



DISCUSSION & FACILITATION GUIDE



a documentary film
www.earthseasoned.com

MEMO

TO: You

FROM: *The Director of Earth Seasoned*

I believe that kids need nature now more than ever: the solitude, the uncomplicated beauty, and the inspiration found in the natural world are critical to our well-being. The reminders are all around us of how disconnected kids have become from nature and just how negatively this affects them in mind, body and spirit.

When I learned that five young women would be living semi-primitively in the Oregon Cascade Mountains for an entire year, I was delighted. What an amazing adventure! When I shared this information with others, I was astounded by how many people truly believed that five women couldn't possibly do this, and well, a fire was lit!

I wanted to make a film that was hopeful and visually beautiful and that carried a message inspiring all of us to spend just a little more time outside. What started as the story of five young women became focused on one of them in particular: Tori. She has attention deficit disorder, dyslexia and short-term memory problems that made learning in traditional settings difficult and led to social problems in high school. Yet, in the wilderness she came alive! Her confidence was boosted by learning and retaining names and calls of birds, identifying plants and animals, and finding herself not just on level ground with her peers but actually forming deep friendships.

*It is my joy to share Tori's story and bring you **Earth Seasoned...#GapYear**. I am beyond grateful that you have chosen to join the adventure. Thanks for helping me extend the reach of the film and connect people to its messages about how nature can help us discover and be our best selves, and fuel our work to make the world better place.*

- Molly Kreuzman

USING THIS GUIDE

Written by Faith Rogow, Ph.D.

This guide was created to help you use *Earth Seasoned* to help young people – and those who care about them – reflect on the transformative power of nature and how we benefit from spending time outdoors. The goal is to use the film as a springboard for conversations that bring new insights, help people to see girls as strong and capable, and reveal the profound role of nature in healing, inspiring, challenging, and nurturing us all.

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ABOUT THE FILM

What happens when five young women aged 18–23 decide to spend a “gap year” living “semi-primitively” in the Oregon Cascade Mountains, applying the skills traditionally used by all indigenous people: skills like fire-by-friction, shelter building, finding edible and medicinal plants, tracking animals and practicing “sit spot” twice a day for introspection? For Tori, diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, and short-term memory problems, what happens is transformation.

As our guide, Tori navigates us through the four season journey and her path to overcome the stigma and ostracism she encountered in school because she was “different”. We see her gradually morph from a self-doubting, shy teen into a confident, capable young woman who forms deep friendships with her peers.

Using Tori's story as a lens, the film addresses issues that burden many young people today: bullying, teen suicide, ADD, learning disorders, and more. Ultimately, hope overshadows these challenges, as the Caretaker program's young women show us the profound gifts that nature offers: sustenance, calm, healing, learning, insight, satisfaction, and camaraderie.

SELECTED PEOPLE IN THE FILM

The Young Women

- Tori Davis
- Emma Trucco
- Thea Smith
- Hannah Schiestel
- Maddee Roseberry

The Mentors

- Amanda Smith
- Joe Kreuzman

Short biographies are available at <http://earthseasoned.com/cast/>

Discussion & Activity Prompts

This section offers more variety than you will be able to use. Typically, two or three questions are enough and the group will take it from there. Don't feel like you need to cover everything or use questions in any particular order (though you'll see that some are especially useful for starting or ending a discussion). Stick to what is most meaningful for the group in the room and adapt wording as needed. The questions are currently written for youth audiences. If your audience is parents or other adults, you'll want to say things like "your child's school" or "your community's school" instead of "your school."

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Opening Questions

My initial reaction to the film is _____.

If you were going to tell a friend about this film, what would you say? What were the main messages?

I think Tori's story is interesting because _____.

What was your major "takeaway" from what you just saw? Was there a particular moment in the film that "spoke truth" to you?

What question(s) do you think the filmmaker was trying to answer (and how do you know)? Did you agree with the answers that the film provided?

Nature

What sorts of connections to nature do you experience? Where do they take place? How do they compare to what you saw in the film?

Tori's father says that some family members were "freaking out" about the possibility of her spending a year "alone" in the wilderness, and her mother, Jeanette, says "I was concerned...I think it probably took me about four or five months to feel good about it..." What do you think they feared? Why do you suppose so many people are afraid of the wilderness? How does the program featured in the film address that fear?

