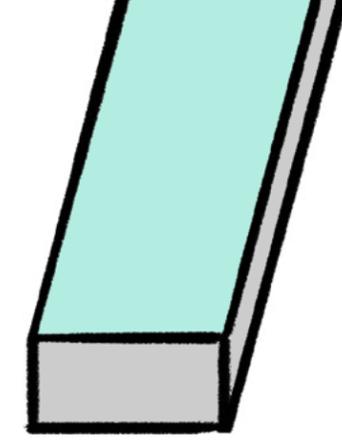
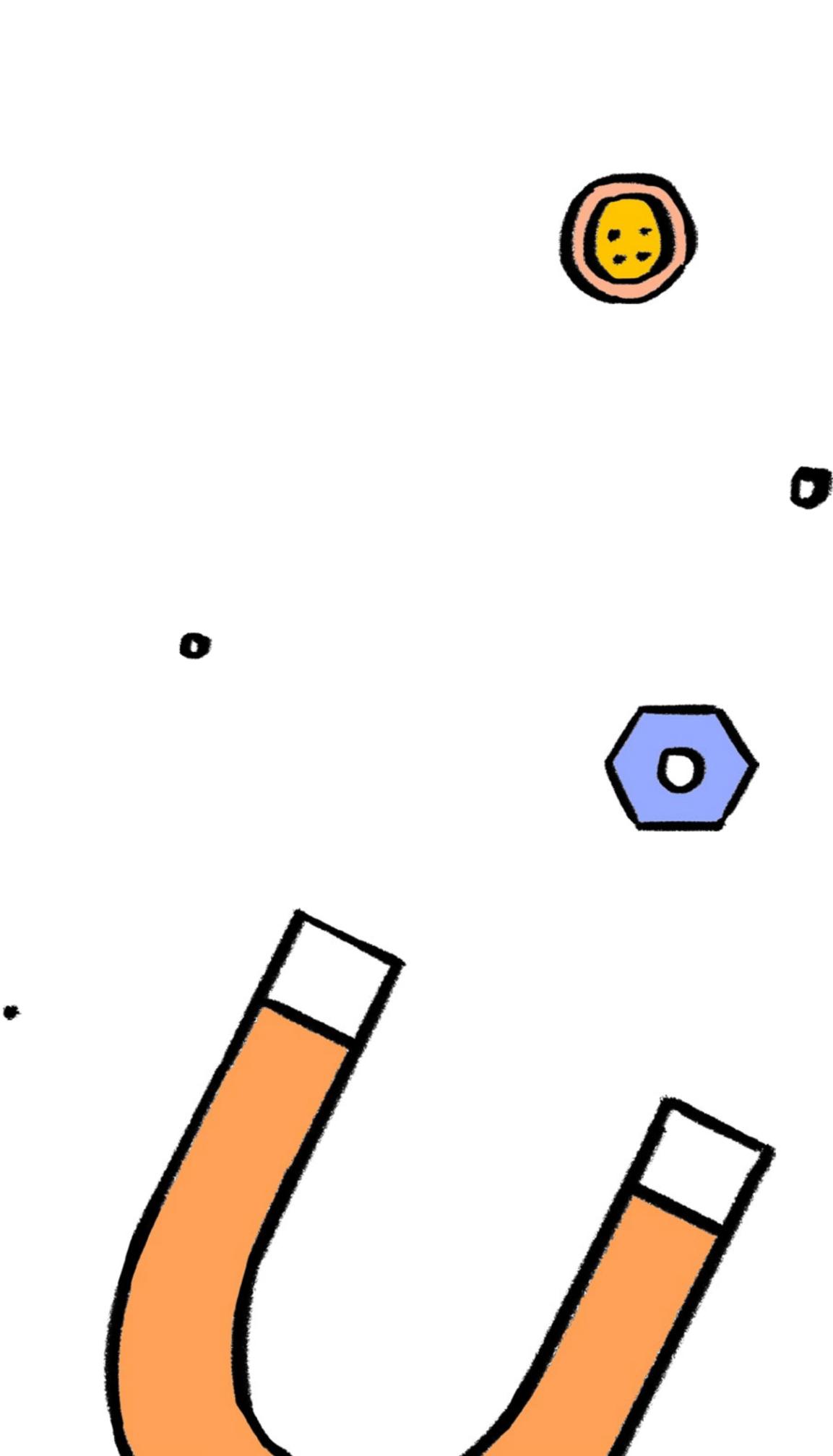


