

## Principles for Respectful Dialogue



(modified from Martha Merrill's article, "The Art of Dialogue", [http://www.fertilitymanagement.com/art\\_of\\_dialogue.htm](http://www.fertilitymanagement.com/art_of_dialogue.htm), accessed 5/29/11)

The FACTS group requests that members and participants read and abide by the following principles-- and to practice the techniques described below as ways to encourage dialogue, develop trust and mutual understanding.

Principles of dialogue are instrumental to fostering relationship and deeper levels of understanding within groups or organizations. When we learn to communicate through our minds, hearts and souls with the desire to connect with one another and to act for the higher good of all, we build a foundation for better performance and understanding, leading ultimately to greater opportunity for peace, harmony and spiritual progress.

### **Rights, Responsibilities and Skills of Dialogue**

For true dialogue to occur it needs to take place within a protective environment of mutually accepted privileges and responsibilities, rooted in two fundamental values: respect for the human person and trust in the process of dialogue. Dialogue works best when the participants are willing to develop certain skills that facilitate the process.

Note that dialogue is different than debate. Debate seeks to prove the other person wrong. Dialogue seeks to promote reflection, leading to a deeper level of understanding. Once concluded, debate tends to close down further discussion. **The goal of dialogue is to promote trust and a continued sharing of ideas.**

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### Practical Application

These simple techniques can be helpful in supporting respectful dialogue:

- 1) "What I heard you say": In written or spoken form, this verifies your understanding of what you have heard. Sometimes called "mirroring", it is an effective way of validating that you have been listening actively.

## Principles for Respectful Dialogue

Privileges*	Responsibilities	Skills
1. Each person has the privilege to define him/herself without being labeled by others	1. Each person must be willing to seriously question his/her assumptions about "the other"	1. Each person should be able to evaluate and articulate his/her own attitudes, values and positions on issues within the context of his/her tradition.
2. Each person has the privilege to express his or her beliefs, ideas and feelings	2. Each person must allow others the same right of self-expression that s/he expects for him/herself.	2. Through active listening, each person can work to be sensitive to what the other is saying, without proffering judgment. The initial goal is to be able to articulate what has been said in a way that demonstrates understanding.
3. Each person has the privilege to ask questions that help him/her understand what someone else has said.	3. Each person should ask questions that respect the other's right of self-definition, even in times of conflict or disagreement.	3. Each person should learn how to respond to questions in ways that help others understand. The goal is to find common ground when it exists and to acknowledge differences with respect.
4. Each person has the privilege not to change or be coerced to change.	4. Each person must accept the others as equal partners in the dialogue, and acknowledge the dignity of the traditions represented.	4. Each person should learn to deal with different points of view while maintaining his/her own integrity. The goals here are to "meet people where they are" and to have respectful exchange of ideas. Participants can agree to disagree.
5. Each person has the privilege to expect that what is said will be held in confidence.	5. Each person must agree to hold what others say in confidence.	5. Each person should learn to deal with others from a position of mutual trust, based on an expectation that others come to the dialogue in a spirit of honesty and sincerity.

- 2) "LAWS" This technique acknowledges the "common ground" that frequently exists at one level and allows the listener to respond with ideas of his/her own and to question or further the discussion. Here's how it works: "What I LIKE about what you said (wrote) is...." AND "What worries me about it is...." "SO...." Following "SO" can be a question or a request for more information: "So, help me understand more about your idea." or "So, help me close the gap here. What is your concept of ...."
- 3) The use of "and": When someone is giving you feedback and s/he uses the word "but", it is common for us not to "hear" anything that went before it. Using the work "and" in that situation helps the listener "hear" both ideas expressed in the sentence better.