Mentor Amanda says, "I think people crave something beyond themselves, and I think nature fills that very well because it gives us a connection to something beyond themselves." Where in the film did you see examples of this type of connection?

What did you learn from the film about the ways that living in sync with nature helps people become better versions of themselves?

Reverence

Amanda observes, “Starting a fire with a bow drill kit, especially the first time you do it, is really, really magical. You’re literally taking wood from a tree, which is sunshine because trees absorb sunlight, and then it’s stored energy, and taking that and creating friction, and through that process of friction we turn it back into fire, which is what it was all along.” Have you ever looked at wood and fire this way? How does Amanda’s perspective give her a sense of connection to the natural world (as opposed to being in competition with it or needing to conquer it)?

As Hannah struggles to light fire, Joe is reminded that, “You go from the smoke going into your face to holding it up and almost like a prayer form and giving thanks and it’s funny because we all go through that, anyone who’s made fire primitively.” Aside from learning how to ignite the fire, what does Hannah learn by accepting that it’s a mistake to hold down the bundle and that success is achieved by holding it up, as if it is a sacred offering?

Tori learns that: “When you caretake the land, you want to leave it better off. You want to make sure you take what you need without overdoing it.” Where in your community or region do you see this approach put into practice? Where is it ignored (and why)?

Joe observes, “We used to hang out around the fire at night, and now we have this television set which flickers just like a fire and it draws our attention, just like you can wander off into a fire but it is imprinting us with other realities.” What realities are screens imprinting on you? What are the messages about preserving natural spaces? Do you think that modern electronics makes it harder or easier (or both or neither) to appreciate the natural world?

The program tries to replace a fear of wild animals with a sense of awe. What’s the difference?

Why do you think the program requires “sit spots”?

Lessons and the Process of Learning

Tori is aware that she learns best through hands-on experiences: “Let’s say I’m being taught how to tree climb like for the first time. Yes, I understand everything that you’re telling me, but could you also do a demonstration, too, because that’s what helps me learn better.” How do you learn best?

As one of their activities, the Caretakers wander. What do they get from that experience that’s different from walking or hiking?

Tori begins to understand what the birds are communicating. The animals don’t learn how to talk – Tori learns how to listen. What practices help her learn how to do that?

Amanda provides this description of learning a new skill: “Any skill that we practice, whether it is flint knapping or bow making, you’re building a relationship with yourself through that process. Sports players talk about being in the zone for a particular game, so all of a sudden everything just comes together and it’s flowing and happening and you’re really good at what you’re doing. The skills, flint knapping, for example, teaches you if you hit the rock wrong, then your piece breaks in half. But if you’re listening to the rock and you hit it in the right place you get the perfect flake to come off and you end up with a beautiful piece of art. It’s an art form. No two people are going to do something the same way. So it’s individual expression of yourself. The skills are extremely important for that, because we all have something big and important to

share with the world and with each other and with ourselves even. All of these skills give us the opportunity to have an outlet for sharing who we are.” Are there any activities in your life where you get in a zone or you feel like you’re really able to express yourself from a deep place? How many of those activities happen at school or at work?

Amanda says, “You never really know something until you’ve learned to teach it. Taking something from being able to do it and then being able to share it with someone else in a way that they can understand it and learn it rounds out your understanding of a skill in a way that nothing else does.” What have you learned well enough to teach? What else would you like to learn that well?

Joe notes that it is much easier for youngsters than adults to learn Caretaker principles because kids are more open to change. If that’s true, do you think that wilderness programs should be required as part of school? Why or why not?

Reflection/What Did I Learn About Myself?

Sometimes watching others can give us insights into our own lives. What did you learn about yourself from watching this film?

What scene from the film most affected you and why?

Did you see or hear anything familiar? What do you have in common with Tori?

If Tori (or anyone else from the film) were with us here, what would you want to ask or say? Why is that question or comment important to you?

Joe says, “When we slow down we go back to nature we connect to the natural flow. Nature helps us slow down, detox, and purge all the different distractions that we kind of build up around ourselves.” What are the distractions in your life? What’s one thing you could do to eliminate those distractions? What would you focus on if you weren’t distracted?

Joe instructs, “Anytime you catch yourself telling yourself something which is from self-doubt, I’m going to ask you guys to write that in your journal and then put in its place what you want.” What sorts of negative self-talk do you do? What could you “write” to replace it?

