



# “Start with Self”

**Inclusive Training Proficiency**  
*A competence model for business  
trainers and educators who care.*



Co-funded by  
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# Foreword

## Why should you care at all?

This guide is for you if:

- you run development and training processes for adults,
- you think you don't have problems communicating with others,
- after training, you receive feedback that everything is OK,
- you pay attention to how you speak to others,
- you believe you understand what inclusivity is.



Strange, right? It sounds like you already know everything, so why should you read on?

You are encountering the first trap of competence development – the better we feel in a certain area, the harder it is to spot an area for growth, the so-called “competence plateau”, the moment when development slows down because we feel good enough.

Inclusivity is particularly insidious because your unconscious behaviours can exclude others, even when you have the best intentions. And you may never find out about it if you don't know how to ask.

We believe in your good intentions and that you are doing your best to provide participants with access to knowledge, materials, and... yourself during training sessions.

## But is this access equal for everyone?

Are you sure the silent participant didn't want to say anything, didn't have anything to say, or didn't feel they had the space to speak? Do you know how to address someone who refers to themselves as 'they'? Have you ever checked if there is a threshold in the doorway leading to the training room?

For several weeks, we collaborated with corporate trainers, vocational education instructors, tutors, coaches, people with disabilities and neurodiversity, and training providers with various professional experiences, to understand the needs of groups that typically lack strong representation in society.

They pointed out many situations and discriminatory behaviours that happen in the training room. This was a great exchange of experience and also an important lesson for us - the Include Project team - as we also operate in the training market.

We have classified these negative behaviours into eight categories, and then transformed them into desirable behaviours, which describe the 8 fundamental competencies in the area of inclusive training facilitation. They form the Inclusive Training Proficiency meta-competence model.

In this e-book, you will find a detailed description of each competence. But in addition, you can reflect on your preparedness for inclusive training with our self-reflection tool, and develop your knowledge and awareness on this topic with our short informative materials, “knowledge bites”.

We believe that you, too, can make learning more accessible and open.

## How to work with the guide?

1. First, complete the self-reflection questionnaire covering the 8 competencies. This will help you identify the areas where you are successfully including participants in the development process, and which ones you need to pay attention to.
2. Based on the results, we will recommend which competency is worth working on.
3. Find the “knowledge bite”.

Are you interested in the description of each competency? We invite you to read all the knowledge bites.

**Grow your inclusive competencies!**

INCLUDE Project Team





# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 1. What is Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice?



### 1.1 Definition

Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice is the continuous, compassionate practice of looking inward to understand your personal identity and its intersection with the world around you. For a trainer, this means examining not only your skills and teaching style, but also your deeply held beliefs, biases, and privileges.

It's an active process of observing your emotional and cognitive responses during a session, especially in moments of friction or discomfort. By doing this, you can identify how your personal lens may be affecting the learning environment. This self-assessment is the foundation for a reflective practice focused on equity and inclusion, where you intentionally work to create a safe and just space for every learner.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

