



British Columbia's  
**Office of the Human Rights  
Commissioner**

For conversation guides

# Human rights conversations support document

## Introduction

This document was created to support conversations using BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's (BCOHRC) resources and accompanying conversation guides. These pre-conversation activities can help create sessions where participants feel welcomed, supported and included. We acknowledge and honour the experience and expertise that many facilitators bring to their roles. The recommendations in this document were developed based on practices used in our Office. We are sharing them for your consideration only.

**1**

**Section 1: Plan the session**

**2**

**Section 2: Begin the session**

**3**

**Section 3: Facilitate the activity**

**4**

**Section 4: Close the session**

# Section 1

## Plan the session

This section includes recommendations to plan for a conversation that is accessible, culturally inclusive and trauma informed.

Conversations about human rights can be challenging. Participants may feel strong emotions, such as anger or shame, or be reminded of similar experiences of harm. While preparing to facilitate conversations, take time to identify who will be participating, any potential barriers to their participation and what impacts they might experience as a result of the discussion.

Participants are often more comfortable in situations they are familiar with and can prepare for in advance. Consider sending participants an email with an agenda before the session. This agenda should include information such as core concepts and content that will be covered, discussion questions and icebreaker questions or activities. Invite participants to tell you about potential barriers to their participation that they have identified based on the agenda you have shared for the session and to recommend supports to address these barriers.

Consider the following types of barriers to participation in the conversation and identify strategies to minimize these barriers.

### Accessibility

Identify potential physical, communication, learning and dietary barriers to participation. Consider supports that will help minimize these barriers and allow participants to engage fully in the session. Examples of supports include setting up wheelchair accessible seating, using a microphone, arranging ASL interpretation, providing a reader or scribe, offering frequent movement breaks and accommodating dietary restrictions, based on personal choices, allergies and religious practices.

Consider preparing a box of items that participants can hold and move in their hands during the conversation. These items can make it easier for some participants to engage in challenging conversations and help some to focus and move during the session. Potential items include small stones, pipe cleaners and plasticine or colouring pages.

### Cultural practices

Identify cultural practices that may support participants' engagement in the session. Examples may include smudging before beginning the conversation, sharing food and drink, not scheduling meetings on religious or cultural holidays, conversing in pairs or in a conversation circle and using a stone or talking stick.

### Trauma informed practices

Consider participants' personal experience with the content. Invite participants to decide whether they wish to participate based on the session content you have

shared. If they wish to participate, let them know they can take a break or leave the session at any time. Offer help in connecting with community supports prior to or following the session, if needed. These resources are listed in the self-care resources section of this document.

## Section 2

# Begin the session

This section includes steps to follow to facilitate the session before beginning the activities in the conversation guide. These include opening activities to create a welcoming, accessible, trauma-informed and inclusive space. Recommended wording is provided in italics.

### **Provide a territorial acknowledgement or welcome**

Make the connection between the focus of the conversation and the importance of recognizing historical and ongoing discrimination against Indigenous Peoples by offering a territorial acknowledgment or inviting an elder to provide a territorial welcome.

### **Review agenda, explain content and describe how participants can take care of themselves**

Post an agenda and provide a brief description of the session.

Remind participants of the content and format of the session, including when breaks will occur. Explain that the resource and follow up conversation may bring up strong emotions and memories of personal experiences. Invite them to do what they need to take care of themselves. This can include stepping away temporarily. Tell them you will share support resources at the end of the session.

Explain that manipulating something in their hands or colouring may help some of them to focus and make it easier for them to engage in challenging conversations. Pass around box of manipulatives or colouring sheets.

### **Lead an ice breaker**

To get to know each other and provide a gentle introduction to the conversation, you may choose to include an icebreaker. Some possible prompts include:

- Introduce your name, pronouns, where you are joining from (organization, Indigenous territory and town.) The following documents may be helpful:
  - » Information about pronouns: [Guide to Pronouns - Human Rights Office - Simon Fraser University](#)
  - » Indigenous territories in B.C.: [Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land](#)
- Include one fun, personal question. Examples include favourite ice cream flavour, favourite warm drink or something you are good at or like to do.

