

# DIALOGUE FACILITATION GUIDE

Applying Behavioural Insights to  
Dialogue in Conflict Settings



# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Camilla Devereux, Mariama Conteh, Dr Ahmed Yassin, Janet Adama Mohammed, Saadgi Rajani, Daragh Neville, Chloé Chambraud, Dr Antonio Silva, and Dr Govinda Clayton for their outstanding contributions to this guide. We extend our deep gratitude to the dialogue facilitators at *Hope Interactive* and the *Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress* who graciously shared their time and expertise with our team.

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
<b>1</b> Encourage participants to create their own ground rules .....	7
<b>2</b> Give everyone the chance to speak .....	10
<b>3</b> Emphasise the things people share .....	13
<b>4</b> Encourage participants to imagine contact with others .....	16
<b>5</b> Encourage active listening .....	19
<b>6</b> Help participants build empathy towards others .....	22
<b>7</b> Introduce participants to constructive disagreement .....	25
<b>8</b> Do a breathing exercise .....	28
<b>9</b> Discuss how societies and groups can change .....	31
Glossary .....	34
References .....	35

# INTRODUCTION



## About this guide

This guide is for facilitators who want to support their participants to engage in more effective peacebuilding dialogue. It sets out a series of practical activities designed to support dialogue participants to speak openly about their experiences, consider alternative points of view, and create peaceful change in their communities.

The activities in the guide take a behavioural insights approach, which applies evidence about human behaviour to solve social problems. They are informed by evidence of what works to promote specific behaviours and attitudes in dispute situations, and are based on the experiences of facilitators working in conflict-affected regions of North East Nigeria.

The guide was created by *The Behavioural Insights Team* in collaboration with the *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*, *Conciliation Resources* and the *Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich*. Together, we are part of Smart Peace, a global initiative which combines the expertise of consortium members to address the challenges of building peace in some of the world's most fragile states — focusing on Nigeria, Central African Republic, and Myanmar. Our work combines peacebuilding techniques, conflict analysis, rigorous evaluation, and behavioural insights.

In North East Nigeria, we are bringing the government, militias, and communities together to reduce prejudice, build stronger relationships, and peacefully address grievances. The resulting learnings will empower communities, international organisations, and governments to implement peace strategies with greater confidence. This project is funded with UK aid from the UK Government.\*

\*The opinions expressed in this publication represent those of The Behavioural Insights Team, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the UK Government or other Smart Peace consortium partners.

# Who the guide is for

This guide is aimed at dialogue facilitators who have experience working in conflict settings, whether in North East Nigeria or other places around the globe. The activities provide some new ways to make your work even more effective, and we hope they spark interesting reflections on how evidence about human behaviour can shape dialogue facilitation.

While primarily aimed at facilitators, activities are also suitable for other types of peacemakers, including mediators, negotiators, and trainers. Activities are designed to be delivered in dialogue sessions, but they can also be used as part of preliminary meetings, community groups, mediatory sessions with political leaders, or as part of training to build local peacebuilding skills.

## How we created this guide

### Learning from Smart Peace facilitators

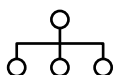
Thirteen years of the Boko Haram insurgency and subsequent military response has killed tens of thousands of civilians, and displaced over two million people in North East Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> A sense of fear and distrust remains, and community members are often resistant to the reintegration of former fighters in their settlements. Frictions are also growing between traditional elites and armed vigilante groups, who are broadly thought to be pivotal in the fight against Boko Haram.

Smart Peace dialogues provide a peaceful mechanism for people of different backgrounds, opinions, and motivations to meet to discuss these tensions, and explore potential solutions to their grievances. To create this guide, we interviewed nine Smart Peace dialogue facilitators who work with a range of actors in North East Nigeria — from elites and militia members, to local leaders and civilians.

We spoke to:



9 facilitators



3 working with elite group / militia members



6 working at community level



All with experience in Borno & Yobe states

---

In the analysis of our interviews, we found that dialogue facilitators share many common aims, challenges, and practices — despite working with diverse stakeholders. To develop activities that facilitators can use when managing dialogues in different settings, we listened carefully to their existing practices, and combined these with examples from research studies. The aims outlined by our facilitators were used to guide the selection of activities that could be practically used to achieve them.

## **Applying behavioural insights to dialogue**

As any peacebuilder knows, human behaviour can be messy. Much of it is nonconscious, emotional, habitual, and driven by assumptions or cues from our environment. People have a tendency to seek out facts that support their existing views, ignoring evidence to the contrary, and selectively interpreting information to fit their perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Their actions are also frequently guided by simple rules of thumb that do not require deliberate thought. These mental shortcuts are triggered automatically by features of the choices or situations that they encounter. As such, people may behave in a violent or aggressive manner as part of harmful, automatic ways of thinking and acting.<sup>3, 4</sup>

A behavioural insights approach generates solutions to social problems based on a realistic understanding of the conscious and nonconscious drivers of human behaviour. When designing solutions, we take existing evidence from the fields of social psychology and behavioural science, and combine these with insights from interviews and other qualitative activities designed to uncover people's motivations, needs, and lived experiences.

Applying a clear understanding of human behaviour is particularly important when facilitating dialogue between people in conflict settings. In such contexts, people may be especially wary of new perspectives or ways of thinking that challenge what is accepted in their community. Participating in structured activities to alter how they communicate with others can lead to important, and positive, changes in their attitudes and behaviours. For example, taking part in activities that encourage people to notice, examine and correct their closed ways of thinking may help them to become more open to alternative views.

## **How to use this guide**

This guide has been designed to be read when preparing for a dialogue session. We encourage you to review the activities in the guide, choose the ones you think would work best with your participants, and practice them on a selection of colleagues before taking them into a real session.

Context matters — so we suggest adapting activities in a way that works for you and your participants. Activities are intended to be adapted and delivered in the way that best suits your facilitation style, so you do not need to memorise or follow the script word by word. You may, however, wish to refer to the guide as a reference text as you conduct each activity.

A behavioural insights approach draws from academic literature. For each activity, we have included endnote references within the text and a full list of sources at the end of the guide. We do not expect you to read all the sources, but we have added them in case you wish to find out more.

Each activity is numbered and listed in sequential order. Use the **Activity finder** to identify an aim you may want to achieve during a dialogue. Choose a corresponding activity from the list and turn to the relevant activity number in the guide to find out more.