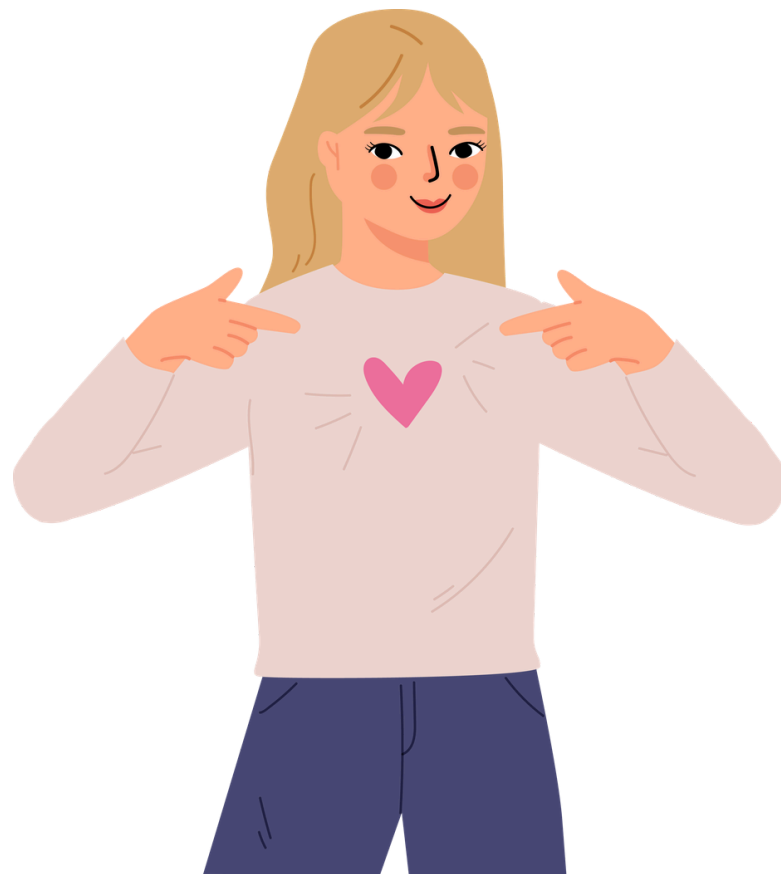
- The Reflective Practitioner was popularized by Donald Schön. His core idea is that professionals, including trainers, can improve by consciously reflecting on their actions. He outlines two key types of reflection: reflection-in-action (thinking on your feet) and reflection-on-action (analyzing an event after it's over). For a trainer, this means processing your own reactions during a session as well as reviewing them afterward to identify and correct for biases (The Reflective Practitioner, 1983)
- Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how various social identities (such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) intersect and overlap, creating unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. For a trainer, understanding intersectionality means recognizing that participants' experiences are not monolithic (Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, 1989)



# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Become a more wanted and authentic trainer: when you understand your own values and communication style, you can show up in the training room as your genuine self. This authenticity builds trust and credibility with your learners. People don't just want to learn skills; they want to learn from a real person who has done the work themselves.
- Navigate challenging situations with greater composure: soft skills training can be unpredictable. When a difficult question arises, a participant pushes back, or an unexpected emotional response occurs, self-awareness is your anchor. By understanding your own triggers and biases, you can react with thoughtful intention rather than impulsive emotion, maintaining control and professionalism in the moment, preventing burnout. By engaging in regular self-reflection, you can identify sources of stress and frustration before they lead to burnout. Understanding your own emotional state and Boundaries helps you manage your energy effectively, ensuring you can show up for your learners session after session, year after year, with passion and resilience.





# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
I can handle any feedback. I don't need a formal reflection process	Without a structured process (like journaling or peer consultation), your learning becomes superficial and reactive. You might only focus on positive feedback or dismiss negative feedback, preventing you from identifying your behavioral patterns and truly understanding your impact
My personal feelings and opinions have no place in a professional training session	This can make you appear inauthentic or disconnected. While professionalism is key, suppressing all personal beliefs and emotions prevents you from recognizing how your biases might be influencing group dynamics or a learner's ability to participate fully.
I'm too busy to reflect. I have to prepare for the next session.	The relentless cycle of prepare-train-repeat without time for reflection is a direct path to burnout. It prevents you from recharging, consolidating your learning, and making necessary course corrections.

If you identify similar beliefs in yourself, don't worry!

Below we'll discuss what to do to update them in the spirit of inclusivity.



# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first.

Here are some behaviors that might exclude people.

Do any of these ring a bell?

You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.



Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Making assumptions based on past experiences, such as "this type of participant is always resistant" or "this exercise always works."	This rigidity makes you a less effective trainer because you stop seeing participants as unique individuals. When you operate from a place of assumption, you can't respond authentically to what the group truly needs
Reacting defensively to challenge or feedback	It prioritizes the trainer's comfort over the learner's psychological safety. When a trainer becomes defensive, they shut down dialogue, effectively communicating that challenging the status quo is not welcome.
Over-relying on your personal narrative as a universal truth	When you present your personal experience as the only valid perspective on a topic (e.g., "In my life, I've found that...") it can invalidate the experiences of those with different backgrounds.



# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Inclusive alternative
Falling into the trap of routine and rigid thinking. You start making assumptions based on past experiences, such as "this type of participant is always resistant" or "this exercise always works."	This rigidity makes you a less effective trainer because you stop seeing participants as unique individuals. When you operate from a place of assumption, you can't respond authentically to what the group truly needs	Approach each session with a beginner's mind. Consciously let go of preconceived notions and be present with the group's current energy and needs. Before you start, ask yourself, "What if I approached this group as if it were the first time I've ever led this training?"
Reacting defensively to challenge or feedback	It prioritizes the trainer's comfort over the learner's psychological safety. When a trainer becomes defensive, they shut down dialogue, effectively communicating that challenging the status quo is not welcome	Start by acknowledging what the person has said. You can say, "Thank you for bringing that to my attention," or "I appreciate you sharing that." This validates their contribution and shows you're listening, even if their feedback feels difficult to hear.
Over-relying on your personal narrative as a universal truth	When you present your personal experience as the only valid perspective on a topic (e.g., "In my life, I've found that...") it can invalidate the experiences of those with different backgrounds.	Frame your personal stories as one example among many. After sharing, intentionally create space for other narratives. Use phrases like, "This is my experience, and it's just one piece of the puzzle. Who has a different experience they'd be willing to share?"



# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 5. Good practices

- Establish a reflective ritual. Before every training session, take 5-10 minutes to sit with your thoughts. Ask yourself: "What are my goals for this group? What assumptions might I be bringing with me? Are there any topics that make me feel uncomfortable, and why?" This practice helps you check your own biases at the door
- Acknowledge your privileges. Consider what unearned advantages you might have in this specific group dynamic (e.g., your gender, where you are from, educational background, or position as trainer). Acknowledge that these privileges will influence how you are perceived and how you interact with others. This awareness helps you be more intentional about not dominating the space.
- Practice active self-observation. Pay attention to your own internal reactions. When a participant says something that makes you defensive or uncomfortable, pause for a moment. Instead of reacting, ask yourself: "What emotional or cognitive response is happening right now? Is my discomfort related to my own beliefs or biases?" This internal check prevents you from projecting your feelings onto the group

Document your reflections. Keep a journal or a digital file where you record your self-reflections. Note what went well and what was challenging. Over time, you can review these notes to identify patterns in your behavior and track your progress in building self-awareness and an inclusive practice.





# 1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Understanding yourself and reflective practice.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now.

No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviors can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?





# 2 Designing inclusive trainings

## 1. What is Designing Inclusive Training?

### 1.1 Definition

Designing Inclusive Trainings is the intentional process of creating learning experiences that are accessible, engaging, and responsive to the diverse needs, backgrounds, and learning styles of all participants. It goes beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to embrace adaptive design that anticipates and accommodates different cultural contexts, physical abilities, cognitive processing styles, and life experiences.

This competency involves thoughtful preparation of training structures, materials, and activities that remove barriers to participation whilst actively incorporating anti-discrimination elements and diverse perspectives throughout the learning journey.



### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), UDL provides a framework for creating learning environments that are accessible to all learners from the start, rather than retrofitting accommodations later. The framework emphasises multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice, Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014).
- Cultural Responsiveness in Education: Gloria Ladson-Billings' research on culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrates that learning improves when educational content connects with learners' cultural references and lived experiences (The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children, 1994).
- Cognitive Load Theory: John Sweller's research shows that learning is optimised when instructional design considers the limitations of working memory, supporting the need for varied presentation methods and structured learning experiences (Cognitive Load Theory: Advances in Research on Managing Complexity, 2010).



# 2 Designing inclusive trainings

## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Increase training effectiveness across diverse groups: when materials and methods are designed inclusively from the start, all participants can engage more fully, leading to better learning outcomes and higher satisfaction scores across demographic groups.
- Reduce last-minute accommodations and stress: proactive, inclusive design prevents the scramble to retrofit training materials when specific needs arise, saving time and creating smoother experiences for both trainers and participants.
- Build a reputation as a thoughtful, professional trainer: organisations increasingly value trainers who demonstrate cultural competence and accessibility awareness, leading to more opportunities and referrals.

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
Inclusive design takes too much extra time and effort.	This belief leads to rushed, generic training materials that fail to engage diverse learners effectively. The "extra time" spent on inclusive design actually saves time later by preventing the need for multiple revisions and accommodations.
Most people learn the same way, so standard approaches work fine.	This assumption ignores extensive research on learning differences and cultural variations in communication styles. It results in training that only works well for participants who match the trainer's own learning preferences and cultural background.
If I try to include everyone, I'll dilute the content and make it less effective.	This false dichotomy assumes that accessibility and rigour are mutually exclusive. In reality, inclusive design often enhances content quality by forcing trainers to think more clearly about learning objectives and varied pathways to achievement.



