

experiences, privilege, and positionality. Thus, do not minimize the magnitude of the impact. Apologize as needed.

CONTRADICTING IDEAS ARE OK. The aim is to create a space where contradicting ideas can coexist, without feeling challenged. Consider replacing “I disagree” with “I would like to understand” (allowing space and openness to learning).

COMMIT TO DE-ESCALATE TOGETHER. A safer space is *not a policing space*. If issues do arise, we commit to addressing them together. Sometimes, in the end, we may want to settle on “agreeing to disagree.”

ACCOUNTABLE SPACE. Hand-in-hand with the above, if we are accountable for our speech and actions, and cognizant of our power, privilege, and positionality, we can commit ourselves to making this an open and welcoming space. We strive to “call in” those who need to be held accountable for their oppressive behaviour and such; this is more compassionate than calling someone out in an attempt to correct their behaviour.

AMEND AND ADJUST GENTLY. If a participant says something that is incorrect or offensive, bring it up politely. Letting comments slip by only makes the space less safe and increases the difficulty of building a trusting environment.

LEAN INTO DISCOMFORT. Meetings and topics can sometimes be challenging. Be willing to experience some discomfort in discussions, particularly if you’re coming from a privileged position, and learn from it as a team!

Source:

<https://politicsandcare.wordpress.com/2017/03/10/safer-spaces/>

Other resources (see more on the website):

- https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/guidelines_discussion.pdf
- <http://bluestockings.com/about/safer-space/>
- <http://thriveworks.com/blog/5-ways-deescalate-conflict/>

Image: Adapted from *Hand Drawn Flower Vectors*, by *The Smell Of Roses*

WHO WE ARE

Formed in Montreal during the 2012 student strike, the group Politics & Care considers care to be a collective issue.

Pushed by a capitalist society, too often we are trying to be as efficient as possible while working towards social change. Event after event, protest after protest, we fight for social justice... until we break down. And even then, we feel guilty for not doing, and being, “enough”.

The collective care discussions, organized by Politics & Care, are **an occasion to reflect on collective well-being, emotional labour, and self-care** as well as to create accountable, sustainable, thriving communities.

Too often, we do not take the time to **question our limits and the emotional involvement that is intrinsic to our (activist) work**. We tend to stretch ourselves too thin at the expense of care for self and one another. So many people around us burn out, get depressed, or are completely overwhelmed.

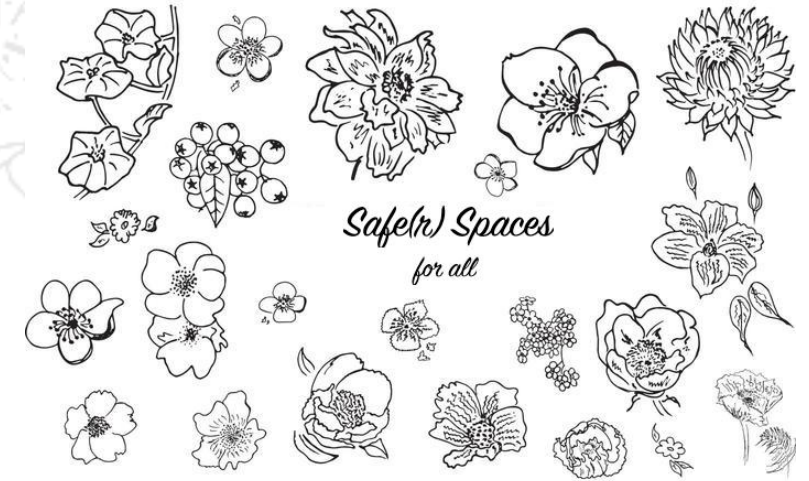
In addition to internalized, capitalist notions of productivity, a group’s internal dynamics have an immense impact on our collective well-being. The **absence of accountability, transparency, and lack of accessibility**, in addition to the presence of **dominant personalities, internal power relations, and hidden hierarchies**, as well as lack of opportunity to bring up issues and conflicts, are among other problematic practices that damage both individuals and our collectives.

Emotional labour (active listening, confidentiality, support work, mediation, defusing tensions and much more) is almost invariably seen as being within the realm of “emotions” and arbitrarily disconnected from the political. Consequently, this work is not valued or valorized. However, emotional labour is integral to sustainable, collective action and to the movements that seek to cease reproduction of systemic oppressions and violence omnipresent in our lives.

We thus need to **open up spaces to discuss and reflect on individual and collective well-being and emotional labour** in our communities.

SAFER SPACES

Building respecting, equitable and enabling spaces



Politics & Care

Politics & Care is a space to weave links between collective well-being, care and politics. All of it with a little bit of magic! We are a collective of artist-community organizers (intersectional feminists, indiscipliné-es) dedicated to integrating care in our politics. We hold collective discussions and facilitate workshops for community organizations and more.