## Activity finder

Aim	Activity	No.
You want to support your participants to...	You can...	
Feel ownership over the dialogue	Encourage participants to create their own ground rules	1
Speak openly about their experiences	Give everyone the chance to speak	2
Communicate with people who are different from them	Emphasise things people share	3
	Encourage participants to imagine contact with others	4
	Encourage active listening	5
Consider another person's point of view	Help build empathy towards others	6
	Introduce participants to constructive disagreement	7
Control overwhelming emotions	Do a breathing exercise	8
Be more open to changes in their community	Discuss how societies and groups can change	9

## Key



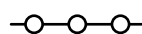
Suggested  
group size



Supplementary  
materials



Time activity  
should take



Position in  
dialogue



This word is covered in more  
depth in the glossary on page 35

# 1

## Encourage participants to create their own ground rules



### Situation

The dialogue is about to start, and you notice participants:

- do not understand the purpose of the dialogue;
- are not engaged; or
- do not know how to communicate.

This activity can also be completed partway through a session, especially if you notice any of the attitudes and behaviours above.

### Activity



Small to medium  
sized groups  
(≈ 5 – 35 people)



No materials



25 – 30 minutes



At start, or as  
refresher during  
discussion

Encourage participants to work together to create ground rules.

### 1 Introduce the idea of ground rules.

- "It can be helpful to have a set of rules to guide us through the dialogue."
- "We can create the rules together. This means we all agree on how we should behave during the session."

### 2 Ask participants to consider the purpose of the dialogue, and values they share.

Examples of the kind of participant responses you may receive are provided under each question.

- "Before we create rules, we should think about the purpose of the dialogue and the values we share."
- "What is the purpose of the dialogue?"

#### EXAMPLE

- "The purpose of the dialogue is to understand one another better."

- "What are our common values?"

#### EXAMPLE

- "We value the opportunity to speak about our feelings."
- "We value having different opinions, and listening to one another."

### 3 Ask participants questions to guide the creation of ground rules.

- "How should we communicate with one another?"

#### EXAMPLE

- "We will not interrupt one another."
- "We will listen carefully to one another."
- "We will recognise mistakes and accept apologies."
- "We will not act on assumptions."

- "What should happen to the things we share in the dialogue?"

- "Unless agreed by everyone, we will not share what is said in the dialogue outside the session."

- "How should we stop ourselves from being distracted?"

#### EXAMPLE

- "We will switch our mobile phones off."
- "We will stop when we are tired."

### 4 Encourage the group to discuss their suggestions amongst themselves.

- Discuss what happens if the ground rules are broken. Ideally, the group should agree on the consequences, and feel comfortable with them.
- If all participants can read, write the ground rules down on a board, so you can refer to them throughout the session.
- If some participants cannot read, you may wish to draw the rules out using symbols. Alternatively, you can clearly repeat the agreed rules to the group at the start, and reiterate them again throughout the session — when appropriate.




# Why

Facilitators told us that participants who do not understand the rules of the dialogue are less likely to participate meaningfully. It is important for the facilitators to set the tone right at the start of the session and find ways of addressing disruptions in advance.

*“At the onset, we make sure everyone knows the ground rules. We explain that for the dialogue to run smoothly, people must respect one another’s opinions, with no phones or disruptive behaviour.”*

Participants should feel safe to take risks, and be vulnerable in front of each other.

This is called  psychological safety <sup>5</sup>. At the start of a dialogue, participants may not feel comfortable voicing their opinions because they fear being judged, or that their views might be shared outside the session. They may not feel comfortable listening to others, especially if they have different opinions.

Establishing a clear set of rules helps to create psychological safety for your participants.

There is some evidence that teams in which people feel safe challenging one another without judgement are more productive and make better decisions.<sup>6</sup>

People tend to place a disproportionately high value on products that they have successfully created themselves,<sup>7</sup> and feel a sense of ownership over them.<sup>8</sup> By enabling participants to work together to create the ground rules, you may help to create a sense of shared identity between them.<sup>9</sup> You may increase the value they place on those rules, and the extent to which they stick to them.

## 2

# Give everyone the chance to speak



## Situation

**Participants struggle to speak openly about their experiences**, and you notice they:

- find it hard to speak about traumatic subjects;
- do not feel it is their place to speak; or
- one person (or more) dominates the conversation.

This activity will give everyone the chance to speak for themselves. It can be delivered as a warm-up at the start of a discussion, or when you notice the attitudes and behaviours above.

Some participants might find it intimidating to speak in front of a large group. If you have a group of ten people or more, divide it into smaller teams before this activity. If you are co-facilitating, your co-facilitators can manage the discussions in the smaller groups.

## Activity



Small group  
(≈ 5 – 10 people)



Stopwatch  
(or mobile phone)



25 – 40 minutes



Warm-up at start of  
discussion, or refresher  
during discussion

**Give everyone in the group equal opportunity to share their thoughts.**

**1 Explain the importance of hearing from everyone in the group.**

- You may want to refer to the dialogue ground rules, especially if they mention hearing from everyone in the group.
- “We want to make sure that everyone feels valued, and has the chance to share their opinions on this topic.”

**2 Introduce an activity that gives each person in the group the opportunity to speak.**

- “Together, we can try a new way of communicating.”
- “I would like one person in the group to share their thoughts on a particular theme of their choosing. We can then go round the group, person by person, and each person can share their thoughts on a topic of their choice.”
- “I will be using a timer so each person has the same time to speak as the next. When the time is up, I will raise my hand.”
- “When someone else is speaking, do not interrupt them. Give them time to talk.”

**3 Ask one participant to suggest a theme they want to talk about.**

- If the participant cannot think of a topic to talk about, ask them a question to support them, such as:
  - “What do you want to achieve through dialogue?”
  - “Why are you here today?”
  - “How do you feel about the things we have discussed so far?”
- Some participants might find it hard to share personal views with the group. You can ask them a more sensitive question, such as:
  - “Can you tell us about yourself?”
  - “What is your role in the community?”
  - “What do you do in your free time?”

**5 Let the participant speak for a set time before moving to the next person.**

- Each person should be given the same length of time to speak.
- Try to give each participant at least two minutes. If the group is smaller and you have more time available, you may give each participant more time to speak.

**6 If the participant does not fill their time, invite the group to maintain the silence.**

- “It is okay if you do not have anything to say for now. We can keep silent and use this time for some quiet reflection before it is the next person’s turn.”

