

# White Ally Dialogue Script

*Designed & tested by our partners at Sewanee: University of the South*

## **Materials Needed**

- Name tags
- Index cards
- Pens / pencils

## Introduction & Purpose Statement

Welcome. The purpose of this dialogue is to acknowledge our shortcomings and successes when it comes to racial justice in order to become better allies at Sewanee. Our purpose is not to persuade, debate, or convince each other of our positions, or to judge each other about mistakes that we have made, but to make a space to listen and speak on a topic that is really difficult to talk about but also really important for our community right now.

Anti-racist activists often speak about the importance of white people learning to take responsibility for their actions, mistakes, and complicity with racism, and to do so in a way that does not place the burden for change or listening on the BIPOC community. This is a space for us to begin to do that work. It also is just one step in a long-term process of growing our own skills for anti-racism and working together to change Sewanee.

## Hopes for the Dialogue

We hope that you will get a chance to reflect and speak deeply about your own experiences and listen to others' experiences, and to do so in a way that demonstrates a commitment to allyship around racial justice.

We also hope you'll come away with some concrete ideas, based on what you learned from others, or what you share about next steps, for how you can grow as an ally.

**MY ROLE AS FACILITATOR** is to:

- To guide you through the dialogue and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.
- To present the agreements for your approval and/or amending.
- To pose structured questions
- To remind you of the agreements, if you need reminding
- I will also be participating in the dialogue



Due to the sensitive nature of our topic, we've also asked faculty and staff who have training in dialogue to be here as support in case we as a group need help navigating these difficult topics. They will be observing, unless we ask them to intervene.

## The Structure of the Dialogue

We will begin by reviewing the Communication Agreements. Then we'll move to a connecting question that will help us get a sense of what brings each of us here today.

Then we'll do a series of "go-round" questions, where everyone will have a chance to reflect in silence and then speak one after another. Each person will have an equal amount of time to respond to the question. If you have questions for people, write them down, you'll be able to ask those directly to each other later.

Then we will open the space in a less structured time for you to have the opportunity to ask each other questions to increase your understanding of others in the room.

Then we'll close by asking each of you to reflect on your experience here together and look toward next steps.

Any questions? Let's get started now with the Agreements.

## Agreements

In order to have a constructive conversation where people speak thoughtfully and listen respectfully, we have proposed the following agreements.

- Recognize that we have all made mistakes when it comes to issues of race or racism; our purpose in sharing these stories is not to judge but to learn from them
- Confidentiality
- Allow others to finish their speaking; avoid interrupting
- Avoid attempts to persuade
- Share airtime
- Speak for yourself and not on behalf of others
- Respect time boundaries
- "Pass" or "pass for now" will be accepted
- Cell phones off or on vibrate

Does anyone have any questions about these? Is there anything missing?



Does everyone agree to follow these agreements? [*Request nods or verbal yeses*]

OK, so these are the Agreements that you're all committing to doing your best to follow. Your commitment also serves to authorize me as a facilitator to remind you if need be.

## Connecting Question

Today we're going to be talking about our identities as white allies, when we have failed as allies, when we have stepped up, and what we would like to do better or differently in the future. Before we do that, let's take a moment to introduce ourselves and hear what we are bringing to the conversation.

Please answer the following question in one breath, the time it takes to breathe in and out.

What is your name, your preferred pronouns, and one thing (hope, experience, responsibility) you are setting aside to participate in this conversation? What is one thing you'd like to bring with you into this conversation?

I'll let us all think for a moment and then when someone is ready to begin, they can. We'll then go around the circle.

## Structured Go-Arounds

### First Question

Now we're ready to move on to the first question. You will have 2 minutes to answer the following question. During those 2 minutes, we'll reflect in silence, so everyone has a chance to gather their thoughts. If you'd like, you can write your thoughts down with the index cards and pens. Here is the question:

Please share a story of a time when you fell short of being an ally. This might have been a time when you engaged in or failed to stand up against racism or microaggressions. What was your initial reaction? Would you react differently today?

Please refrain from disclosing any identifying information about the parties involved.

Take 2 minutes to think and make some notes about what you're going to say, so that you'll be able to give full attention to each other when others are speaking.



