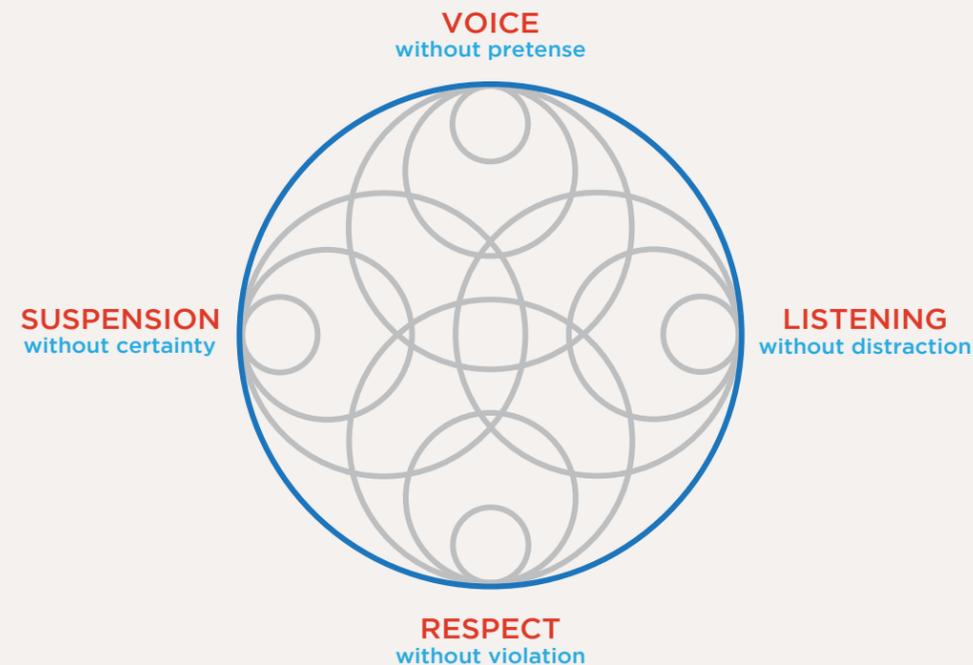




DIALOGIC PRACTICES

Did you know that it is impossible to have a high quality conversation without these practices?



However good you are, if you practice you will get better...

The atmosphere within which people talk and think together is dependant on the Dialogic Practices. Deepening the practices makes the atmosphere richer and more conducive to thinking well together by making a stronger container.

Dialogue is a mode of talking and thinking together that...

...helps people to find a common understanding and a common purpose. The decisions and actions that result from good dialogue make common sense to everyone involved. Good dialogue requires a set of simple and practical skills that can easily be learned and bettered with practice. In dialogue people express their own views, needs and aspirations, listen to others, agree and disagree with one another, support and challenge each other, become aware of their own assumptions and impact on others, come to appreciate diversity and to accommodate differences in ways that may not have been obvious at first. With the benefit of dialogue it is possible to undertake participatory change with people rather than imposing change by doing it to people. Change of this kind is sustainable over time because it feels right and is based on collective common sense.

WHAT ARE THE DIALOGIC PRACTICES?

The Dialogic Practices are at the heart of the Dialogue skills that are being introduced into the Virginia Department of Corrections. They are ethical, they are fundamental to good communication and if they are absent it is not possible to have high quality exchanges with others. They are called Practices because the more you practice them the better you get. The more you understand and use the Dialogic Practices the higher the quality of your encounters with others will be. There are only four Practices and they reinforce one another. They are simple enough to remember and use whilst you are talking with others and you then notice the quality is not as good as you would like it to be.

VOICE: The beginning of finding your voice is to speak up. The conversation may not be going so well because you know something that is not being said, and if it were said it would make a difference to how people are thinking and the decisions they are making. As long as you don't speak up, the conversation lacks your contribution. Once you do speak up, the practice is learning to be more genuine and authentic in what you say. Every person is unique and has a unique perspective which enriches the conversation when they speak up genuinely. Some people say one thing in the room in front of others, and then another thing behind their backs. That gives poor information for the decisions being made, and is also likely to offend people. So the practice of Voice is saying what you think, feel or mean in the room, and feeling comfortable being quoted accurately later as having said it. Sometimes the challenge is doing so when there are more senior people present, but more senior people do need to hear and understand your genuine views and to take them into account in their decisions. Things said with respect will be listened to and will help understanding, whilst things said disrespectfully will

lead to reaction and the polarisation of views. The practice of Voice is saying what you think whilst respecting that others may have good reasons for thinking differently. That creates the greatest potential for constructive progress.

VOICE:

Level 1: Speaking up

Level 2: Saying what you think, feel & mean genuinely and respectfully

LISTENING: The first step with Listening is hearing what other people are actually saying. Generally speaking, people don't participate as well as they think they do, and are poorer listeners than they believe they are. People tend to listen when they are interested or agree with what is being said, but often get distracted and thereby ignore much of what others say. What many people don't realise is that their listening affects the speaker and that their lack of listening leads the other person to be less interesting. The more carefully you listen, the easier it is for the other person to speak up and to be genuine and authentic about what they are trying to say. Once you are listening to what is said, the practice is to try to understand what the person really means. The tone of their voice, their choice of words, their level of comfort or discomfort and the things they don't say are all helpful in understanding what is really meant. As you listen you may helpfully access similar experiences in yourself that enrich your understanding, empathy and compassion. In particular, when people are in a very different situation from your own, the practice of Listening requires you to remember that their experience is not your experience, and that each individual has a unique journey through life.

