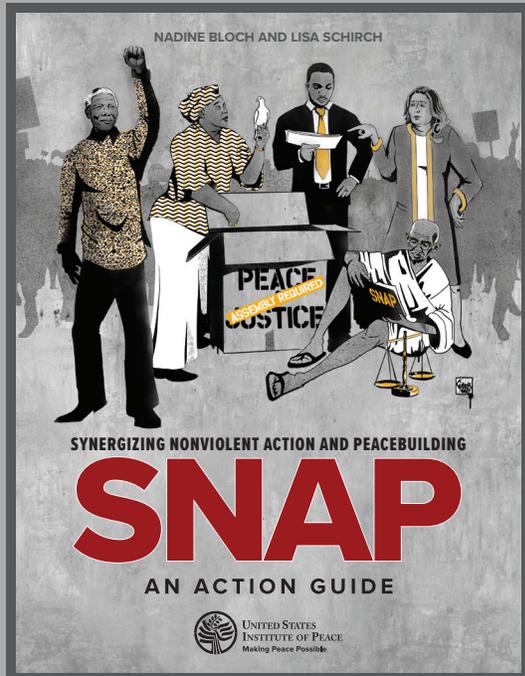




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BY NADINE BLOCH AND LISA SCHIRCH

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UNIT 3

**Dialogue to Defuse Interpersonal
Conflict and Support Coalition Building**

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

Identify how communication skills and dialogue can foster greater participation in conflict transformation

Identify nonverbal and verbal forms of communication necessary to defuse hostility and find solutions to challenging conflicts

Identify the characteristics of active listening, paraphrasing, and respectful engagement

Practice how to use dialogue and communication to build coalitions and develop consensus on group goals, strategy, and tactics

UNIT

3



Dialogue to Defuse Interpersonal Conflict and Support Coalition Building

Peacebuilding methods, including interpersonal communication and dialogue, can help defuse interpersonal conflict and strengthen internal dynamics within groups. These skills can help to widen support and build coalitions between groups and recruit others to join a nonviolent movement. This unit provides a practical understanding of the communication and dialogue skills that can enhance activists' and peacebuilders' abilities to do their work effectively and strategically.

Chile's "No" Campaign

General Augusto Pinochet came to power in 1973 after a military coup ousted the democratically elected Chilean president Salvador Allende. Under Pinochet's rule, thousands of political opponents were assassinated, tortured, and disappeared. In 1983, during the country's economic crisis, trade union leaders organized the growing dissent to the regime into public resistance actions. They used slowdowns, *cacerolazas* (noise brigades), lightning or flash protests (short, spontaneous actions that dispersed before police could arrive), strikes, and many other tactics. Women used cultural dance and created *arpilleras* (tapestries) to document the regime's brutality, communicate with the outside world, and raise money to support the opposition. All these nonviolent tactics helped solidify the broad civil resistance movement and build a strong coalition that would bring about a power-shifting national referendum.

The Catholic Church, which avoided directly opposing the regime, was able to open up political space while Pinochet was in power to make room for organizing and protection for victims of human rights abuses. The Cardinal of Santiago also made efforts to mediate between reformers and the government.

In an attempt to legitimize his regime, Pinochet held a national plebiscite in 1988 to extend his rule for another eight years. However, the public overwhelmingly voted no, forcing the dictator to step down. A diverse coalition made up of Chilean popular movements, labor unions, the Catholic Church, and other groups was a driving force behind Pinochet's defeat. The coalition was built by people with the skills and willingness to dialogue and negotiate with other groups, despite the groups having differing views on several issues. Some groups wanted an entirely new constitution, while others only wanted Pinochet to leave office. Some groups supported Allende, Pinochet's predecessor, and others were initially in favor of Pinochet and opposed Allende. While there was significant diversity in the coalition, they were all able to agree on one goal: ending Pinochet's presidency and transitioning to democratic rule.

The plural views of the opposition were represented in the "No" side's use of a rainbow as its main symbol. The coalition cut across ideological and political lines to successfully delegitimize the regime. The groups registered 7.5 million people to vote in the plebiscite, despite Pinochet's use of widespread repression and torture to maintain control of the country. Another part of the campaign involved television programs and advertisements in which members of the opposition used a fifteen-minute daily broadcast to expose Pinochet's human rights abuses and bring awareness to the breadth of opposition to the regime.