Relationships

Tori is “a little nervous” about meeting the other young women “because in my high school life I’ve had troubles with hanging out with girls my age.” But she ends up building strong friendships. What aspects of the Caretaker experience allow Tori to develop those friendships? Could any of those conditions be re-created in your school or community?

Tori describes being bullied. Are there kids at your school who are “different,” like Tori? How are they treated? What could you say to the bullies?

Sandy recalls that when Tori was bullied, she “came running over and she was bawling, and she just looked at me and said, why are people so mean to me?” Sandy’s answer was, “it’s not just you. You’re not the only one who goes through this.” In your view, was that answer helpful? How would you have answered?

What was your reaction to Tori's story about her friend who "had problems with school bullying, and he ended up deciding that he couldn't take it anymore and just ended it."? Have you known anyone like Tori's friend? How did their death affect the people around them? What do you wish that person had known? If you could go back and talk to the bullies, what would you want them to know?

Compare and contrast the ways that the young women learn to get along to what you see in groups of friends who interact using social media. What are the benefits and drawbacks of interacting online and interacting face-to-face?

Conflict Resolution

Amanda reports that "The shelter building was probably the biggest argument they had continually all year and it was definitely the biggest contention point. Just the fairness and equanimity of the work." If you were in their shoes, what rules or agreements would you want to see implemented to make things fair?

The Caretakers don't always get along, but they remain friends. How might having a work task to complete together create an opportunity for bonding and also create an opportunity for conflict? What makes it possible for the girls to remain friends, even when they're mad or they disagree?

Amanda tells the young women that, "it's okay if things don't get resolved. You're allowed to be pissed off and grumpy and no one has to fix it." What's the difference between trying to "fix" someone and providing support for that person? Have you ever tried to "fix" a friend who was upset? What could you have done instead?

Joe explains, "Doing a circle or group check in helps to bring honesty and to teach that you can voice something which is seemingly confrontational, you can voice it in an open and loving way. You can have two different opposing opinions, and it just means they have a different opinion from me. They're seeing something from a different angle. So it's bringing the humility and seeing through someone else's eyes. And that's a part of healing and growth." Can you recall a time when you gained a new insight by hearing about how (and why) someone reacted to a situation differently than you? Think back to a time when you said something mean. How might you have made the same point, but in a non-confrontational way?

"Disabilities" & Healing

Amanda questions the marginalization experienced by people labelled as learning disabled: "They have this idea because they don't learn the way other people learn that they're not good enough." Have you ever felt that way or known someone who felt that way?

Joe points out that researcher Dr. Frances Kuo has found that a simple 20-minute walk in nature boosts the ability to concentrate as well or better than a dose of medication for kids diagnosed with attention disorders. Why do you think that might be the case?

Tori's parents refused to medicate her. Educator Sandy Reed sums up the conundrum: "Kids today are medicated more than they should be. They're taking meds for everything. On the other hand, I have a son with autism, and medication saved his life." What's your view of the role of prescription drugs in kids' lives today? What would you like to see happen in terms of policy or training for medical professionals?

Joe explains, "When someone finds their own medicine it's them finding their own innate gifts to the world. It is slowing down enough, it is getting real with yourself, and it is drawing that line in your own

personal sand, so that you can find what your gift to the world is. It's not what your parents want your gift to be. It's not what society wants your gift to be. It's not how you should be molded in to your peer group to be a certain way. It's you finding your own place of personal power, because that is a place of passion, and that is a place that will help steer you and guide you for the rest of your life." What do you think he meant when he described finding your own personal passion as finding your own "medicine"? What's significant about the choice to use the term "medicine"?

When Tori first does "sit spots," she is bored, distracted, and skeptical of the activity's value. However, she soon begins to notice things that hadn't caught her attention before and eventually comes to value the experience: "I'm just going to close my eyes and really concentrate on what's around me. It's so quiet and peaceful. It makes me feel really good. I want this feeling to last. It's been a few weeks and I feel so much more calm and aware from doing these sits. I even feel aware of being more in control of myself, which really does make me more confident." Do you think that the practice of "sit spots" could help anyone you know?

Gender

Tori describes herself as being "a bit of a Tomboy. Because I'm not like other girls who like worry about doing their nails or fixing their hair a lot and like going to the mall every weekend. Me, I don't care if I have like huge muddy feet. I kind of just go with it. I'll eventually like wash it off later, but I'm not the kind of person that freaks out if there's like, a bug crawling on me." Do you know girls who are "tomboys?" How are they treated? Why do you think we label girls who like physical, outdoor activities and getting dirty with a word that makes it seem like these things are outside the gender norm for girls?

