

#Tool 11b



Strategies for an interpersonal dialogue to debunk rumours

Objective

The purpose of this tool is to identify and describe the main communication strategies that can be used to hold productive and transformative dialogues with the aim of actively challenging prejudices, misinformation, disinformation, and exclusionary narratives relating to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristic (SOGIESC), whilst promoting conversations that respect diversity and human rights.

How to use the tool

- ✦ The content of this tool helps you to identify and learn about diverse communication strategies and tactics that can be put into practice in everyday conversations and dialogues carried out by trained Anti-rumours agents. It can be used as material for training sessions, workshops or activities designed to promote critical thinking and communication skills, enabling people to develop the ability to challenge prejudices and exclusionary narratives in their daily lives. The content of this tool should be used after having worked through the content of Tool 11a on the main barriers to productive dialogue
- ✦ Participatory methods such as group discussions and role-plays can be used to put into practice the various strategies and tactics described in the tool during anti-rumours trainings and workshops.

Recommendations

- ✦ During Anti-rumours trainings or workshops it is advisable not to try to delve deeply into all the strategies at once, but to select a few to put into practice and work on them in small groups to ensure meaningful learning.
- ✦ It is highly recommended to test the efficiency of combining different communication strategies, depending on our confidence, abilities, context, and audience.
- ✦ When facing antrirumours dialogues in our daily lives, it is important to adapt the strategies to the context, the nature of the relationship between the participants of the dialogue and the level of polarisation in the conversation, always assessing whether the conditions are right for maintaining a safe and constructive dialogue.
- ✦ The final section includes a matrix of practical dialogue examples covering various contexts and types of interlocutors, which may serve as a source of inspiration.

Communication strategies for dialogue

1. Attitudinal tools

Attitudinal tools are key because they create the psychological climate necessary to prevent the other person from becoming defensive, to encourage them to question their own beliefs, and to facilitate an exchange based on reflection rather than confrontation.

Attitude	What does this involve?
Humility and critical self-reflection	- Recognise that everyone is influenced by prejudice, social environments and misinformation. - Acknowledge that personal experiences, privileges and social context can shape the way reality is perceived and interpreted. - Remain open to questioning and revisiting existing beliefs and assumptions. - Do not expect a single conversation to bring about deep reflection. A more realistic objective may be to encourage reconsideration, offer an alternative perspective or challenge an overgeneralisation. - Recognise how social norms relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics can shape perceptions, expectations and assumptions.
Empathy	- The other person needs to feel that there is a genuine interest in understanding their perspective, even when there is disagreement. - This increases their sense of being understood and encourages them not to shut themselves off, but to remain more open to questioning their own views. - Empathy also involves recognising and validating life experiences that differ from one's own, particularly when they relate to situations of discrimination, invisibility or exclusion. - Empathy does not mean agreeing with or justifying every opinion, but rather understanding the other person's experiences and emotions without compromising the commitment to human rights.
Maintaining a respectful attitude	- Maintaining a respectful attitude and treating people with dignity, and not resorting to personal attacks, even when there is a strong disagreement. - While anger and frustration are perfectly justifiable feelings during difficult conversations, the ability to regulate emotions should prevent your interlocutor from feeling attacked and shutting down. - Redirecting the conversation towards shared objectives and less contentious ground or postponing the conversation entirely are good de-escalation strategies when the conditions are no longer right for a productive dialogue. - Maintaining respect for the person does not mean legitimising discriminatory speech or human rights violations.

Attitude	What does this involve?
Strategic patience	- Do not expect discussions to produce significant short-term results. - The aim is not to “win” the discussion, but to express disagreement respectfully and encourage gradual, sustainable change.
Recognising the limits of dialogue	- Some conversations may involve derogatory views that undermine the human rights of LGBTIQ people or promote hatred. - In such situations, it may become clear that the minimum conditions for dialogue are absent. Setting clear boundaries before such incidents arise and terminating engagement when they do may be the most appropriate response. - It is also essential in such cases to be aware of the legal framework relating to hate speech and hate crimes, and to consider legal action whenever necessary.