The coalition of diverse groups, which also included military defectors, the international community, and businesses, was key to the success of the “No” campaign and helped Chile transition to democracy.

Adapted from “Chile: Struggle Against a Military Dictator (1985–1988),” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/chile-struggle-against-a-military-dictator-1985-1988/>.

Both activists and peacebuilders need to be able to actively listen and communicate respectfully to build understanding and relationships with a variety of people to accomplish their goals.

Key Concepts

HOW ARE COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE SKILLS USED IN NONVIOLENT ACTION AND PEACEBUILDING?

The tools of communication and dialogue have long been the driving force of peacebuilding approaches around the globe. Nonviolent movements also have a long history of using these skills, a reminder that these two fields have similar origins and many points of connection.

Peacebuilders and nonviolent activists can use communication and dialogue skills in these ways:

- A. To educate and inspire people and reach out to potential allies or uncommitted individuals to be supportive of the issue
- B. To build relationships and trust with people in communities and strengthen their capacity to do collaborative work
- C. To defuse tense situations within a group or between insiders and outsiders
- D. To understand each other's interests and identify common ground while acknowledging the diversity in any group
- E. To identify and prioritize goals

- F. To make collective decisions through inclusive and engaged participatory processes
- G. To communicate with each other in ways that show respect, and to build a culture where each individual and group feels respected and listened to, which in turn increases the chance they will feel ownership and commitment to the process and cause
- H. To communicate or negotiate with key people, power elites, or opposition representatives, including authorities or government officials (unit 8 will address this point)

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT BUILDING COALITIONS TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE AND JUST PEACE?

Successful nonviolent movements require the active participation of large numbers of people, which in turn requires **building broad coalitions**, like the one that led to victory in Chile's "No" campaign. Similarly, peacebuilding processes that engage diverse groups and stakeholders are more likely to succeed than those that are purely elite-led or exclusive in nature.¹ Communication, dialogue, and negotiation skills are important to all the activities in the first block of the Curle diagram (see figure 5).

HOW DOES INTERNAL GROUP CONFLICT IMPACT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS?

Nonviolent activists and peacebuilders often seek to address oppressive systemic issues. Yet, these issues are often as prevalent within these groups as in the societies at large. Racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of social oppression can drive conflict within an organization even as it works toward ending that oppression in the wider society.

It is important to overcome internal issues because it will better position the organization or movement for success if its work is not bogged down in internal conflicts. Advancing the long-term goals and objectives of negotiations and peace processes requires listening to constituent groups and engaging them in meaningful dialogue. Furthermore, when groups embody the ideals they are promoting, they are more likely to be seen as legitimate by other groups in society, by the opponent, and by the international community.

Many nonviolent movements are made up of smaller autonomous or self-organizing “affinity groups.” These are small groups of people who make decisions together and support each other in carrying out an agreed upon tactic to achieve a common goal. The affinity group is one place to use dialogue as a means to listen to and empower each member. It is a place to address issues of power and privilege within the group and recognize the interconnections between racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of systemic oppression. Building trust within the group is key to being able to tackle problems effectively. While the term *affinity group* is fairly unique to nonviolent movements, the idea is somewhat parallel to “working groups” or “caucus groups” that function in peacebuilding processes as supportive small groups that meet on the sidelines of a negotiation or dialogue to discuss and process decisions and events.

HOW DOES DIALOGUE HELP BUILD INTERNAL UNDERSTANDING AND COHERENCE?

Dialogue is “a sustained interaction among groups to learn from each other and transform relationships, as they address practical and structural issues in society.”² It is a way of talking that encourages active listening and honest but respectful speaking. The goal of dialogue is to improve understanding and relationships between people or groups that are in conflict or differ in their approach to addressing a problem. Unlike negotiation, dialogue does not aim for an immediate solution to a problem. Instead, dialogue is useful when there are different experiences and perceptions between groups. Dialogue creates the space to talk about problems in a place where everyone is committed to listening to each other and trying to understand different points of view.

Dialogue is different from debate (as shown in table 5). In a debate, participants either consciously or unconsciously believe that there is only one right way to believe or act. When people believe they alone hold the whole truth, it may lead them to think there is no need to listen to others, other than to figure out how to overpower their position. Dialogue requires participants to keep their minds open to the process of learning and changing through hearing another’s point of view.

