The Art of Dialogue

This page is dedicated to the principles of dialogue that are essential for fostering relationships and achieving understanding among diverse individuals and organisations. When we learn to communicate through our minds, hearts, and souls with the intention to connect to the spirit within one another, and act for the greater good of all, we will be on the path to high performance, understanding, peace, harmony, and spiritual progress. It is hoped that the principles presented here will help to elevate our awareness of the essential skills of dialogue.

Introduction

Dialogue is not some simplistic assertion of one's own position, nor is it necessarily about persuading others to one's point of view. Dialogue is about demonstrating respect for another's life and being determined to learn when confronted with differences in personality and perspective. Daisaku Ikeda

Krishnaji compared a dialogue to a game of tennis, where the question is like the ball tossed from one court to another, with each player returning it with their comment or observation. This continues until both players vanish and the ball is left suspended in mid-air! That means the observers (participants), with their particular knowledge, viewpoints, opinions, etc., disappear, leaving only the observation of the issue taking place. If the observers (or their personalities) are to disappear, it does not matter how many or who they were. Prof. P. Krishna

Ground Rules, Rights, Responsibilities and Skills of Dialogue

A mind in dialogue questions every opinion and doubts every conclusion because it is not interested in a verbal answer. It seeks to go beyond words and gain a deep insight into reality. It aims for a comprehensive understanding of the facts and the issue, rather than merely a method for solving a problem.

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True dialogue requires a protective environment of mutually accepted rights and responsibilities, rooted in two fundamental values: respect for the human person and trust in the dialogue process. Dialogue works best when the participants are willing to develop certain skills that facilitate it.

This workshop is divided into five sections for participants to practise in pairs or small groups. To reinforce the principles, these practices should be repeated periodically over time, for instance, on a weekly or monthly basis. Firstly, select a chapter from the "All the World's a Stage" eBook, then engage in a dialogue by responding to the question about the role model's life, using the following principles. You can think of it as an experiment.

Rights		Responsibilities		Skills	
1.	Each person has the right to define him/herself without being labelled by others Subject creates a profile using value system and then are described by classmate(s)	1.	Each person must be willing to seriously question his/her assumptions about "the other" Get somebody to question the subject's assumption on an object e.g. photo / object etc	1.	Each person should be able to evaluate and articulate his/her own attitudes, values and positions on issues within the context of his/her tradition.
2.	Each person has the right to express his or her beliefs, ideas and feelings Subject describes something they are	2.	Each person must allow others the same right of self-expression that s/he expects for him/herself.	2.	Each person should learn how to temporarily set aside his/her own views and feelings in order to be more sensitive to what the other is saying.

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	passionate about in the role models life		Establishing the right to hold a view The art of agreeing to disagree. How can I allow someone else to hold a view which I factually know to be wrong?		
3.	Each person has the right to ask questions that help him/her understand what someone else has said. Typical question: Could you please clarify?	3.	Each person should ask questions that respect the other's right of self-definition, even in times of conflict or disagreement.	3.	Each person should learn how to respond to questions in ways that help others understand.
4.	Each person has the right not to change or be coerced to change.	4.	Each person must accept the others as equal partners in the dialogue, and acknowledge the dignity of the traditions represented	4.	Each person should learn to deal with different points of view while maintaining his/her own integrity.
5.	Each person has the right to expect that what is said will be held in confidence.	5.	Each person must agree to hold what others say in confidence.	5.	Each person should learn to deal with others from a position of mutual trust, based on agreement that others come to the dialogue in a spirit of honesty and sincerity.

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The Art of Dialogue Interactive Workshop

For teachers and young people aged 14 to 16

A 45-minute workshop in which adults and young people practise speaking honestly, listening without interruption, asking respectful questions, and disagreeing without coercion. The goal is understanding rather than winning.

