



Suggested Group Agreements

Objective: To create a respectful group environment.

Introduction: When talking about highly charged issues that are close to your heart, you may feel uncomfortable listening to perspectives that contradict your experience or position. It's easy to feel defensive and respond with a counter argument. But getting outside your comfort zone is often necessary to understand a different perspective. Remember, listening \neq agreeing!

With that in mind, group agreements define a shared set of behaviors, norms, and expectations for your group. Don't be discouraged if your chapter doesn't always live up to the ideal. Consider them your aspiration. These agreements are based upon the work of Essential Partners.¹

1. **I will speak for myself and from my own experience.** Speak with honesty and admit what you do not know. Begin sentences with "I notice" or "I wonder", as opposed to "you people" or "you think".
2. **I will listen with an open heart and mind.** Assume good will and don't let prior assumptions dissuade you from listening and learning from each other. In addition to listening to the person's position, try listening to understand their feelings and values. You may never agree with their position, but you may discover shared values and make a human connection.
3. **I will set aside the need to persuade others to agree with me.** Acknowledge that there are many forms of religious expression within and between our faiths.
4. **I will not interrupt.** Wait until a speaker has finished before you respond and refrain from sidebar conversations. Using your cell phone is another type of interruption, so put it away during meetings.
5. **I will "step up" to share my thoughts and experiences and then "step back" so others may share theirs.** Give everyone an equal opportunity to speak, or in the words of renowned educator Peggy McIntosh, maintain an autocratic allocation of time for a democratic allocation of voice.²
6. **I will ask a clarifying question** if I don't understand something that's been said. For example, "what do you mean when you said _____?" or, "can you say more about your personal connection to the issue?"
7. **I will "pass" if I don't want to speak.** But if a sister is often silent, check in with her after a meeting. Ask how she's feeling and how you might help her feel more comfortable sharing in the group.
8. **I will maintain confidentiality.** What's said in the group, stays in the group. But please, take what you learn out into the world!

¹ Essential Partners. <https://www.whatisessential.org/fdad>. Fostering Dialogues Across Divides, Chasin and Herzig. You can download this 100+page guide for free or \$40 for hard copy (includes shipping).

² <https://www.speakoutnow.org/speaker/mcintosh-peggy>