Dialogue can be both formal and informal. Anyone can use dialogue skills informally to ease discussions on difficult subjects. You can find an overview of some of these skills below. To do a deeper dive, check out USIP’s new dialogue tool kit.³

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

Some communication experts estimate that 60–80 percent of communication is nonverbal.⁴ That means each person communicates with others primarily through facial expressions, body posture, and eye movements. Researchers have found that some people are much better at reading nonverbal cues than others. *Emotional intelligence* is a term used to describe how

TABLE 5.

Comparison of Debate and Dialogue

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
The goal is to “win” the argument by affirming one’s own views and discrediting other views.	The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views.
People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their beliefs.
People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid.	People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.
People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.	People appear to be somewhat open to changing their understanding of the issue.
People speak based on assumptions made about the other’s positions and motivations.	People speak only about their own understanding and experience.
People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.	People work together toward common understanding.
Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side.	Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief.

Source: Lisa Schirch and David Camp, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical, Hands-On Guide* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007).

someone may be feeling by “reading” their faces and bodies to understand what they are trying to communicate. The ability to interpret and employ culturally appropriate eye contact, facial expressions, and body language is especially important when communicating across cultures since postures and physical expressions may have different meanings in different cultures. Want to determine your own emotional intelligence to interpreting nonverbal communication? Take the emotional intelligence quiz listed in the Resources section.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

Both listening and speaking require verbal communication skills, including active listening and paraphrasing. Active listening is an important skill because it helps people feel their concerns are heard and acknowledged. When people feel heard, they are less likely to repeat themselves, yell or shout, or be very angry. Active listening is an essential skill for defusing an

angry or violent confrontation. Table 6 provides some of the key skills needed to practice active listening effectively.

HOW CAN DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES BE USED TO DEFUSE HOSTILITY AND AGGRESSION?

Understanding what escalates and what defuses aggression can be helpful in managing relationships and communication (see table 7 for examples). Peacebuilders tend to use methods that defuse hostility and aggression. Nonviolent actors may engage in activities that escalate conflict and create tensions, but the goal should not be to create animosity or to use personal attacks. Understanding when, where, and how to escalate conflict, without instilling hostility, is important to successful conflict transformation.

A tool to help activists and peacebuilders remember skills and actions to safely engage with and/or defuse hostility and aggression is a mnemonic

TABLE 6.

Key Skills for Active Listening

<i>Empathize</i> —Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand how that person feels.	<i>Identify</i> —Try to identify the <i>feelings</i> or emotions of the speaker, the <i>meaning</i> of their message, and the <i>specific content</i> they are trying to communicate.
<i>Validate</i> —Affirm to the other person that their experience is valid, even if you have had a different experience.	<i>Paraphrase</i> —Restate in your own words what you heard a person say, including the feelings and meaning of their message.
<i>Clarify</i> —Ask questions to get more information.	<i>Gather information</i> —Attempt to understand more about the situation.

Stay calm—Take a deep breath and keep breathing slowly. Try to center yourself and calm your body's reactions to the situation.

TABLE 7.

Defusing Hostility and Aggression

FACTORS THAT ESCALATE HOSTILITY + AGGRESSION	METHODS OF DEFUSING HOSTILITY + AGGRESSION
Limited choices: being cornered without a way of escaping and "saving face"	Offer a way out: help the other person save face by doing one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reassure an aggressive person that their concerns are legitimate offer the option to pursue the issue in a different setting (off the street) refrain from openly judging the person's behavior
Use asymmetrical posturing: when one person or group has or is perceived to have more power than another	Use symmetrical posturing: nonaggressive, nonchallenging body language
Use ostentatious symbols of power: physical postures that project power, such as sunglasses, high-tech equipment, expensive vehicles, contextually extravagant lifestyles, uniforms, guns, or other symbols of wealth and power	Show respect: acknowledge local customs, leadership, and ethical/moral norms
Refusal to acknowledge the other side or their point of view	Acknowledge the equal humanity of all and the legitimacy of their concerns or point of view
Listening only to defend your own point of view	Listen to understand the other person rather than to defend your own position
Focus on people rather than problems	Disagree with ideas, not with people: be hard on the problem and soft on the people
Be stubborn	Share your willingness to be cooperative
Demand to solve the problem immediately	Call for a time-out so that everyone can calm themselves down and reflect on the issues

TABLE 8.

