

dialogue activities are designed to encourage sharing. Though each activity uses a slightly different dialogue technique, some general methodological principles apply to all of them:

Pre-response

Give everyone a chance to record his or her response in some way before asking any individual to respond orally. The pre-response might be written, drawn, shown with hand signals, or indicated by body positions. Make the pre-response easy by asking a very specific question with a concrete answer, by providing a sentence starter to be completed, by giving a spread of answers to choose from. This technique gets everyone involved in answering the question, makes it clear that there is a spread of opinion on the answer rather than the one "right" response, and creates the need for an individual to examine a position contrary to other ideas being presented.

Dialogue starter

Make it easy to get the dialogue started by designating the first speaker, often in a humorous way; for example, the person with the curliest hair, the person with the next birthday, the person wearing the baggiest pants. Each person will then take a turn around the circle. The starter designation usually creates a burst of laughter, thus further relaxing the group.

Pass option

Tell the group that the sharing must always be done freely. If at any time a participant is asked a question he or she doesn't know how to answer, or does not want to answer in public, the person simply says "Pass." If participants choose to respond, however, their answers should be as honest as possible. The pass option is, perhaps, the single most powerful technique in creating an atmosphere where open dialogue can happen. Given the choice of either answering honestly or passing, young people almost always choose to answer. But the pass is always there as a safe and easy way out when things get too hot to handle. It is imperative that the pass option be respected by the directors and by all participants.

Gradual deepening

Move the dialogue gradually from light, easy topics to more serious ones. The easier sharing teaches the technique and warms the participants, thus facilitating deeper sharing.

Listening

Help your group see the important role of the *listener* in the dialogue process. A person is encouraged to share by sensing that someone is really listening. Everyone in the dialogue circle shares in the listening role. It is important for all the members of the group to look at the speaker, to respond facially to what is said, and to ask follow-up questions. The adults should be especially present to each speaker; at the same time the adults will need to be careful not to become the focus toward which all answers are directed.