UNITE RESOURCES

# Applying the Principles of Dialogue

BC MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES



When applied, the principles of dialogue help create a safe and inclusive space to collectively explore the polarizations that divide our communities. They help us learn different ways to give space to each other – something most of us are not very good at. Addressing complex issues that create divides, such as those related to mental health and substance use, requires us to have open, honest, and non-judgemental conversations and hear each other.

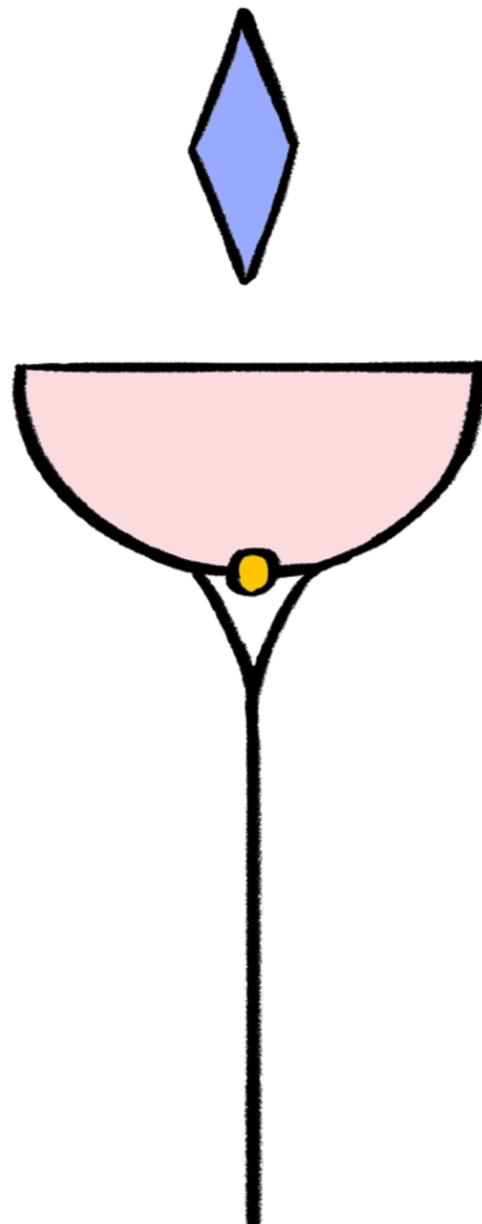
Although there are no “rules” for dialogue, there are certain orientations and practices that make our interactions less judgemental and our communities more accepting.

## Practice Empathy

EMPATHY IS THE DESIRE to understand the world beyond our own experience by understanding the experience of others, while acknowledging the limitations of our capacity to understand. It is this tension between what can and cannot be directly experienced that makes empathy unique. Empathy is at the core of human relationships. It is the attempt to imagine yourself in someone else's shoes and to experience how you are implicated in that world. Through empathy, both our understanding of the other and of ourselves is changed. Through empathetic dialogue, we seek to free ourselves from the prison of our individuality and learn to function better together.