The 6 D's of Assertive Intervention

Direct intervention:

- Use open, nonthreatening body language, hands visible and empty
- Use active listening
- Lower volume, slow movement
- Do not touch angry people or police
- Use appropriate content, be flexible, sing or chant

Delay: Wait it out, if that is an option; put time on your side

Distract: Direct attention elsewhere

Delegate: Work with a buddy or allies

Distance: Put space between you and the problem

Document: Let people involved know you are filming, from a safe distance if possible

Source: *Beautiful Trouble*.

called **the 6 D's of Assertive Intervention**, shown in table 8.

Dialogue, active listening, and other forms of interpersonal communication are critical tools for activists and peacebuilders alike. They are essential for building the

kind of trust and relationships that are key to building coalitions, solving problems, and transforming conflicts. The following exercise gives individuals the opportunity to apply some of the dialogue concepts we have presented to different coalition- and alliance-building scenarios.

Beyond the Page #1

Practice Building Alliances and Coalitions

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Improve understanding of how to build alliances and coalitions. The following scenarios provide an opportunity to experiment with using communication, dialogue, and negotiation skills.
- To experience through a role play based on the Chile Front Line story the importance of

communication, dialogue, and negotiation skills in building alliances and coalitions to foster greater participation in nonviolent campaigns.

SETUP:

- You will need space for groups of two people to role-play.

HOW IT IS DONE:

1. Divide the participants into groups of two.
2. Ask each pair to work with one of the following scenarios to practice the skills. The scenarios are fictional but are based on the real-life dilemmas faced within the “No” campaign.
3. Debrief in the large group.
 - **Facts:** What happened in each scenario? What worked well and what did not?
 - **Communication:** What communication strategies did you use? What did you notice about the verbal and nonverbal communications your partner used? Were they effective?
 - **On a personal level:** What part of the conversation was particularly challenging and how did you overcome it?

SCENARIO A: FAR LEFT AND CENTER ORGANIZERS OF THE “NO” CAMPAIGN

Both left and center political parties want to oust Pinochet, but they disagree on tactics. The far-left parties want to use a combination of street protests and sabotage of government property and antagonize the police and military. The center wants to focus only on large-scale public protests with absolutely no property damage or aggression to police or military. The center wants to make sure the movement has wide participation and tactics do not prevent public participation. If the far left uses violence, fewer people will participate or have sympathy for the movement. The far left believes the center is not radical enough and is too compromising with Pinochet’s forces. It believes only a combination of coercive force and punishment will bring down the state. In this scenario, have one person play the role of

far-left organizer and the other play the role of center organizer. The center organizer should approach the far-left organizer with communication and dialogue skills from this lesson.

SCENARIO B: CATHOLIC CHURCH AND LABOR UNIONS

The leaders of both the Catholic Church and the labor unions are concerned about Pinochet’s aggression toward those who oppose his policies. The Catholic Church has hosted vigils for those whom the regime has “disappeared” and tortured. The labor unions are focused on pursuing workers’ rights to organize and fair wages. The Catholic leaders want the “No” campaign to emphasize that Pinochet needs to leave in order to end the torture and disappearances of Chilean civilians. The labor unions want to emphasize an economic message of democratic socialism, with greater attention to fair wages. The Catholic leaders and labor unions disagree on the focus of the “No” campaign. In this hypothetical scenario, have one person play the role of Catholic leader and the other play the role of labor union leader. The labor union leader should approach the Catholic leader with communication, dialogue, and negotiation skills from this lesson.

SCENARIO C: THE “NO” CAMPAIGN AND THE MILITARY

In every country there are family relationships that cross the lines of conflict. In Chile, it is possible that leaders in the “No” campaign would have had private, family connections to leaders in Pinochet’s military. In this scenario, have one person play the “No” campaign organizer and the other play the role of a military leader. Using the skills in this lesson, the “No” campaign organizer approaches a Chilean military leader to understand whether it might be possible for the military to defect to the side of the Chilean people in the event of a “No” campaign win in the plebiscite.