Duration	45 minutes	**Group**	6 to 30 participants
Format	Circle plus pairs	**Age**	Teachers and ages 14 to 16

Learning outcomes

- Explain the difference between dialogue and persuasion or debate.
- Use a talking piece to practise attentive listening and equal participation.
- Clarify another person's meaning before responding or disagreeing.
- Protect each person's right to self-definition, dignity, and an unchanged view.
- Reflect on one dialogue skill to use in school, home, or community life.

Materials and room setup

Prepare Chairs in one circle; one neutral talking piece; timer; one printed participant sheet per person; pens; and one age-appropriate role-model question or statement.

Possible talking pieces A smooth stone, wooden object, soft ball, or object made by the group. It should be easy to pass and should not be thrown.

Choose a stimulus Use a short role-model video, image, quotation, or question such as: 'Which choice best reveals this person's values?' Participants need enough shared information to discuss it.

Facilitator preparation

Adult and youth equality During the circle, teachers take part under the same speaking and listening agreement as young people. The facilitator manages safety and time but does not decide the 'correct' opinion.

Confidentiality Explain that personal comments stay in the group, except where someone may be at risk of harm or safeguarding procedures require an adult to act. Do not promise absolute confidentiality.

Choice Participants may pass, ask for a question to be rephrased, or speak about the shared stimulus instead of personal experience.

Talking piece protocol

This workshop uses a simple talking-piece method inspired by talking-circle practices. Indigenous and Native American nations have distinct traditions; do not present this classroom protocol as a reproduction of one universal ceremony.

- Only the person holding the talking piece speaks.
- Everyone else listens without interrupting, correcting, or rehearsing a reply.
- The holder may speak briefly, pass, or request clarification.
- The piece moves in the agreed direction; no one is required to speak.
- A second round may be used for responses after everyone has had a first opportunity.

Source basis The Art of Dialogue: rights, responsibilities, skills, respect for the human person, and trust in the dialogue process.

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Facilitator Run Sheet

Core workshop 45 minutes

Time	Stage	Participants do	Facilitator focus
0-5	Agree the space	Hear the purpose; discuss and consent to the talking-piece agreement.	Clarify passing, equality, confidentiality limits, and respectful language.
5-10	Notice labels	Individually write three values they choose for themselves; a partner asks one curious question.	Protect the right to self-definition. No partner labels or diagnoses.
10-18	Listening round	Use the talking piece to respond to a role-model prompt in up to 45 seconds.	No interruptions. Invite listeners to notice meaning, feeling, and assumptions.
18-26	Listen and reflect	In pairs, A speaks for 60 seconds; B paraphrases without adding an opinion. Swap.	Practise temporarily setting aside one's own view.
26-35	Clarify before reply	Participants ask clarification questions; speaker answers using the talking piece.	Questions must help understanding, not trap, embarrass, or persuade.
35-42	Agree to disagree	Respond to a debatable statement; paraphrase one other view before giving a response.	Keep equal dignity and the right not to change.
42-45	Exit reflection	Complete the participant sheet and name one skill to practise.	Invite voluntary sharing; collect feedback without grading opinions.

Say this at the start

Welcome "Dialogue is not about winning or forcing agreement. It is a disciplined way of understanding an issue and the people discussing it."

Equality "In this circle, age and job role do not give anyone more speaking time or a more valuable opinion. We share responsibility for the quality of the conversation."

Agreement "Only the person holding the talking piece speaks. Everyone else listens. You may pass. We will not label one another, and no one has to change their view."

Safety "Personal comments stay here unless someone may be unsafe or an adult must follow safeguarding procedures. Speak from your own experience and avoid naming people who are not present."

Thirty-minute version

Use stages 0-5, 10-18, 18-26, 26-35, and 42-45. Shorten the listening round to 30 seconds per speaker and use one clarification question per pair. Do not remove the opening agreement or exit reflection.

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Dialogue Agreements

Read these aloud, invite amendments, then ask for a visible sign of agreement before beginning.