LISTENING:

Level 1: Hearing what is said

Level 2: Participating with people to understand what they really mean

RESPECT: Fundamental to Respect is how you see and respond to what is similar and what is different. Some things said by other people are similar to your own views or experiences, whilst other things said are not. Where you agree with what is said because it resonates with your own views then it is easy to listen and to receive what they are saying. Where you do not agree, you have a choice. On the one hand you can ignore that different view (which devalues the person saying it and may be experienced by them as a violation), or you can reject outright what was said (which will be experienced as some level of violence). The practice of Respect is one of learning how to receive constructively that which is different and that you do not immediately agree with or even understand. It is about receiving difference whilst not necessarily supporting or condoning that difference. Rather than withdrawing or rejecting, this requires listening to the other person to hear what they are saying and what they mean, which in turn will help them to be more articulate and genuine. It requires an acceptance that the other person, who holds different views from yours, has a reason for holding their views which is valid to them. Because each person is unique and has a unique set of experiences, you may not know what that reason is for them. Respect leads you to receive their view (not agree with, support or condone their different view) and creates the conditions to discover why they hold that view. A coherent understanding is the fruit of Respect.

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WHAT ARE THE DIALOGIC PRACTICES?

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RESPECT:

Level 1: Being open to both similarity and difference

Level 2: Receiving different views in a way that creates coherent understanding

SUSPENSION: The first step in Suspension is following what happened. When we talk and think together with others, there is a sequence to the way things develop and to what is said and how it is received, ignored or rejected. Things that are said lead to proposals and explanations that in turn lead to others. Sometimes we trip ourselves or each other up, or get caught in repetitive cycles that impair or prevent progress. Sometimes people even find themselves arguing with one another not realizing that they actually agree with each other. Looking back on it reflectively we may realise where we went wrong. When you suspend your view you step back to look at how you come to hold that view. Rather than simply judging a person or a situation, you ask yourself how you come to be forming that judgment. The deeper practice of Suspension is the art of following what happens as it is happening, and adding that perspective in order to free things up and help to make progress. This requires awareness, attention, insight and flexibility. When there is no Suspension, individuals will be absolutely certain that they are right, and that their view is how it really is. If others don't agree then there is an impasse. Suspension is required

to free locked horns. The practice of Suspension leads to an inquiry into how the view (that people are certain is right) has been formed. What have people seen, heard or read, and what assumptions have been made? What reasoning has been used and have they jumped to any conclusions to form the belief held? What are the implications of acting on that strongly held view? It is this inquiry into our individual and collective views through Suspension that enables us to be more open-minded in the way we engage with others. The wisdom developed by the Practice of Suspension enables us to change and grow as individuals. When people in Dialogue collectively suspend their views, then this enables changes of collective thought and enables change and development in the overall culture in the agency.

SUSPENSION:

Level 1: Following what happened in an open-minded way

Level 2: Witnessing what happens as it happens to bring wisdom

Submitted by Peter Garrett

Women's Conference in Virginia Beach

On October 16-17, the VADOC held a "Women in Corrections" conference in Virginia Beach. The conference was hosted by the Eastern Region and a similar event in Staunton was hosted by the Western Region in July. The women's conference is in its second year following last year's first-ever women's conference.

Director Harold Clarke opened the conference, and Chief Deputy Director Debra D. Gardner served as the event's keynote speaker on the first day, which also featured a panel discussion and remarks by Statewide Evidence Based Practices Manager Mike Seville, who focused on humor in the workplace.

The second day's featured speakers were Lisa K. Thomas, a motivational speaker and author, and Deputy Director for Administration Cookie Scott.



Cognitive Community Graduation & Treatment Officer Pinning Ceremony



On November 1, VADOC celebrated cognitive community graduation at the Academy for Staff Development Western Campus in Marion. Western Regional Administrator, Operations George Hinkle served as guest speaker. During ceremonies 28 staff received certificates for completing Cognitive Community Training. Also, 17 officers received pins recognizing them as Treatment Officers.



Sussex II Holds First Cognitive Community Graduation

On October 15, Sussex II State Prison held its first Cognitive Community Commencement Ceremony. Sussex II State Prison was recently recognized as the first Security Level-4 Intensive Re-entry Site in the Commonwealth. This event recognized 26 men that are transitioning back into society from Sussex II and have successfully participated in this reentry environment. Chief Deputy Debra Gardner served as the keynote speaker offering words of wisdom and encouragement. Successful businessman and former offender, Michael Hart, offered words of motivation and encouragement as well. Families of the community members as well as staff members from Atmore, Community Corrections, and several other institutions also attended the ceremony in support of this on-going reentry initiative.

