

How can we foster enriching interfaith conversations?

An Encountering Other Faiths Webinar Series
Session 3: Role of Facilitator & Tools
for Deepening Dialogue

Given today's global climate, dialoguing with and respecting people of different faiths is critical. It is integral to a future of justice and peace.

Sr. Maria Hornung, MMS, Author,
Encountering Other Faiths



Role of Facilitator: The Art of Facilitating Interfaith Engagement

Tool #1: Set Ground Rules

Tool #2: Teach Listening Skills

Tool # 3: Ask Good Questions

Tool #4: Choose a Common Experience or Shared Resource

Tool #5: Use Yourself as a Gift to the Process

Five Tools for Your Facilitator Tool Kit

SETTING GROUND RULES is a critical resource in the toolkit of the facilitator.

Ground rules allow you to:

- Manage the quiet or the dominant or the know-it-all or the disruptive member of your group;
- Engage participants as allies in collective responsibility for productive sessions;
- Establish your role as protector of the group process, keeping the space safe and fair and open to all voices;
- Return to the guidelines when you may need to interrupt someone or re-direct the conversation.

Tool #1: Ground Rules ... Guidelines for Dialogue



Sample Ground Rules

- Speak for yourself - use “I statements”
- Allow “equal air time”
- “I don’t know” is an perfectly acceptable answer
- No proselytizing or denigrating
- Use “oops”, “ouch”, and “wow”

Setting Ground Rules for Dialogue ... Guidelines ... Group Covenant

Tool #1

Listening is a key part of
the dialogue equation.

Dialogue = Speaking + Listening



Tool #2: Teaching Listening Skills

Fran Jacobs, a Catholic social worker and dialogue facilitation trainer taught that a GOOD QUESTION is ...

- 11 words or less
- not answered by “yes” or “no”
- authentic - we’re genuinely interested & we don’t know the answer
- neutral - free from bias/embedded assumptions
- answered from our own experience - doesn’t assume knowledge



Tool #3: Asking Good Questions

Curious Questions

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Curious Questions are not Judgmental Questions

Examples:

1. How does your family celebrate Sukkot? vs.
Why do you take off for this holiday when no one else does?
2. What is it like to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday? vs.
Why do you get that mark on your head before work - can't you go after work?
3. Do acts of terrorism have anything to do with the Muslim faith? vs.
Why is Islam such a violent religion?



Insight about Questions From the Buddhist Tradition

Tool #3: Asking Good Questions

The Japanese and Korean term *MU* meaning "not have; without" is a key word in Buddhism, especially Zen traditions.

MU has been used in popular culture to:

- Suggest that one “un-ask” the question;
- Indicate the question is fundamentally flawed;
- Refer similarly to "N/A" or "not applicable," because the conditions of the question do not match the reality.

Source: Wikipedia

An example of this concept is often invoked by the loaded question:

"Have you stopped beating your wife?"
to which "mu" would be the only respectable response.

Suggested themes for exploration (Encountering Other Faiths Workbook, pp.44-45)

Poetry, short stories, videos,
TED talks, and podcasts are great
shared resources.

Tools for reflection
(Encountering Other Faiths Workbook, p. 67)



Tool #4: Choose a Common Experience or Shared Resource

Tool #5: Use Yourself as a Gift to the Process

SMALL GROUP SHARING ...

- What story lies behind your desire to support others in having positive interfaith encounters ?
- What spiritual practices help you to lend a compassionate presence and animating role as facilitator of interfaith engagement?
- What triggers might you anticipate that could detract from your positive use of self as facilitator?

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Closing & Next Steps

Thank you for taking on the Role of Facilitator
And Expanding your Toolkit
in the Art of Facilitating Interfaith Engagement

- Setting Ground Rules
- Teaching Listening Skills
- Asking Good Questions
- Choosing a Common Experience or Shared Resource
- Using Yourself as a Gift to the Process

Thank you for your participation !

