

The Dialogue Circle – Online

Creates a space to address social and relational aspect of a conflict, facilitating a conversation with a common subject between two or more people. It is an opportunity for learning and self-reflection, with the aim of developing a better understanding and awareness of self-assumptions and those of others.

Dialogue circles online - Creating space for dialogue in a virtual world

Why?	<p>Why do we need to adapt and provide dialogue online?</p> <p>To achieve our objectives when designing dialogue, we need to focus on the main purpose, which is for people to learn from themselves and the others for common understanding and personal growth. This process is not limited to face-to-face meetings or events and should always be an educational focus of World Scouting.</p> <p>Coping with differences in our own homes and communities may seem less challenging than facing differences from afar, such as those we perceive through media coverage of distant places and peoples. Yet, in both cases, and more relevant than ever, the challenges of learning to understand and respect differences is an educational process for all. In fact, dialogue is an effective tool to cope with the tensions that the inability to deal with differences might produce.</p> <p>Through dialogue and as Scouts, we promote better coexistence and cooperation between people from different cultural or religious backgrounds. Such dialogue fosters the discovery of both what is shared and what is different in our respective cultural and religious worldviews.</p>
How? Process: specific actions	<p>Dialogue can be facilitated online, using a variety of conferencing platforms. A Dialogue Facilitator should prepare themselves for the differences of dialogue online compared to in-person dialogue and the challenges it presents, but still maintain the common objectives, purpose, and ground rules of dialogue.</p> <p>Using the guidance herein and prior knowledge, the Dialogue Facilitator supports equal and fair participation among all participants to increase mutual understanding of similarities and differences.</p> <p>Through careful preparation, and an understanding of technology and the development process, the dialogue online establishes and maintains a safe space for people to understand themselves, learn, surface their assumptions, and question their previous perceptions and judgments. Online methods further emphasise questioning, listening, and co-creating for mutual understanding.</p>
What? Result: what do you do, result of why?	<p>The online practice of dialogue requires us to enhance our active listening skills and tune in emotionally to understand another person's point of view correctly.</p> <p>In this dialogical process, we learn and adapt. We can fully engage with each other, thus increasing our mutual trust levels. When these changes are mutual, the dialogue transforms relations between the parties from adversarial to respectful, opening the way to create new relationships.</p>

	<p>Scouting's idea of an active citizen is an individual who strives to build a better society with tools that are democratic and non-violent and is respectful of the opinions and differences of others. They are committed and assume responsibility to act with critical thought. They don't passively accept reality as defined by others. Therefore, the impact of dialogue online ensures Scouts are still shaping a variety of peacebuilding efforts, in small ways and on a wider scale.</p>	
Preparation for dialogue online	For participants	For facilitators
	<p>It's important to ensure all participants are informed and prepare ahead of the dialogue circle. This includes logistics, connection, expectations, and personal preparation.</p>	<p>Facilitating a dialogue online requires just as much preparation as face to face. All Dialogue Facilitators should prepare through a team briefing that include checking the technical platform and connection, deciding the timeline and process, understanding the group participating, as well as their roles and responsibilities. This also includes the front- and back-end facilitators and teams.</p>
Deciding on the topic	<p>To decide on the topic for a dialogue, consider the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants propose or agree one or two topics in advance. - The topic is already agreed. - Participants freely contribute topics and vote on them during the introduction to the session. <p>For more support, see resources within the <i>Guidelines for Dialogue Ambassadors</i></p>	
Facilitators - Be prepared	Challenges - Online	Tips and tricks - Online
	<p>As with face-to-face dialogue, we must be prepared or be aware of potential challenges or conflicts that may occur. Some examples could be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wi-Fi connection • Language and understanding • Body language • Hidden agendas, context or sensitivities • Silence • Conflict <p>More detailed information below</p>	<p>A few things to remember or practise ahead of dialogue online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing silence - Connecting and technology - Using body language and eye contact (camera) - Active listening (need for back end online) - Creating a safe space - Responding but not taking sides - Preparing prompt questions - Guiding, rearranging and considering the time <p>More detailed information below</p>

Tips and tricks to support dialogue online

It's always good to prepare for facilitation and dialogue; dialogue online is no different. These are a few things to remember or practise ahead of the online session:

