



Reaching Across Boundaries Talk to create change

A MIX IT UP HANDBOOK ● 3RD EDITION



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About this Handbook

This Handbook shows you how to convene Mix It Up Dialogues on your campus. These kinds of conversations support the creation and maintenance of healthy school communities:

Students, as Dialogue participants, talk openly and honestly about the social climate in their schools. They also brainstorm ways the climate can be improved — and then act on those ideas.

Teachers, by convening Dialogues, support key learning objectives — improving students’ active listening and critical thinking skills. In the end, teachers will find that classrooms are easier to manage and more conducive to learning.

Administrators, in supporting Mix It Up Dialogues, help create a more respectful school. Students, parents, teachers and staff will feel more connected to and welcome in a school that embraces respect and marginalizes conflict.

Mix It Up Dialogues (also called study circles) are different from other kinds of conversations; they help participants reach across social boundaries, get to know each other and gain respect for different viewpoints. Mix It Up Dialogues work because:

- They include all kinds of people with different experiences and ideas.
- They are conducted in small groups (6 to 10 people), led by facilitators.
- Group members set their own rules for talking respectfully.
- Participants don’t have to agree with each other, but they do learn how to find common ground.

Mix It Up Dialogues aren’t just about talking, however. They’re also about taking action — changing personal behaviors that may hurt or exclude others and engaging in collective projects to improve school climate.

Why Conduct Mix It Up Dialogues?

For many students, social boundaries are a taxing, daily constant. In a 2002 Mix It Up survey:

A majority of students said that schools were “quick to put people into categories.”

Forty percent admitted that they had rejected someone from another group.

One third said it’s hard to become friends with people in different groups.

Social boundaries like these can create divisions and misunderstandings in our schools. By working to cross these barriers, students can help create environments with less conflict and fewer instances of bullying, harassment and violence.

Students and their adult allies can help form safe, welcoming schools — places where every student can grow socially and academically. The goal of this Handbook is to help make that possible.

To learn about a school that has benefited from these kinds of Dialogues, log onto www.mixitup.org. Click on “Mix It Up Stories” and then select “Aurora, IL Creates Mosaic of Young Voices.”

General Instructions

WHERE TO CONDUCT DIALOGUE GROUPS

You can hold Mix It Up Dialogues in various settings:

- In the classroom. Each session in this Handbook is 50 minutes long – just the right amount of time for a class period.
- Across classrooms. Conduct the Dialogues with students in your class – and in other classes. Team up with that other social studies classroom.
- As club activity. Mix It Up Dialogues are a natural activity for school-based clubs.
- Across extracurricular groups. Don't stop with your club; recruit the SGA or the basketball team. Mix it up!
- As part of service learning. These Dialogues can enhance the meaningfulness of community service projects.
- As a school-wide conversation. Consider assemblies, special events, the first week of school—and consider mixing grade levels.

BEFORE YOU START THE DIALOGUES ...

Divide participants into small groups of 6-10 people. Working in small groups will help people get to know each other, keep the conversations manageable and allow each discussion to happen in a 50-minute time frame.

Ensure that the groups are diverse. Participants may self-select into homogenous groups; encourage them to join a group that includes people they do not know.

Recruit facilitators from each group. We recommend that students (in pairs) serve as facilitators, with adult mentoring or training. When students serve in this capacity, conversations are more likely to be open and honest. Sometimes, teachers or teacher-student pairs facilitate. Provide facilitators with a copy of this Handbook and familiarize them with their roles and responsibilities. (See Appendix A.)

IF YOU ADAPT THIS HANDBOOK ...

Although we recommend conducting all of the sessions in order, we know that time constraints and other factors may not make this possible. If you skip sessions or otherwise adapt the Handbook, conduct the 5-minute ground rules exercise in Session 1 before engaging in any kind of dialogue. A collective commitment to talking respectfully will help ensure that discussions are inclusive and constructive.