## 2 Designing inclusive trainings

### 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviours that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviours are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Using only one type of activity or learning method throughout the training.	This approach only serves participants who learn best through that particular method, leaving others disengaged or struggling. Visual learners may be lost in discussion-heavy sessions, whilst kinesthetic learners may disconnect during lecture-style presentations.
Including examples and case studies that only reflect one cultural or demographic perspective.	When all examples feature the same type of people or situations, participants from different backgrounds can't see themselves in the content, making the learning feel irrelevant or unwelcoming.
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives.	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capacities, effectively excluding them from full participation in the learning experience.
Scheduling intensive sessions without adequate breaks or considering different attention spans.	This approach favours participants with high energy levels and neurotypical attention patterns whilst disadvantaging those who need more frequent breaks due to health conditions, caregiving responsibilities, or neurodivergent processing styles.



# 2 Designing inclusive trainings

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviours look like in designing inclusive trainings, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

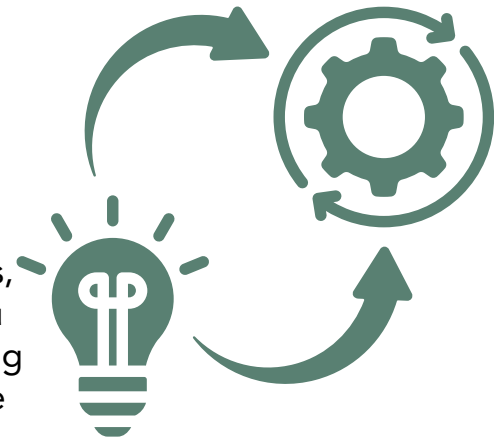
Excluding behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Using only one type of activity or learning method throughout the training.	This approach only serves participants who learn best through that particular method, leaving others disengaged or struggling.	Incorporate multiple learning modalities in every session. Include visual elements (infographics, diagrams), auditory components (discussions, music), kinesthetic activities (role-plays, movement), and reading/writing tasks. This ensures every participant encounters content in their preferred learning style.
Including examples and case studies that only reflect one cultural or demographic perspective.	When all examples feature the same type of people or situations, participants from different backgrounds can't see themselves in the content.	Actively diversify your examples across cultures, industries, age groups, and life experiences. Before finalising materials, review them specifically for representation. Ask yourself: "Would participants from different backgrounds see themselves reflected here?"
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives.	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capacities.	Design activities with built-in alternatives from the start. For every physical activity, include seated or low-mobility options. Provide multiple ways to participate in role-plays (observer, note-taker, facilitator) so everyone can contribute meaningfully.
Scheduling intensive sessions without adequate breaks or considering different attention spans.	This approach favours participants with high energy levels and neurotypical attention patterns.	Build in regular breaks every 45-90 minutes and vary the intensity of activities. Follow high-energy activities with reflection time. Communicate the schedule in advance so participants can prepare and self-advocate for their needs.



## 2 Designing inclusive trainings

### 5. Good practices

- Conduct pre-training accessibility surveys. Before designing your session, send participants a brief survey asking about learning preferences, accessibility needs, dietary restrictions, and any other accommodations. This information allows you to design inclusively from the beginning rather than adapting afterward. If it's impossible to cover all needs, ask about the one you can cover.
- Create a "representation audit" checklist. Develop a systematic way to review your materials for inclusive representation. Check that your examples, case studies, and images reflect diversity in gender, age, ability, family structures, and industry contexts. Make this review a standard part of your preparation process.
- Develop modular content delivery. Structure your training content so it can be delivered through multiple channels - visual presentations, hands-on activities, small group discussions, and individual reflection. This flexibility allows you to adapt in real-time based on group needs and energy levels.
- Partner with community representatives. Establish relationships with people from different communities who can review your materials for cultural sensitivity and accessibility. Their feedback helps you catch blind spots and ensures your content resonates authentically with diverse audiences.
- Build a library of inclusive activities. Collect and document training activities that work well for diverse groups. Include variations for different group sizes, time constraints, and accessibility needs. This resource saves time and ensures you always have inclusive options ready.