- **Connecting and technology.** Before the dialogue, you should familiarise yourself with the online platform you will be using. All members of the facilitation team should be familiar and practise with the technology. Ensure you are somewhere with a stable internet connection; a blank, neutral, or appropriate virtual background, and good light.
- **Body language and eye contact.** Nonverbal communication is very important with dialogue online. It contributes to the safe space and enables the Dialogue Facilitator and participants to tune in emotionally as well as verbally. Look at the camera. Use your hands (be sure your hands are in the frame). Try not to move too much that the connection is disrupted. Ensure nonverbal responses are equal for each participant. All participants should have their video on, where network connections allow, and be encouraged to find an appropriate, visible space. Monitor and respond to their body language where possible.
- **Active listening.** Avoid communicating with others online where possible. This includes your back-end facilitator if used or consulting the chat box during the dialogue. You should model active listening and support participants to rearrange and guide their thoughts. The back-end facilitator is responsible for responding to the chat and participant needs. They should only communicate with the front-end where necessary.
- **Respond but don't take sides.** It's important to maintain engagement, interaction, and the flow of the dialogue. You can respond to participants, but not always and never take sides. This supports the principles of dialogue, models behaviour, and maintains a safe space for all.
- **Managing silence.** Silence is good for thought and reflection; however during dialogue it's the role of the Dialogue Facilitator to guide the discussion and respond to long silences. You can summarise or reflect. You can ask a question or guide further reflection. Silence is also a good opportunity to invite participation. You can ask someone specifically if they have anything to add if you have not heard from them yet.
- **Creating safe space.** It is just as important online as offline to create a safe space. In your introduction, you can introduce yourself and casually greet others as they join. If you don't know one or two of the participants, you may find it useful to have time with them beforehand. Recapping the ground rules also ensures everyone feels this is a safe and professional dialogue circle. During the dialogue, maintain the ground rules. Invite active participation. Ensure participants know they do not have to contribute if they do not wish to. The back-end facilitator can also support queries and is responsible for managing the sequence of speakers. Use your body language and look into the camera to connect with and respond to participants' body language and statements. Finally, in the beginning of the session, ensure every participant is comfortable with using the technology.

- **Prepare prompt questions.** Before the dialogue, you can practise or prepare a few questions or prompts to help guide the discussions, fill the silence, or engage all participants in the dialogue. Use open/closed questions and keep participants connected to the purpose.
- **Time.** Keep an eye on the time. Try to ensure each person gets the opportunity to contribute if they wish. Equally, be mindful of how much time individuals spend sharing and move the discussion on where necessary.
- **Rehearsal.** Front facilitator and back facilitator should practise in advance of the proceedings; rehearsal is key.

It is also advised to consult the Dialogue Facilitator *action* [kit/guidelines] before any facilitating a dialogue.

Challenges to consider/prepare for to support dialogue online

As with face-to-face dialogue, we must be prepared or be aware of potential challenges or conflicts that may occur. Some examples could be:

- **Network connection.** Audio and visual connection may be impaired when the internet connection is unstable. Ensure you have previously agreed with the back-end facilitator how to manage this, for both yourself and the participants. Be confident to continue the flow of the dialogue if a participant's connection drops while they are speaking.
- **Language and understanding.** Understanding what is being said can be challenging online, especially in dialogue across international groups. During the introduction, remind participants to speak slowly and clearly. You may need to clarify or rephrase something if it seems misunderstood or a potential conflict is present. Add a ground rule or use the ground rules to ensure misunderstandings do not cause conflict.
- **Reading body language.** In one square on a screen, it can be difficult to see or read body language. You can model good, clear, open body language that invites others to do the same and creates a safe space. Ensure you have all faces visible on the screen. Look directly into the camera to ensure you can see and respond to any negative or closed body language. Invite participants to share. Encourage them to express their emotions or contribute.
- **Context, sensitivities, or hidden agendas.** It can be challenging to understand the reason or response when participating in a dialogue. Sometimes there may be existing tension, sensitivities, or hidden agendas. As the Dialogue Facilitator, you should manage your responses professionally. If you identify a tension area, guide the discussion, rearrange the contributions, or if necessary, ask someone to step out of the dialogue.
- **Silence.** This can be difficult to manage online; however, remind yourself this is positive for reflection. Guide participants through the silence. Advice can be seen in the tips and tricks section.