### TIPS FOR NURTURING EMPATHY

- Model empathy during the conversation
- Use stories, games, and activities to help participants understand what someone else might be experiencing in a certain situation
- Emphasize shared values and common interests while recognizing differences among participants
- Create opportunities for group discussions or small projects to allow all participants to collaborate together and forge bonds

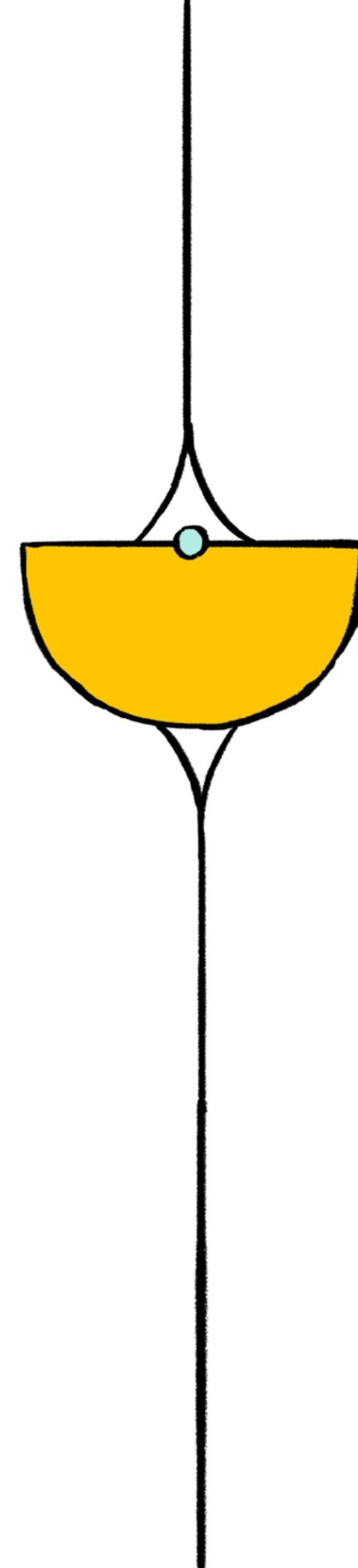


## Celebrate Diversity

IN DIALOGUE, we recognize and honour diversity. This is not mere tolerance as we would tolerate (endure) the pain of a toothache. Instead, we welcome the other as someone who challenges our assumptions and therefore our identity and, in doing so, opens up new possibilities. The beauty of the encounter with “otherness” and the subsequent discomfort is that it gives us time to stop, reflect, and get comfortable with discomfort. Celebrating diversity means seeking to gain deeper understanding and appreciation of each other.

### TIPS FOR CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

- When any idea is expressed, encourage the exploration of other ideas that surround it, including those that stand in contrast (you might think of this as “idea diversity”)
- Make sure everyone's voice is heard and respected
- Encourage participants to get to know individuals as people rather than carriers of a position
- Openly address diversity and inequality