WHAT YOU NEED

Each group will need some basic supplies:
 Flip chart, or large sheets of newsprint for taking notes
 Markers
 Tape to hang notes on the wall
 A timer, watch or clock

Where to Go for Help

Mix It Up wants to support your Dialogues. Our associates — experts at conducting these kinds of discussions in school settings — are available to answer your questions and to help you find solutions to any challenges that arise. To get in touch with an associate:

Call: 334 956 8272

Email: mixitup@tolerance.org

For additional information about organizing Mix It Up Dialogues at school, download a free copy of *Organizing Your Mix It Up Dialogue Program*. Go to www.studycircles.org. Click on “Mix It Up.” This information will be especially useful for organizing large-scale, or whole-school Dialogues

Session 1

What Are the Social Boundaries in Our School?

50 MINUTES

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

What You Need

Items listed on page 3

Copies of the Session 1 Handout, p. 5

Goals for this session:

1. To get to know each other
2. To create ground rules for this discussion — and for subsequent ones
3. To start talking about what divides us

Welcome (5 minutes)

Talk briefly about why your group is doing this Dialogue. (For ideas, see “Why Conduct Mix It Up Dialogues?” on p. 2. Couple this information with examples of bullying or divisions in your school.) Briefly explain your role as facilitator. (See Appendix A.) Introduce the goals for the session. Answer any questions participants have.

Distribute the Session 1 Handout.

Introductions (10 minutes)

“Let’s get to know each other. On your handout, look at the questions under ‘Getting to Know Each Other.’ Turn to the person next to you. Answer Question 1. Each person will have 30 seconds to answer. Next, find another partner, and answer Question 2. Again, each person will have 30 seconds. We’ll keep going until every person has answered at least four questions.”

Get back together with the group: “Say your name and one thing you shared with a partner.”

Set Ground Rules (5 minutes)

“We need to agree on rules about how to talk with and listen to each other. Look at the ideas listed under ‘Ground Rules’ on your handout. Should we add some additional ground rules? Do we need to change any of these?”

Write additions and changes on a big sheet of paper; then hang it on the wall. Note: an 11” x 17” poster of the ground rule “starters” is available for free at www.mixitup.org; click on “Download posters and more.” A “goals for this session” poster is also available.

Group Discussion (25 minutes)

“Let’s talk about the social boundaries in our school.” Ask these questions:

1. “What kinds of groups are there at this school?”
2. “Do people talk to people from other groups? Why or why not?”
3. “Which groups get along? Which groups don’t? Why?”
4. “Is it important for groups to Mix It Up? Why?”

Write notes on big sheets and hang them up.

Closing (5 minutes)

Talk about this question as a group: “What is one new thing you found out today?”

Follow-Up Ideas

Write a first-person essay or a poem about a time you were excluded – or a time when you rejected someone else. Submit your writing to Mix It Up. If your essay or poem is selected for publication, you’ll receive a cash prize. Log onto www.mixitup.org; click on “Get Published.”

Continue the discussion with Session 2, which begins on page 6.

SESSION 1 HANDOUT

What Are the Social Boundaries in Our School?

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What is one of your favorite things to do, and why?
2. What is something you don't like to do, and why?
3. What is something you like about yourself, or you are good at doing?
4. What are your hopes for the future?
5. What do you worry about?
6. Why do you want to be a part of this dialogue?

Ground Rules

- Listen carefully and treat each other with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for others or for "your group."
- If you feel hurt by what someone says, say so, and say why.
- It's OK to disagree.
- Don't use names if you talk about someone who is not in the group.
- Some of the things we will talk about in this group will be personal. Unless we all say it is OK, we will not talk about each other's stories outside this group.

Additions to ground rules

Group Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of groups are there at this school?
2. Do people talk to people from other groups? Why or why not?
3. Which groups get along? Which groups don't? Why?
4. Is it important for groups to Mix It Up? Why?

Session 2

What Are the Challenges of Reaching Across Social Boundaries?

50 MINUTES

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

What You Need

Items listed on page 3

A copy of the group's ground rules, taped to the wall

Notes from the group's discussion in Session 1, taped to the wall

Copies of the Session 2 Handout, p. 7

Goal for this session

To talk about the challenges of reaching across boundaries.

