

9 RULES FOR BETTER DIALOGUE

1. KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW

It's OK to not know everything about a topic, but it's important to acknowledge that the information you have may not be complete. If you're passionate about it, keep learning.

2. DON'T THINK YOU KNOW WHAT OTHERS KNOW

Other people will have different experiences and knowledge that shapes their perspective and their responses. We can only assume where people are coming from and assumptions are usually unhelpful. Instead, practice taking what people say at face value whilst remembering the value it has in helping you understand them is limiting, and without creating someone else's big picture for them because it'll probably be inaccurate.

3. SHARE THOROUGHLY

If you're sharing specific factual information, as opposed to ideas, then be specific. Give comprehensive answers and advice- as if the person you are sharing with doesn't have any primary knowledge or background on the subject. This avoids the possibility of misinterpretation and unintentional misleading.

4. BE PRINCIPLED

To be principled, you first need to know what your principles are. Principles are your boundaries and your guidelines. Without them, anything goes, and when anything goes, consistency and integrity is lost. Define your principles as an individual and practice them. Some compromise is inevitable in life, but where you will not compromise- that's where you'll find your principles.

5. BE OPEN TO GROWTH

Dialogue and engaging with others is ultimately about growth. It should really be about the growth of all parties, and that's only possible when everyone is open to growing. Being open in this way means having the capacity to be challenged, to feel challenged, and still be able to develop and expand your own ideas and thinking.

6. ASK QUESTIONS

If you don't understand clearly, or want to know more about a particular point, ask. If we don't ask for clarity we end up creating our own answers and continuing a discussion based on inaccurate assumptions.

7. SPEAK MEANINGFULLY

Don't speak for the sake of speaking, and don't speak just to be heard. We have so much to offer each other but this is easy to forget when we don't take the time to make our words meaningful. Take a minute to think about what message you're trying to give, or what idea you're putting on the table, how you're framing it and what the outcome of you're sharing is going to be.

8. AVOID GENERALISATIONS

Generalisations are useful when identifying a widespread problem. It can be necessary when engaging on an individual level, but the key word here is necessary. Group politics and mass generalisations are a quick way to lose sight of the objective of the dialogue and sometimes a better way is to personalise.

9. BE RESPECTFUL

Meaningful dialogue means interactions that actually achieve a level of learning, development of ideas or better understanding. We're not going to reach meaningful dialogue if we think the other person has nothing to offer us or if they think we have nothing to offer them. That's why dialogue requires a level of respect in order to build the trust that something can be gained from it.

This isn't about tone policing, which would be dismissing a person's message because of the way they said it rather than listening to what they're saying. Rather, it's about maintaining beneficial exchanges and knowing when it's no longer of any benefit. Some people feel challenged (see point 5), get uncomfortable and start to dismiss anything people say that doesn't fall in line with their current beliefs. This is not being respectful. Previous points define how to be respectful in difficult dialogue, which involves acknowledging we don't have all the answers, and neither does the other party, and that it's OK- it's necessary- to feel challenged and uncomfortable because this is where growth happens.