

# SAFE SPACE

*a set of ground-rules for creating consensual, productive, and drama-free high-stakes conversations*

This is a set of dialogue ground-rules: a way to instantly create (and replicate) a Safe Space for sharing high-stakes information, talking productively about triggering situations, or calling out dysfunctional dynamics in a relationship, meeting, or process. It is infinitely adaptable. By selecting which sub-principles to emphasize, you can implement the 4 Principles to best support your situation, depending on the level of personal or group risk. Some components may be inappropriate for some settings, and invaluable in others. The more risk involved, the more carefully you want to frame the conversation.

*Examples include: board meetings, grassroots organizing sessions, co-working groups, co-op house meetings, personal relationship negotiations, and discussions where there is an imbalance of power in the participants.*

"How do I have a Safe Space Conversation?"

While you can incorporate these ground-rules into conversation norms in a lot of ways, the following script is a good place to start:

- 1) "Hey, this conversation might be kind of intense, so I'd like to use this set of ground-rules while we talk. Can we try that?"
- 2) "Shall I tell you about the Principles, or would you like to read them? Do they make sense to you? Is there anything we should add?"
- 3) "Let's invoke these rules from now until we're done chatting. Ok? Ok!"
- 4) "So, I've been meaning to talk to you about..."
- 5) "Well, that was [*challenging/helpful/etc.*] Thank you for the talk, and for setting up these ground-rules with me."
- 6) "...and, hey, now that we've set up these rules, if you ever need to have a high-stakes chat with me, you can just say 'can we have a Safe Space conversation?' Then we'll be on the same page!"

## EQUALIZE THE SPACE

- **confidentiality** – share experiences & lessons, not gossip and identifying details
- **step-up/step-back** – challenge yourself to step out of your pattern
- **challenge the idea or the practice** being voiced, not the person voicing them
- **everyone has equal worth**, and all perspectives are equally valid

## CHECK YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

- **no judgments** or 'disclaimers/self-judgments'
- **everyone is an individual**, not just a representative of a group
- **'I Statements'** – own your perspective, don't project it
- **believe** in our common best intentions

## THE RIGHT TO BE HUMAN

- **respect each other's right to be human** (to have a bad day, to be triggered, to fail, etc.)
- **honor our differences** – our family of origin, culture, orientation, race, class, gender, ability, etc. make us who we are
- **acknowledge emotions** appropriately
- **practice giving and receiving forgiveness**

## CONSENSUAL DIALOGUE

- **active listening** – attention focused, appropriate eye contact, check body language, inquire about (and use) preferred pronouns
- **take a risk and speak up**, but maintain everyone's right to pass
- **silence is okay** – pauses in the pace of dialogue invite all the voices in the room:
- **50% rule** – each party is responsible for an equal part of the 'problem' and the 'solution'

