

Brave Space Guidelines

November 2024

The Office of the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner utilises these Brave Space Guidelines at its events. The goal is to create an environment that supports trauma-informed and empathetic interactions between all participants. Similar tools are also known as safe space guidelines.

These Brave Space Guidelines have been adapted from a tool originally created by Survivor Connections, an independent, peer-led support group for survivors of modern slavery in Australia. They align with similar guidelines implemented by Survivor Alliance and the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery internationally. They aim to make interactions in anti-slavery spaces safer.

Safety is subjective in any shared space. A willingness to learn takes bravery. It is impossible to always get things right the first time, and we ask all attendees to commit to approaching interactions with the intention of creating greater safety for everyone.

These guidelines can help us to share space bravely, and with empathy.

1. Acknowledge diversity

Creating safety starts by making sure that diverse perspectives are valued and heard.

That means recognising expertise from all backgrounds and experiences, including different genders, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, cultures, religions, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds. Modern slavery covers a broad range of situations. We respect that people may describe lived experiences of modern slavery in diverse ways.

2. Enable learning

We aim to learn from each other and hold space for different views and opinions with empathy. Mistakes or misunderstanding may arise, but we always strive to learn to be more respectful.

Sometimes strong opinions come from a place of pain. Being open to the possibility that someone else's pain may make them see things differently, is an important part of respectful interaction.

3. Caring language

We should always use kind language. Our choice of words should never invalidate someone else's experiences of abuse or take away their choice to identify as they feel is right for them.

4. Avoid assumptions and comparisons

Allowing people to share their experiences in their own words creates safety. It is important to avoid assumptions. One can never know someone's entire story, and it is a privilege to bear witness to what they choose to share.

It can be hurtful to compare experiences of trauma. Everyone is impacted by trauma in different ways. Assumptions and comparisons can invalidate someone's experience and cause pain.

It is useful to use 'I' or 'me' statements rather than collective terms when sharing. Using absolutes such as 'no one has experienced' or 'all survivors think' is unhelpful because it may mean that marginalised voices are overlooked.

5. Respect boundaries

It is important to respect everyone's boundaries. This includes not pressuring someone to disclose more than they are comfortable with.

6. Create a safe space

A safe space means that people can share authentically, without fear of judgement. It is important to always consider everyone's wellbeing, especially when discussing trauma related content.

It is important to use respectful communication, even when disagreeing.

OASC encourages the use of content warnings where feasible, and check-ins on the ground rules for discussion. For example, whether it is an appropriate time to disclose abuse in detail or whether that is more appropriate at another time.

7. Address power dynamics

Power dynamics can emerge in any group setting, and it is important to be mindful of how power is distributed. It is important that all participants at the event have equitable opportunities to participate and contribute.

8. Shame sensitive approach

Many survivors feel shame around their experiences of trauma. It is important to be aware of how language or attitudes can perpetuate victim blaming. Saying things like, "Why didn't you just leave?" "You are just attention seeking!" "It's your fault for making bad choices...." Can deeply retraumatise people. Instead, we can use language that recognises strengths and affirms dignity. We can never know what someone should or could have done in a situation we have never faced.

"Whoever we are, and whatever our role is, we can build an environment of healing and safety in the relationships we foster." Survivor

Every choice we make, the words we speak, and the way we interact can create an environment that provides healing.

We hope this will be the experience of participants at the Office of the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner's events.