



How to run a conversation on Belonging

Many people who took part in our conversations expressed the value they found in talking to others and addressing the three seemingly simple questions we posed. Holding conversations like this helps people to understand experiences that are different to their own, as well as identifying things we have in common.

Here are some tips on running a conversation on belonging:

- Be clear about the time the conversation will take, and stick to that time. People will commit when they have a sense of how long it's going to take. We found the ideal time to be 90 minutes, with refreshments available as people talked.
- Assure them of confidentiality: that nothing they say within the conversation will be shared outside the group in a way that identifies them. Ensure that each participant understands their own responsibility to keep confidentiality.
- Note that the conversation is an informal one, it's simply based on each person's personal experiences and thoughts.
- Give participants permission to leave the room at any time, and to stop whenever they like. Let them know that they don't have to answer any follow up questions, and should only share what they feel comfortable in sharing.
- One person has to lead the conversation. It's better if that person doesn't get involved in the conversation, except for asking follow up questions.
- The best number of people to have in a conversation is four, with an additional person leading the conversation.
- Begin with whakawhanaungatanga: each person does an in-depth introduction, telling the group where they are from, what they do, where they have lived, about their family.
- Before you start the conversation, remind people about equity of time to ensure that everyone gets an equal amount of time to speak if they want it. The lead person has the responsibility to ensure this happens, and can use prompts such as "you haven't said much yet, is there anything you would like to share" or "let's make sure that everyone else gets to speak as well."
- As people begin to share about themselves, ask follow-up questions. For example, if someone says "I went on to study xxx subject" ask them why they

chose that subject, what was interesting to them about it. If they say they travelled to and lived in another country or another town in Aotearoa New Zealand, ask them why they chose to leave, what brought them back. This phase of the conversation is both about getting to know each other but also about slowly opening up and getting used to talking about yourself. Give each person at least 5 minutes each to introduce themselves.

- As you move to the first question, (When do you feel like you belong in Aotearoa New Zealand?), explain it further by saying “when do you feel comfortable? when do you feel included?” As they answer, ask follow up questions. For example, if they say “I feel belonging with my family and friends”, ask what it is that their family and friends do to make them feel that way. If they say “when I’m valued”, explore further what people are doing to make them feel valued. With each answer, you can explore in more depth and seek fuller explanations. Ask for examples or stories that would explain what they are saying.
- In this part of the conversation, people may speak spontaneously, and they might ask each other questions. The lead person’s role is to ensure that any comments and questions are appropriate, and to judge that the person’s reactions. The lead person should check in with participants regularly: “are you ok to discuss this? do you want to continue? do you need a break?”
- Question 2 (What stops you from feeling like you belong?) will lead to more difficult memories and experiences being shared. Continue to ask follow up questions and seek more explanation as participants answer. On rare occasions, there may be some emotions arising as people speak about what has happened to them. Make sure you give space to the emotion, allow others to express sympathy, thank the person for sharing and make sure they are feeling safe to continue. Often people will feel relieved in sharing their stories and having sympathetic listeners. However, if they require more support, make sure you have numbers handy for them to call: 1737 is the best place to start.
- Moving on to question 3 (What needs to change for you to feel like you belong?), the conversation is now focused on what can make things better. That can be personal and individual, or it may be bigger things, such as changes to government policy, or changes to culture. Follow up questions might involve asking them about practical changes that would make things better. It’s ok for people to say they don’t know.
- You may wish to capture some of the ideas and experiences participants have shared. Before doing that, you must seek the consent of the participants, even if you are leaving out names and identifying details. The safety of the people in the room is paramount.

- Finish the conversation by thanking people for sharing with the group, and perhaps thinking about next steps. They may want to keep in touch – be careful that there is full consent before contact details are shared, and make sure there is no pressure to do so.
- The conversation may be a starting point for a joint activity to make change within your own community. If you would like to do so, please see the tools on our xxx page.