**7 Once the last person has spoken, give time for reflection and questions.**


- “Thank you for sharing. Does anyone have any questions about what they have heard, or want to share anything new?”

# Why

Facilitators told us that participants may not speak because others dominate the conversation. Participants carefully judge whether it is safe to speak based on their gender, age, and social standing in relation to people around them. Women, youths, and minority groups may feel less empowered to speak out relative to others who dominate the conversation.

Participants also may not speak because they find it difficult to talk about traumatic experiences. If they, or someone they know, has been a victim of violence, they may need more time to process their emotions and share their experiences with others. Facilitators emphasised that all dialogue participants should be given the time they need to express their feelings.

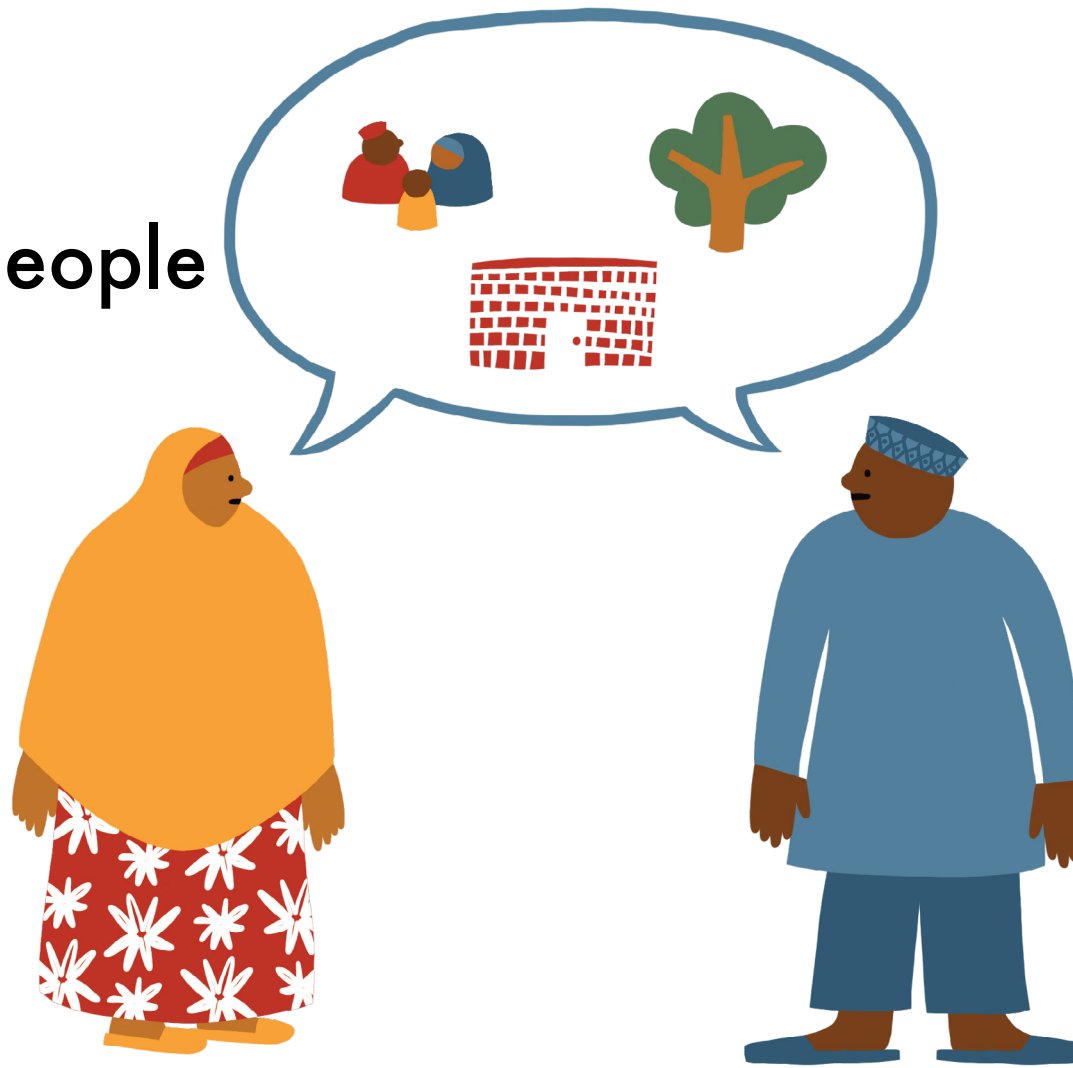
*“The dialogue is for everyone to speak, so that the facilitator and members can understand the situation on the ground.”*

Our perception of  social norms<sup>10, 11</sup> — the behaviours we think of as being normal in our social group — determine what kind of interactions we are willing to have in any given situation. The desire to avoid negative judgement from others may lead some participants to stay silent, when really they have a lot to say.

This activity is called a serial testimony. In a serial testimony, each person is given an equal amount of time to speak. The structured exercise provides a legitimate reason for a person to speak because they have an allocated time to fill. This activity may help survivors of violence who may benefit from periods of uninterrupted time to share their stories.

### 3

## Emphasise the things people share



### Situation

**Participants struggle to communicate with people who are different from them**, and you notice they:

- criticise people of a specific background, gender, or age;
- do not engage with such people; or
- do not engage with those more, or less, powerful than them.

This activity will take participants away from the discussion, and encourage them to think about the similarities between them. If you know there are people in the group who find it hard communicating with one another due to perceived differences, use this activity as a warm-up at the start of the session.

### Activity



Small group  
(≈ 2 – 10 participants)



No materials



20 – 25 minutes



Warm up at start  
of session, or refresher  
during discussion

**Emphasise things people share with one another.**

**1 Acknowledge the situation, and encourage reflection.**

- "I see that you do not feel comfortable talking about these things together."
- "It takes time to speak openly with other people about things that are important to us. Let us pause for reflection for a moment."

**2 Encourage people to try to get to know one another better.**

- "There is always time to get to know one another better, even if you live in the same community."
- "To help you get to know one another better, we can do a short activity together."

**3 Split participants into small groups. If possible, make sure there is a range of opinions in each group.**

**4 Ask the group members to talk about their similarities.**

- "What similarities can you find between the people in your group?"
- "You have ten minutes to discuss this together. I have a stopwatch, and I will use it to keep time. I will tell you when to start and when to stop discussing by raising my hand."

**5 Give some pointers on the similarities they could discuss.**

- "To start, I suggest you take turns individually talking about your lives, what you like and dislike, your interests, your family, and life experiences."
- "Be as open as possible. Everyone has some things in common."

