

Hosting Dialogue

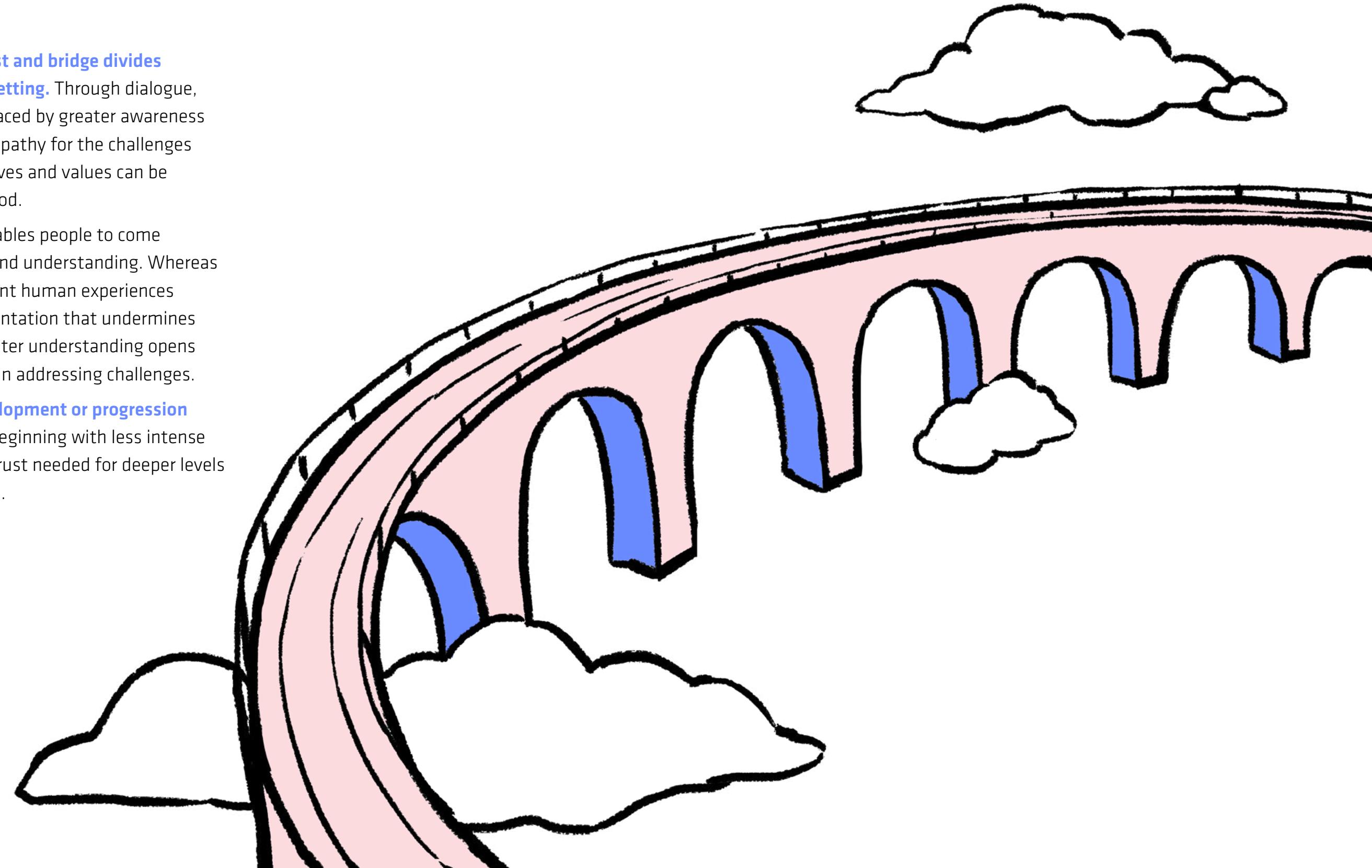
A Foundation for Collective Action
UNITE RESOURCES · BC MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

What Is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a way to create trust and bridge divides among people within a given setting. Through dialogue, simplistic explanations are replaced by greater awareness of complexity and increased empathy for the challenges others face. Different perspectives and values can be expressed, heard, and understood.

Dialogue is participatory. It enables people to come together and build awareness and understanding. Whereas quick judgements about different human experiences can create an “us-vs-them” orientation that undermines effective support and care, greater understanding opens the door to collaborative effort in addressing challenges.

Dialogue often involves a development or progression through four movements. By beginning with less intense engagement we can build the trust needed for deeper levels of exploration and collaboration.



Four Movements in Dialogue

COMING TOGETHER

This initial movement involves identifying differences or misunderstandings in your care setting that make it difficult to deal with the current challenges. Often disagreements between people or parties are based on misunderstandings. Carefully creating the container, setting or situation in which people can come together and really listen to one another as equal participants can nurture new understanding and trust.

- *What disagreements or misunderstanding are making it difficult for us to move forward?*
- *How might we bring people who disagree with one another together in ways that promote listening?*
- *How will we ensure everyone involved is able to speak openly and be heard? How can we address differences in power?*

FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

The tendency when we bring people together is to share information (teach) or resolve issues (problem solve). But before we are open to learn from each other, we need a level of trust and respect. So when you plan dialogues that bring people together, focus on activities that build relationships. If you do this well, learning and problem solving will follow.

- *What does a “relationships before content” perspective mean for us?*
- *What, within our current agenda, are we prepared to give up, change or temporarily set aside?*
- *In what specific ways might we promote relationships and understanding in our setting?*

QUESTIONING TOGETHER

Learning is not so much about being taught answers but being exposed to good questions. When people build relationships, they become curious about each other. They become open to explore why the other might think differently about a particular situation or challenge. This questioning, based on a relationship of trust and respect, nurtures learning.

- *How can we keep the focus on questions, not to be answered but to be explored together?*
- *How might we nurture self-reflection, questioning one's own assumptions and beliefs?*
- *How might we engage participants in asking honest questions of each other (questions about what they don't know)?*

ACTING TOGETHER

This movement is really beyond dialogue. But when a foundation has been built with dialogue, you will have a solid basis from which to engage in coordinated action. This action will be truly collaborative and most beneficial if it retains the spirit of dialogue in the working conversations that continue.

- *How can we avoid going too quickly into action planning?*
- *How much mutual understanding is needed to support collective action?*
- *What role will dialogue continue to have in our planning and action?*

