

# Elevating the Voices of Young People and Children

## Facilitation Guidelines for Educators

As educators, many of you may have your own protocols for facilitating conversations with your students. For those who may want more information, here are suggestions.

### Getting Started

One approach is to begin the conversation with **dialogue**--a way of capturing divergent thinking. The purpose of dialogue is to uncover a wide range of viewpoints by listening to one another without making assumptions or casting judgments. Dialogue is about welcoming a diversity of ideas by asking participants to respectfully and mindfully listen to each other. It allows peers to gain insights into the experiences and stories that have shaped each other's lives and why someone may respond to the topic in a specific way. During dialogue no one tries to convince others of a particular point of view or negates another's ideas. Dialogue is about being curious and interested in each other's thinking, therefore, genuine questions are encouraged. Dialogue can help establish a climate of trust among the group to know that one's ideas are valued and everyone is listening.

Basic guidelines for dialogue:

1. Every voice needs to be heard, one at a time.
2. If you are not speaking you are listening, without judgement.
3. Demonstrate interest in another's ideas by asking genuine questions.
4. Listen respectfully, mindfully and in the spirit of inquiry.

Dialogue can be created amongst any age level, just attending to different development needs.

### Next Steps

The insights the group gains about each other's experiences and thinking through dialogue, can help the group find areas of agreement that they may want to move forward and build upon. The guidelines for a **skilled discussion**--a way to capture convergent thinking, is a decision-making tool that supports a group to find agreement as they decide upon their collective response to the question they are tackling.

Basic guidelines for a skilled discussion:

1. Remember the purpose of the conversation - the question and the purpose for the activity. Are members willing to contribute and be influenced by each other?
2. Balance advocacy with inquiry. Can we contribute and defend our ideas while asking questions about the ideas of others?
3. Look for and construct shared meaning. What do we mean by \_\_\_?

*These guidelines were developed by early childhood educator and advocate Judy Graves in collaboration with staff at the Oregon Department of Education.*

4. Identify agreements and what may be blocking agreements. What statement does our group agree would be important to share with Oregon leaders?

### Potential questions for student responses:

- What should Oregon's leaders be learning from the Covid-19 crisis?
- What do you imagine could be different and perhaps, even better following this crisis? For your family? For your community? For Oregon? For the planet?
- Can you imagine ways we can help each other better?
- What should be Oregon's priorities during and following this crisis? What opportunities do you imagine?
- Through the challenges of COVID-19, what personal or cultural strengths or assets have you and your community relied on to help you cope, stay positive, be present, and move forward? How can Oregon rely on the many strengths and assets of its people and communities to cope, stay positive, be present, and move forward?
- How has your life changed or your family been impacted by the state's response to Covid-19 (schools and businesses closing, facial coverings, staying home, etc.) ? Are there both negative and positive aspects of this change?
- What do you think learning could be like during and following this pandemic? What are ways your school or classroom could help you learn right now and in the next few years?
- How can we transform what we have learned as we face the challenges of Covid-19 into a new vision and roadmap for the future? How do we want to live and learn in the years ahead?
- [Add your own question]

Children, like adults, are experiencing a wide-range of feelings that accompany the uncertainties posed by this pandemic, including feelings of helplessness along with new ways to connect and engage. This invitation offers a way for students to process together, to have a voice and to share their experiences and stories. We are asking them to activate one of our human species' most distinctive gifts-- imagination! Perhaps, Oregon's students can remind us of this gift and help us all imagine a better future for Oregon and the planet.