**6 If one or more members of the group can write, ask them to note down the similarities.**

- "Write down on the paper as many similarities as you can find in the whole group."

**7 After ten minutes, ask one person to give feedback to the whole group.**

- "Can you summarise the similarities you found in your group?"
- "What did you learn about one another?"

**8 Encourage participants to reflect on what they share as they communicate during the dialogue.**

- "Thank you for sharing the similarities you have found."
- "Try not to forget what we have learned. As you talk to one another during the dialogue, it can be good to reflect on the things you share."

## Why?

---

Facilitators told us that some participants do not want to engage with people based on assumptions they have about their character, based on their background or identity. Perceived differences can stop people from communicating well with others. The power imbalances between leaders, community members, militias, youths, elders, men and women stop people from sharing ideas and listening to one another.

*“Lack of communication and listening is a huge hurdle. The leaders with power want to be consulted as they have force and power in their roles, but they do not understand that different people have different things to bring.”*

As humans, we have a tendency to prefer people who are similar to us. Even when people seem very different, they share things (e.g. being a mother or a father, or having the same religious values). Highlighting similarities encourages people to see others as belonging to their group and, as result, feeling more positive towards them.<sup>12</sup> Studies have shown that, when similarities are highlighted, people have greater trust in others.<sup>13</sup>

# 4

## Encourage participants to imagine contact with others



### Situation

Participants struggle to communicate with people who are different from them, and you notice they:

- do not engage with people of a particular background, ethnicity, or religion;
- do not intend to communicate with such people; or
- judge people based on their identity, rather than their experiences.

This activity is designed to be conducted partway through the dialogue, especially if participants express any of the attitudes and behaviours above. Choose a moment when the participants can take a break from the discussion to focus on a new activity.

This activity works best if your participants resist engaging with a person or group outside the dialogue because of their identity. For example, participants might be worried about talking to someone of a particular religious group, ethnicity or area. The activity is not designed to spark discussion about a person who is actually attending the dialogue, because it might make them feel uncomfortable.

Do **not** use this exercise when reflecting on people who may have conducted violent acts towards your participants. This requires a more nuanced conversation.

### Activity



Small group  
(≈ 2 – 10 participants)  
or individual level



No materials



15 – 20 minutes



Refresher during  
discussion



Encourage participants to reflect on what it might be like to interact with someone from a different background, group, religion or region.

**1 Encourage participants to reflect on communicating with this person from a different background or group.**

- “You have been speaking about your concerns [communicating/working/shopping with] [person/group]. Let us take a moment to reflect on that.”

**2 Ask them to imagine meeting this person.**

- Participants should not say their answers aloud. Rather, encourage them to reflect silently on their own.
- “I would like you to try to imagine what it would be like to actually engage with this person.”
  - “Where would you meet them?”
  - “What would you say?”
  - “What would you do?”
  - “What would they say?”
  - “What would they do?”

**3 Encourage participants to imagine what they might share with this person.**

Examples of the kind of participant responses you may receive are provided below.

**EXAMPLE**

- “We are both religious.”
- “We are both fathers.”
- “We are both teachers.”
- “What values do you have in common?”

**EXAMPLE**

- “We both value freedom.”
- “We both value peace.”
- “We value truth.”

**4 Close the activity and ask those who feel comfortable to share their reflections with the group.**

- “How did you find the experience of imagining this interaction?”
- “If you feel comfortable, please share your thoughts with the rest of the group.”

## Why?

---

Facilitators told us that some participants do not want to engage with people from certain groups. In some cases they do not want to communicate with new people in their community because they fear them. It is important, however, to prepare people for the day when they may meet such people.

*“We ask, how prepared are you? There will be people from different environments in your community, what are the principles that you can create to enable peaceful coexistence?”*

Participants might not trust people who they think are unlike them. Studies have found that telling people to imagine engaging with another group (for example, imagining a conversation with an asylum seeker) increases trust,<sup>14</sup> and improves attitudes<sup>15</sup> towards them. Developing trust and positive attitudes towards other people is the first step towards wanting to interact with them.<sup>16</sup> This activity may help your participants to feel more confident in interacting with people who they think are unlike them.

# 5

## Encourage active listening



### Situation

**Participants struggle to consider another person's point of view**, and you notice they:

- ignore opinions that differ from their own;
- are distracted when others are speaking; or
- interrupt one another.

This activity will take your participants away from the discussion, and encourage them to practice their listening skills. It can work as a refresher exercise or as a warm-up at the start of a session, especially if you know that some people in the group struggle to listen carefully to others.

### Activity



Small to medium  
group  
(≈ 5 – 35 people)



Stopwatch  
(or mobile phone)  
Active listening  
handout



20 – 40 minutes



Warm up at start of  
session, or refresher  
during discussion

Help participants to listen carefully to one another.

### 1 Introduce an active listening activity.

- "We are here to communicate with one another. Good communication is made up of speaking and listening."
- "The ability to be a good listener takes time and practice."
- "I can help you learn how to listen to one another more effectively. For this, we will do a short activity together."

### 2 Introduce the concept of active listening.

- "We are going to practise something called active listening."
- "What do you think active listening is?"

### 3 Explain what active listening involves.

- "That is great. Thank you for sharing your ideas."
- "Active listening is a method of listening and responding to another person in a way that improves your understanding of one another."
- "Active listening has three components."
  - "Firstly, it means listening very carefully to what the other person is saying, and engaging with what is said. You should listen carefully because you want to understand, not because you are preparing for what you want to say."
  - "Secondly, active listening means using your body language to show you are interested in the speaker. Avoid crossing your arms, and sit facing them."
  - "Thirdly, active listening means using your voice to show your interest in what the speaker is saying, encourage them, and check your own understanding. Although it is called 'listening', you do not need to always be silent."

### 4 Give examples of phrases that participants can use when they are listening.

- "To show interest, you can say things like, "Uh-huh", "Mmm", "Oh?"."
- "To check your understanding, you can say things like:
  - "What I'm hearing is \_\_\_\_\_, is that right?"
  - "What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?"
  - "Can you put that in other words?"

### 5 Split the group into pairs.

- You may deliberately create pairs comprising members who have previously struggled to listen to one another. Alternatively, you can randomly allocate people into pairs.