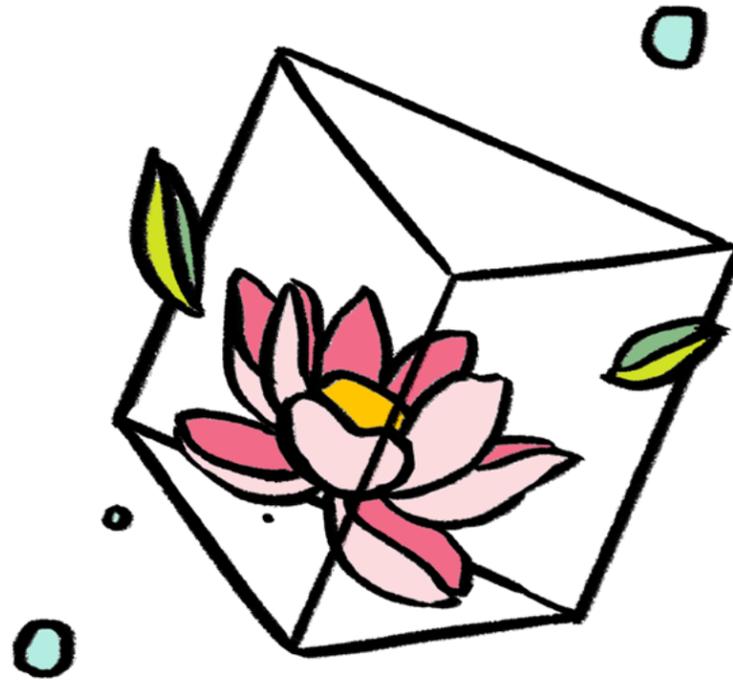


## Expose Assumptions & Suspend Judgement

TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE, we must first become aware of our own assumptions and recognize how they shape our thinking, our conclusions, and our way of seeing others and the world. Dialogue provides an opportunity to examine critically simplistic assumptions that lead to biased beliefs, attitudes, and actions. We come to see other positions as new possibilities. This requires us to pause for a moment and suspend (not suppress) judgements, resist prematurely jumping to a conclusion, and take time to respectfully explore the possibilities together.

### TIPS TO HELP EXPLORE ASSUMPTIONS AND SUSPEND JUDGEMENTS

- Create opportunities for participants to explore their personal views
- Engage participants in activities that involve “trying on” different perspectives
- Invite participants to reflect on how their personal views are influenced by assumptions based in their past