2. Strategies for building an empathetic connection

Strategies that foster an empathetic connection are essential because they defuse the ‘us versus them’ logic of confrontation and replace it with a relational framework in which the other person ceases to be an adversary and becomes a dialogue partner with whom it is possible to build understanding.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Active listening	- Listening is a sign of respect, genuine interest and empathy. - Examples of people who have reconsidered views similar to those of the other person may encourage reflection on their own beliefs. - Focusing on understanding the other person instead of waiting for our “line”. - Asking strategic questions is the main tool in dialogue, as it helps gather valuable information about: concerns, motivations, prejudices, fears, misinformation, personal experiences, shared interests and inconsistencies, which can all be valuable in guiding the dialogue. - Briefly summarising the other person’s views in your own words (e.g. “If I have understood correctly, what you are saying is...”) helps demonstrate active listening and build trust.
Speaking from their values and interests	- Frame arguments in ways that connect with the other person’s values and interests. This is more likely to encourage openness to dialogue and reflection. - Avoid using values that might reinforce prejudices, and bear in mind the framework of fundamental values and human rights.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Referring to shared concerns and objectives	- Refer to shared concerns and interests to strengthen empathy and mutual understanding. - Highlight shared values or objectives (e.g. individual freedom, improving the neighbourhood or community cohesion) to reduce “us versus them” thinking and foster a sense of common purpose.
Acknowledging points of agreement	It is important to be able to acknowledge points of agreement on certain aspects of their arguments: “You’re right about this...” so that they remain more open to hearing disagreement with the central discussion point.

3. Maintaining their attention and interest

Strategies for maintaining the other person’s attention and interest are key because they keep them engaged, preventing rejection or disengagement and helping the dialogue to progress on the basis of respect, understanding, curiosity and a low-tension atmosphere.

Strategies	What do they involve?
Positive messages	- Avoid focusing on telling the other person that they are wrong or questioning their views, as this is likely to trigger defensive reactions and reduce openness to dialogue. - Focus on arguments, experiences and stories that encourage reflection and contribute to constructive dialogue. - Whenever possible, complement the report of discrimination with examples of coexistence, inclusion and social contribution.
Clear and understandable messages	- Avoid overloading the conversation with facts, references, statistics or complex theoretical concepts, as this may reduce engagement and hinder dialogue. - Prioritise clear communication by combining relevant evidence with its practical implications and concrete examples.
Introducing complexity in layers	- Prioritise clarity while gradually introducing complexity to challenge oversimplifications and highlight nuance. - Introduce complexity progressively, starting with exceptions and gradually incorporating additional nuances. E.g. In a conversation about the rumour “LGBTIQ people are always trying to impose their way of life on others”, you could introduce complexity progressively: First: “Of course, not every LGBTIQ person thinks or behaves in the same way.” Then: “People have different experiences and opinions, just like in any other group.” Finally: “It is therefore important to distinguish between individual

	experiences, different LGBTIQ realities, and broader social debates, rather than making generalisations about the whole group.” This approach starts with a simple exception to the generalisation and gradually introduces more nuances without overwhelming the person or making the conversation confrontational.
Encouraging curiosity	▪ New information is more likely to be considered when it connects with people’s interests, concerns or lived experiences. ▪ Use facts, historical references, lived experiences and testimonies from LGBTIQ people, together with examples that reflect the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics.
Easing tension	▪ If a particular topic becomes a barrier to constructive dialogue, temporarily shift the conversation towards less contentious issues before returning to it when appropriate.

4. Challenging stereotypes and correcting misinformation and disinformation

Meaningful communication strategies should create the conditions for information challenging stereotypes, misinformation and disinformation to be considered, rather than perceived as a threat. Avoiding defensive reactions is a key part of this process.

