

## Getting Comfortable with Discomfort

[Elective 1]

<b>AUTHOR(S):</b>	Sarra Alpert
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	Program on tools for exploring productive discomfort. - <i>Submitted by Sarra Alpert</i>
<b>TOPIC(S):</b>	Leadership Development, Communication Skills
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b>	Participants will leave with at least one new tool for better handling discomfort and complexity.
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	Staff
<b>TIMING:</b>	90 minutes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Text study
<b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>	Paper and pen for each participant; some markers or crayons or other minimal art supplies
<b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b>	Any space is fine (as long as it's big enough for all participants to sit in a circle)

### SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Activity #1: different points of view (30-40 min total)

- 5 min: On separate pieces of paper, everyone should write out a few statements that either they personally very much disagree with (but that they know someone else might reasonably believe) or that they personally believe but know others in their lives disagree with them about. For our purposes, "reasonable" means that someone believes it for reasons that are rooted in their values, not just in cruelty or lack of knowledge. Statements should be written as in the voice of someone who believes it (i.e. "I believe that everyone who cares about the environment should be vegetarian.")

## CORNERSTONE 2020 RESOURCE

- 5 min: Put all the pieces of paper in the middle of the room. Each person should choose and pick up one statement that they didn't write but which they either deeply disagree with or at least feel that they have concerns about and feel that they don't fully understand.
- 5 min: Go around the circle, with each person reading their statement out loud as written. Give people time to observe how their bodies feel in reaction to hearing these statements and to reading the one they chose.
- 10 min: Get into pairs or small groups. Each person should present the statement they chose and their group needs to generate at least three reasons that they can imagine that someone might believe that statement. The reasons should be in good faith -- i.e. not imagining that the person who believes that statement is simply cruel or stupid or inhumane. In the group conversations, try to draw on any experiences you've had talking with people who believe some version of that statement and see what you can draw out from there.
- 10 min: Come back together:
  - Go around and have each person name one value they conceivably share with the person who believes the statement they chose. For example, many Jews who support Israel boycotts and many Jews who vehemently oppose Israel boycotts both believe that that path is the one towards a just, values-driven, sustainable Jewish future.
  - Discuss: why do we have certain impulses towards flat-out rejecting some ideas that we disagree with? When is that the right thing to do? When would another approach benefit us?

### Activity #2: Holding complexity (40-50 min total)

- 5 min: Share this text: "The opposite of a fact is falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth." - Niels Bohr. Brainstorm examples of each of those categories.
- 5 min: Show people examples from the "Vent Diagrams" series online (can be found on Instagram or at [ventdiagrams.com](http://ventdiagrams.com)). Explain the concept of the project: "The idea of a 'vent diagram' as a diagram of the overlap of two statements that appear to be true and appear to be contradictory. We purposefully don't label the overlapping middle. Making vent diagrams as a practice helps us recognize and reckon with contradictions and keep imagining and acting from the intersections and overlaps. Venting is an emotional release, an outlet for our anger, frustration, despair -- and as a vent enables stale, suffocating air to flow out, it allows new fresh air to cycle in and through. We're trying to make "vents" in both senses of the word: tiny windows for building unity and power, emotional releases of stale binary thinking in order to open up a trickle of fresh ideas and air."
- 15 min: Ask people to think about two ideas they hold that are: both true, often come into contradiction with each other, and both important enough to you that you want to find a way to hold them together. Put those ideas into your own vent diagram. Take some time to decorate them!
- 10 min: In chevruta, study the first text on the text study handout (the Eruvin 13b text). Discuss:
  - How would you describe the relationship between the houses of Hillel and Shammai?
  - What kinds of qualities are needed to be in such a relationship? How have you personally found ways to practice those qualities in your own life, or how have you seen others practice those qualities?
  - What are the challenges of maintaining this kind of relationship? What kind of work needs to be done to overcome those challenges?

## CORNERSTONE 2020 RESOURCE

- 15 min: Come back together to study and discuss the remaining texts. With each of the additional texts (the Jim Corder text and the set of three that build off of the Genesis text), the key question to reflect on is: *When have you seen this done or when have you done this yourself? What did it take to make that happen?*

Closing activity (5-10 min):

- Ask everyone to write down two lists: how they do feel and act when they find themselves in moments of deep disagreement, and how they want to feel and act (reflecting the values they want to hold) in those moments.
- Go around the circle. Ask each person to share one word from their “how I want to feel/act” list along with a physical movement that symbolizes or represents that word.