- **Conflict.** As the Dialogue Facilitator, you should be familiar with managing conflict and respond professionally. Should conflict arise, guide the discussion, rearrange the contributions or if necessary, ask someone to step out of the dialogue.

It is also advised to consult the Dialogue Facilitator *action [kit/guidelines]* before any facilitating a dialogue.

Establishing a safe space online - Facilitator guidance

A safe space can describe a physical space where people feel that there is no risk, where they are sheltered and at ease. But this expression also describes a state of mind and mood where people feel comfortable, trusting, and willing to open up. Therefore, dialogue online is no exception. Dialogue online should still create a safe space or platform for people to surface their assumptions and to question their previous perceptions and judgments.

As you may know, dialogue occurs mainly in our stretch/learning zone (*Guidelines for Dialogue Ambassadors manual, page 78* and as a Dialogue Facilitator you should navigate the dialogue and facilitate this interaction with new people, ideas, or situations, through the online experience. Some participants may already find themselves in the stretch zone with online participation, video, or technology, therefore establishing a safe space is essential and sometimes more difficult.

To make the space safe, ensure that all participants do their best to suspend their judgments and take the risk of sharing their feelings and perceptions as well as surfacing their deeper questions, without losing sight of the aim of dialogue: to collectively reach mutual understanding, not necessarily reaching an agreement, on one or more issues, possibly even finding some common grounds.

Challenges - creating a safe space online

- Be realistic on how much to expect from people to be vulnerable in an online space
- In one square on a screen, it can be difficult to see or read body language.
- It's challenging to understand the audience when participating in dialogue and even harder online.
- Understanding what is being said can be challenging online, especially in dialogue across international groups.
- Poor connections can result in misinterpretation of a point or of who should/can speak or when using a video.

Tips and tricks - creating a safe space online

- Before the dialogue, introduce yourself to people you don't already know and offer to meet them before the session start.
- In your introduction, introduce yourself and casually greet others as they join to create a calm, safe space.
- Recap the ground rules.
- Ensure understanding of the process and technology.
- During the dialogue, maintain the ground rules and invite active participation.
- Ensure participants know they do not have to contribute if they do not wish to.
- Use your body language and look into the camera to connect with

		<p>and respond to participants' body language and statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage a (temporary) use of the camera to avoid anonymity and contribute to the safety of the space.
Structure	Intro	
	When planning your dialogue, agree the time of the session with the participants, and factor in breaks and any preparation time.	
	Time	
	0–5 min.	<p>Who: Back-end facilitator</p> <p>What: Welcome and logistics of the dialogue, including technical platform and process particularities; introduction of roles (front-end facilitator, back-end facilitator, participants, observer); reiteration/agreement on ground rules.</p>
	5–6 min.	<p>Who: Observer/back-end</p> <p>What: Introduces the front-end facilitator</p>
	6–16 min.	<p>Who: Front-end facilitator</p> <p>What: Welcome and recap of dialogue circle structure (intros, dialogue, debrief); invite each person to introduce themselves, one by one, led by the facilitator</p>
	16–20 min.	<p>Who: Back-end facilitator</p> <p>What: Shares screen and conducts the vote</p>
	20–25 min.	<p>Who: Front-end facilitator</p> <p>What: Recap ground rules and invite questions</p>
	Dialogue	
	25–85	Who: Front-end facilitator and participants

	min.	<p>What: Use the raised-hand function or other technology function when you wish to speak. Sequences of speakers will be captured by the back-end facilitator and regularly updated and posted in the chat. The front-end facilitator will invite the next speaker</p> <p>Participants: Can share their contribution, following the ground rules and using the raised-hand function.</p>
	Debrief/Reflection	
	85–115 min.	<p>Who: Front-end facilitator and participants?</p> <p>What: ‘How do you feel about this dialogue?’ Invite each participant to speak, encourage reflection, use prompt questions, and guide the discussion. You can also use sli.do to capture impressions simultaneously.</p> <p>Participants: Contribute with their impressions.</p>
	115–130 min.	<p>Who: Front-end facilitator and then back-end or observer.</p> <p>What: Final reflection; thanks and more on using dialogue in the future.</p>