What do you imagine would have been different about the group's experience on the mountain if it wasn't girl-only? What do you notice about gender dynamics when you're in mixed groups as compared with single-gender groups?

Closing Questions

What is one thing you learned from the film (or the discussion) that you wish everybody knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?

I think Tori's story is important because _____.

Before this film (or discussion) I _____. Now I _____.

ACTIVITY PROMPTS

Journaling is a common activity during the wilderness program. Rather than starting a discussion immediately after viewing the film, have everyone spend time recording their reactions to the film in a journal. Then come together as a group and invite people to share what they wrote. As a group, reflect on how pausing to journal instead of talking right away influenced the course or content of the ensuing discussion.

At one point, Tori describes the strengths of the other young women: hard-working, funny, great cook, confident, etc. Do the same thing for your circle of friends, team, troop, club, class, family, or any other group you belong to. What sorts of activities help us see others' strengths and talents?

The film includes a quote to open each season:

FALL – “Now I see the secret of making the best persons,
It is to grow up in the open air and eat and sleep with the earth.” *Walt Whitman*

WINTER – “Only in the winter, in the country, can you have longer, quiet stretches
when you can savor belonging to yourself.” *Ruth Stout*

SPRING – “There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance
that dawn comes after night and spring after winter.” *Rachel Carson*

SUMMER – “To lie sometime on the grass under trees on a summer's day listening to the murmur
of the water, watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.” *Joe Lubbock*

Divide into four groups, with each group assigned one quote. Have each group do some quick online research to identify the person who was quoted and see if you can find the entire piece from which the excerpt was taken. Reconvene and have each group share what it learned. Talk about what the quote means and why the filmmaker linked it to a particular season.

Tori says, “I've actually been really glad to step away from all that technology and push it aside, and take a break from it for a year. Because once you're not so addicted to your phone and you actually experience fully what's going on, like, oh wow, there's a chickadee in that tree! You can find all this cool awareness. And tracking ... I didn't know there was that turkey track ... wow, that's so cool!” Turn off your phones and head outside for a silent walk. Then come back and share what you noticed.

Tori describes a friend whose suicide was connected to bullying. Role play what you would say if a friend told you they were thinking about suicide. Be clear that there's a difference between being a supportive friend and being a professional who can give a suicidal person the help and support they need. Make a list of all the people in your community that you'd feel comfortable sending a friend to for help.

ACTION STEPS

Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult. Rather than pre-determining what actions the group should take, you can reflect the spirit of the film and empower people in the room:

1. Start by brainstorming a list of possible actions.
2. Help the group to narrow the list and choose their focus.
3. Plan next steps.

Initial brainstorming can be done in small groups or with everyone together, and it can focus on either individual or collective actions. If the group is having trouble getting started, you can offer a couple of possibilities:

- Think about one thing you saw in the film that you'd like to learn or do. What steps could you take to make that happen? Where could you find help to take those steps?
- Join in efforts to protect an existing local natural site or, if none exists, to create one (e.g., adding vegetation to a park that is currently concrete surrounded by chain link fences).
- Arrange a camping trip or visit to a state or national park.
- Learn about “Every Kid in a Park” program for 4th graders – visit <https://everykidinapark.gov/>.

Background Information

COYOTE TRAILS SCHOOL OF NATURE

The Caretakers program featured in the film is just one of the primitive living skills education and mentoring opportunities offered by CTSN, an independent, non-profit based in Oregon. With a mission focused on connecting under-served children and adults to the outdoors, the organization has offered nature-based experiences to more than 23,000 children of all ages ranging from Southern and Central Oregon to Kansas, Ohio and beyond.

At the heart of the School's method is the conviction that, given the right opportunity, each child will instinctively seek a meaningful relationship with the natural world. Once reconnected with nature, they will continue to explore in ways that help them experience a deeper understanding of self and become better caretakers of the Earth.

For more information about the School and its programs, visit coyotetrails.org.