# 2 Designing inclusive trainings

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Designing inclusive trainings. Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency. You can take your first step right now. No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviours can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?





# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 1. What is Inclusive Communication?

### 1.1 Definition

**Inclusive Communication** is the intentional practice of creating equitable dialogue environments where all participants feel valued, respected, and able to contribute authentically. It involves consistently using language that avoids stereotypes and excludes no one, while actively addressing communication barriers from different cultural backgrounds, identities, or styles.

Inclusive communicators demonstrate sensitivity to both verbal and non-verbal interactions, including spatial awareness and cultural communication differences. They constructively clarify misunderstandings and respond directly when exclusionary language, inappropriate humor, or discriminatory behavior occurs, fostering environments where all voices are heard and respected through proactive bridge-building across differences.





# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Linguistic Relativity: This concept, explored by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, suggests that the language we use influences how we think about the world (Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, 1956)
- Non-Violent Communication (NVC) by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is a powerful tool for empathetic communication. It focuses on expressing feelings and needs without blame or judgment, and it emphasizes listening to others with compassion (Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, 1999)
- Psychological Safety: researched by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson, refers to a shared belief that a team or group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams, 1999)



## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

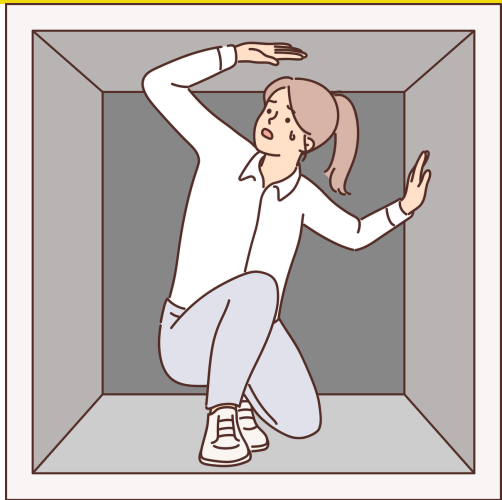
- Increase training engagement - participants feel safer to ask questions, share experiences, and practice new skills without fear of judgment or exclusion;
- Reduce conflicts and complaints - equip learners with tools to address microaggressions and miscommunications before they escalate into post-training questionnaire or other formal HR issues;
- Model the behavior change you're teaching - demonstrate real-time inclusive communication, showing participants exactly what it looks like in practice rather than just talking about it.



# 3 Communicating inclusively

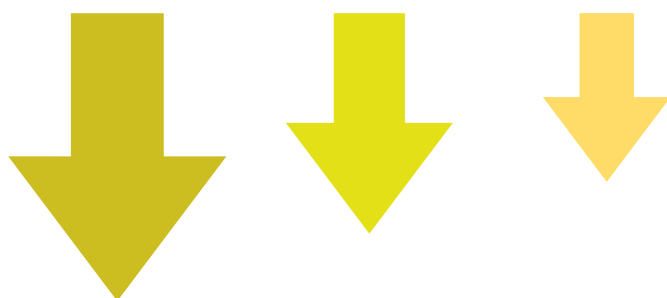
## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:



Beliefs	Possible consequences
After all, I already communicate inclusively	You stop noticing microaggressions you might unconsciously commit
Treating everyone the same equals inclusion	You fail to recognize that "same treatment" often favors those who fit the dominant communication style
They should adapt	The trainer misses opportunities to learn from different communication approaches and cultural perspectives

If you identify similar beliefs in yourself, don't worry. Below we'll discuss what to do to update them in the spirit of inclusivity.





# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviors that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Using "guys" to address mixed groups	Linguistically erases women and non-binary people, suggesting male as the default and others as exceptions
Age-based exclusion, eg. At your age, it's probably too difficult	Reinforces ageist stereotypes about learning ability, dismisses capabilities based on assumptions rather than evidence, and discourages participation by creating self-doubt
Making assumptions about knowledge based on organization type, eg. It's obvious to people from corporations	Creates hierarchy between work backgrounds and makes people from nonprofits, small businesses, or other sectors feel inadequate or less valued
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives	Excludes people with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capabilities from full participation



# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Using "guys" to address mixed groups	Linguistically erases women and non-binary people, suggesting male as the default and others as exceptions	Use inclusive terms like "everyone," "team," "folks," or "colleagues" when addressing the group
Age-based exclusion, eg. At your age, it's probably too difficult	Reinforces ageist stereotypes about learning ability, dismisses capabilities based on assumptions rather than evidence, and discourages participation by creating self-doubt	Ask What's your preferred approach for learning new concepts? - focus on individual needs rather than age assumptions
Making assumptions about knowledge based on organization type, eg. It's obvious to people from corporations	Creates hierarchy between work backgrounds and makes people from nonprofits, small businesses, or other sectors feel inadequate or less valued	Say For those familiar with this concept from any context... - acknowledge that valuable experience exists across all sectors
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives	Excludes people with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capabilities from full participation	Offer multiple ways to participate: You can stand, sit, or move around as comfortable and provide alternative methods like verbal responses instead of physical demonstrations



# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 5. Good practices

- Consciously shift from gendered terms like "guys" to universal ones such as "everyone," "folks," or "team." This practice signals that the training space is for everyone, regardless of gender identity
- Avoid making assumptions about an individual's abilities or knowledge based on their age. Instead of using phrases like, "At your age...," ask open-ended questions that focus on their individual experience and learning preferences.
- While sharing personal stories can be powerful, avoid presenting your experience as the only valid perspective. Follow your stories with questions that invite participants to share their own diverse experiences.

When you witness a microaggression (a subtle, often unintentional comment or action that is discriminatory), address it calmly and constructively in the moment.

This protects the person targeted and educates the group on inclusive behavior.





# 3 Communicating inclusively

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Communicating inclusively.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency. You can take your first step right now!

No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviors can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?





# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 1. What is Creating Inclusive Learning Environments?



### 1.1 Definition

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments is the art of shaping both physical and emotional conditions that enable all participants to feel psychologically safe, physically comfortable, and empowered to engage authentically in the learning process. It involves intentional attention to environmental factors, from lighting and seating arrangements to group norms and emotional climate. This competency recognises that learning happens best when people feel they belong, can be themselves, and have their diverse needs anticipated and accommodated.

It's about creating conditions where differences are valued as strengths rather than obstacles to overcome.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- **Psychological Safety:** Amy Edmondson's extensive research demonstrates that psychological safety, the belief that one can express ideas, concerns, and mistakes without risk of punishment or humiliation, is fundamental to effective learning and team performance (The Fearless organisation, 2018).
- **Environmental Psychology:** Research by Sally Augustin and others shows that physical environments significantly impact cognitive performance, stress levels, and social interaction. Factors like lighting quality, noise levels, and spatial arrangement directly affect learning outcomes (Place Advantage: Applied Psychology for Interior Architecture, 2009).
- **Inclusive Classroom Climate:** Shaun Harper's research on inclusive teaching practices demonstrates that environmental factors (both physical and social) significantly impact whether students from marginalised groups feel they belong and can succeed (Race and Racism in Higher Education, 2019).



# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Maximise participant engagement and retention: when people feel safe and comfortable, they're more likely to participate actively, ask questions, and retain information long-term, leading to measurably better training outcomes.
- Prevent dropout and disengagement: inclusive environments reduce the likelihood that participants will disengage or leave training programmes due to feeling unwelcome or unable to participate fully.
- Create positive word-of-mouth for your training programmes: participants who feel genuinely included become enthusiastic advocates, leading to stronger program reputation and increased enrolment.



## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
The physical environment doesn't matter as long as the content is good.	This belief ignores how environmental barriers can prevent participants from accessing even excellent content. Poor lighting, uncomfortable seating, or inaccessible layouts can cause physical discomfort that completely derails learning.
People should just adapt to whatever environment is provided.	This places the burden of accommodation entirely on participants, particularly those with disabilities or specific needs. It signals that their comfort and success aren't priorities, leading to disengagement and exclusion.
Creating inclusive environments is too expensive and complicated.	This assumption prevents trainers from exploring simple, low-cost environmental modifications that can dramatically improve accessibility and comfort. Many inclusive design solutions are free or inexpensive but require intentional thinking.



# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviours that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviours are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Ignoring or dismissing requests for environmental adjustments (lighting, temperature, seating).	This sends the message that participants' comfort and accessibility needs don't matter, potentially causing physical discomfort that prevents learning and signals that they don't belong.
Assuming everyone can see, hear, and move in the same ways when setting up activities.	This creates barriers for participants with sensory impairments, mobility differences, or processing needs, effectively excluding them from full participation.
Using spaces with architectural barriers without seeking alternatives.	When training venues have stairs-only access, narrow doorways, or inaccessible bathrooms, it physically prevents some people from attending, creating obvious exclusion.
Failing to establish ground rules for respectful interaction.	Without clear norms for inclusive behaviour, dominant personalities can monopolise space whilst others feel unsafe to contribute, creating an emotionally exclusive environment.



# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviours look like in creating inclusive learning environments, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these same situations.



Excluding behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Ignoring or dismissing requests for environmental adjustments.	This sends the message that participants' comfort and accessibility needs don't matter, potentially causing physical discomfort that prevents learning.	Proactively ask about environmental needs and adjust when possible. At the start of sessions, say: "Is the lighting/temperature/volume working for everyone? Please let me know if adjustments would help you engage better." Make changes readily and without making participants feel burdensome.
Assuming everyone can see, hear, and move in the same ways when setting up activities.	This creates barriers for participants with sensory impairments, mobility differences, or processing needs.	Design activities with multiple accessibility options built in. Announce "We'll be doing a visual activity, and I'll also describe everything aloud." Provide both written and verbal instructions. Offer seated alternatives to standing activities.
Using spaces with architectural barriers without seeking alternatives.	When training venues have stairs-only access, narrow doorways, or inaccessible bathrooms, it physically prevents some people from attending.	Prioritise accessibility when selecting venues. Include accessibility requirements in your venue criteria. When perfect spaces aren't available, communicate limitations in advance and work with participants to find solutions.
Failing to establish ground rules for respectful interaction.	Without clear norms for inclusive behaviour, dominant personalities can monopolise space whilst others feel unsafe to contribute.	Co-create group agreements that explicitly address inclusion. Include norms like "share airtime," "respect different perspectives," and "assume positive intent." Post these visibly and refer back to them when needed.



# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 5. Good practices

- Conduct an environmental accessibility check. Before every training, walk through the space with accessibility in mind. Check lighting levels, background noise, sight lines from all seats, pathway widths, and restroom accessibility. Document what works and what needs adjustment.



- Create flexible seating arrangements. Move beyond traditional classroom setups. Offer various seating options (chairs, standing areas, floor cushions where appropriate) and arrange them to encourage interaction whilst accommodating different physical needs and cultural preferences.
- Establish communication norms early. In the first session, co-create agreements about how the group will interact. Include specific norms about interrupting, sharing airtime, asking questions, and giving feedback. Make these visible throughout the training.
- Provide multiple ways to participate. Not everyone processes or expresses information the same way. Offer options like written responses, verbal sharing, artistic expression, or physical demonstration. This variety ensures everyone can contribute in ways that feel authentic.
- Build in regular environment checks. Throughout longer sessions, periodically ask:

**"How is everyone doing with the temperature/lighting/noise level?"**



Be genuinely responsive to requests for adjustments, and normalise the idea that environmental comfort supports learning.



# 4 Creating inclusive learning environments

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by creating inclusive learning environments.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now. No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviours can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?





# 5 Promoting fair and equal participation

## 1. What is Promoting Fair and Equal Participation?

### 1.1 Definition

Promoting Fair and Equal Participation is the art of fostering an environment where every individual feels empowered to contribute, regardless of their background or personality.



It's about actively creating a level playing field so that a session's success is truly a reflection of the collective wisdom of the group. This includes creating group agreements focused on respect and inclusion.

