

Step In: Step Out – using comfort zones

Goals

- to identify and support a range of emotions
- help participants internalize the concept of comfort/discomfort zones
- to strengthen the container through people's self-revealing.

Time 30-45 minutes

How to Lead

A note on comfort zones: We use the concept of “comfort zones” and “discomfort zones.” This is different from building safety. If the facilitator and group do a good job of building safety, then the participants will frequently go out of their comfort zone in order to stretch and grow. Allowing feelings of discomfort can, therefore, be one sign of growing safety in a group. We encourage participants to consciously take risks or challenges that step outside of their comfort zones.

Comfort zones is an important concept and it helps for participants to integrate it deeply, as they can more fully make choices on behalf of their own learning. This exercise is a physical way to with the concept of comfort / discomfort zones and get into a playful mode about stepping out of their comfort zones! And, as a bonus, this tool is a way to both talk about comfort zones and simultaneously builds the container as people actually step outside of their comfort zones through personal self-disclosure.

Set-Up On the floor

Using masking tape or a large rope, draw a large circle. The circle should be large enough that all the participants could comfortably fit into and move around in the circle. And there should be space outside of the circle, too (also for all the participants).

Running the Exercise

During this exercise, be playful and offer energy to the exercise. Keep people from getting too stuck by keeping the exercise running along (“okay, let's get back together”). Get everyone standing inside the circle. Then, explain that this circle represents their comfort zones. Ask participants to call out attitudes/emotions/behaviors that they are currently doing in this training that are within their comfort zones. As someone calls out something, if other people agree, have them stand next to them. As people are naming things, point out that what might be in one person's comfort zone might not be in another person's. And even that what is comfortable at one moment might feel different in another context.

Then, when the group looks ready for the next step, explain that of course what is outside of the circle are attitudes/emotions/behaviors in their discomfort zone. Again, have participants name things outside of their comfort zones. As people name things, if others feel similarly have them step outside of the comfort zone (the circle), too. Encourage the group to notice their personal feelings. Then have everyone step back into their comfort zones.

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(A note for your co-facilitators: it can be great if they want to participate. And in moments when someone steps outside of their comfort zone and nobody joins, it is a good moment for facilitators to see if they can find it in them to honestly join the person in the discomfort zone.)

Debrief

Have everyone check-in with their buddies, especially if people have taken deep risks. Encourage more personal expressions (either in small groups or in the large group): “How was it when you stepped out?” “Did anyone worry that nobody else might join them? How did that feel?” In the large group debrief about this: “What’s the value of stepping outside of your comfort zone?” Encourage consideration of how learning is actually a skill for third-party nonviolent intervention. Also, this is a great time to make the teaching point that the comfort zone actually grows as people keep stepping outside of their comfort zone.

Where This Tool Came From

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