Getting Started (10 minutes)

"Before we get started, let's look at our ground rules. Are there any we need to add or change?" Make any needed changes.

"In our last session, we got to know each other a little bit, and we talked about groups in our school. The notes from that discussion are on the wall." Summarize the main ideas from that discussion, and ask: "Have you thought about that discussion? What have you been thinking?"

Distribute the Session 2 Handout.

Exploring the Issue (35 minutes)

"In this session, we will talk about why it can be hard to reach across boundaries. Let's look at some things that other students have said about this. Would someone like to read aloud the stories in your handout?"

Next, ask these questions:

1. "Have you ever felt like this? What was it like?"
2. "What ideas are missing?"
3. "In our school, what is the main thing that makes it hard to reach across boundaries?"
4. "Why does this kind of stuff happen?"
5. "What in your life has made you feel this way?"
6. "Why do people see these things in different ways?"

Write down the main ideas from the conversation on big sheets of paper and hang them up.

Closing (5 minutes)

Talk about this question as a group: "What is one new thing you found out today?"

Follow-Up Ideas

As a math exercise or social science exercise, develop and conduct a survey of fellow students. Do they see the school's social boundaries the same way your Dialogue Group does? For a sample survey, see <http://www.tolerance.org/teens/survey.jsp>

Continue the conversation with Session 3, which begins on page 8.

SESSION 2 HANDOUT

What Are the Challenges of Reaching Across Social Boundaries?

Mari says: Many people don't treat each other with enough respect.

We are expected to treat adults with respect, but many adults don't treat us very well. People also don't treat each other with respect across the boundary of race, and across other boundaries.

Karim says: I want to fit in.

I want to have a group of friends who know me, and who make me feel comfortable. But I don't want to get stuck with a label, and have people think of me as a "type." I want to be free to hang out with all kinds of people.

Jamia says: The way the school works keeps groups separated.

Things like tracking and keeping grade levels apart in school assemblies can divide us. The school should do things to bring us together so we can get to know each other.

Derrick says: If I don't know you, I don't know what to expect.

If I'm nervous or afraid about who you are or what you might do, I might assume the worst about you, or stereotype you.

Greg says: A lot of the things that keep us apart really start outside of school.

The people in our school live in all kinds of neighborhoods. But where we live depends on how much money our parents have and what race we are. When we get to school, we stay in the same kinds of groups.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt like this? What was it like?
2. What ideas are missing?
3. In our school, what is the main thing that makes it hard to reach across boundaries?
4. Why does this kind of stuff happen?
5. What in your life has made you feel this way?
6. Why do people see these things in different ways?

Session 3

What Would a School Without Boundaries Look Like?

50 MINUTES

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

What You Need

Items listed on page 3
 2 blank sheets of large paper taped to the wall
 A copy of the group's ground rules, taped to the wall
 Notes from Sessions 1 and 2, taped to the wall

Goal for this session:

To talk about what it would mean to us and our school if social boundaries didn't exist

Getting Started (5 minutes)

"The ground rules are up on the wall. We can refer to them if we need to. In our last session, we talked about why it can be hard to reach across boundaries. The notes from that discussion are hanging up on the wall." Summarize the main ideas from that discussion, and then ask: "Have you thought about that discussion? What have you been thinking?"

Practice Breaking Down Boundaries (10 minutes)

"In this session, we are going to talk about what it would be like if we could break down some boundaries and really Mix It Up. Before we start that conversation, we are going to take a few minutes to practice breaking down boundaries by getting to know each other a little better."

"Let's break into groups of three. Find out one thing that the three of you have in common. Then, find out one thing about each of you that is unique. Do you all have siblings, or like the same bands, for example?"

After a couple of minutes, bring everyone back together; ask participants to share something they learned about each other.

Thinking about "Boundary Crossers" (10 minutes)

Give an example of someone who is a boundary crosser, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask participants to do the same. They can draw examples from their lives, movies, TV, sports, books, history or any place else. Ask:

1. "What did these boundary crossers do?"
2. "What happened as a result?"
3. "What do all of these boundary crossers have in common?"
4. "What does it mean to be a boundary crosser?"

