



**Interreg**   
EUROPEAN UNION

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# Dealing with sudden controversy



Social  
innovation

1.

How to handle the tension  
between **LIMITING OR INVITING**  
**FOR DIALOGUE?**

- What if a young person takes a very extreme position? What if you find the young person's humiliating or hateful attitude unacceptable?
- Should the statement then be limited?
- How can you indicate that a boundary has been crossed and yet continue to invite for conversation?

## Exercise

### Why limit statements?

- ✓ Write down your point of view on  
“Aggressive and hateful  
statements of young people  
must be limited by their  
supervisor”
- ✓ Motivate your point of view:  
why?



Group  
discussion

Who wants to share  
some ideas?

What are arguments  
pro/contra limiting?

(we list this up – flipchart)

## Group discussion



What is the influence of the (in)formal rules in your organisation or professional context on the position you can take?

Would you like to change this? Why?

## Some insights in research

Experts and practitioners take different points of view:

- AGAINST LIMITING
  - ✓ provokes more rebellion
  - ✓ closes the dialogue
- FOR LIMITING:
  - ✓ pedagogical task
  - ✓ no hostile, harmful environment for young people

All stress very clearly that young people should be able to see that they are sincerely invited for further discussion.

2.

How to assess if statements are  
(un)acceptable?



## Strict limits or “boundary zones”?

- ✓ At the heart of our understanding of what ‘safe spaces’ means for young people
- ✓ A choice that you and your organisation must make in specific situations
- ✓ We work with no strict ‘boundaries’ but in pedagogical ‘boundary zones’
  1. “I want to limit unacceptable statement?” > how to limit??
  2. Limiting is counterproductive > how to foster a more nuanced vision through questions??

To support the workers in both cases, we will elaborate on both in the following parts of the training.

## Exercise on 'border areas'

- To navigate well in these border areas, you must know your group/individuals...
- Question: what is for you a 'border area' where you would feel you have to intervene?
- Conversation in pairs or in group
- Listing

## Compare with research findings

- Three possible border areas
  1. Social
  2. Scientific
  3. Pedagogical
- Discussion: do you recognize these border areas? Do you see other?
- These insights
  - can help us to assess if statements are (un)acceptable
  - clarify that a 'neutral' attitude on our part is not possible

3.

How to LIMIT STATEMENTS?

Two possible exercises

Group discussion > go to 3A

Roleplay > go to 3B

# 3. A

## How to LIMIT STATEMENTS?

### Group discussion

- It is important when ‘limiting’ statements to invite the youngster immediately for further discussion
  - They are teenagers or adolescents who are busy finding their own voice, their own opinions, their own place in the world...
  - This is where the real stakes lie in limiting these statements: do we contribute to an open and safe pedagogical climate?

## Start with examples

- ✓ Examples of unacceptable statements from your experience?
- ✓ We list the examples
  
- ✓ Individual reflection:
  - Choose one clear example
  - What would you say/do to immediately limit that statement?
  - Write down please 😊

## Group discussion



- ✓ Who wants to share some ideas?
- ✓ We list the reactions (flipchart)
- ✓ Discussion
  - ❑ Put yourself in the place of the young person: what would they think and feel about this reaction? Would it convince to correct or limit the statement?
  - ❑ What would be an alternative?



# Limiting & inviting: example sentences



- I'd really like to talk to you about this, but I don't want you to use offensive or discriminatory words.
- It hurts me to hear you talking about another young person this way. Try to put it another way and still say what you really want to say.
- I'd like to discuss this further, but you know that word is not considered acceptable?
- I would like to listen to you, but I won't be able if you use these words, which is a pity, because I think you have already given this matter some thought.
- I feel very uncomfortable when you use those words, so you shouldn't do that. But now tell me what you think about this, what's important.

# 3. B

## How to LIMIT STATEMENTS?

### Roleplay

- It is important when ‘limiting’ statements to invite the youngster immediately for further discussion
  - They are teenagers or adolescents who are busy finding their own voice, their own opinions, their own place in the world...
  - This is where the real stakes lie in limiting these statements: do we contribute to an open and safe pedagogical climate?

## Exercise Roleplay on limiting statements

- ✓ 3 groups: 'youngster', supervisors' and observers
- ✓ Youngsters will be asked to express a controversial statement (see instruction card)
- ✓ 'Supervisors' leave the room. They will be confronted with someone who will make an unacceptable statement. (see instruction card)
- ✓ Observers in two groups: observe the 'youngster' or the 'supervisor (see instruction card)

## Roleplay

- ✓ All youngsters leave the room.
- ✓ One 'youngster' and one 'supervisor' enter the room for the first roleplay.
- ✓ After 5' we go further with the second, third ... roleplay

## Discussion

- ✓ Experiences, emotions and ideas of the youngsters
- ✓ Comments from the observers on the 'youngsters'
- ✓ Experiences, emotions and ideas of the supervisors
- ✓ Comments from the observers on the 'supervisors'

## If you want to limit and invite

Some literal  
example sentences  
can help you in  
'limiting & inviting'

- ✓ I'd really like to talk to you about this, but I don't want you to use offensive or discriminatory words
- ✓ It hurts me to hear you talking about another young person this way. Try to put it another way and still say what you really want to say.
- ✓ I'd like to discuss this further, but you know that term is not considered acceptable anymore?
- ✓ I would like to listen to you, but you won't be able to if you use these words, which is a pity, because I think you have already given this matter some thought.
- ✓ I feel very uncomfortable when you use those words, so you shouldn't do that. But now tell me what you think about

4.

Which DISCUSSION  
TECHNIQUES can be supportive?



If you choose not to avoid or block a controversial statement but discusses it with young people individually or in a group, there are a few guiding principles and questioning techniques that are important. In this part of the training, we will explore these.

## Case

- We read a case about controversy in the classroom (see card)
  - ✓ “Moroccans don't want to integrate at all, they have no respect for us, and certainly not for women.”
  - ✓ “I'm tired of being accused all the time.”
- Individual: how would you react when you have chosen to deal with the situation (and not to avoid or downplay it)?



Group  
discussion

Who wants to share  
some ideas?

What are possible  
reactions??

(we list this up – flipchart)

## We return to the case

When peace and quiet had returned, the teacher gave space to both students to tell their stories. The deal was that both could tell their stories and there would be no judgment. The boy came with a personal story: “This weekend my girlfriend was harassed by a group of young people at the station.” The girl also told some anecdotes from her personal life, which showed that she has very often was humiliated because of her migration background.

## Further reflection

Two by two discuss the question:  
What would you consider the most  
important principles to have a  
fruitful conversation on this issue?  
Which attitude of the supervisor,  
what kind of questions, how to start  
and end the conversation,...?

We list these ideas in the group

Some ideas on  
guiding principles  
for discussing  
controversial issues

- ✓ Show respect
- ✓ Ask more deeply
- ✓ Take emotions seriously
- ✓ Promote nuance
- ✓ Repeat and summarize
- ✓ Conclude the conversation reflectively

(based on *Democratic Dialogue*,  
2017)

# CLOSING OF THE SESSION



- Do you feel more comfortable dealing with this issue in your practice?
- Which elements from this training were very useful for your practice?
- What questions and uncertainties are left unanswered?
- What opportunities and limitations do you see now to use this in your professional context?