BENEFITS OF NATURE

A significant body of research has found that time spent outdoors

- Leads to a wide range of better health outcomes
- Increases the likelihood that girls will remain active into adolescence
- Improves social-emotional wellbeing
- Reduces stress, anger, and aggression
- Boost academic performance
- Helps develop impulse control and the ability to focus

Sources:

- http://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CNN_NatureImprove_16-10-27_O_newlogo.pdf
- http://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CNN_AcademicOutcomes_16-10-27_O_newlogo.pdf
- For more information, visit richardlouy.com

ADD/ADHD

The mainstream medical community defines ADD and ADHD as brain disorders. Symptoms include an ongoing pattern of inability to focus and or excessive fidgeting or constant movement in situations in which it is not appropriate. These may also be accompanied by an absence of impulse control. The disorder is often treated with stimulants like Ritalin.

The condition is controversial in part because there is no objective diagnostic test for the disorders. Critics point to over-diagnosis, misdiagnosis of behaviors that are actually normal for young children, and over prescribing of drugs when other treatments could be as or more effective.

Source: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/index.shtml>

TEEN SUICIDE

Thousands of teens commit suicide each year in the United States. In 2013, suicide was the third leading cause of death for 15-to-24-year-olds, and the sixth leading cause of death for 5-to-14-year-olds.

Studies show that at least 90% of teens who kill themselves have some type of mental health problem (depression, anxiety, drug or alcohol abuse, a behavior disorder). They may also have problems at school or with friends or family, or be struggling with issues related to gender identity, or been the victim of sexual or physical abuse or bullying.

Some signs that a teen may be contemplating suicide include:

- Change in eating and sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance
- Marked personality change
- Unexplained decline in the quality of schoolwork
- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms, often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Repeated assertions that they are a bad person
- Talk about suicide or verbal hints: I won't be a problem for you much longer; Nothing matters; It's no use
- Affairs suddenly put in order (e.g., gives away favorite possessions, cleans room)
- Suddenly cheerful after a period of depression
- Symptoms of psychosis (hallucinations or bizarre thoughts)

A teen who talks about suicide should be taken seriously. Help is available via local hotlines, youth centers, and schools, as well as from mental health professionals and specially trained clergy.

Sources:

- http://www.aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth/facts_for_families/FFF-Guide/Teen-Suicide-010.aspx
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Teen-Suicide-Statistics.aspx>

BULLYING

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2016, one of every five (20.8%) students reports being bullied. Bullying is not minor teasing or a natural part of childhood or something that every child experiences. It is severe harassment with serious consequences:

- CDC research has found that students who are bullied are more likely to experience low self-esteem and isolation, perform poorly in school, have few friends in school, have a negative view of school, experience physical symptoms (such as headaches, stomachaches, or problems sleeping), and experience mental health issues (such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and anxiety).
- Students who engage in bullying behavior are at increased risk for academic problems, substance use, and violent behavior in adulthood.

- Bullying affects witnesses as well as targets. Witnesses are more likely to use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs; have increased mental health problems; and miss or skip school.

The good news is, students have a unique power to prevent bullying. More than half of bullying situations (57%) stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the student being bullied.

Source: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

Facilitation Tips

As a facilitator, you set the tone. The way you approach your task determines whether or not people will feel safe enough to speak and listen with open hearts and minds.

Your role is to shepherd a process that enables people to:

- Share honestly and respectfully
- Learn from one another
- Stay on track
- Use the available time in a purposeful manner
- Work through any challenges that may arise

To accomplish that, you'll want to remain calm and respectful; speak gently, even when you're enforcing ground rules; and express interest in what every person has to say (not necessarily with words, but with your facial expressions and body language).

Facilitators should avoid:

- Telling people what they should experience, think, or feel.
- Providing answers to participants or interpreting the film for them.
- Making yourself the center of attention by responding to each comment or thanking people after they speak. This practice directs attention toward you and breaks the circle of the group, and could be perceived as unfair if you don't thank everyone in the same way.
- Asking your own questions (except for clarification) or making interpretive comments.
- Functioning as a content expert or teacher. Your personal agenda shouldn't displace the opportunity for open-ended dialogue. If a participant specifically asks for you to share your expertise or for resource recommendations, turn to the group first for suggestions before adding your own.
- Functioning as a therapist. The film raises issues like (teen suicide and bullying) that could be emotionally volatile for some participants. When participants feel safe enough to be vulnerable, it can be powerful (and wonderful) for the entire group, so you don't want to shut down expressions of deep emotion. But occasionally emotions shift from upset to crisis. Unless you are a credentialed mental health professional, be prepared to refer people to local specialists and support.
- Losing your cool. If you are having a hard time managing feelings, find the right spot in the agenda to take a break, go off by yourself to collect yourself, call on your resilience, remember your strengths, and remember your role.