<https://politicsandcare.wordpress.com>
politics.and.therapy.are.one@gmail.com

SAFE(R) SPACES are created to make spaces accessible to everyone in various ways – this includes creating spaces where we can have emotionally charged conversations. We start with a general understanding that it's OK to feel and express emotions. Another objective is to facilitate building of empathy and mutual understanding among participants.

These spaces are created by laying down a set of basic guidelines that can increase our levels of self-awareness, as well as comfort and ease with the people with whom we are sharing intimate thoughts and issues, and sometimes matters in which we strongly believe. While the facilitators bring forth some basic elements of safer space practices, the space is open for participants to contribute additional practices to make the space safer for sharing delicate and emotionally charged matters.

The term *safer* indicates that we cannot guarantee an *absolutely* safe space; the comparative term suggests that a space can become *more* safe if we collectively try to adhere to these basic (and other relevant) guidelines. The facilitator's role includes reminding people of the guidelines but, more importantly, *it is a collective responsibility to maintain a safer space.*

Below is a set of main elements that constitute safer space practices. Please note that it's a *work in progress*, not an exhaustive list. Your comments and suggestions are very welcome.

RESPECT. First and foremost, a simple reminder that, in all cases, respect for self and others is essential and paramount to a discussion. Respect people for who they are and where they are at. Respect people's beliefs, opinions, viewpoints, and experiences; we all took different roads to get here. Use non-violent communication to express your own views (also see "Criticize Ideas, Not People"). Respect people's identity, background, names, and pronouns; do not assume anyone's gender identity. Also, respect people's economic status. We commit to not reproducing systemic oppressions, such as racism

(in all its forms, including horizontal racism), sexism, patriarchy, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on.

CRITIQUE IDEAS, NOT PEOPLE. Don't make things personal. Also, make sure you recognize your positionality, even as you critique ideas. This guideline creates a space where people feel comfortable contributing without feeling like they themselves will be attacked for their views.

AVOID JUDGMENT. Diverse groups have lots to offer, including different opinions. When group members share their likes and dislikes, respect their personal opinions and preferences. Adopt a non-judgemental approach.

(ACTIVE) LISTENING. Try to hear people out, recognize their emotions and understand their perspectives, rather than being defensive and protecting dominant narratives.

TAKE PERSPECTIVE & EMPATHIZE. Recognize that people's perspective is their truth. Respect it and refrain from judging. (also see Respect and Avoid Judgement points above).

RECOGNIZE YOUR PRIVILEGE AND POSITIONALITY. Be aware of your prejudices and privileges. If you're coming from a privileged background (socio-economic, cultural, immigration status, and so on), recognize it along with your position, social standing and social capital, and consider how they may affect your way of thinking and being.

CONFIDENTIALITY. People share matters that are personal and delicate, so it's important to commit to maintaining confidentiality. Consider everything that's said to be private, unless specified otherwise. *What's said in the room remains in the room* is a good adage to remember. If you would like to share someone's story or comment, please ask them first. Exercise discretion outside of the space.

CAREFUL & ATTENTIVE SPACE. As we share, we commit to being careful with each other, and to not say harmful/hurtful things. Be aware of how others are feeling.

ONE MIC, ONE VOICE/DON'T INTERRUPT PEOPLE. Only one person speaks at a time. Raise hands, take turns; give preference to those who haven't spoken (much).

BE SELF-AWARE: TAKE SPACE, MAKE SPACE/STEP UP, STEP BACK. Be aware of how much space you are taking/how much you are speaking. If you feel you are speaking a lot, you should step back and let others take that space; if someone hasn't taken that space/hasn't expressed much, they might consider stepping up to contribute.

NO OBLIGATION TO SPEAK OR SHARE. Allow for silence/reflection. (This point, in particular, goes with the previous one.)

"I" AND "MY" EXPERIENCE. Everyone should speak from his/her/hir own experiences, and avoid "we" statements, either to represent people present in the group, or folks who are not among us. In short, don't speak for others.

AVOID MAKING GENERALIZATIONS. Don't make blanket statements about any group of people. (In addition to members of a particular community, this also includes political parties, religious groups, socio-economic classes, age ranges, etc.) If you're not sure that something you want to say is factually correct, phrase it as a question.

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS. People should not assume other people's experiences or intentions. If you have questions, clarify. Don't simply assume.

INTENTION VS. IMPACT. Good intentions are not enough. We all need to be responsible for our own speech and actions. Be aware that our actions have an effect on others, despite good intentions. The *impact* of what's said/done could be very different or even starkly opposite to the intention. It is important to understand and listen to *impacted* folks and change our behaviour. Do not judge the reaction of those who are *impacted*; our frames of reference can be very different, based on our