Strategies	What does this involve?
The power of stories	▪ Personal experiences and stories with an emotional element can be far more effective than ‘neutral’ data and information. ▪ Stories that reflect real experiences, a diversity of life journeys and shared elements of the human experience – and which emphasise commonalities – have a greater impact. ▪ Ensure that the stories also reflect internal diversity within the LGBTIQ communities (age, background, disability, rural living, family situations, etc.).
Highlighting a lack of knowledge indirectly	▪ If your interlocutor is unfamiliar with a key aspect of the topic under discussion (e.g. the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity), avoid responding with criticism or ridicule (e.g. “But how can you talk about this if you can’t even tell one from the other?”). ▪ It is better to ‘remind’ them of the concepts without lecturing them or trying to make them look foolish.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Correcting false beliefs without lecturing	- When inaccurate or misleading information is identified, respond by providing accurate information in a way that encourages dialogue and reflection. - If the other person suggests that sexual orientation or gender identity is a choice, a whim or a fad, it may be helpful to share a personal learning experience. For example, explaining that similar doubts or assumptions were once held, but changed through greater understanding of the realities and lived experiences of LGBTIQ people, may encourage reflection.
Challenging generalisations	- When faced with comments that generalise about LGBTIQ people, the appropriate strategy is to highlight the diversity of experiences, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics that exist within these communities. - Draw on personal stories, positive role models and compelling evidence to highlight the diversity of LGBTIQ people and their lived experiences.
The credibility of information sources	- When addressing misinformation and disinformation, use sources that the other person is more likely to consider credible and trustworthy. - Using a diverse range of reliable sources helps increase credibility and adapt communication to diverse audiences. - It can be particularly useful to draw on sources specialising in sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, as well as organisations, research and leading bodies in the field of human rights.
Focus on the underlying causes	- Rather than responding directly to a specific rumour, consider exploring the concerns and fears that underlie it. - Redirect the conversation towards the underlying factors that may contribute to those concerns, such as limited knowledge, misinformation, disinformation, previous experiences, perceived loss of status, uncertainty or a sense of grievance.
Using alternative narratives to avoid reinforcing rumours	- Rumours are reinforced through repetition. Repeating them, even with the intention of refuting them, may inadvertently strengthen their visibility or credibility. - In many cases, the suitable strategy is to step outside the framework of the rumour and challenge it indirectly through alternative stories and narratives based on a different framework and set of values. Method: “the sandwich theory”. - When it is necessary to address false or misleading information directly, avoid repeating the rumour unnecessarily. - Start with accurate information, refer briefly to the misleading claim only if necessary, and conclude with accurate information or compelling evidence that reinforces the facts.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Identifying the “hidden” motives of those who spread rumours	- Where appropriate, draw attention to the interests or agendas that may underpin the spread of certain narratives or rumours. - Exercise caution when the other person identifies with those actors or narratives, as this may trigger defensive reactions and reduce openness to dialogue.

5. Reinforcing the reasons for change

As well as challenging stereotypes and misinformation, it is crucial to reinforce the reasons that might encourage the other person to re-examine their own beliefs, as change depends not only on correcting information or challenging stereotypes, but also on triggering internal motivations that make such an adjustment cognitively feasible and psychologically acceptable.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Highlighting the complexities and consequences	- There are often people who advocate a policy proposal or initiative that offers a seemingly clear and simple ‘solution’ to a complex issue. - It is only when they are asked to work out the practical implementation of that measure that they begin to identify complexities and negative consequences that had not been taken into account and which may even run counter to their own interests. - Encourage people to imagine how certain proposals would affect those close to them or their loved ones if they were put into practice.
Offering alternative explanations	- Beliefs that help people make sense of complex realities or provide a sense of certainty are unlikely to change unless they are replaced by an alternative explanation that fulfils a similar function. - When challenging a misleading belief, provide a credible and evidence-based alternative explanation. Simply refuting the belief is rarely sufficient; the alternative also needs to be meaningful and acceptable to the other person.
Sharing examples of changes of heart	- Examples of people who have reconsidered views similar to those of the other person may encourage reflection on their own beliefs. - Such examples are often more influential when they involve people with whom the other person identifies or shares values, interests or experiences.