Even the most experienced facilitators benefit by preparing themselves in advance. So...

- Preview the film and use that preview as an opportunity to process your own raw reactions before engaging others in a dialogue.
- Anticipate potential glitches. For example, plan strategies for dealing with things that might derail the dialogue (e.g., offensive language, raised voices, a person who wants to dominate the time, or

people who interrupt while others are speaking). See the “Responding to Challenges” section for suggestions.

- Educate yourself on the issues. Though the facilitator should not take on the role of expert, it can be helpful to know important facts. For example, some parents or educators might react defensively to the film’s questioning of the use of drugs to treat ADD or ADHD. Knowing exactly where to point people so they can find factual information can help you bring closure to arguments between participants who make competing factual claims. See the “Resources” section of the guide for ideas.

During the Discussion

- Use words, body language, and tone to create a welcoming atmosphere where people feel comfortable expressing all sorts of views. Convey the feeling that “we’re all in this together.” Steer participants away from rhetoric that seeks to identify enemies rather than work towards solutions.
- Explain your role. Be clear, concise, and transparent.
- Together with the group, establish basic ground rules for the discussion (see pp. 16-17). These are intended to create safe space and keep the discussion on track. Rules would typically include things like:
 - Speak only for oneself. Use sentences that start with “I,” not “we” or “everyone” or “people.”
 - Don’t generalize or presume to know how others feel.
 - No yelling.
 - No use of personal put-downs.
 - Start by sharing your name the first time you speak.
- As you establish guidelines, take care not to be seen as demanding “political correctness” or asking people to code switch from the routine way they speak. Help the group distinguish between language they may not like but can tolerate and “fighting words,” which should be off limits. Define “fighting words” as language that makes someone so angry or upset that they can no longer hear what the speaker is saying. It’s off limits not because it is offensive, but because it actually blocks the communication we’re striving for. Racial, sexual, and gender slurs often fall into the category of “fighting words.”

Responding to Challenges

- If participants are hesitant to speak
 - Spark conversation by inviting people to talk with a partner (pair & share) and then share the results of that conversation with the larger group.
 - Start with an “easy” or non-controversial question or shift to a “safer” topic and come back to the controversial topic later.
 - If you think people are silent because they don’t trust others in the room, you might ask everyone to agree to keep confidential anything said during the discussion.
- Prevent discussions from overheating:
 - Structure the discussion to provide everyone who wants to speak a chance to be heard. Depending on the size of your group, strategies might include using go-rounds (where each person takes a turn speaking), limiting opportunities to speak for a second or third time until

everyone has had a first chance, and/or dividing the audience into small groups or pairs. You may also want to appoint a timekeeper and place time limits on speakers.

- If your event has a particular purpose (e.g., encouraging participation in a local initiative), be sure that everyone understands the goal in advance. If the discussion strays too far off topic, get things back on track by validating the importance of other concerns and then gently reminding speakers that the purpose of today's event is [fill in the blank]. Or politely ask the speaker to explain how what they are saying relates to the purpose. They may see a link that you don't and can provide the group with valuable insight.
- At the beginning of the discussion, remind people that they will be engaging in a dialogue, not a debate. A debate is about staking out a position and trying to convince everyone else that you are right and they are wrong. A dialogue is about exchanging ideas in order to learn from one another. That means actively listening as well as talking.
- Be consistent about intervening when people stray from the group's ground rules. If you let things go with one person, it will be harder to be seen as fair if you redirect another later.
- If you need to intervene, gently interrupt with a reminder of the ground rules. If the speaker needs help, offer an alternative way of phrasing or engaging that's in keeping with the rules.

If a discussion overheats, de-escalate by interrupting the energy without shutting down the conversation. For example:

- Use the film as a model. Ask the group to think about how Joe, Amanda, or Tori might respond to the situation or the controversy.
- Acknowledge the depth of feeling and importance of the issue and pause the discussion to give everyone a chance to write down a one or two sentence response. Quick poll the group—do a go-round and give everyone a chance to say something brief (or pass) before anyone else can speak.
- Summarize the major opponents' points of view. If they feel heard, they will feel less need to shout. Start with a phrase like, "Let me see if I understand..." If people are calm enough, you might ask those most engaged in the argument to summarize what they think the other person is saying.
- Transform the core issue under debate into a question and break into dyads or small groups to discuss that question. After several minutes, bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to share what came up for them in the breakout discussion.
- If the group has already identified common ground (e.g., we all love our kids; we all think nature is important; etc.), remind people of the views they share. Then ask if people feel ready to resume the discussion or if they want to take a short break.