### 6 Ask one person in each pair to speak for three minutes about a topic of their choosing, while the other listens.

- "Now you are in pairs, I would like one of you to speak for three minutes about a topic of your choosing."
- "I have a stopwatch, and I will use it to keep time. I will tell you when to start talking and when to stop talking by raising my hand."
- "When one person is talking, the other person should practise active listening."

**7 Once the three minutes are over, ask one or two participants who were allocated as 'listeners' to share how they found the experience with the rest of the group.**

- "How did you find that?"
- "What was easy about that?"
- "What was hard about that?"

**8 Ask the participants to swap over, and start the three minutes again.**

- "Okay, let us do the activity again. This time the person who was listening will be the one who is talking."


**9 After the activity is over, ask participants how this experience might change the way in which they interact with one another.**

- "How could this experience change the way you communicate during the dialogue?"
- "What might you do differently now?"

## Why?

Facilitators told us that some participants do not listen carefully to perspectives if they do not align with their own. Imagining why someone might hold an opposing view is challenging, so participants choose the easier option of ignoring it completely. For instance, if participants have been victims of violence, it can be difficult to understand why others would accept insurgents in their community.

*"How can we talk about reintegration and yet the insurgency has not ended? Who are we reintegrating? Is it the communities or the insurgents? Why should we forgive and reconcile without justice?"*

People do not remember everything that they hear, and what they hear may not always be the most important information that was communicated to them.  **Active listening** is a way of listening and responding to another person in a way that improves the listener and speaker's understanding of one another.

This exercise encourages the listener to use their voice and body to show the speaker that they are listening carefully to what is being said. Evidence suggests that when people receive verbal responses that show the other person is listening carefully to them, they feel more understood than when they receive advice or other kinds of acknowledgements.<sup>17</sup>

# 6

## Help participants build empathy towards others



### Situation

Participants struggle to consider another person's point of view, and you notice they:

- ignore opinions based on who is speaking, not what they say; or
- stigmatise a group or person based on their identity.

This activity helps participants to consider what it is like to be a stigmatised person. It requires you to ask your participants some reflective questions, which works well with one person on their own, or a small group (e.g. less than five people).

Questions could provoke insensitive answers from participants. To avoid causing upset, the stigmatised person should **not** be present in the activity group. The activity could be led as a separate discussion following the main dialogue session.

Do **not** use this exercise to reflect on a person who may have conducted violent acts towards your participants. This requires a more nuanced conversation.

### Activity



One person or small group (< 5 people), away from main dialogue



No materials



20 – 25 minutes



Refresher during discussion, or as separate mini discussion

**Encourage participants to reflect on a time they were judged unfairly to help them better understand others' feelings.**

**1 Explain that you want to help the participants to understand other people better.**

- "I want to help you to understand other people better."
- "I am going to ask you a few questions. For each question, I would like you to pause for a while to reflect on what your answer is. You can then share the answer with me, if you feel comfortable."

**2 Ask the participant to reflect on a time they were judged for being different.**

- "Can you think of a time when you were treated badly, or judged, for being different?"
- "How did the situation make you feel?"
- "Can you describe it to me?"

**3 Ask the participant to reflect on another group who are judged for being different.**

- "Now, try to think about a group of people that you think are often judged negatively for being different, and are treated badly as a result."
- "What group can you think of?"
- "How are they different?"
- "How are they treated poorly?"

**4 Ask the participant how people feel when they are judged for being different.**

- "Thank you for sharing."
- "Now, how do you think people from this group feel when they are judged or treated poorly?"

**5 Encourage them to think about how their experience, and that of the group they have named, are similar.**

- "Earlier, you told me about a time you were treated badly or judged for being different."
- "Thinking about your experience, and that of the other group you mentioned to me, how are their experiences similar to yours?"
- "Can you describe the similarities?"


**6 Ask them how their experience helps them to understand other people.**



- "How does thinking about those similarities make you feel?"
- "Does your experience help you to understand what it might be like for a person from another group? How?"

## Why?

Facilitators told us that participants can judge one person unfairly based on prejudices they have towards a whole group. Under such circumstances, they do not think critically about what has happened to that person, or whether they can control this. For instance, they might have negative thoughts about the child of a member of Boko Haram, based on their view of the group as a whole.

*“For women impregnated by Boko Haram, many believe the child will carry the gene of Boko Haram. They fear what Boko Haram will do to them.”*

Under  **correspondence bias**, people put the behaviour of others down to their characteristics rather than other factors.<sup>18</sup> For example, when people see someone shouting they overstate their characteristics as an aggressive person and understate the role that other things, such as someone provoking them, may have played in their response. Correspondence bias can feed into stereotypes of groups, whose actions may result from things unrelated to their identity.

Participants may have low  **empathy** towards people from stigmatised groups. They may not want to interact with, or help, such people. A  **perspective-taking** exercise<sup>19</sup> could help them. Perspective-taking is the process of imagining oneself in another's shoes, to understand how they feel. This activity prompts participants to think about their own experience, as well as that of someone from a different group, in order to increase understanding towards people from different backgrounds. Exercises like this have been shown to promote helping behaviours and create more positive attitudes towards others.<sup>20, 21</sup>



# 7

## Introduce participants to constructive disagreement



### Situation

**Participants struggle to consider another person's point of view**, and you notice they:

- cannot rest until they win the argument;
- stop talking or listening to others; or
- see others as opponents.

This activity is designed to prevent participants from seeing one another as opponents who must be overcome. You should do this activity with people from both sides at the same time. This could be two small groups, or two people, who are in a dispute during the session.

### Activity



Two small groups  
( $< 5$  people),  
two or more individuals,  
who are in conflict  
with one another



No materials



10 – 15 minutes



Refresher during  
discussion

**Encourage participants to rethink how they see a disagreement.**

**1 Remind participants that disagreeing is not always bad.**

- "I see you disagree on this."
- "That is okay. Disagreeing is not always bad."
- "Disagreements are a chance to learn new information and see things in a different light."

---

**2 Encourage each participant to share their perspective.**

- "What is your perspective on this issue?"

---

**3 Prompt participants to ask one another why they feel the way they do.**

- "Now, I encourage you to find out more about one another's opinions. I am going to take a step back for a moment, and give you some time to ask one another:
  - when you first came to feel this way;
  - why this issue is important to you; and
  - if there was ever a time you felt differently."

---

**4 After participants have finished discussing, ask what they have learnt from one another.**

- "From listening to the other person's point of view, what have you learnt about one other?"
- "And what have you learnt about the topic?"

