

## Communicating Well

### Tools for Listening and Speaking

Did you know that your communication style is culturally learned behavior? You absorbed what is considered polite and respectful, and what is considered rude or disrespectful early in life. Sometimes this information was taught to you explicitly – ‘Don’t interrupt your elders.’ – or implicitly by observation and participation. While we tend to expect that everyone learned the same set of rules, these rules vary culture to culture and generation to generation.

Consider using two tools to aid in communicating well in your small groups or church meetings. These tools remind us to respect each other in our similarities and differences and to make room for each other in our introversion or extroversion, or in the various ways in which we enter and participate in dialogue.

The first tool is **Respectful Communication Guidelines**. Offered by the [Kaleidoscope Institute for diverse and sustainable communities](#), this tool invites cultural self-awareness and awareness of others as a way of extending Christian grace.

Here are the guidelines:

### **RESPECTFUL Communication Guidelines**

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

Likewise, the practice of **Mutual Invitation**, also developed by [Kaleidoscope Institute for diverse and sustainable communities](#), helps us speak and listen without the anxiety of wondering whether or when our opinions will be able to be voiced. It also offers a way of gently calling forth into community those who are reluctant to speak or those for whom invitation is culturally required. Here is how it works:

## **Mutual Invitation**

The designated person shares first. This may be the chair or the leader. This person models the length and content of the sharing.

After sharing, he/she/they invites another to share.

Each person invited has three options:

- **Share** and **invite**.
- **Pass for Now**, then **invite** another to share. The group should keep track of those persons who **Pass for Now** and invite each person once again.
- **Pass** and **invite** another to share. The group will not return to this person in this round of sharing.

Do this until everyone has been invited (or re-invited for those who have utilized **Pass for Now**).