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A ready-to-use template for opening workshops, meetings, and events with respect, kindness, and understanding.

neurodiverse workshop and meeting guideline Template

Setting the Tone for an Inclusive and Equitable Space

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# Why Use This Tool?

There are two important reasons to use this tool or something like it to begin your group activities:

1. It is a promise to your participants that you value their diverse needs and expertise and are committed to understanding and accommodating everyone present.
2. It allows you to clearly state what is expected of your participants in terms of respectful behaviour.

# How To Use This Toolkit

## Before you start:

1. Setting the tone is a promise you make to your participants. Read the expanded explanations for each tone guideline and decide whether you can commit to upholding them. If you cannot, you can still use this tool, but I ask that you modify the list to reflect what you will actually provide and expect.
2. Make the guideline list available to your participants for the duration of your presentation. I like to have a poster on the wall for in-person workshops, or a digital copy sent in advance for virtual events. You are welcome to copy and paste the plain text guideline list to add to your own documentation, or isolate and print or share the embedded images on the presentation and poster format overview pages.

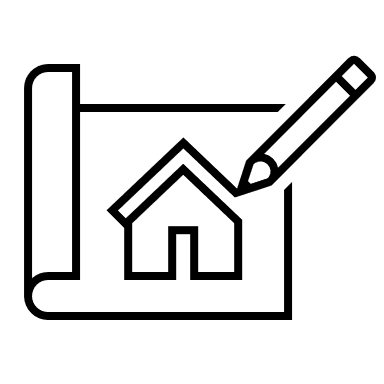
## Opening your Event:

It is important that an inclusive event contain a land acknowledgment appropriate to your region, but that is outside the scope of this tool.

**ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: 5 MINUTES**

1. Direct participants to where they can see or refer to the Setting the Tone guidelines.
2. Read or otherwise go over the expanded definitions for each guideline item.
3. Allow for questions, clarifications, or requests for additional accommodations.

# Overview: Plain Text Version



SETTING THE TONE

1. **We are all experts**
2. **We are all learning**
3. **Share the air**
4. **Communication takes many forms**
5. **Confidentiality**
6. **This can be hard so...**
7. **This is an intersectional space**
8. **Mutual respect**

# Overview: Presentation Format

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# Overview: Poster/ Full Page Format

Text

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# Expanded Definitions

## WE ARE ALL EXPERTS

A workshop may only have one facilitator, but it has many experts. Each of us is an expert in our lived experience. We encourage you to share, at your own comfort level, your learning and experiences that will broaden our understanding.

## WE ARE ALL LEARNING

Learning is a lifelong process. We are all on different points in that journey, (your facilitators included) and so we do our best to gently teach while being understanding of our fellow participants who might not know as much as we do yet. Remember that education is a privilege that we have not all had equal access to.

There are no stupid questions, but there can be harmful ways of phrasing them. We welcome all questions but ask that they be made in a respectful manner and come from a place of willingness to learn. Remember that if you feel you need clarification, there is a good chance that someone else will as well, and they might be hesitant to ask.

## SHARE THE AIR

Understand that our diverse group has diverse sensory needs and thresholds. This may be exacerbated by trauma histories. In order to allow all of us to participate fully and in relative comfort we ask that you:

* Eliminate or greatly reduce scented products and perfumes
* Refrain from deliberately speaking over other participants
* Keep your contributions succinct, when possible, to allow everyone to participate
* Avoid raised voices and aggressive questioning

Some neurodivergent people struggle with knowing intuitively when it is a good turn for them to speak. We are extra mindful of this as we create (optional and voluntary) space for people who either have not had a chance to speak in a while, or who might inadvertently begin speaking at the same time as another participant or facilitator. We may also help with gentle reminders to share the floor if time becomes short.

## COMMUNICATION TAKES MANY FORMS

We are all familiar with some communication accommodations. As a bilingual province, we regularly provide support for people to interact in both English and French. And we have all seen sign language interpreters facilitating communication for Deaf participants. Many people in the Intellectual and Developmental Disability (I/DD) community communicate best visually or textually.

To this end, we promise to provide as much written documentation in advance as possible and enable live captioning for video workshops.

We also welcome and highly encourage the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication technology (AAC) that translates symbols and text to AI-generated spoken word. If you can’t remember encountering anyone using AAC before, the late Stephen Hawking was a famous early adopter.

It is also important to note that words are not *always* communication. If your group includes members who have involuntary echolalia or vocal tics, the polite response is to ignore them as you would a hiccup or a cough.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

We encourage our participants to share personal experiences and anecdotes if you feel safe and comfortable doing so. Any such disclosures should not leave this space.

Please share and apply what is taught but protect and respect what is shared.

## THIS CAN BE HARD SO...

This subject can be difficult or stressful to learn about. Group meetings and workshops can be difficult in and of themselves to some.

We highly encourage you to take the steps needed to be comfortable and regulated. These can include:

* Taking breaks when needed
* Leaving the room if you are triggered or overwhelmed
* Participating in some or all of a video workshop with your camera and/or microphone off
* Having a support person in attendance
* Practising self-regulation skills like moving around, stimming, humming, or fidgeting

## THIS IS AN INTERSECTIONAL SPACE

We acknowledge that the most vulnerable amongst us may come from numerous experiences of marginalization including discrimination based on race, orientation, trauma history, financial status, gender, and disability. It is not enough to be accepting, we must work to be an actively anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-oppressive space. Harmful and discriminatory behaviour is not allowed.

## MUTUAL RESPECT

Overt disrespect will not be tolerated. I remind you that we are all learning, but we expect all facilitators and participants to do their best to respect each other’s pronouns, identities, needs, and limitations. We will make mistakes, but we pledge to operate from the best of intentions, and to apologize and correct when we get it wrong.

# Thanks/Acknowledgements

In 2010, I had the privilege of participating in SVNB’s (then called FSACC, Fredericton Sexual Assault Crisis Centre) The Empowerment Project: Train the Trainer program.

This was where I first encountered the use of “Setting the Tone” as a way of introducing the guidelines and commitments for a workshop. I have not since found a phrasing that more perfectly encapsulates what I would like to promise and expect when I present a program, and I am deeply grateful to them for this learning.

The beautiful phrasing of guideline #3, share the air, also comes from this same program.

Many thanks to SVNB for their important work and wonderful training.