

Shetland Partnership

Methods and Techniques



Conversation Cafes

A Conversation Café is a relaxed and informal setting where participants can discuss various topics and identify key priorities.

They create a welcoming space for people to share their experiences and views, ensuring everyone feels equal and heard. Typically, they involve up to 10 people plus a host and can be one-off sessions or a series. The groups can vary depending on the topic, with a facilitator guiding the discussion to help everyone contribute and build on each other's ideas.

Suitable for:

A Conversation Café is a way to bring people together to talk and share ideas. It is useful for building community, coming up with new ideas, solving conflicts, learning, and making changes in organisations. Additionally, Conversation Cafés can act as platforms for debunking myths and dispelling shame and stigma that may surround many experiences. They provide a space for connection, tackle isolation, and can make people feel valued.



Type of engagement:



Consult



| Involve

How to do it:

The [conversationcafe.org](https://www.conversationcafe.org) organisation describe six principles for good conversation:

1. **Open-mindedness** - Listen to and respect all points of view.
2. **Acceptance** – Suspend judgment as best you can.
3. **Curiosity** – Seek to understand rather than persuade.
4. **Discovery** – Question assumptions, look for new insights.
5. **Sincerity** – Speak what has personal heart and meaning.
6. **Brevity** – Go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on.

- Find a welcoming and accessible venue. Set a theme or topic for discussion and prepare materials like Conversation Café agreements and prompts.
- Ensure the venue is comfortable with small group tables, refreshments, and name badges to encourage participation.
- Promote the event to attract participants.
- Welcome participants, introduce the theme, and explain the Conversation Café principles to create a respectful environment. Conversation Cafes typically last 1-2 hours with a host or facilitator leading the session.
- Invite everyone to share their thoughts and listen to others. Ensure everyone has a chance to speak and remind them to keep their contributions brief.
- Guide the conversation, keep it on track, and ensure any agreements are followed.
- Before closing, summarise key points discussed and thank participants. Ask for feedback and suggestions for future topics.
- Share a summary of the discussion with participants and plan future Conversation Cafés based on their feedback.

★ Advantages	⚠ Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversation Cafes provide a respectful and non-judgmental environment where everyone gets a chance to speak and share their thoughts • They can help people connect, build relationships, and understand each other through empathy • They bring different perspectives together for richer discussions and innovative solutions • They can make participants feel valued and heard • They are flexible and can be used in various settings and for different topics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants may dominate the conversation, while others may feel hesitant to speak up • Conversations can sometimes stray from the main topic • The success depends a lot on how well the facilitator manages the discussion • Different opinions can lead to conflicts that need careful handling • Keeping the discussion within the set time can be tough • Creating a welcoming space can be challenging in some settings, and capturing and acting on the insights from the session can be difficult.

Further information: 

Conversation Café: conversationcafe.org

Conversation Café toolkit – in support of Scotland’s Women’s health: [Conversation Cafe toolkit - in support of Scotland's Women's health - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland](#)