## **Introduce and develop a community agreement**

### **Introduce the importance of a community agreement.**

Everyone has a responsibility to create and maintain a space that is as inclusive and welcoming as possible, especially for those participants who have experienced discrimination. Participants can do this by developing a community agreement.

### **Highlight the difference between discomfort and harm**

Harm can often occur through language, attitudes and behaviours that are based on stereotypes, biases or negative assumptions related to people's identities, such as race and gender. Harm is not the same as discomfort. During the conversation, some participants may feel uncomfortable, especially if learning about new points of view that challenge the way they currently see the world or contradict a belief they hold. This discomfort may show up as denial, feeling embarrassed, annoyed or ashamed of not being aware of these issues. Discomfort is a common reaction and can be an important first step in transformational learning. It is often helpful to feel uncomfortable in this way because it can help us to reflect on actions that we can take to make positive change. Common responses to discomfort include rejecting the new information as untrue, responding with excess humour or disengaging. These responses are common but can prevent us from moving forward in our learning. Invite participants to reflect on their feelings of discomfort and reflect on ways to understand and accept or address them.

### **Invite participants to develop a community agreement**

Ask participants to co-create the agreement with you by sharing ideas that might help to make the discussion respectful, welcoming and inclusive. Begin with some examples and invite participants to add more. Examples may include:

- Listen in a way that works best for you—this may include moving your body or holding something in your hands
- Share only your own story
- Open your mind to learning new ideas
- Show gratitude when people share their experience
- Acknowledge it is our responsibility and not that of others to take care of our learning
- Respect confidentiality—only share people's stories if you have permission to do so
- Take and make space—speak up if you haven't had the chance to do so, be aware of how much you have spoken and make space for others to speak
- Understand that level of participation can vary—anyone is welcome to pass on speaking and just listen

### **Adopt and apply the community agreement**

Once the community agreement is developed, ask for everyone to indicate their willingness to follow it with a thumbs up. Identify a strategy to ensure the guidelines are followed and respected. Examples include giving participants the choice of reminding the group of a guideline that has been ignored or signaling to the facilitator to do so.

### **Explain the process**

Describe the process for the session based on the information you have gathered about accessibility, cultural practices and participants' personal experiences with the content of the session. Examples include:

#### **Conversation options**

- Sharing circle: If participants are comfortable speaking in a large group, ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate by taking turns speaking around a circle. Provide the option to pass. Pause from time to time to invite those who have not yet spoken to contribute, without singling them out by name. Consider passing an object, such as a stone or talking stick, to identify the speaker.
- Think-pair share: If participants aren't comfortable speaking to a large group, provide time for reflection, followed by optional sharing with a partner.

#### **Break options**

- Stop for a movement break as needed
- Consider moving outside
- Invite participants to stand and move during the conversation and to pause and step away from the group if needed

#### **Snack and refreshments options (optional)**

- Invite participants to contribute to the snacks
- Make snacks and refreshments available before the conversation begins
- Pause half-way through the conversation for a snack break
- Invite participants to serve themselves throughout the conversation

## Section 3

### Facilitate the activity

BCOHRC's conversation guides provide activities and conversation questions to lead groups in exploring resources and participating in follow-up conversations. For example, our Office has developed conversation guides for the following resources:

- [I Love My Human Rights video series](#)
- [Systemic Discrimination video](#)
- [Systemic Discrimination infographic](#)

## Section 4

### Close the session

Thank participants for their participation and consider ways to continue the conversation. The conversation guides include activities to close the session.

#### Support resources

Participating in conversations related to human rights may bring up challenging emotions for those impacted by similar experiences. These feelings can arise during and immediately after the session or in the days or weeks that follow. The following resources and strategies may be helpful:

#### Community supports

Develop a list of local, community supports that you are familiar with in your community.

BCOHRC's [Who Can Help webpage](#) includes a list of community supports which may be helpful.

#### Connecting with others

Reaching out to colleagues, friends or family members who may have similar experiences with the human rights issue discussed during the session can help you to process and work through these feelings and to consider collective actions.