Imagining a Different Future (20 minutes)

Ask: "What would our school look like if cliques and other social boundaries didn't exist?"

Let participants think for 3 to 5 minutes.

Distribute markers to participants, and ask them to draw what they imagined. Use the 2 big sheets of paper on the wall. (Or, group members can draw on individual sheets of notebook paper, which you can tape together as a "quilt.")

When the whole picture is finished, talk about what each participant created: "What did you draw? Why was that important to you?"

Closing (5 minutes)

Talk about this question as a group: "What is one new thing you found out today?"

Follow-Up Ideas

Photograph or paint existing social boundaries in your school. Contrast these images with the drawings from Session 3 on a bulletin board or in a PowerPoint presentation.

Clip articles from newspapers or Web sites like www.mixitup.org that demonstrate peoples' willingness to cross social boundaries. Create "Boundary Crosser" collages, or decorate a classroom bulletin board.

Continue the discussion with Session 4, which begins on page 9.

Session 4

What Can We Do to Break Down the Barriers?

50 MINUTES

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

What You Need

Items listed on page 3

2 sheets of large paper taped to the wall — write “Individual” on one, “Group” on the other

A copy of the group’s ground rules, taped to the wall

Notes from Sessions 1 and 2, and the drawings from Session 3, taped to the wall

Copies of the Session 4 Handout, see p. 10

Goal for this session

To develop action steps to help break down boundaries and bring people together.

Getting Started (5 minutes)

“The ground rules are up on the wall. We can refer to them if we need to. In our last session, we talked about what ‘Boundary Crossers’ are like, and what our school might be like without social boundaries. The drawings that we did are on the wall.”

Summarize the main ideas from the discussion in Session 3, and then ask: “Have you been thinking about our last discussion? What have you been thinking?”

Developing Action Ideas (30 minutes)

“Let’s think about things that we could do, as individuals and as a group, to create the kind of school we envisioned in Session 3.”

Distribute the Session 4 Handout. Break participants into pairs. “What can we do as individuals? What can we do together? Look at the ‘Sample Action Ideas’ on your Handout to get started. Write your ideas down.”

Come back to the big group. Ask each pair to share their ideas. Write every idea down on the big sheets of paper on the wall. (Don’t judge ideas, or spend time discussing them. Write down every idea.) If some ideas seem similar, ask the group if you can combine them.

Point out that participants can begin to take the individual actions immediately.

Now, pick favorites from the possible group actions. Give each participant 3 colored stickers. “Put stickers next to the ideas that you like best on the “Group” sheet. If an idea is really important to you, put two or three stickers next to it. Or, you can spread your stickers around.”

When everyone has voted, circle the two or three ideas that got the most votes.

Closing (15 minutes)

Close the session by discussing the following questions:

1. “What is one important thing that you learned from these Mix It Up Dialogues?”
2. “What is one thing that you will do differently in your life from now on?”
3. “What is an action idea that you would like to do with other people?”
4. “How do you think things might change in our school if we followed through on our individual and group action ideas?”

Follow-Up Ideas

Working together, complete at least one group action idea. Download “10 Steps for Taking Action” from www.mixitup.org to get started. You’ll also find information there about Mix It Up Grants.

Keep a journal, for two weeks or more, to track your progress with the individual action steps.

Consider organizing more Dialogues. For some ideas on how to get more people in your school involved, download *Organizing Your Mix It Up Dialogue* Go to www.studyircles.org. Click on “Mix It Up.”

APPENDIX A

Tips for Facilitators

What does a facilitator do?

A facilitator...

- helps the group set ground rules.
- manages the discussion.
- keeps the conversation respectful and productive.
- stays neutral (does not take sides).
- helps the group look at the issues from many different points of view.
- helps everyone in the group participate in the dialogue.
- takes notes as conversations unfold.

What are the facilitator's responsibilities?

