

LEANING IN: Opening to What Feels Difficult

"In improv, we try and think about everything everybody gives us as a gift. When something is offered to you, how do (you) engage that as something to play with? As something to open and unpack and have fun with and explore where it goes? Who finds this easier or harder is this difference between being open and closed." ~Tane Danger

conversation skills you will practice:

- openness
- curiosity
- perspective
- engagement

When we're under stress or experiencing something difficult, we feel uncertain, and things can feel scary – rarely is this a space where we're at our best. We look for things to be familiar so we can know what to expect, feel some stability, and trust ourselves to navigate the situation with a sense of mastery. Often this reaction to the unknown takes the form of us becoming rigid in our thinking and controlling in our interactions with others.

When we practice "opening," especially when we feel the urge to remain "closed," we learn a lot about how we personally react in moments of discomfort. Choosing novel experiences that reflect what happens within us when we feel challenged can help us practice being curious and more willing to explore.

1 Try brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand. Pay attention to how it feels in your body to do this everyday activity in a new way. Also notice what happens in your mind and the different ways you want to respond.

2 Then, take a few minutes to reflect on the following:

- How often did you experience the urge to "take over" with your dominant hand? How did you respond to that urge?
- What stories might you hear in your mind about doing this thing that feels uncomfortable? (e.g. "This is stupid," "This is a waste of time," "I'm not getting my teeth clean," "I can't do it right this way," etc.)

Want to do more with this activity? If so, add the next few steps.

3 Invite a friend to try this, as well. Compare notes on how it felt to do something uncomfortable and how you each responded to that discomfort. Were there similarities or differences to your reactions?

4 What if you changed the story you were telling about being in discomfort? (Maybe, "This is interesting!", "I wonder how long it will take to get used to this?", "What a good exercise for my brain!") How does that change your perspective?

CONVERSATION CONSIDERATIONS

What might this activity tell you about your perspective on navigating discomfort? How might leaning in when you want to turn away help you stay present when things become uncomfortable in a conversation? How might telling a new story about your discomfort – seeing it as a gift to play with and explore – help you stay more engaged when things feel hard?

