

Sassy Facilitation

supporting cooperative communication

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

This tool is essentially a set of dialogue ground-rules: a way to instantly create and dismiss a Safe Space for sharing high-stakes information, talking productively about triggering situations, or calling out dysfunctional dynamics in any relationship, meeting, or process. It is infinitely adaptable. By selecting from the subcategories, you can change the intensity of the 4 Principles to fit your unique situation, depending on the level of risk being taken by the folks involved. 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 where this tool has been useful: Board meetings, activist/grassroots organizing sessions, co-facilitators/co-teachers' working groups, co-op/collective house meetings, intimate/platonic relationship negotiations, and discussions with persons of authority or an imbalance of power.

While you can deploy this tool in almost any way, the following formula is a very good place to start:

- 1) Welcome each other to the Space, thanking everyone for being present
- 2) Go over the tool together, clarifying wherever there is ignorance or different understandings
- 3) Agree to 'invoke' or 'call up' these rules now
- 4) Have your conversation, calling on the rules as needed
- 5) Thank each other for participating, and for honoring the rules
- 6) 'Call down' or 'release' the Space from the Safe container of the ground-rules

The 4 Principles of a SAFE SPACE

Equalize the Space

confidentiality – share stories, experiences, and lessons;
not names and gossip
step-up/step-down – give space before you take space;
challenge yourself to step out of your pattern
value and encourage risk taking in speaking, while
maintaining everyone's 'right to pass'
challenge the idea or the practice being voiced, not the
person voicing them
everyone has equal worth in this discussion; all knowledge
and opinions are equally valid

Check Your Assumptions

no judgments or disclaimers (including self-judgments)
inquire about preferred pronouns; maintain appropriate
gender neutrality in your language
treat everyone as an individual, not as 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 respect each other's right to be human (i.e.
inconsistent, emotional, triggered, etc.)
avoid blaming people for the misinformation they have
received
acknowledge emotions, hold appropriate space for them
practice giving and receiving 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
50% rule – each party in a situation is responsible for an
equal part of the discussion, problem, and solution