Strategies	What does this involve?
Facilitating the process of 'change'	- As changing deeply held beliefs can be challenging, create the conditions that make this process easier, while avoiding approaches that may threaten the person's sense of identity or self-esteem. - An impactful strategy is to offer a narrative that is favourable to change and consistent with the person's values and personal narrative (e.g. 'This is consistent with your values... this ties in with your concern about...').

Reminder

Not every conversation needs to be seen through to the end. When a dialogue becomes a space for humiliation, denial of rights or violence towards LGBTIQ people, the priority shifts from persuasion to protecting the dignity, safety and well-being of those concerned. Knowing how to set boundaries, end a conversation or seek out other spaces for advocacy is also part of an impactful anti-rumours strategy.

Matrix of examples: Situation – strategy – potential outcome

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
Conversation with someone close to you (a friend or family member) with whom you have a relationship of trust, in an informal setting and without any prior tension. There is scope for a lengthy, two-way dialogue.	Active listening, open-ended questions, acknowledging common ground, sharing personal stories, gradually introducing nuances.	Greater willingness to question beliefs, explore the conversation in greater depth and continue the dialogue in the future.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
A conversation with a stranger during a community event, where there is no prior trust and time is limited.	Brief listening, exploratory questions, clear and positive messages, shared objectives, avoiding complex debates.	Encourage reconsideration, sparking curiosity and leaving a positive impression that facilitates future conversations.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
A dialogue with a person in a position of authority (teaching staff, management, a political or institutional leader) in relation to the person they are speaking to.	Prepare solid arguments, use credible sources, acknowledge points of agreement, maintain a respectful tone and focus on shared objectives.	Encourage active listening and increase the chances of influencing policy or bringing about institutional change.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
A conversation amongst peers in which stereotypical comments or jokes about LGBTIQ people are made. There is peer pressure on the person who speaks up.	Ask the group questions, challenge generalisations, introduce alternative perspectives, use relatable examples and avoid singling out any one person directly.	Reduce peer pressure and encourage a range of opinions to emerge within the group.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
A conversation in a highly polarised context where the other person is showing strong emotional involvement and little willingness to listen.	Seek to remain respectful, defuse tension, look for common ground and assess whether it is appropriate to continue the conversation.	Avoid escalating the conflict and preserve the possibility of future dialogue.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
Conversation with someone who is repeating a rumour based mainly on a lack of knowledge, without displaying a hostile attitude.	Explain concepts without lecturing, use stories, provide accurate information and encourage curiosity.	Increase understanding and encourage a re-evaluation of initial beliefs.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
Dialogue with a person who uses clearly discriminatory language to provoke or confront others publicly. There is an unequal power dynamic or a risk to LGBTIQ people present.	Set clear boundaries, protect individuals concerned, do not fuel the confrontation, and consider ending the dialogue.	Protect the dignity and safety of those affected by avoiding legitimising hate speech.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
A facilitated conversation in a workshop or training session, where there is a safe space and sufficient time for reflection.	Role-play, reflective questions, personal stories, case studies, collaborative dialogue and perspective-taking.	Development of critical thinking and a greater understanding of the complexity of the situations addressed.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
Conversations on social media or digital platforms where multiple people participate and the audience is more important than the original speaker.	Alternative narratives, brief and positive messages, verified information, avoiding repeating rumours, and deciding when not to respond.	Reducing the spread of misinformation and disinformation providing useful resources to those observing the dialogue.

Dialogue situation	Most appropriate strategies	Potential outcome
Conversation with a person directly affected by discrimination or violence against LGBTIQ people. There might be a more intense emotional reaction due to personal lived experience.	Active listening, emotional validation, empathy and respect for their pace, whilst avoiding questioning or minimising their experience.	Build trust, provide recognition and create a safe space for dialogue.

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