*[After 2 minutes]*

As you listen to each other, listen to understand, not to judge or find fault. You also may hear things that you want to ask about—write your questions down as you think about them, you'll have time to ask each other later. Don't interrupt at this point—unless you are having a hard time hearing.

I am going to keep time for you. So when you are ready to speak, I am going to start the 2 minutes. When the 2 minutes are up, I will let you know and then you can find a quick way to finish your speaking—you finish your sentence, but not your paragraph.

*[Turning to a person next to you]*

Would you like to start?

*[After each person has answered or chosen to pass]*

Before we go on to the next question, we want to capture this moment of curiosity. Reflect back on what you heard. Is there a question that you would like to ask later when we get to that section that you are curious about—something you heard just now that you wish you could hear more about—jot that question down so you will have it when we get to the section meant for questions.

### Second Question

Now it's time for the second question. We'll do the same thing we did for the first question.

Think of a time where you were an ally or stood up for racial justice or stood up against microaggressions. What did you do and what did you learn from it? If you can't think of something, please reflect on why that might be.

Take 2 minutes to think and make some notes about what you're going to say, so that you'll be able to give full attention to each other when others are speaking.

*[After each person has answered or chosen to pass]*

Before we go on to the next question, we want to capture this moment of curiosity. Reflect back on what you heard. Is there a question that you would like to ask later when we get to that section that you are curious about—something you heard just now that you wish you could hear more about—jot that question down so you will have it when we get to the section meant for questions.

### Third Question

Now for the third question, we'll do the same thing we did for the last two questions.



We often hear that it is difficult for white people to know how to talk about race at Sewanee. Does this align with your experience? How can we/you better encourage change and action around racial justice at Sewanee? When have you seen racial justice really make progress at Sewanee?

Take 2 minutes to think and make some notes about what you're going to say, so that you'll be able to give full attention to each other when others are speaking.

*[After each person has answered or chosen to pass]*

Before we go on to the next section, reflect back on what you heard. Jot down any questions as we are about to get to the section meant for questions of genuine curiosity.

## Questions of Genuine Curiosity

This is the time to learn more about what others have said and to make connections between what is on your mind and what you've heard. It is important to remember that you are not here to debate or persuade but to explore your curiosity and better understand others.

Is there something someone said that you are curious about or would like to understand better? Is there an assumption you have that you'd like to check out? Let's start by seeing if each person can ask or receive a question. Focus your asking on what interests you or what curiosity was sparked in you about what they meant or what more they might want to say. Try to ask your question of a particular individual. Other members of the group are welcome to reflect and comment as well.

You will have 20 minutes. Please take two minutes to think of the questions that you have for others.

*[After 2 minutes has passed]*

Whenever someone has something—you may begin,

Remember to track who has asked and who has answered so that everyone has an opportunity to participate.

*[After 20 minutes, tell people something like the following]*

Thank you, everyone, for being so open, honest, and committed to change. These are really difficult topics to take on, and I'm grateful for each of you for being a part of this.



There's never a perfect time to end but we want to leave some time at the end to generate thoughts on where we go from here—that will be our closing question.

## Closing Words

Here is our final question for today. You will have up to 1 minute to respond to the following question:

What are some ways you can turn what we've discussed into action? What is one concrete step or accountability you will take as a result of this dialogue? Are there any next steps you'd like us to take on together?

Take a minute to reflect on this question and in a minute I will ask someone to begin—remember you will have up to one minute to answer.

## Confidentiality Review & Wrap-Up

We have one final piece of business and that is to review the confidentiality agreement that you made at the beginning of this dialogue. You have all agreed to:

Honor confidentiality; that is, not sharing what you hear in a way in which the speaker could be identified without the speaker's permission

Does everybody feel comfortable with this level of confidentiality?

Thanks to everyone again for being present here today. Please encourage your friends and colleagues to sign-up for future sessions.

I know our work is just getting started, and we have lots of work to do to make Sewanee the community we want it to be. Still, thank you for being a part of this first step, and reflecting with each other about your own commitments and the ways you want to be involved in creating change. Thank you for showing up.