



Engaging Strategies [Fishbowl](#)



Time: 30 minutes

Overview: *In this activity, participants are divided into two groups that are seated in concentric circles, all facing the center. The outside circle listens while the inside group has a discussion about a topic. Then the groups switch places so the listeners become the speakers, and vice versa.*

When and Why: This activity strengthens listening skills and encourages everyone to participate in turn in a discussion. It can be used during a session to discuss content, or at the end of an engagement to give airtime to everyone about what they learned or found useful.



SEL Focus: While the main emphasis of this activity is on the **Social Awareness** skills (*Perspective-Taking, Empathy, Appreciating Diversity* and *Respect for Others*) needed to participate in constructive dialogue, the activity also strengthens **Self-Awareness** (*Accurate Self-Perception*) and **Self-Management** (*Self-Discipline*) as participants work to communicate effectively.

Steps:

1. Set up two concentric circles of chairs, all facing the center of the circle, and have everyone take a seat.
2. Provide the question prompt or discussion topic and set a timer for 10 minutes. Only the inside group members may speak during this time. Instruct the outside group to quietly listen and notice their own ideas that surface during the discussion. Note-taking on a graphic organizer may be helpful.
3. When the time is up, ask the groups to trade places so that the outside group is sitting on the inner circle chairs and vice versa. Set the timer again and let the new inside group discuss the topic.



Debrief with one of these activities:

- Ask participants to write down a response to one comment they heard and explain why they agree/disagree.
- Turn to a partner and discuss how it felt, both being a "listener" and a "discusser."
- Share one word or a short phrase with the whole group that was important about the discussion to them.

Modifications and Variations:

- You can assign the groups opposing views in an argument. This works especially well when you have read an article or watched a video prior to the discussion that shows opposing views.
- With adults, or students who are skillful and experienced with the Fishbowl strategy, place an empty chair in the inner circle, and invite a participant join in to ask a question or have a speaker clarify a thought.
- If groundwork has been laid for the "inner/outer circle, support partner" mentioned in Step 2 above, provide debrief time after each discussion circle during which the observing partner provides feedback on specific areas the group has already agreed on (e.g., impactful idea or statement, eye contact, voice volume, connection to another speaker's point).