

Youth Engagement:
**Opening the Door
to Difficult
Conversations**

Toolkit

Module 1:
**Trust and
Community
Standards**



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Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit

Module 1: Trust and Community Standards

Background

This session will introduce participants to the discussion-style tools that will be used throughout these sessions. These include check-ins, sitting in a circle, and the ability to opt out of sharing during a discussion. During this session, the group will also develop a list of community standards that will help them work together and feel safe enough to participate. This session is designed to lay the foundation of trust, respect, and expectations for the group. The facilitator should take note of different personalities in the group (for example, who is a leader or who needs encouragement to speak in front of the group).

Objectives

- Facilitate the youth learning about each other to begin fostering a sense of community.
- Establish community guidelines that will facilitate interactions within the group.

Materials

- Objects for interactive activity (balls and/or stuffed animals)
- Flipchart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Small sheets of paper
- Pens for everyone in the group

Check-in

Explain that you will be starting each session with a check-in question to get to know everyone and ending with a check-out question to receive feedback from the participants.

Check-in questions do not have to be about the subject of the session. The purpose of these is to help participants be present in the circle and focused on the session. Suggested check-in questions include:

- What's something people don't know about you?
- What are you looking forward to about the upcoming season?
- What are you most excited to do this summer?

There are many websites that have suggestions for check-in or icebreaker activities. One example is:

<https://teambuilding.com/blog/icebreaker-questions>

Facilitator's Tip: Kickstart the session by introducing yourself, including your name and pronouns, and answering the check-in question. Then, choose a participant to follow, and let the process continue as each person selects someone else from the circle until everyone has had a chance to answer.

Tell the group that this session will be spent getting to know each other and figuring out the best way to work together.

Activity 1: Group Juggle

Ask everyone to stand in a circle with their hands up and palms facing in the circle. Explain that you'll be tossing a ball (or other object) through the circle until everyone has a turn to catch the ball. The first time around, each person must introduce themselves by saying their name when they catch the ball. They will then throw the ball to the next person.

After everyone has caught the ball once, each person will say the name of the person they are throwing to and lower their hands after they have both caught and thrown the ball. The activity ends when the ball comes back to the facilitator. Ask everyone to remember who they threw the ball to.

Continue with this activity and ask each person to throw the ball to the person they threw it to last. They will continue to do so throughout the rest of the activity. This time add a second ball/object partway through. Repeat again, adding as many objects as you can.

Facilitator's Tip: Adding additional balls can be chaotic. If you find that this is not working for your group, resume the activity with only one ball. Ensure that everyone has had a turn before concluding the activity.

If needed, refer to this instructional video that demonstrates this activity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdhStC0qwrl>

Activity 2: Navigating without Direction

For this activity, ask everyone to think of their favourite place in the world. Then ask the group to think of the floor as a map of the world. Ask them to go to their favourite place on the map without talking to each other. Once everyone has found a place, ask them to say where they are standing and why it makes sense. The map won't make sense: Australia might be next to Newfoundland.

Ask the group to identify what would have made the process easier. They will likely suggest things like figuring out where north is or having a reference point.

To debrief, bring everyone back into the circle. Explain that similar to navigating a map, group standards are important in navigating group discussions. For instance, standards are essential because they provide a clear framework that ensures productive interactions among all participants.

Activity 3: Co-Creating Community Standards

This activity will create the community standards to be followed throughout all group discussions. For this activity, it is important to amplify youth's voices and ensure that they know their opinion is valued.

You will also be able to share your ideas for discussion in Part 2 of this activity.

Part One: Anonymous Brainstorming

Begin by handing out a paper and pen to each participant. Ask the group to individually write down their ideas for community standards that they believe will contribute positively to the group discussions.

Facilitator's Tip: Encourage participants to think of behaviours that can promote respectful communication and interactions regardless of race, gender, religion, or background.

Part Two: Discussing Ideas

Gather all the anonymous suggestions and begin by reading out each idea one by one and writing them down on the flip chart/whiteboard. Encourage participants to share their thoughts.

Suggest the following standards if the group doesn't come up with them on their own:

- Being confidential (What is said in the room, stays in the room.)
- Being open to try new things
- Being open to others' opinions, perspectives, and life choices
- Respecting the voices of others in the room. (In other words, bullying and hate speech will not be tolerated.)

When the group has reached consensus on the standards, let them know you'll be periodically checking in to see how they think the group is living up to the standards.

Facilitator's Tip: Be sure to explain to the group that you and any other facilitator will also be held to these standards. Ask participants to suggest anything a facilitator could do to help build trust between themselves and group members as well as between group members. Add these to the group standards as appropriate.

Remember to let group members know the limitations of confidentiality. That is, you are legally required to break confidentiality in situations where the youth themselves, or another may be at risk of harm or if a child is being abused.

Check-Out

Do you think we can follow the community standards during our time together as a group? If there is a concern about the group's ability to follow the community standards, ask what they feel will be challenging, and if they have any ideas of how to ensure the standards are followed.

If there is time, briefly revisit the map question and ask the group to explain why they chose the place they did as their favourite place in the world, and if they have been there before. This is a good opportunity to encourage conversation and sharing within a group, especially if some of the participants are less comfortable speaking in front of others, as it is lighter subject matter.