

## Stephen Lawrence Day Philosophy Sessions Suggested Ground Rules for Group Discussion

The following ground rules have been written to the participants of the group.

- 1) **The ball rule:** only he or she with the ball may speak.
- 2) **The listening rule:** do your best to *actively listen* to – not just *hear* – what whoever has the ball is saying, giving their idea proper and fair consideration (see below).
- 3) **The hands up/palms out rule:** if you want to say something please let the facilitator know by putting either your hand up or your palm out (facilitator to decide which).
- 4) **The respect rule:** be respectful to all the members of the group and towards the ideas represented by the members of the group. Here's a little more on respect:
  - a. give each speaker **space to speak/think**. Don't speak over each other.
  - b. give their ideas **proper and fair consideration**. Sometimes, for instance, a *context* is needed for the group to understand where someone is coming from or what they might really mean. The group may work collaboratively to search for such contexts.
  - c. be **respectfully critical** (a good template is: 'I agree/disagree with X when she said... because...') and **collaborative** – the group is working together to progress the discussion, being respectfully critical is part of that shared enterprise. Sometimes this may mean simply rephrasing language (e.g. from 'I think that's a stupid idea!' to 'I disagree with X because...') or addressing one's tone or body language.
  - d. Don't be afraid to **make judgements** ('I disagree...' / 'I think that's wrong...' / 'I don't think that's right...' but do so **respectfully** and always try to provide a **good reason** for why you have made the judgement you have made. **Avoid judgementalism:** prejudging an opinion before it has been given a fair hearing or before any reasons have been given or fully explained. (See b above)
  - e. **Ideas are separate from people**. Sometimes people represent ideas deliberately, sometimes only by implication, and sometimes people represent ideas that are not necessarily their beliefs. This can be a very valuable way to proceed, so listen and appropriately make judgements (see d above) about the ideas, not the person who represents the idea.
  - f. **Be comfortable with discomfort:** a good philosophical enquiry is good, among other things, because it is open and people can explore ideas as fully as they are able. This means that sometimes you may feel uncomfortable. As long as contributions and exchanges remain respectful and the discussions conducted maturely, any idea or view (at the facilitator's discretion) should be permissible.
  - g. **A few 'don'ts':**
    - i. Don't make fun of people or their ideas.
    - ii. Don't be rude to members of the group.
    - iii. Don't laugh at people or their ideas.
- 5) **The Talk Ball Sign:** during Talk Time, the ball rule (see above) is suspended as everyone may speak at the same time without holding the ball. When the facilitator holds the ball in the air, this is a sign that the ball rule is back in play. In short, it means to 'stop, look and listen straight away and to be ready for a whole group discussion to commence'.