Beyond the Page #2

Using Hassle Lines to Practice Defusing Difficult Situations

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Experience a simulation of conflict and conflict intervention to identify and practice how to escalate and de-escalate behavior; discuss implications for general conflicts
- Create a common experience to ground a discussion on managing conflict

SETUP:

- You will need a space large enough for pairs to stand and interact with each other.

HOW IT IS DONE:

Hassle lines are essentially mini role plays done in lines with participants facing each other (or in concentric circles facing each other).

1. Have participants arrange themselves in two parallel lines facing each other. Everyone should be standing directly across from someone. Have participants shake hands with the person across from them to make sure that they know who their partner is. (If it is an odd number, one of the facilitators can join the shorter line, or the odd person out can take observation notes.)
2. Give a scenario for the role play once people are in their two lines. Assign roles, one to each line of people. Instruct folks to interact only with the person they shook hands with and to ignore others around them. Each person will be interacting with their partner according to assigned roles.

Here are some potential scenarios:

- Nonpolitical dog kicker: You are outside, maybe on the street or in a park, and for some reason, you (one line of people) are aggressively kicking a dog. Perhaps the dog bit you, or perhaps you are angry about something else. The other line of people wants you to stop kicking the dog. Perhaps it is their dog you are kicking, or perhaps they just like dogs.
- Disrupter versus listener: Everyone is at a community hearing. One line of people is intent on disrupting the hearing (they are activists, have made their phone calls, met with their elected officials, and feel that the hearing is a sham—which is why they want to shut it down). The other line is a “regular” citizen who came to the meeting to find out what is going on. The citizen wants the disrupter to be quiet so they can hear.
- Heckler versus protester: Everyone is at a protest. One line is a heckler, intent on being nasty and aggressive toward the protester (the other line). The protester just wants to hold the rally and get the heckler/anti-protester to go away or stop.
- Angry, flipped-out protester versus protester: Everyone is at a meeting or community gathering. One line is a protester, and the other line is a protester who is losing it—very angry, upset, maybe incoherent, nasty.

- Unfriendly media versus activist: At a public event, one line plays unfriendly, antagonistic media, and the other plays a protester.
3. Encourage people to be theatrical and get into their roles: “The more you put into it, the more you get out of it.” (Just like life!) Give them ten seconds to get into character.
 4. Say “Go!” and run the role play for 90–120 seconds. Call out “Freeze!” or clap to stop the activity.
 5. Shake it out, open up the circle, and debrief. Some prompt questions in addition to the Feelings? Facts? Forward? Series could include the following: How did it feel to . . . ? Were you successful at . . . (de-escalating, escalating, achieving your goal, etc.)? What specific tools did you use? What did your partner try, and did it work? What do you think they should have done?
 6. Before the debrief loses energy, set up another hassle line with new roles for each line, giving each one the opportunity to be the assertive or aggressive role. Run two or three role plays as you have time, and close by reviewing the frameworks and tools listed below.
 7. Things to notice while the role play is happening, and then to highlight during the debrief:
 - PHYSICAL: body posture/stance; what hands, eyes are doing; rate and type of movement
 - VERBAL: level of sound, noise; speed; content of conversation
 - EMOTIONAL: relationship built? listening used? commonalities or differences established?
 8. Offer a framework/mnemonic for assertive intervention and de-escalation if appropriate. Ask participants to reflect on the “ABCD/E” of the role play. Were you able to do each of the following? Why or why not? How do communication and dialogue skills contribute to your ability to respond?
 - A—Assess the situation
 - B—Breathe and ground before responding
 - C—Choose how you are going to respond
 - D—De-escalate through your choices
 - E—Escalate and consider the potential consequences
 9. Offer the 6 D’s as a way to think about defusing hostility and aggression. See table 8.

Resources

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Notes

1. Desiree Nilsson, “Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace,” *International Interactions* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 243–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2012.659139>.
2. “Dialogue,” United States Institute of Peace, accessed November 16, 2017, <https://www.usip.org/glossary/dialogue>.
3. “Peacemaker’s Toolkit.” *Peacemaker’s Toolkit*. Last modified February 26, 2012. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/02/peacemakers-toolkit>.
4. Communication experts debate the exact percentage of nonverbal to verbal communication. While an exact percentage is unclear, there is wide agreement that nonverbal communication is significant.



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