

#Tool 11a



The main barriers to interpersonal dialogue

Objective

The purpose of this tool is to identify the main barriers that hinder communication and productive dialogue aimed at effectively countering and challenging prejudices, rumours and misinformation relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), whilst also identifying those factors that may lead to revictimisation, invisibility or insecurity for LGBTIQ people during dialogue processes, thereby fostering safe, respectful and transformative environments for conversation.

How to use the tool

- The content of the tool contributes to identify and understand the various barriers that hinder productive dialogues designed to encourage reflection and critical thinking. It should be used before exploring the most meaningful communication strategies for maintaining productive dialogues (See Tool 11b).
- It can be used in training sessions and workshops, as well as for individual reflection on how these barriers influence dialogue.

Recommendations

- ✦ Begin by reflecting on how these barriers may influence personal assumptions, biases, attitudes and emotions, and how they may affect dialogue.
- ✦ Participatory methods such as group discussions and role-play can help identify and analyse these barriers, while encouraging reflection on how they can be addressed and are specially recommended for Anti-rumours trainings and workshops.
- ✦ Recognise that not all dialogues start from a position of equality. Experiences of discrimination, violence or exclusion can significantly influence participants' attitudes, expectations and emotions, and ability to engage.
- ✦ Examine the polarisation of the people involved in the dialogue, as well as assessing whether there are people directly affected by the issue.
- ✦ Provide for mechanisms to support emotional well-being amongst all the participants of a training, focus group or conversation.

Main barriers to productive dialogue

1. Communication and attitudinal barriers

Barrier	What does it involve?
Confrontational and moralising style	Feeling attacked or judged often leads to defensive reactions, reducing openness to reflection, alternative perspectives and self-questioning.
Lack of active listening	People are more likely to consider different perspectives when they feel listened to and have the opportunity to express their views without unnecessary interruption. Listening involves recognising the validity of others' experiences, even if they do not coincide with one's own.
Ambiguous, complex, technical or inappropriate language	- The use of complex or technical language, with references to a great deal of data, can lead to a sense of disconnection and misunderstandings. - The use of pathologising expressions, the incorrect use of pronouns and names, or the use of obsolete terminology.
Body language	Pay attention to body language. Even when using a respectful tone, gestures and facial expressions may convey confrontation or disapproval.
The wrong context	- Some conversations require a setting that supports calm, respectful, safe and, where appropriate, confidential communication. Choose the setting and timing carefully. - In conversations relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics, it is advisable to assess whether the minimum conditions of safety, trust and respect are in place for the people concerned. - Analysing potential power dynamics.

2. Cognitive and emotional barriers

Barrier	What does it involve?
Ego protection	- When beliefs are closely linked to a person's identity, challenges may trigger defensive reactions, particularly if the person feels judged, discredited or portrayed as uninformed. - Direct attempts to change someone's views may reinforce existing beliefs rather than encourage reflection. Anti-rumours dialogue should therefore not be approached as a debate with winners and losers.
Confirmation bias	People often give greater weight to information that confirms existing beliefs than to information that challenges them.
Preference for simplicity and essentialism	- People often favour simple explanations for complex realities, reinforcing stereotypes and overgeneralisations. - There is often an assumption that there is only one legitimate way of expressing gender, forming relationships, creating families or belonging.
The effort involved in changing one's mind and the belief in neutrality	- Reconsidering deeply held beliefs requires cognitive and emotional effort and is more likely when people perceive a reason to do so. - The discomfort caused by conflicting beliefs may reduce openness to new information and make it more difficult to reconsider existing views. - Many people believe that talking about diversity implies taking an ideological stance.
The emotional burden	- Intense emotions, such as fear, anger or anxiety, may reduce the capacity for critical reflection and increase the likelihood of defensive responses. - Certain discourses on diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics, rely precisely on emotions such as fear, uncertainty or the perception of a threat to the family or certain social values, making it difficult to analyse the information critically. - Fear-based narratives often attract greater attention, particularly when they frame difference as a source of threat or uncertainty. - Personal, family or community experiences of discrimination or violence may evoke strong emotions that influence openness to dialogue.

Barrier	What does it involve?
Overestimating our own knowledge	Limited knowledge of a subject may lead people to overestimate their understanding, making it more difficult to consider alternative perspectives (a phenomenon commonly referred to as the Dunning–Kruger effect).
Limited knowledge of the reality of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics	- Many people form opinions about diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics based on incomplete information, stereotypes or limited experiences. - A lack of awareness of the internal diversity within the LGBTIQ community, of the history, of the discrimination suffered or of the existing legal framework can hinder understanding of certain realities and encourage oversimplified interpretations. - The absence of role models and positive experiences can also contribute to perpetuating prejudices or misconceptions.
Dialogue fatigue	Many LGBTIQ people have spent years answering the same questions or defending their legitimacy.

3. Social barriers related to identity

Barrier	What does it involve?
Social pressure	- People tend to avoid expressing doubts or changes of opinion for fear of rejection. - Heteronormativity, as well as gender roles, make it particularly difficult for some people to express doubts or change their minds.
Loyalty to the group	Changing one's mind can be perceived as betraying the group to which one belongs and may lead to conflict or a loss of status.
Polarised, opposing groups	- Complex realities are often simplified into opposing groups, making it more difficult to recognise nuance, identify common ground and foster mutual understanding. - Discussions within homogeneous groups tend to radicalise their positions.
Personal narrative	People generally seek consistency between their beliefs, values and sense of identity. Information that challenges this coherence may therefore be difficult to accept.

Barrier	What does it involve?
Dehumanisation of the other	- Dialogue is unlikely to be constructive if the other person is viewed as incapable of reasoning or dismissed solely because of the group to which they belong. Empathy and mutual respect are essential conditions for meaningful dialogue. - Dehumanisation can also occur when the legitimacy, dignity or right of certain people to define and express their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics is called into question. - It also occurs when certain identities are presented as a social problem, a threat or an exception that needs to be constantly justified.
Invisibilisation and/or misrepresentation of experiences and realities	- When certain experiences or forms of diversity are barely represented in the media, education, culture or everyday life, it becomes more difficult to understand them and discuss them on an informed basis. - The lack of role models can encourage the emergence of stereotypes, oversimplifications or misconceptions.

4. Barriers relating to information

Barrier	What does it involve?
Misinformation	- Repeated exposure to incorrect or biased information makes it difficult to establish a common factual basis, which hinders dialogue. - Misinformation may include rumours, myths, anti-rights rhetoric or pseudoscientific information that contributes to generating fear, rejection or confusion.
The 'illusory' truth	When an incorrect statement is repeated many times, the perception of its truthfulness increases, even if it is false.
Information overload	Information overload often leads people to rely on cognitive shortcuts and familiar narratives to make sense of complex issues.
Distrust of sources	When information comes from sources that are not trusted, it is less likely to encourage reflection or constructive dialogue.

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