Conversation Agreement

We will keep confidentiality.

People may want to express sensitive opinions. We agree not to share what we hear from others in a way that they can be identified, without permission.

We will participate voluntarily.

If we don't feel comfortable answering a question at any point, we may feel free to "pass" or "pass for now."

We will use respectful language.

Productive discussion requires that we not disparage others' opinions or beliefs. We will refrain from attacking or criticizing others, and instead ask questions to deepen our understanding of how they came to their views.

We will be open.

We will attempt to recognize and set aside assumptions we may have about the experiences, beliefs, and motives of others. We will do our best to be open to learning from one another.

We will listen attentively.

We will give speakers our full attention and listen without interrupting.

We will speak for ourselves.

We will avoid using generalizations like "we all" and "nobody." We don't want to assume where everyone is coming from or isolate anyone from the conversation. Let's use language like "I believe" or "I think."

We will stay on topic.

Staying on topic allows us to explore the many viewpoints and beliefs that stem from this issue.

We will do our part to make sure everyone has a chance to be heard.

Once we have spoken, we'll refrain from commenting until others have had a chance to speak.

Excerpted from "Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project".
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Self-Help Tools

1. **If you feel cut off**, say so or override the interruption (“I’d like to finish...”)
2. **If you feel misunderstood**, clarify what you mean (“Let me put this another way...”)
3. **If you feel misheard**, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say, then affirm or correct the statement.
4. **If you feel hurt or disrespected**, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings in you. (“When you said x, I felt y...” where “x” refers to specific language). If it is hard to think of what to say, just say “OUCH” to flag your reaction.
5. **If I feel angry**, express the anger directly (e.g., “I felt angry when I heard you say x...” rather than expressing it or acting it out directly (e.g., by trashing another person’s statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question).
6. **If you feel confused**, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information, you may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. (“Are you saying that?”)
7. **If you feel uncomfortable** with the process, state your discomfort and check with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. (“I’m not comfortable with the tension I’m feeling in the room right now and I’m wondering how others are feeling.”) If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. (“How about taking a one-minute time out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?”)
8. **If you feel the conversation is going off track**, share your perception and check in with others. (“I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focusing on y. (<http://whatisessential.org/blog/shifting-margins>) that right?”) If so (“I’d like to get back to x and hear from more people about it.”)

These self-help tools were derived from discussions with participants about difficult moments and what they might do in the further in similar situations.

Additional Resources

Connecting with Nature

Children and Nature Network

www.childrenandnature.org – An invaluable source for anyone who wants to connect kids with nature. The site includes links to research, local organizations for families, suggestions for action and much more.

National Park Service

www.nps.gov – Find Parks near you, learn about their unique natural features, investigate habitat preservation efforts, and more. Don't forget to look for your State and local parks, too:

www.discovertheforest.org/

ADD/ADHD

Dr. Frances Kuo

<http://lhhl.illinois.edu/adhd.htm> – Dr. Kuo's Landscape and Human Health Lab does research on “treating” attention disorders with time in nature.

Also see Faber Taylor, A. & Kuo, F.E. (2009). Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 12, 402-409.

(<http://jad.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1087054708323000v1>)

Dr. Lawrence Diller

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/medicating/interviews/diller.html – In this interview, Dr. Diller explains the rise in the use of drugs (like Ritalin) to “treat” ADD/ADHD. The doctor offers more information at DocDiller.com

Bullying & Suicide Prevention

National Bullying Prevention Center

www.pacer.org/bullying – Statistics, prevention strategies and initiatives, advice for parents, and more.

Stop Bullying

www.stopbullying.gov – Information on bullying (including cyberbullying) and interventions from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide

www.sptsusa.org/about-us – Provides free, online training for educators and parents on identifying at-risk teens and preventing suicide attempts. The organization also provides resources for teens, including this list of hotlines that offer help: www.sptsusa.org/get-connected

Earth Seasoned Partners

Coyote Trails School of Nature