1 Self-definition

I describe myself. Others do not label, stereotype, diagnose, or speak for me.
Our wording or amendment: _____

2 Expression

I may express beliefs, ideas, and feelings. I give others the same space I expect.
Our wording or amendment: _____

3 Clarification

I may ask questions to understand. I ask respectfully, especially during disagreement.
Our wording or amendment: _____

4 No coercion

I may keep my view. I do not pressure another person to change theirs.
Our wording or amendment: _____

5 Trust and safeguarding

I treat others as equal partners and keep personal comments private within the safeguarding limits explained by the facilitator.
Our wording or amendment: _____

Talking piece agreement

- We listen while another person holds the talking piece.
- We keep contributions brief enough for others to have a turn.
- We may pass without explanation.
- We respond to ideas, not the worth or identity of the speaker.
- We paraphrase before challenging a view.
- We pause the activity if the agreement is not being followed.

We agree to use this protocol for today's workshop.

Participant or group sign: _____	Date: _____
Facilitator: _____	Talking piece: _____
Our pause signal: _____	Direction of passing: _____

Facilitator repair language

Interruption "I'm pausing us. The talking piece is with ____. Let's return our attention to them."

A label appears "Can you restate that as your observation or question, without defining the other person?"

A loaded question "What are you genuinely trying to understand? Please turn that into a clarification question."

Pressure to agree "Understanding is required; agreement is not. Please explain your evidence without asking the other person to surrender their view."

Emotion rises "Let's pause for one breath. You may pass, continue, or ask for a break."

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Interactive Activity Guide

Activity 1 Define yourself 5 minutes

Do Each person writes three values they choose to describe themselves. In pairs, share one value and one example. The listener asks only: 'What does that value look like in action?'

Principle practised Right to self-definition; evaluating and articulating one's own values.

Activity 2 Listening round 8 minutes

Do Place the talking piece in the centre. Prompt: 'Which choice in the role model's life interests or challenges you, and why?' Pass the piece around once. Listeners do not respond yet.

Principle practised Equal expression; temporarily setting aside one's own view.

Activity 3 Paraphrase before opinion 8 minutes

Do In pairs, A speaks for one minute. B begins, 'What I heard you saying was…' A confirms or corrects. Swap. Only after confirmation may either person add a response.

Principle practised Responding in ways that help others understand.

Activity 4 Clarify before reply 9 minutes

Do Return to the circle. Participants use the talking piece to ask one respectful question: 'Could you clarify…?', 'What led you to…?', or 'What do you mean by…?' The original speaker may answer or pass.

Principle practised Questions that respect self-definition, even in conflict.

Activity 5 Agree to disagree 7 minutes

Do Use a statement linked to the stimulus. Example: 'A good outcome can justify a difficult choice.' Each speaker must accurately paraphrase one earlier view before adding their own.

Principle practised Different viewpoints, equal dignity, integrity, and no coercion.

Useful prompts

To deepen understanding	To disagree respectfully
Could you say more about…?	I understand your point as…
What experience or evidence shapes that view?	I see it differently because…
Have I understood you correctly that…?	The evidence I am using is…
What assumption might we be making?	What would change or strengthen your view?

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Participant Reflection Sheet

Name	_____	Date	_____

Complete this independently. You may refer to the shared stimulus rather than personal experience.

1 Listening

Record one idea you heard accurately, without agreeing or disagreeing.

What I heard was…

2 Clarifying

Write one question that would help you understand the speaker more fully.

Could you clarify…?

3 Assumptions

Name one assumption you noticed in yourself, the group, or the stimulus.

An assumption worth questioning is…

4 Respectful disagreement

Write a response that protects both your integrity and the other person's dignity.

I understand your point as… I see it differently because…

Exit reflection

Circle one: I felt heard Always Often Sometimes Not yet

One dialogue skill I will practise next is…

One change that would make the next dialogue safer or more useful is…

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