

White Allies Network

The quality of our spaces

At our inaugural meeting on the 30th June 2021, we agreed ten qualities we wanted to be characteristic of the spaces we create for helpful and constructive dialogue. **They were designed to act as ground rules for our conversations** to which we would hold ourselves mutually accountable moving forwards.

In launching additional WhatsApp Groups for network members, the Conveners of these groups felt we might need to revisit these to help guide the qualities of these spaces too. The revised set were submitted to our Council of Reference in May 2023 and approved. They are now structured in five pairs of qualities.

Feeling triggered – it is not uncommon for individuals to feel ‘triggered’ - to feel anger, hurt and other difficult emotions - in conversations about race and racism. It is particularly important when that happens during a conversation or when reading a WhatsApp group post that we remember these qualities; to take some breaths, to pause and to reflect, before responding.

We commit to displaying these qualities in all our spaces – to be:

RESPECTFUL and NON-JUDGEMENTAL

- **Being slow to make negative judgements** – we must be allowed to make mistakes if we are to learn. We are not here to point the finger.
- **Being aware of the intersectionality of experiences** – respecting the complexity of individuals’ stories and experiences.

HUMBLE and CURIOUS

- **Allowed to own our ignorance** - safe enough for people to speak out, even if it displays their ignorance, as a starting point from which to move on and learn.
- **Able to say ‘sorry’ authentically** - when we do make mistakes and unintentionally offend: it’s the *impact* of what we say that matters, even if we don’t *intend* to offend. When we apologise we will listen, acknowledge, and name the mistake.
- **Being curious about views very different from our own** - rather than dismissing or reacting to them, pausing before responding especially if we feel ‘triggered’.

MINDFUL and HEARTFUL

- **Care-ful** - thinking before we speak, considerate in our contributions and language, while not being afraid to make genuine mistakes and offending unintentionally.
- **Emotional and Empathetic** - holding back from rationalising away each other's feelings or experiences and able to express our own feelings:
 - To cry (it's a tough topic)
 - To laugh (it's a tough topic so sometimes we will need some light relief)
 - To express anger, pain and fear (holding each other in difficult feelings, helping each other process those feelings).
 - Guilt and shame are common and normal responses to people who care about tackling racism. But staying stuck in guilt and shame is no good to any of us and certainly isn't solid ground for allyship. [from p22, *The Good Ally* by Nova Reid]

OPEN and AUTHENTIC

- **Personal** - able to speak my truth - sharing our own experiences and perspectives, because these are our reality, learning from experiences and perspectives different from mine. Being both accountable for ourselves and conscious of intersectionality.
- **Courageous** – open to challenge and to be challenged; courage to confront ourselves and others.
- **Confidential** – so that what is shared is kept confidential to the context in which it is shared, to encourage everyone to share at an appropriate level.

KIND and OTHER-CENTRED

- **Sensitive to each other's needs** - building relationships first:
 - Don't assume everyone should feel able to share.
 - Give others the time and space they need - some need more than others.
 - Accepting of each other if some are further behind in their understanding than others or don't have fluent, well presented, words.
- **Decentring ourselves** - recognising that becoming antiracist is not about 'me', about defending my ego, but about serving a greater cause.

June 2023

White Allies Network Steering Group

