

SAFE SPACE

a tool for allowing deep and consensual dialogue

“In order for any discussion to be productive, you must create an open and relaxed atmosphere.”

-Anti-Oppression discussion guidelines

You can use this tool creatively, adapting the intensity of the 4 basic principles to different situations, depending on the level of risk being taken in each setting. Some components of these tools may be inappropriate for some settings, and invaluable in others. The more personal risk involved, the more carefully you want to frame the space at the outset, because a secure anchor is the only thing that will enable a process to fly to the heights of its potential.

A few settings I've used this tool in are: board meeting, activist/organizational meetings, co-facilitators/teachers meeting, co-op/group house meeting, personal relationship talks, and discussions with persons of authority.

The 4 Principles of a SAFE SPACE

Equalize the Space

confidentiality – share stories and experiences, not names and gossip

step-up/step-down – give space before you take space, and challenge yourself to step out of your pattern

value and encourage risk taking, while maintaining everyone's right to pass

challenge the idea or the practice, not the person

everyone has equal worth in this discussion, and all knowledges and opinions are equally valid

Check Your Assumptions

no judgments or disclaimers (including self-judgments)

maintain gender neutrality in your language, and inquire about preferred pronouns

treat everyone as an individual and not a representative of any specific group

personalize your knowledge, don't project it (i.e. use I statements)

believe in our common best intentions

The Right to be Human

we all have the right to be human (i.e. inconsistent, emotional, triggered, etc.)

avoid blaming people for the misinformation taught to them

acknowledge emotions

practice forgiveness

Practice Consensual Dialogue

active listening – attention focused, maintain appropriate eye contact, check your body language,
take breaks only when you need to

silence is okay – an unforced pace of dialogue is one into which people can step-up safely

be sincere and consistent, practicing respectful honesty