

# Diversity, Otherness and Privilege

## *a guide for conversation*

### Facilitator's Guide

The booklet *Diversity, Otherness and Privilege - a guide for conversation*, produced by the Susanna Wesley Foundation (SWF), is a resource for communities to consider all kinds of diversity, and to consider their own sense of otherness and privilege, both individually and, most crucially, in community.

Obviously a booklet cannot cover this topic comprehensively but we hope nonetheless that it will stimulate questions and dialogue within communities, and generate conversation, empathy, and understanding as an ongoing practice. As you facilitate, therefore, work to balance both space to hear about past experiences and space for **imagining a positive, hopeful future**. Be sure to discuss with your group expectations for the conversation sessions - do they (or you) expect to end up with certainty and 'an end' to the process? Is this realistic?

#### Interwoven categories

As you think about how to facilitate a group using this booklet, your immediate inclination may be to limit the scope of the sessions to a particular type of diversity (cultural diversity, disability, age, gender, income, faith, or LGBTQ+ issues, for example), and indeed this may be what participants expect. However, we are all, of course, complex individuals who may be privileged in one (or more) of these areas, but experience exclusion or oppression in another. This interweaving of categories in our identity is one aspect of what is termed **intersectionality**. Whether you use this word with your group or not, we recommend approaching this booklet, and conversation groups using it, with a view to exploring our identities, both as individuals and as community systems, as inherently and inseparably complex and multi-faceted.

To learn more about intersectionality, search for 'What is Intersectionality Newcastle' on YouTube for an introductory video by Newcastle University.

What this means for group discussion and planning is that we suggest steering groups towards the concepts - diversity, otherness and privilege - as themes for conversation, rather than only focusing on one type of diversity. This kind of approach will enable multi-layered dialogue that allows people to speak about various interwoven facets of their identity and experience.

That said, do discuss with your group how to balance complex identities with focusing on particular diversity issues in your conversation groups.

#### Group preparation

The way you facilitate sessions using the booklet will depend on the size, goals, and timeframe of your group. Small groups of 6-10 are a good size to aim for, meeting several times. It's worth considering together whether you will allow 'new' people to join the group at all, or up to a certain point, or at any point. This is because new people may change the dynamics and development of trusting relationships. We do recommend beginning by establishing just a few **'ground rules' together** as outlined below on the third page of this guide.

We suggest you not over-plan your sessions, allowing flexibility for the discussion to emerge, while also sticking to an agreed time limit. In addition, we propose you begin by working with participants to **decide together** what form the conversations will take, and how the booklet material will be used, modelling a non-hierarchical approach that empowers participants to take responsibility for the group.

Provide the booklet to participants ahead of any gathering. It's good to give those who are slower to read and/or process the chance to ingest the material. Note that large print versions of the booklet and facilitator guide are available.

The success of a conversation group on these challenging issues hinges on the **quality of the relationships** and the intention to speak from love. You might print and hand out the John Wesley quote on the last page of this guide for participants to have as a reminder of this. Consider also **sharing a meal** as part of each conversation session.

As noted above, the booklet is a starting point, not a comprehensive guide. There may be new diagrams your group can create, or you may discuss additional terms the group suggests, such as **victimhood** or **empathy**.

## Group activities

This resource is a 'guide to conversation' but this doesn't mean that talking needs to be the only activity. Role play, for example, can be used to think about experiences or hopes. Go to [presencing.org](http://presencing.org) and click on resources and tools from the Presencing Institute to see how you might use embodied practices to move towards a hopeful future. Likewise you might use tools like paint, modelling dough, or drums to represent and express ideas and experiences. Permission to play often allows people to see themselves, and others, in a new way.

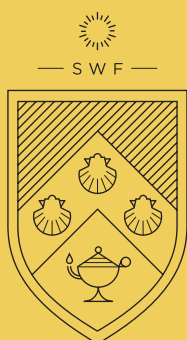
## Facilitating respectful conversation

There are many issues to be aware of when facilitating a conversation on diversity, otherness, and privilege; these issues require skills in group facilitation, conflict management, and respectful communication. It is a lot to ask, and you might consider facilitating as a pair or team. Here we address a few:

- these topics can provoke rapidly heightened, and sometimes unexpected, emotions. It is vital for a facilitator to be able to guide a group, not extinguishing difficult emotions but rather providing a space and place for their exploration and helping avoid escalation into harmful confrontation.
- It is easy as a facilitator to insert one's own agenda into the discussion. You will never be totally neutral but we recommend trying to allow groups to discuss these issues in an open forum. Unless you are a trained therapist, avoid trying to be one and be sure that the group is aware that this is not your role. Signpost people to further specialized help if issues arise.
- Try to make the physical space welcoming and to sit people in a circle with a little space between people so it is not claustrophobic.
- Be attentive to the power dynamics in the room (for example, if you have religious or community leaders and other people together), including your own role, and ensure participants are treated fairly and on an egalitarian basis. This may include allowing and managing periods of silence.

- Providing 'safe space' for all participants can be challenging to do, especially since groups will always include difference. 'Safe space' is in quote marks to show that the notion is itself not without controversy and could be a topic for discussion in the group.
- It will be important to consider the needs of all in providing a grace-filled, hospitable space. On the one hand, participants may want to uncover their own privilege and critically debate cultural norms. On the other hand, it is also important that participants who may frequently feel at risk in their daily life can express themselves safely.
- A good way to create a hospitable space is to allow participants to begin by talking about what that means to them, and to set up a shared understanding of what will be appropriate in their particular group. This will of course already begin to bring to the surface the very issues that the booklet addresses. Examples of a shared understanding *might* include:
  - ▶ **Listening more than speaking**, charitably and deeply, not only to wait for a space in order to respond; consider using a 'talking stick' - only the person holding it can speak (search online for 'indigenous talking stick' to find out more)
  - ▶ Not speaking for others, whether present or absent, individuals or groups
  - ▶ Keeping what is said in the group as confidential
  - ▶ Making all activities and discussion, and the group itself, invitational; no-one is required to participate; participants can come and go from the room
  - ▶ Allowing challenging questions, or the telling of traumatic experiences, but giving a 'trigger' warning that this might happen.
  - ▶ Not asking one person to speak for the subset of the population of which they are a part (unless they choose to)
  - ▶ Avoiding speaking in generalities about a group of people (such as 'women', 'straight people', 'old people', *etc.*)
  - ▶ Allowing silences, and/or intentionally placing them into the schedule at regular intervals
  - ▶ No judging, mocking or dismissing each other, but rather treating each other with respect and love

**Do let us know how your discussion groups go, as you use this booklet.  
We would love to hear from you.**



The Susanna Wesley Foundation (a partnership of the Methodist Church in Britain and the University of Roehampton) is committed to an ethos of participation that facilitates learning in, between, and from communities of faith.

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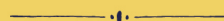
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