

Set the tone & create group culture

1. Group culture

In session 1, we talk through how to set some group guidelines so a culture is created where people feel comfortable to share and discuss. Three basic principles can really help with this:

- Thank people for sharing
- Let your group know that if something doesn't feel right to share, it's better not to. (if in doubt don't.)
- Give people the flexibility to engage at the level they want to. It's okay to not have the 'right' answer or for people to say 'they don't want to answer'. There is no pressure, requirement or obligation.

Offering hospitality is a great way to create this culture. If you're hosting in-person, room layout, music and food or drink can help people feel relaxed. If you're hosting online, be friendly on chat as participants arrive. Always allow a little time at the start of the session for participants to chat, encouraging humour and space for them to decompress.

Each session is designed to be run in 90 minutes. You may want to extend the time to allow for more informal catching up at the start.

2. Engage with the issues

Although Difference isn't issue-based and doesn't focus on one specific divide or fracture, the aim is that through the act of listening to stories and reflecting on experiences you will create an opportunity to consider the issues that are most important for you and your wider community. These could relate to race, class, gender, climate justice or other issues.

Engaging well with these issues means welcoming people's experience and story. We often steer away from difficult conversation and disagreement but try not to close down a space where different views are shared – welcome lively conversations with respectful sharing of different perspectives.

If a discussion begins to take over a session, ask participants to pause, thank them for engaging so honestly and suggest you revisit it after the session. You could meet with them individually or together if that gives more space to listen,

and you could revisit the issue as a group at the Re-Gathering after the final session

3. Model the habits

The best way for your participants to understand the habits is to see you model them as you host. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Be Curious:

- Let all your participants know that they are valued by opening up space for them to share, while ensuring no one feels under any pressure to do so
- You don't need to have all the answers – modelling humility and asking questions is really powerful

Be Present:

- Model good listening with your group, avoiding distraction
- Model appropriate vulnerability – bringing something of your own story can be really important in giving your group permission to share

Reimagine:

- Invite God to be at work in your course – the possibilities that God could open up through this course are endless!
- People may surprise you in their willingness to participate or the impact of a session on them, so prepare to adapt.