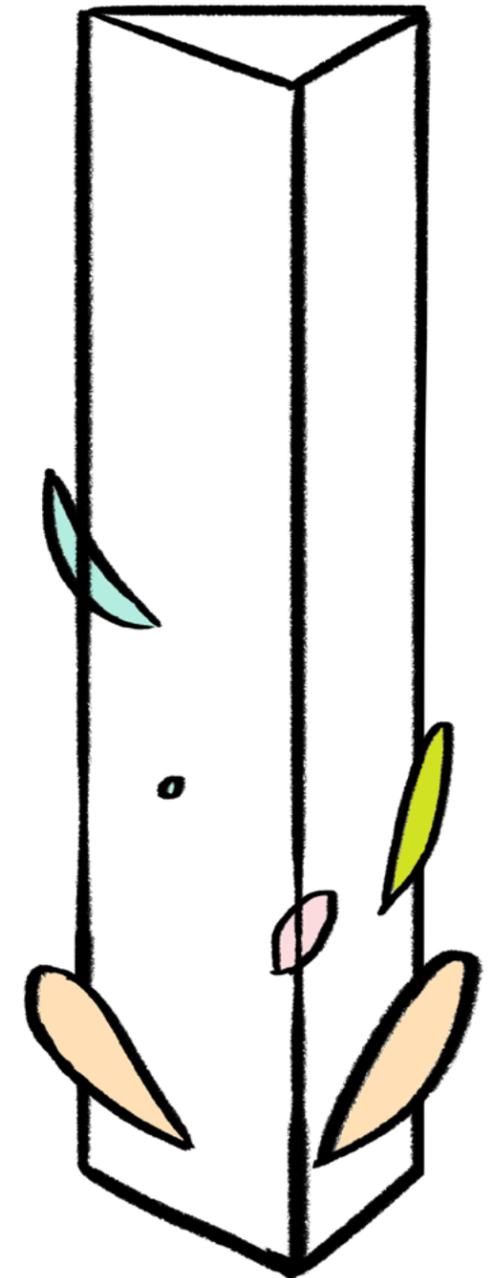


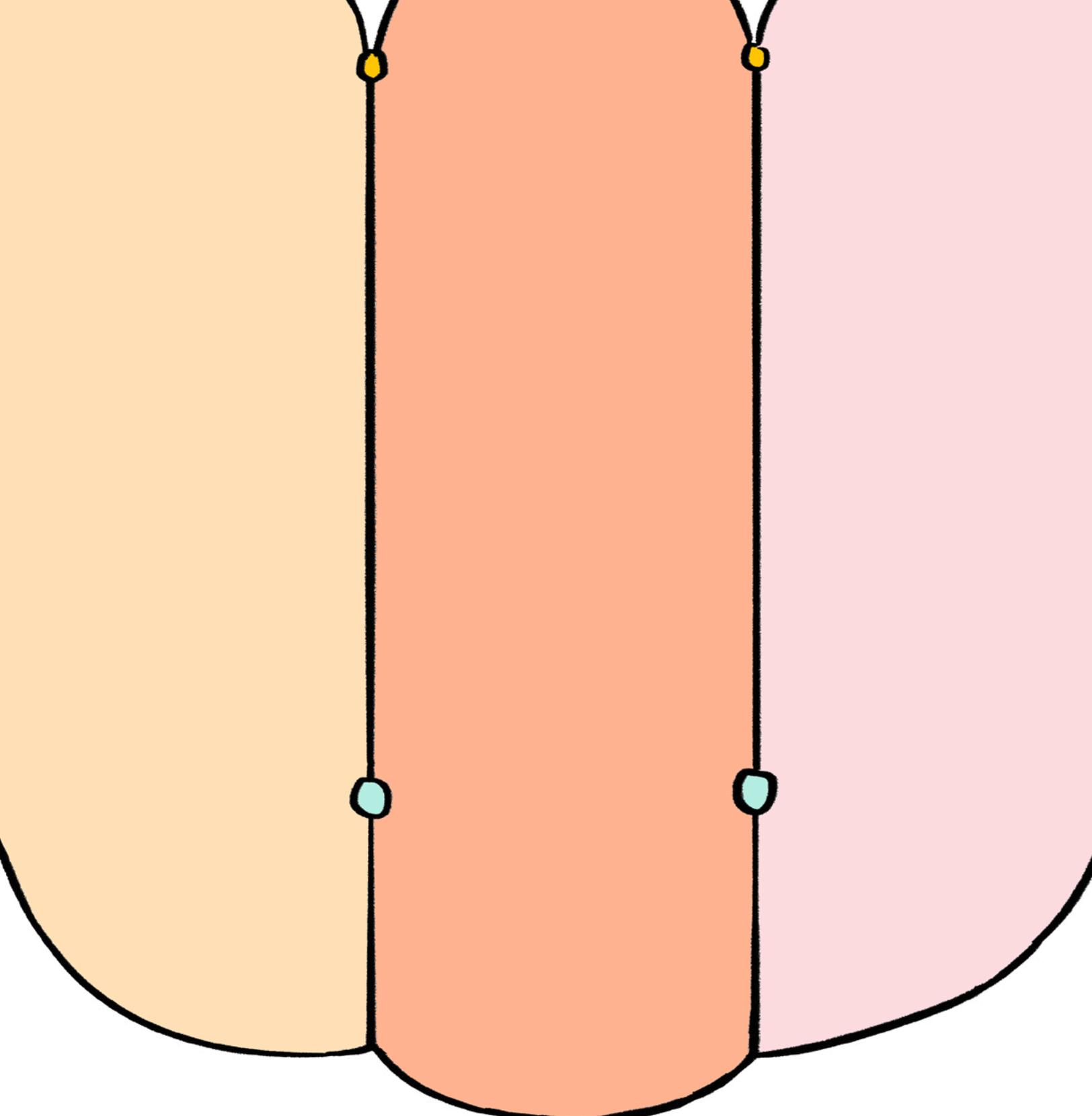
## Put Power in Its Place

POWER IS UBIQUITOUS – we cannot simply pick it up or put it down like a tool. Our authority is represented in our roles and engrained in us through our social hierarchies. In authentic dialogue, all participants are able to engage in the conversation as peers. This requires all voices to be heard and no one voice to dominate or be seen as the authority. To hold a real dialogue in the context of unequal power means we must openly acknowledge the inequality of power relations and how this influences our everyday social interactions. This allows both those with greater or lesser power to hold each other accountable to examine their assumptions and prejudices and engage in a genuine pursuit of understanding.

### TIPS FOR PUTTING POWER IN ITS PLACE

- Focus on listening and understanding rather than making decisions
- Encourage discussion about power imbalance in the group and openly identify situations in which participants may appear to be disempowering others
- Ensure all voices are heard (encourage and facilitate participation from those less likely to speak up – this may involve initially working with them outside of the group context)
- Invite participants to question and assess the evidence for what they hear from any source





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