

Collaborative Dialogue

the 4th Way of talking

Collaborative discussion at a staff or team meeting level is enhanced with the right framework of questions. Below are some of these.

Conversation, Discussion, Debate, Dialogue

Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman (1999) describe four ways of talking:

- 1 • Conversation consists of convivial, casual, friendly, talk about personal and social matters; it's usually not directed or facilitated.
- 2 • Discussion is talk that has a purpose—often to make a decision. Discussion may seem unstructured at first as people brainstorm ideas and explore possibilities, but it becomes more structured as people choose sides. It may, in fact, begin to resemble debate.
- 3 • Debate is an extreme form of discussion, in which the format dictates that people take sides and advocate for that side, rebutting points from the other side. Debates are usually structured and formal; they leave no room for compromise or building on others' ideas.
- 4 • Dialogue is more structured than conversation, but less structured than discussion or debate. Dialogue engages people in building their understanding of an issue, without the pressure to make decisions or be "right." People inquire into ideas, rather than advocate for their own or others' ideas.

House Rules

- 1 We will speak from our perspective not on behalf of others.
- 2 We will introduce ideas from our own understanding.
- 3 We will respect others ideas. We are there to explore not persuade.
- 4 We will practice empathetic listening with a degree of personal resilience when we find topics challenging.
- 5 We will clarify our thoughts and ask questions to build understanding.
- 6 We will discuss ideas rather than opinions in a spirit of open inquiry

EXPLORING AN ISSUE

1

I was wondering...



2

I'm curious about...



3

What if we...



Hint

When members of a group are just trying to understand an issue, they may find that dialogue is all they need. When a group is trying to make a decision, it may still want to engage in dialogue to explore ideas, and then shift to discussion.

ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION

1. What do you mean by....?
2. Will you explain that again?
3. I have a question about....?
4. I don't quite understand....?

ask

Tip: Disagree with the issue not the person.

PARAPHRASING



Tip: Focus on the main points and clarify when needed.

1. So what you are saying is....?
2. In other words you mean...?
3. I have a question about....?
4. If I understand you completely...?

ASKING FOR A RESPONSE

1. What do you think....?
2. We haven't heard from you yet...?
3. Do you agree....?
4. I'd like to hear your opinion....?

Tip: Remember you are trying to get a response not put someone on the spot.