---

**5 Reiterate the importance of learning from diverse opinions.**

- "It is important that diverse opinions are shared during a dialogue. By seeking to learn, a disagreement can become an opportunity for discovery."

## Why?

Facilitators told us that participants have hardened positions on some topics. They are not open to new ideas or ways of doing things.

*“The vigilante groups have particular standard operating procedures that guide their actions and perspectives. While there are often advances, we have sometimes seen that changing this is generally considered as almost impossible.”*

Some participants struggle to engage constructively with other people because they see them as opponents to be overcome. This is counterproductive to the goals of dialogue, where the focus is on sharing and listening to experiences. Participants try to subvert the conversation towards things they want to talk about, and attack other people when they share alternative views:

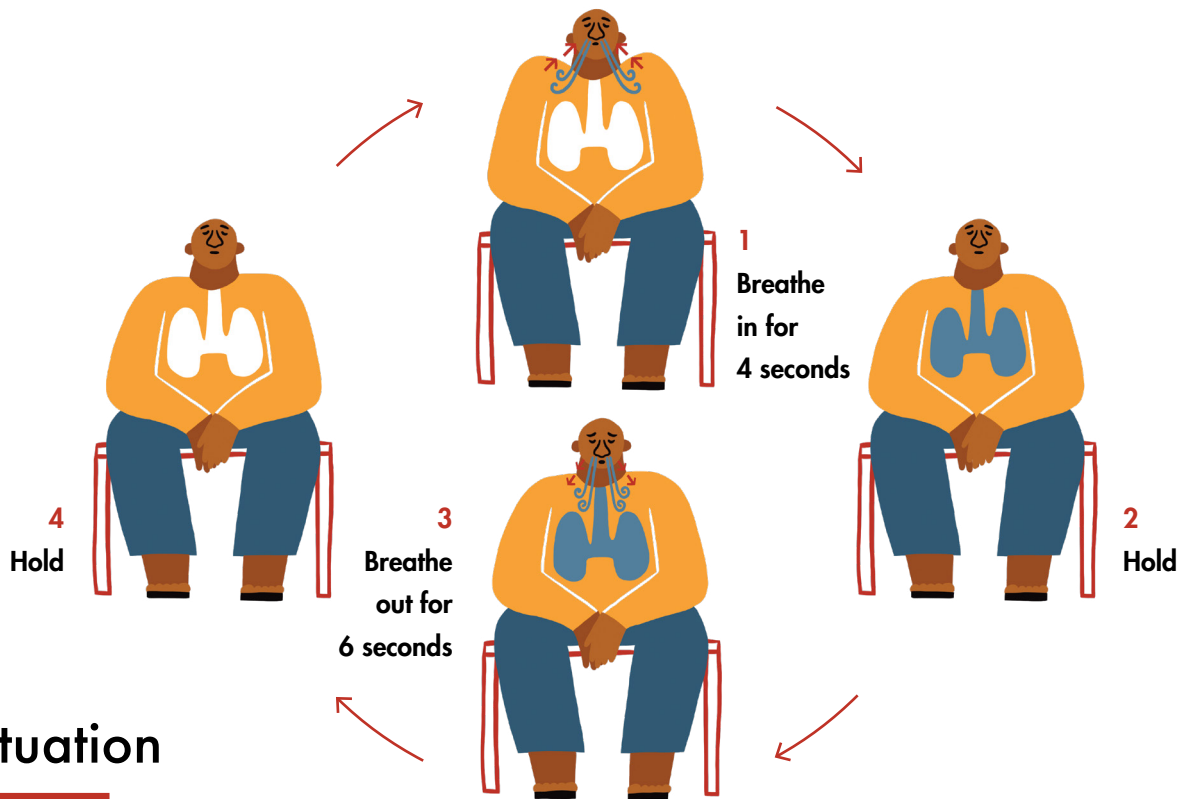
*“Solutions from the security agents often lean towards the use of force and commands. There is little understanding for approaches, such as mediation, which resolve conflict by listening to the parties and developing joint solutions.”*

○ **Confirmation bias** means people are drawn to things that fit their world view, and ignore things that do not.<sup>22</sup> Participants might stop listening or speaking when people disagree with them. Alternatively, they might dismiss or attack other people for having different opinions.

This activity introduces people to the concept of ○ **constructive disagreement**.<sup>23</sup> The questions are designed to help participants listen to another person’s point of view while respectfully expressing their own opinions, rather than pushing things away if they do not agree with them. This is one step in a long journey towards building trust between opposing parties. People who trust one other feel comfortable that they can disagree without damaging their relationships, and may make better decisions.<sup>24</sup>

# 8

## Do a breathing exercise



### Situation

**Participants are too upset to engage,** and you notice they:

- freeze up and stop talking;
- appear anxious or agitated; or
- they are tearful.

This breathing exercise aims to reduce stress in your participants. The activity works best with one facilitator and one participant or a small group. It can be used as a warm-up exercise, or to calm down one or more participants during a session.

For some, breathing exercises can be difficult, especially if they are already short of breath. Make sure participants who are already short of breath can opt out of this activity.

### Activity



One small group  
(≈ 2 – 10 people)



No materials



15 – 20 minutes



Warm up at start  
of session, or refresher  
during discussion

Help participants to focus on their breath.

**1 Begin by acknowledging strong feelings, rather than ignoring them.**

- "I can see why this might be upsetting for you right now. I understand."
- "It is normal to feel upset, angry or stressed. Sometimes we want to manage our emotions more productively, so they do not overwhelm us."
- "Once we have composed ourselves, we can think more clearly, express our feelings, and engage with other people more effectively."

**2 Explain that you would like participants to take a mindful break to focus on breath.**

- "Let us take a break to do a breathing exercise."
- "When we are anxious, concentrating on our breath and allowing it to become deeper can help calm us down."

**3 Give participants the opportunity to opt out.**

- "If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can stop and breathe as you usually would."

**4 Show the impact of deep breathing on the body.**

- "When we breathe in, air fills our chest and our belly expands."
- "When we breathe out, our chest and belly get smaller."