Prepare. Facilitators prepare for Dialogues in two important ways. First, be sure you know the discussion materials inside and out. Make sure you have all of the materials needed for each session (copies of handouts, markers, etc.). Second, set up the room prior to discussions — i.e., get notes hung to the wall and move chairs around as needed.

Guide the conversation. Follow the discussion format in this Handbook. Help keep the conversation going by asking open-ended questions:

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about this?
- Could you talk a little about why you feel the way you do?
- What experiences have you had that would help us understand what you think?
- What would be a strong case for (or against) what you just said?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- Do you think others see this the way you do? Why or why not?

Keep track of time. Be mindful of time constraints. Each session in this handbook is geared toward 50 minutes. Wear a watch, or check the room's clock often.

Be culturally sensitive. People from different cultures communicate in different ways. Here are some suggestions to help:

- Listen actively. Help the group think about what it feels like to be in the other person's shoes.
- Don't assume that there is only one way (yours!) to communicate. One reason to conduct Mix It Up Dialogues is to get comfortable with different ways of thinking and talking.
- In some cultures, people tend to be quiet, and to think before they speak. In others, people will jump into a conversation right away. Help everyone participate in a way that feels good to them.
- Look for the things that everyone in the group has in common.

Free Facilitator Training Resource!

Download a copy of *Training Young People to Facilitate Study Circles*. Go to www.studycircles.org. Click on "Mix It Up." The guide shows young people and their allies how to facilitate a "study circle" or, in this case, a Mix It Up Dialogue. It includes a training agenda, training exercises and handouts.

APPENDIX B

Handbook Evaluation Form

Your completion of this form will help us improve future editions of the Mix It Up Handbook. Thank you for taking the time to complete it. Please return the form to us by fax at (334) 956 8488 or by mail: Mix It Up Dialogue Evaluation, 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104. Questions? Email us: mixitup@tolerance.org

Name _____
 Phone _____ Email _____
 School _____
 Address _____

Would you be willing to assist us further by participating in a 20-minute phone interview?
 Yes No

My school is an:
 Elementary School Middle School
 High School Combined School
 Other _____

I am a:
 Teacher Student Counselor
 Administrator Other _____

Did you use this Handbook to organize Mix It Up Dialogues? Yes No
 *If no, why not? _____

*If no, you may stop. Please return this form to us. Thank you. *If yes, please proceed to next question.*

How many students participated in the Dialogues?

Who was involved in the Dialogues?
 one or more classrooms
 student club(s)
 large # of students
 whole school
 other _____

Which dialogue sessions did you complete?
 Session 1 Session 2 Session 3
 Session 4 None

How useful was the Handbook in helping you conduct the Dialogues?
 NOT USEFUL AT ALL VERY USEFUL
 1 2 3 4 5

How could we improve the Handbook? _____

What impact have your Dialogues had? (Check all that apply.)
 Positive changes in classroom climate
 Positive changes in school climate
 Increased respect and understanding between students
 Increased willingness among students to cross social barriers
 Reduction in number of inter-group conflicts at school
 Other _____
 No changes yet, but I expect that changes will happen in the near future (within a year).
 No changes

What action projects, if any, were completed as a result of these Dialogues? _____

Are you considering doing Mix It Up Dialogues again?
 Yes No Not Sure

Can you imagine using a similar process to address other issues at your school in the future?
 Yes No Not Sure

Would you be willing to consider the possibility of participating in a long-range study of Mix It Up Dialogues in schools? Yes No

Additional Comments

The first 500 schools to complete and return this evaluation form will receive a FREE COPY of the award-winning book, *A Place at the Table: Struggles for Equality in America*, which profiles historical and contemporary “boundary crossers” in the United States.

APPENDIX C

Acknowledgments

This Handbook was created with input from hundreds of people across the United States. In particular, we wish to thank the following individuals, who gave generously of their time to conduct research, take part in focus groups, review drafts, and test material.

