DIALOGUE CIRCLE
How do I cope?

(Add a subtopic if you wish)

Draft script for the conversation
Duration 120 min

Instructions for using the script

- Plan the dialogue in advance based on the script.
- The script is intended to support the dialogue; it does not need to be shared with the participants. It is a good idea to print out the script for yourself after editing it.
- The wording in the script is just an example. Edit it to suit the topic of the dialogue, the target group and your own style.
- The times are approximate. They are intended to give an idea of how much time should be spent on each stage. There is no need to follow the times exactly, except for the start and end times.
- Set aside time for preparing the room, welcoming people, and bringing closure to the gathering. Arrange the chairs in a circle, place paper and pens underneath them for writing. Offer a cup of tea or a cookie to start the gathering.
- Find a note-taker so that you can focus on facilitating the dialogue.
- The note-taker's task is to record as accurately as possible what is said during the gathering. Reading the instructions will help to prepare for taking notes.
- You can draw on your own group facilitation skills and use proven methods to support the conversation and the participants as needed.
- You can also use discussion cards to support the script and guidance: https://www.sitra.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/timeout-conversation-cards.pdf
- May you have an enriching time together.

Dialogue Circle ”How do I cope?”

READING INSTRUCTIONS:
On the right, lyrics and guidance tips for the instructor:
Basic font - say, for example, like this
Italic font - help for the instructor in conversation
Bold: Change as necessary

Minutes	Section
15	**Start, introductions, agreements, getting to know**
10	Attuning
75	Group discussion (incl. break)
5	Discussion outcome: writing
10	Discussion outcome: sharing
5	Thank you, closing

Total 120 min

Introduction (1/3)

Welcome to the Dialogue Circle “How do I cope?”
Our dialogue topic is: **“Solidarity and a sense of security in our community/ ”The elderly coping in troubled times” / "Young people's sense of security living near the border” etc.**

The purpose of the dialogue circle is to create a safe and respectful space to share our experiences and feelings about the current security situation. We listen in order to understand how geopolitical tensions affect our daily lives and sense of security in Estonia.

This dialogue is part of a broader initiatives: Borderland Dialogues. Similar dialogues are being held in in other countries bordering Russia, such as Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway.

I am **XX** and I am **acting as a facilitator/instructor/leader** in this dialogue.
If you wish, share why you decided to convene the dialogue circle.

Dialogue circle

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Introduction (2/3)

Dialogue is a conversation that aims at a better understanding of the topic, others and oneself.

During the dialogue, there may be different views on the topic. This is fine, as we are not seeking unanimity.
The conversation does not need to result in decisions or solutions, but these may emerge.

The purpose of dialogue is not to argue, persuade anyone, or decide which position is best, but to increase mutual understanding.

As the facilitator, I try to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. In practice, this means, for example, that if people interrupt each other or someone speaks alone for a long time, I calmly interrupt them. Is that okay with everyone?

XX will act as the note-taker.

The note-taker may introduce him-, herself.

The conversation will be recorded in such a way that it does not reveal who participated in the dialogue. The recording will be used as a material for a summary, and will be published on Eesti Koostöö Kogu website in autumn 2026. Individual participants cannot be identified from the summary.

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Introduction (3/3)

We have two hours. We will start with getting to know each other and then get into the topic with short pair discussions.

Most of the time will be spent on joint discussion, followed by a short summary. We will finish at **xx:xx.**

Before we begin, we will review the principles that help maintain an open and safe discussion space.

You may want to print out a few copies and place them in the centre of the circle.

Principles

- **Share** your own experiences and thoughts.
- **Listen** with an open mind and try not to interrupt.
- **Respect** different participants.
- **Connect** to what others have said.
- **Ask questions** to understand more.
- **Explore** also new and unknown things.

Principles and trust (1/2)

The principles of constructive conversation will be used in the dialogue, so let's go through them now.

- To understand the topic and one another better, we should talk about our own experiences. This means that we explain to others what events and situations have shaped our views.
- Everyone should be allowed to speak in peace. Try to listen openly in order to better understand what the other person is saying. Do not rush to judge or comment.
- Practice a respectful attitude toward others even when their opinions differ from yours.
- Try to relate what you say to the points raised by others during the discussion. However, you don’t need to agree on things.
- When you want to know more about something, ask the others directly about their points of view.
- It is important to look for things that have gone unnoticed for one reason or another. We can try to see things together that nobody can see from their own point of view.

You can ask participants to confirm whether it is appropriate to proceed on the basis of these principles.

Principles

- **Share** your own experiences and thoughts.
- **Listen** with an open mind and try not to interrupt.
- **Respect** different participants.
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- **Explore** also new and unknown things.

Principles and trust (2/2)

Let us now agree on the confidentiality of the conversation.

It is my hope that you will continue the dialogue that is now beginning after this event, and I hope that you will continue it in such a way that no individual participant can be identified from the comments or quotations. Is this acceptable to everyone?

Please acknowledge this.

You may ask whether there is anything else that needs to be agreed upon or what is important to know before getting started.

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Getting to know

Let's start with a brief round of introductions.

Introduce yourself by your first name and briefly share what brought you to participate in the dialogue circle.

You can say: **This will only take a moment, so we can have a proper discussion on the actual topic.**

Let's start here, please.

You can also be the first one to start.

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Getting into the discussion

Let's get started by getting into the mood with the following video/music/text.

You can use this text, for example, to get into the mood:

The security situation has affected people's livelihoods and sense of security throughout Estonia. The rapidly changing world and growing information noise have increased anxiety and raise questions about how people actually feel, what they think, and what they hope for in the midst of change.

In the dialogue circle, we can share our experiences and, by listening to each other, find ways to strengthen resilience and cohesion.