**5 Take participants through a breathing exercise.**

- A** Ask them to close their eyes: "If you feel comfortable, please close your eyes. If you do not want to, it is fine to leave your eyes open. Just focus on an object a little further away — for example, a tree outside the window."
- B** Ask them to slowly notice things around them: "Notice the feeling of your clothes, the weight of your shoes on your feet, and the texture of the chair."
- C** Begin with a long inhalation. Count to four: "Inhale with me. Can you feel the belly expanding? 1... 2... 3... 4..."
- D** Pause your breath and relax for a short moment.
- E** Then exhale slowly. Count to six: "Exhale with me. Can you feel the belly contracting? 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6..."
- F** Pause your breath and relax for a short moment.

**6 Repeat steps C, D, E, and F for a few minutes.**

**7 Once the activity is over, remind participants to use the same breathing technique when they next feel overwhelmed.**


- "When you are ready, you can open your eyes."
- "Next time you feel anxious or overwhelmed, remember to take deep breaths."

## Why?

---

Facilitators told us that traumatised people may become upset very quickly. Many have experienced personal tragedies that are difficult to talk about. Revisiting painful topics can trigger flashbacks, which leave people visibly upset or shaken:

*“Notice the way they hold their body. Maybe the way the issue is being discussed is upsetting them.”*

Focusing carefully on breathing aims to control anxiety and stress. Breathing exercises help people with their  emotional regulation. Rather than getting rid of negative emotions entirely, they help participants to control them.

Evidence suggests that breathing exercises could reduce stress, as measured by self-reported feelings and levels of chemical messengers in the body.<sup>25, 26</sup> When combined with other therapies, relaxation techniques could be helpful in reducing post-traumatic stress in people who have experienced violent conflict.<sup>27</sup>

# 9

## Discuss how societies and groups can change



### Situation

**Participants are not open to social change happening in their community,** and you notice they:

- do not want to engage in a dialogue discussing social changes;
- say society or people can never change; or
- say that they oppose the change.

This activity aims to improve participants' openness to change in their community. It can be delivered as a warm-up at the start of a discussion about social change, or when you notice the attitudes and behaviours above.

### Activity



One small group  
(≈ 2 – 10 people)



No materials



25 minutes



Warm up at start  
of session, or refresher  
during discussion

Introduce participants to the idea of society growing and changing over time.

### 1 Introduce a discussion about how societies and groups can change.

- "I am hearing that some of you are anxious about changes happening in your community."
- "It is worth reflecting on why you feel this way. Together, we can think about how communities can change over time."

### 2 Introduce the idea of two mindsets: fixed, and growth.

- "People tend to move between two ways of thinking: a fixed mindset, and a growth mindset."
- "When someone thinks with a fixed mindset, they believe that they cannot change over time. For example, they might say, 'I am not good at listening to people.'"
- "When someone thinks with a growth mindset, they believe that it is possible they can change over time: 'I am not good at listening to people... yet.'"

### 3 Encourage participants to create a "...yet" statement.

Examples of the kind of participant responses you may receive are provided under each question.

- "A person who is thinking with a fixed mindset might say, 'I am not good at praying.'"
- "What would someone who is thinking with a growth mindset say about this?"

#### EXAMPLE

- "I am not good at praying... yet."

### 4 Describe how people with a growth mindset think about social change.

- "Just as individuals are able to change over time, society can change over time too."
- "People who think with a growth mindset believe in society's ability to change over time."
- "For instance, a person might value education. Thinking with a growth mindset, they believe that, one day, all children will go to school."

### 5 Explain that social change can happen when people who are thinking with growth mindsets come together.

- "To achieve change, people who are thinking with growth mindsets need to come together."
- "People with a growth mindset can help others to change by convincing them that change is possible."
- "As more and more people believe in the ability for society to change in line with new values, we see social change happening around us."

### 6 Share a relevant example of social change in the community in which you are facilitating the dialogue.

- A crucial part of this exercise is providing examples of times society has changed.
- Choose an example of society changing that you know your participants will recognise and understand.
- The example should involve well-known people who believed that change was possible, and then pushed for positive social changes by influencing those around them.

#### EXAMPLE

- "It was once the case that many children did not go to school. At this time, people did not value school. Slowly, values changed. More and more people pushed for change, including religious and traditional leaders, and now many children go to school."



## 7 Prompt quiet reflection on social change.

- Ask your participants to sit quietly and reflect on the following questions.
- Between each question, leave time for participants to gather their thoughts. They do not need to share their responses yet.
  - “Can you think of a positive change you have witnessed in your community?”
  - “How did people’s openness help make this change happen?”
  - “How do you think society will change during your lifetime?”
  - “Which groups do you think will treat one another differently, and in what way?”
  - “For instance, how might different armed groups, displaced people, religious groups, or nationalities treat one another?”

## 8 Encourage individuals to share their reflections with the rest of the group.

- “Now you have had time to think, would anyone like to share their reflections with the group?”
- “Thank you for sharing your thoughts. What do others think?”



# Why?

Facilitators told us that people struggle to engage in topics related to changes in their community because they do not think things will change. For example, participants struggle to imagine a community where former insurgents coexist peacefully with other groups.






*“When discussing justice, forgiveness and reconciliation of former Boko Haram insurgents, we have faced difficulties. Some people just want Boko Haram people to be killed.”*

Some participants are very attached to their points of view and perceive them as the ultimate truth. Some do not believe their views can ever change — they say that they can never forgive someone who has hurt them.

*“They say it is too early to change. But part of healing is getting the people hurt back in the space, so you collectively deal with the pain. Change does not happen in a second. It takes processes to change.”*

When people think that the dispute cannot be resolved, or people will not change in the future, these are examples of having a  **fixed mindset**. This activity teaches people to adopt a  **growth mindset**. This means they are more open to new ideas — specifically, the idea that individuals, groups, and societies can change over time. Prompting people to think in this way can encourage them to have less rigid views about other people, reduce aggressive reactions,<sup>28</sup> and increase cooperation between people.<sup>29</sup>