The students of BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL, Burlington, WI; CASE HIGH SCHOOL, Racine, WI; CROCKETT HIGH SCHOOL, Austin, TX; GERING JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, Gering, NE; MANCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL, Manchester, CT; MARY D. BRADFORD HIGH SCHOOL, Kenosha, WI; PARK HIGH SCHOOL, Racine, WI; REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL, Austin, TX; SOUTH KITSAP HIGH SCHOOL, Port Orchard, WA; UNION GROVE HIGH SCHOOL, Union Grove, WI; WEST AURORA HIGH SCHOOL, Aurora, IL

In addition NANCY ANSHELES, Catalyst & Co., South Portland, ME; LILIANA BALLESTAS-CUEVAS, Manchester High School, Manchester, CT; ROBERT T. BLACKWELL, Ujima Management Consultants, Inc., Springfield, IL; CARRIE DONOVAN, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), College Park, MD; MELINDA FINE, Fine Consulting, New York, NY; SANDY FRANKLIN, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX; PATRICIA GARCIA, Aurora Community Study Circles, Aurora, IL; HEIDI GRISHAM, Crockett High School, Austin, TX; GAYLE HANCOCK, South Kitsap Study Circles Project, Port Orchard, WA; MICHAEL C. HINES, SR., National Coalition Building Institute, Fayetteville, NC; SUE HIPPI, Case High School, Racine, WI; MARY JANE HOLLIS, Aurora Community Study Circles, Aurora, IL; DARCIE GRIFFIN, Park High School, Racine, WI; JOHN LANDESMAN, Montgomery County Business Roundtable, Rockville, MD; EUGENE LECOUTEUR, Lake Snell Perry & Associates, Washington, DC; PETER LEVINE, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), College Park, MD; KAREN LEWIS, Crockett High School, Austin, TX; ROSEANN MASON, Center for Community Partnerships, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha, WI; MICHELLE MCCARTHY, Union Grove High School, Union Grove, WI; SUSAN MCCORMACK, Creative Discourse, Essex Junction, VT; WINKIE MITCHELL, Springfield City Schools, Springfield, OH; SUE MUTCHLER, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX; MICHAEL J. PERRY, Lake Snell Perry & Associates, Washington, DC; LISA SCHELL, West Aurora High School, Aurora, IL; ROBERT SHERMAN, Surdna Foundation, New York, NY; JIM SPAFFORD, Manchester High School, Manchester, CT; SAMANTHA SPANO, E.O. Smith High School, Mansfield, CT; CYNTHIA SWAIN, Reagan High School, Austin, TX; JEFF TRACY, Center for Conflict Resolution, Scottsbluff, NE; ROBBIE TWOHIG, Burlington High School, Burlington, WI; KEITH CHESTER VEAL, Lake Snell Perry & Associates, Washington, DC.

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APPENDIX D

About Mix It Up

The Mix It Up program supports the efforts of students who are willing to take on the challenge of identifying, questioning and crossing social boundaries in their schools and communities. Last year, more than 2 million students at almost 7,000 schools participated in Mix It Up at Lunch Day. They swapped seats in their cafeterias and lunch areas, stepped out of their comfort zones and connected with new people.

This year, Mix It Up at Lunch Day is Tuesday, November 16, 2004. Join in!

The Mix It Up Handbook shows you how to conduct Mix it Up Dialogues. In the dialogues, participants will have honest discussions about social boundaries, and they will plan action projects that to help cross those boundaries. Participants then can apply for a Mix It Up grant to help fund their boundary-crossing projects.



TEACHING TOLERANCE
TOLERANCE.ORG
FIGHT HATE PROMOTE TOLERANCE

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Tolerance Programs and the Study Circles Resource Center joined forces to create Mix It Up. The Southern Poverty Law Center combats hatred and intolerance in the U.S. through education, investigation and litigation.

www.tolerance.org



STUDY CIRCLES
RESOURCE CENTER

The Study Circles Resource Center is dedicated to finding ways for all kinds of people to engage in problem solving on critical social and political issues. It provides tools to help people organize productive dialogue, recruit participants from all walks of life, find solutions and work for action and change.

www.studycircles.org

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