



Effective Norms for Dialogue

LINKING COMMUNITY VALUES TO INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

WHAT IT IS

Norms are the principles guiding the behavior of the group, within the context of the dialogue(s) they will be having together.

HOW TO DO IT

Start with a set of 3-5 EFFECTIVE norms.

Facilitators can...

- adapt pre-existing norms (test them against the criteria below).
- write a set of norms (see below).
- create norms as a group (see below).

Communicate norms clearly.

WHY WE DO IT

- Increases a sense of safety for participants by setting clear expectations.
- Helps the group self-regulate + hold one another accountable to collective values.

Make sure everyone in the group...

- understands the norms.
- has the ability to abide by the norms.
- agrees to the norms.

Over the course of the dialogue(s):

- Reiterate + reinforce norms regularly.
- Revise + supplement as needed.

EFFECTIVE NORMS ARE . . .

MEMORABLE

Keep norms simple and short.

One clause per norm. One action word. Five norms or fewer. People can't follow norms that they can't remember!

BAD: "Strive to practice deep and active listening and demonstrate it with your body language."

GOOD: "Embody listening."

ACTIONABLE

Make norms concrete.

Words like "respect," "listen," "civil," "open-minded," etc., mean different things to different people. Identify the action(s) connected to the value. What does it look like to live out that value?

BAD: "Honor each other's humanity."

GOOD: "Use each other's names."

ALIGNED

Match norms to purpose.

Think about what makes sense given the topic and structure of the dialogue(s) + participants' identities, experiences, culture(s), and values.

For example, "Everyone gets equal time to speak" might make sense for one topic/group, but not another.

COLLABORATIVE

Do norms together.

Whether the group adopts existing norms or creates them together, they should be:

- universally understood
- unanimously agreed-to
- collectively recalled, revised, and reinforced over the course of the dialogue(s)