# GLOSSARY

- 
-  **Active listening** Active listening is a way of responding to another person. It aims to improve understanding between the listener and the speaker. It refers to listening carefully, as well as showing interest and encouragement towards the speaker with both words and body language.
- 
-  **Confirmation bias** Confirmation bias refers to the way people seek out, favour or interpret information in a way that fits with their existing values or way of thinking. For instance, people might ignore information that does not support their argument.
- 
-  **Constructive disagreement** Constructive disagreement is a positive kind of disagreement in which two or more people disagree, but find value in one another's arguments. For instance, two people may disagree on whether attending a dialogue session is important, but accept that they both have valuable reasons for their opinion.
- 
-  **Correspondence bias** Correspondence bias describes the tendency to under-emphasise contextual or situational factors. For instance, one might put the behaviour of another person down to specific characteristics, rather than thinking about the context under which choices are made.
- 
-  **Emotional regulation** Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage feelings productively. Unchecked emotional responses to experiences can be unpleasant and may prevent a person from completing certain actions.
- 
-  **Empathy** Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of someone else. It also describes the ability to understand why a person might feel the way they do, from their frame of reference.
- 
-  **Fixed mindset** A person who thinks with a fixed mindset is constrained by their beliefs and thoughts. They think that personal qualities or character traits are fixed, and therefore cannot change over time.
- 
-  **Growth mindset** A person who thinks with a growth mindset finds freedom in their thoughts and beliefs. They think that personal qualities or character traits are not fixed, and therefore can change over time.
- 
-  **Perspective-taking** Perspective-taking describes a person's ability to look beyond their personal point of view, to consider how someone else may see the world or think about a situation.
- 
-  **Psychological safety** Psychological safety is the belief that you will not be punished when you make a mistake, and you are free to speak freely without being judged harshly by others.
- 
-  **Social norms** Social norms are the expectations for behaviours and attitudes that are shared by people in a given social group. Sometimes, perceptions of what kind of behaviours people may accept in a social group do not match the actual behaviours that are present.
-

# REFERENCES

- 1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2020, December). Nigeria emergency. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/nigeria-emergency.html>
- 2 Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2 (2), 175–220.
- 3 Amodio, D. M. (2014). The neuroscience of prejudice and stereotyping. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 15 (10), 670–682.
- 4 Payne, B. K. (2001). Prejudice and perception: The role of automatic and controlled processes in misperceiving a weapon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81 (2), 181–192.
- 5 Frazier, M. L., Fainshmidt, S., Klinger, R. L., Pezeshkan, A., & Vacheva, V. (2016). Psychological Safety: A Meta-Analytic Review and Extension. *Personnel Psychology*, 70 (1), 113–165.
- 6 Edmondson, A., (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative science quarterly*, 44 (2), 350–383.
- 7 Norton, M. I., Mochon, D. & Ariely, D. (2012). The IKEA effect: When labor leads to love. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 22 (3), 453–460.
- 8 Kahneman, D., Knetsch, J. L., & Thaler, R. H. (1991). Anomalies: The endowment effect, loss aversion, and status quo bias. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5 (1), 193–206.
- 9 Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In J. A. Williams & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. 33–47. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- 10 Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H. B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51 (3), 629–6
- 11 Schultz, P. W., Nolan, J. M., Cialdini, R. B., Goldstein, N. J., & Griskevicius, V. (2007). The constructive, deconstructive, and reconstructive power of social norms. *Psychological Science*, 18 (5), 429–434.
- 12 Trepte, S., & Loy, L. S. (2017). Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, (March), 1–13.
- 13 Sanders, M., Ni Chonaire, A., Carr, D., Heal, J., & Anik, L. (2017). Increasing Social Trust with an Ice-Breaking Exercise – an RCT carried out with NCS participants. London: The Behavioural Insights Team.
- 14 Turner, R. N., West, K., & Christie, Z. (2013). Out-group trust, intergroup anxiety, and out-group attitude as mediators of the effect of imagined intergroup contact on intergroup behavioral tendencies. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43 (S2), E195–E205.
- 15 Turner, R. N., Crisp, R. J., & Lambert, E. (2007). Imagining intergroup contact can improve intergroup attitudes. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 10 (4), 427–441.
- 16 Vezzali, L., Capozza, D., Stathi, S., & Giovannini, D. (2012). Increasing out-group trust, reducing in-group humanization, and enhancing future contact intentions via imagined intergroup contact. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48 (1), 437–440.
- 17 Weger Jr H., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M. & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. *International Journal of Listening*, 28 (1), 13–31.
- 18 Gilbert, D. T. & Malone, P. S., 1995. The correspondence bias. *Psychological bulletin*, 117 (1), 21–38.
- 19 Batson, C. D., Polycarpou, M. P., Harmon-Jones, E., Imhoff, H. J., Mitchener, E. C., Bednar, L. L., Klein, T. R. & Highberger, L. (1997). Empathy and attitudes: Can feeling for a member of a stigmatized group improve feelings toward the group?. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 72 (1), 105–118.
- 20 Kalla, J. L., & Broockman, D. E. (2020). Reducing Exclusionary Attitudes through Interpersonal Conversation: Evidence from Three Field Experiments. *American Political Science Review*, 114 (2), 410–425.
- 21 Batson, C. D., & Ahmad, N. Y. (2009). Using empathy to improve intergroup attitudes and relations. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 3 (1), 141–177.
- 22 Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2 (2), 175–220.
- 23 Haidt, J. (2012). Can't We All Disagree More Constructively?. In *The Righteous Mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York: Vintage.
- 24 Komori-Glatz, M., 2018. "Cool my doubt is erased": constructive disagreement and creating a psychologically safe space in multicultural student teamwork. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 7 (2), 285–306.
- 25 Ma, X., Yue, Z.Q., Gong, Z.Q., Zhang, H., Duan, N.Y., Shi, Y.T., Wei, G.X. & Li, Y.F., (2017). The effect of diaphragmatic breathing on attention, negative affect and stress in healthy adults. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 874.
- 26 Hopper, S.I., Murray, S.L., Ferrara, L.R. & Singleton, J.K., (2019). Effectiveness of diaphragmatic breathing for reducing physiological and psychological stress in adults: a quantitative systematic review. *JB I Evidence Synthesis*, 17 (9), 1855–1876.
- 27 Seppälä, E.M., Nitschke, J.B., Tudorascu, D.L., Hayes, A., Goldstein, M.R., Nguyen, D.T., Perlman, D. & Davidson, R.J., (2014). Breathing-based meditation decreases posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in US military veterans: A randomized controlled longitudinal study. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 27 (4), 397–405.
- 28 Yeager, D. S., Miu, A. S., Powers, J., & Dweck, C. S. (2013). Implicit theories of personality and attributions of hostile intent: A meta-analysis, an experiment, and a longitudinal intervention. *Child development*, 84 (5), 1651–1667.
- 29 Goldenberg, A., Endevelt, K., Ran, S., Dweck, C. S., Gross, J. J., & Halperin, E. (2017). Making intergroup contact more fruitful: Enhancing cooperation between Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli adolescents by fostering beliefs about group malleability. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8 (1), 3–10.

