can we talk about next time to further this dialogue?
- ☐ Moving forward, what could/will you do differently as a result of what you've learned here?
- ☐ What can we do as a group to share what we're learning?
- ☐ What can we do before the next meeting to make sure we are prepared?

With Your Co-Mod

- ☐ What went well? What could have gone better?
- ☐ What stage(s) from dialogue to action is the group in in? Is a shift needed?
- ☐ Are all participants engaging in dialogue? Are there specific tensions between group members that need to be addressed? Are participants holding each other accountable to their group norms?
- ☐ Prepare for the **next dialogue** (when, where, what topic, prompts, how to set context).
- ☐ Report back to your **Leadership Team** about your dialogue group.

Charlottesville, August 2017

The Basics

In August of 2017, a large group of white supremacists gathered in Charlottesville, VA for a “Unite the Right” rally to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate leader Robert E. Lee. These protestors included members of the KKK, neo-Nazi groups, and other white supremacist groups. Many counter-protestors gathered to oppose both days of this rally. Each day turned violent, and on August 12 a counter-protestor named Heather Heyer was killed, and 19 others were injured, when a car allegedly driven by a white supremacist ran into the crowd.

Many people on all sides of the political spectrum condemned the actions of the white supremacists, although many criticized President Trump and the US Justice Department for not initially condemning the actions of the white supremacists, and instead blaming violence on “many sides” of the issue, and for not calling for a hate crime investigation quickly enough.

Note to Moderators:

Be careful of people acting as “feelings police” and “perspective police.” As a moderator, your role is to validate the emotions each person is having without allowing participants to speak for or over others. You may want to review group norms with your group again before this dialogue – make sure those norms include “Everyone is an expert in their own experience.” Don’t get trapped in a debate about free speech vs. hate speech.

Consider:

Is this the right time to have a dialogue about the events in Charlottesville, or should your group gather and support each other in different ways right now? Other ways to support each other can include:

- Gather somewhere with animals and small crafts, like coloring or silly putty. Provide comforting food.
- Dialogue about something else that won’t create the same amount of battle fatigue (for example, after the 2016 election, some had very productive dialogues about gender, not about the election in particular).
- For staff/faculty: Create a staggered work schedule so that each member of your office can take some time away to be with their families, animals, or anywhere that helps them recharge.
- For staff/faculty: Create a plan together for how you will continue to support each other once students return to campus.

Dialogue Questions for Your Group

*Please do not attempt to ask all of these questions. Pick the best ones for **your** group.*

1. “What’s at the heart of this matter for you?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- How have your personal life experiences shaped how you responded to that question?
- How strongly were you impacted by the events in Charlottesville? Why do you think that was the case?
- Who here feels like these events have a direct implication for their life? Why or why not?
- Do you feel safe in our community today?

2. “What does white supremacy mean to you?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- What does this term make you think of? Who and what do you associate with it? Do you see it daily?
- Are you thinking about the prevalence of white supremacy differently after the events in Charlottesville?
- How has our community addressed the legacy of white supremacy in the past? How do you hope we will address it moving forward? What role can you play in that?

3. “There is a lot of conversation about the right to free speech and free assembly, and whether or not that should cover speech that is explicitly about hating people of certain identity groups. When you hear about that debate, what are the two big feelings that come up for you?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- For those of you find this framing helpful, what do you like about thinking in this way?
- For those of you who don’t find this framing helpful, what don’t you like, or how else would you like to talk about what happened in Charlottesville?

4. “How is language impacting you around these events?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- Think about words like “terrorism,” “alt-right,” “Nazi,” “hate crime,” “racial prejudice in policing,” and the conversation about “blame on all sides.”

5. “For those of you whose identities were explicitly targeted by the white supremacists in Charlottesville (those of us who identify as people of color, and/or Jewish, and/or Muslim, and/or LGBTQ+, and/or immigrants, and/or people with disabilities). How are you feeling right now?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- How were you feeling as you heard the news from Charlottesville?
- What concerns do you have about finding support for yourself on campus?
- What concerns do you have about supporting others on campus?
- How have you been thinking about your identities during and since this event?

6. “For those of you whose identities were not explicitly targeted by the white supremacists in Charlottesville (those of us who identity as white, Christian, straight, cisgender, born in the US, and able-bodied). How are you feeling right now?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- How were you feeling as you heard the news from Charlottesville?
- What concerns do you have about supporting others on campus?
- How have you been thinking about your identities during and since this event?

7. “What type of response would you like to see from our community now? What role can you play in that response?” (Follow-up questions to use after this one if needed)

- Think about a response you’ve seen from this community about a similar issue in the past. What about that response felt productive, or made you feel safe?
- What about that response felt unproductive, or made you feel less safe, or didn’t impact your feeling of safety at all?