You can also use a topical article, news item, research paper, song or other material related to the topic that is suitable for your group of participants to stimulate conversation. Or you can edit the text to suit your group of participants.

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Getting into the dialogue - pair conversation

Divide the group into pairs/threes. Clearly state who is paired with whom. If there are only three people in the group, you can discuss the initial ideas with the whole group. You can start the warm-up without any materials, directly with pair work.

Start the dialogue with pair/triplet conversations.

Starting question:
Tell your partner about your personal experiences—thoughts, feelings, or images—that was aroused by the introduction and relates to current security situation. How does this affect your everyday life?

Alternative starting question: **Tell your partner about a recent personal experience or situation that is in some way related to the cohesion or sense of security in your organisation / area / community.**

Make sure that both of you get a chance to speak.

You have 5-6 minutes for this.
You may begin...
Now it's time to finish.

Dialogue circle

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Joint conversation (1/2)

Now I want to hear what you talked about with your partner and what thoughts came up. What other experiences came up? The couple who is ready can start.

At this point, it is a good idea to ask each participant a question to show that everyone's participation in the dialogue is important.

After the pairs have finished, continue the conversation together:

Now that you have listened to each other, what thoughts/feelings and possible questions have come up? What else do you remember?

Try to pick up on the topics that come up in the conversation and formulate possible additional questions based on the issues raised. For example
Tell us more about how this stressful situation affected you. What has it led to?

You say that communication with the authorities has changed. Can you give us some examples?

You can also summarise some of the themes that have emerged:
You raised at least the following issues: **xx, xx and xx**

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Joint conversation (2/2)

Try to pick up on topics that come up in the conversation.
Use them to formulate additional questions. It is good to let the dialogue proceed at its own pace and avoid turning it into an interview. If needed, take a break.
Encourage people to give examples and focus on their own immediate experiences.

Supporting questions:

- **What gives you strength and courage at this time?**
- **What helps you/your organization/community cope (despite everything)?**
- **Can anyone think of anything else we haven't talked about?**

Notice what people say about how they cope. You can summarize what you hear and reflect it back to the group. ***I hear that xx, xx, xx helps you cope.***

At the appropriate moment, move on to exploring future perspectives.
Supporting questions:

- **What do you need now to feel safer and part of society?**
- **How can we avoid divisions and increase trust in society?**
- **How can we better prepare for possible future crises?**
- **How can people themselves contribute to strengthening resilience? Our organization/network/professional association, etc.?**

Dialogue circle

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Outcome of the conversation: writing

The dialogue is coming to an end. I would like to hear what issues, feelings or thoughts our dialogue has raised.

Ask everyone to write on the piece of paper that you placed under their chair with a pen before the conversation began.

Working individually, write down in full sentences:

a) two thoughts about what you found most important in the dialogue circle.
b) one thought about what you experienced while participating in the dialogue circle.

Notice the pace of writing and when it seems that everyone has finished, move on to sharing.

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Outcome of the conversation: sharing

Ask each person to take turns reading out what they have written. You can give people the option to share one thought.

Let's start with you.

What stood out most for you in the dialogue circle, and what was your experience of participating in the dialogue circle?

Based on what you have heard, you can briefly summarize the general conclusions.

Collect all the papers and add the participants' final thoughts to the dialogue circle notes.

Dialogue circle

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Thank you and closing remarks

Our dialogue circle is coming to an end.

If you wish, you can share your participation in this dialogue on social media, for example.
You can use the hashtags #dialoogiring
#BoderlandDialogues and #kuidasmahakkamasaan

The dialogue was confidential, so please do not share what others said without their permission. You can share your own thoughts and feelings, as well as general themes that came up in the conversation.

Thank you **x.x** for taking notes.

Thank you all for participating in the dialogue. Have a safe trip home.

Thank you!
Sending the notes

Thank you for being part of the first dialogue circles initiatives in Estonia.

We hope that this experience was enriching and will give you the courage to continue organizing dialogue circles in the future.

The results of the dialogue circles will be compiled and analyzed by the researchers at the University of Tartu.

A public summary will be ready in the fall of 2026 and will be available to all interested parties.

The knowledge gathered will help communities, organizations, and decision-makers better understand people's experiences and make more informed and effective choices.

* Send the notes using the the following link.

Some recommendations

- If possible, send us a photo of the participants in the dialogue circle or a photo of the empty circle of chairs.
  Agree with the participants in the introduction that you will send the photo.

- If desired, adjust the general theme of the dialogue circle as needed, e.g., taking into account the context and target group.
  Here are some examples:

- How can we work with school staff and local residents to strengthen a sense of cohesion and security in our community?
- Youth safety in Narva
- What is it like to live next to the border?
- The experiences of aging people in Peipsiääre during turbulent times.
- The role of literature and creative activities in a changed security situation.
- Creative courage, etc.

An example to note-taker

Dialogue circle "How can I cope?"

Topic: Youth safety in Narva

- I have started following the news and social media more closely to keep up with what is going on. Sometimes I feel that this causes anxiety, but at the same time I want to be informed.
- At school, we talk more about crisis preparedness and shelters. This seems particularly important in Narva because we are so close to the border—it makes you think about how vulnerable we really are.
- I feel that my loved ones and the community are currently the most important sources of security. There are many different cultures and languages in Narva, but it is cooperation and mutual support that give me security.
- I feel that the future is more uncertain. I used to think more about traveling and my career, but now I wonder whether we will have peace and stability here in the long term.
- There is a lot of misinformation and frightening stories circulating on social media. Sometimes it is difficult to understand what is true, and this causes confusion and tension among friends. For example, just yesterday there was a situation where...