

SAFE SPACE

groundrules for high-stakes dialog

"What is Safe Space?"

It's a set of groundrules which provide a process for instantly creating a consensual, productive, and drama-free environment for engaging in high-stakes dialog. It is easily adapted to a variety of contexts by emphasizing different components – each principle may be inappropriate in some settings, and invaluable in others. The more personal or group risk involved, the more carefully you want to frame your talk.

"When might I need Safe Space?"

Anytime you might share high-stakes information, try to solve a problem, unpack a dysfunctional situation, work on interpersonal relationships, or address power dynamics, you will set yourself up for success with a Safe Space. Examples include:

- meetings (of any kind or size)
- co-working teams
- neighborhood or volunteer groups
- dialog with your mother, spouse, boss
- anti-oppression or 'identity-centric' work

"How do I set up Safe Space?"

While you can incorporate these groundrules into dialog in a lot of ways, this script can help you start:

- 1) "Hey, this conversation might get intense - in order to keep it safe and productive, I'd like to set up some groundrules. Can we try that?"
- 2) "Shall I talk you through the Principles, or would you like to read them? Do they make sense to you? Anything to add?"
- 3) "Do you feel ready to talk this way? OK!"
- 4) "So, I'd like to talk about..."
- 5) "Thank you for your time, your effort, and for setting up these groundrules with me."
- 6) "By the way, now that we've set this up, if you ever need to have a high-stakes chat with me, you can just ask me for a 'Safe Space conversation'!"

EQUALIZE THE SPACE

- share outcomes, not details
- make space/take space
- challenge practices, not personhood
- your truth has equal worth

CHECK ASSUMPTIONS

- no judgments or 'disclaimers'
- we are individuals in our groups
- own your perspective, don't project it
- believe in common best intent

THE RIGHT TO BE HUMAN

- respect each other's right
- honor differences always (center as needed)
- acknowledge Ouch, Oops and Awesome
- practice forgiveness

CONSENSUAL DIALOG

- actively listen
- take a risk (or a pass)
- silence is OK & speed is OK
- the 50% rule