It involves encouraging "I" statements and watching for group dominance to ensure balanced participation. It also means promoting open sharing of intentions so every voice is heard and valued.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Group Dynamics and Social Loafing: Social psychologist Kurt Lewin is widely recognized as a founder of the scientific study of group dynamics. One of the challenges to fair participation is social loafing, a phenomenon where individuals exert less effort when working in a group than when working alone. (Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics [1935-1946], 1948)
- "I" statements or "I" messages: this communication technique, popularized by psychologist Thomas Gordon in the 1960s, shifts the focus from blaming others to expressing personal feelings and experiences (Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.), 1970)
- Social Identity Theory: Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, this theory explains how individuals' sense of self is derived from their group memberships. It helps to understand in-group and out-group biases, where people may subconsciously favor those within their own group (Human Groups and Social Categories, 1981)
- Psychological Safety Coined by Amy Edmondson: psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes (The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth, 2018)



### 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Increase your credibility: a trainers who can skillfully manage group dynamics and ensure fair participation are seen as more competent and professional. This builds trust and respect from the participants
- Reach higher quality feedback: by promoting open sharing, trainers receive more genuine and constructive feedback. This helps them better understand the impact of the session and make necessary adjustments
- Make more innovative problem-solving: when diverse voices are heard, a greater variety of ideas and solutions emerge. This leads to more creative and robust outcomes for any problem-solving activities within the training.

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps



Beliefs	Possible consequences
<p>Quiet people are just shy; they just don't want to speak up</p>	<p>This assumption can cause you to miss out on valuable insights and perspectives. Often, those who don't speak up are deep thinkers who need a different kind of prompt or space to share. Ignoring their silence can reinforce their feeling of being invisible and rob the group of their unique contributions.</p>
<p>My role is to be an expert and deliver information, not to be a group therapist</p>	<p>This view narrows the scope of a trainer's role. A trainer's job goes beyond just dispensing knowledge. It includes creating an environment where that knowledge can be effectively absorbed and applied. Ignoring group dynamics can make participants feel like they are in a lecture, not an interactive learning experience, which limits the potential for deep learning and skill development.</p>
<p>Group agreements are a waste of time, everyone knows how to be respectful</p>	<p>Assuming a shared understanding of respect and inclusion can be a major pitfall. Group agreements provide a clear, co-created framework for how the group will operate. Without them, you leave it up to chance, which can lead to misunderstandings, unintentional exclusion, and a lack of accountability when issues arise</p>

If you identify similar beliefs in yourself, don't worry! Below, we'll discuss what to do to update them in the spirit of inclusivity.



### 3. Identifying excluding behaviors

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviors that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

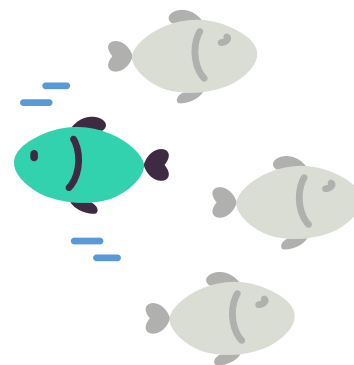


Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Directing questions only to certain people or roles (e.g., senior leaders, extroverts).	This signals that only certain voices are valuable and that others are not expected to contribute. It can make participants who are not called on feel invisible and disengaged.
Finishing a participant's sentence or speaking over them.	This behavior is dismissive and invalidates the participant's voice. It sends the message that their contribution is not important enough to be heard in its entirety and can shut down future attempts to speak.
Dismissing or brushing over a participant's differing opinion or negative feedback	This action shuts down dissent and critical thinking, creating an environment where only positive or conforming views are welcome. It can make participants feel unsafe to be honest and can lead to resentment
Laughing at or making a joke about a participant's question or idea	Even if a joke is well-intentioned, it can be perceived as belittling. This creates a hostile environment and can cause the participant to feel embarrassed, preventing them and others from taking the risk of asking questions again.



## 4. How to do it differently

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations



Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Inclusive behaviour
Directing questions only to certain people or roles (e.g., senior leaders, extroverts).	This signals that only certain voices are valuable and that others are not expected to contribute. It can make participants who are not called on feel invisible and disengaged.	<b>Asking open-ended questions to the whole group and allowing for a "think time" before expecting an answer.</b> This encourages everyone to formulate their thoughts and feel they have a chance to contribute
Finishing a participant's sentence or speaking over them.	This behavior is dismissive and invalidates the participant's voice. It sends the message that their contribution is not important enough to be heard in its entirety and can shut down future attempts to speak.	<b>Actively listening and allowing participants to complete their thoughts without interruption.</b> Use non-verbal cues like nodding to show you're engaged.
Dismissing or brushing over a participant's differing opinion or negative feedback	This action shuts down dissent and critical thinking, creating an environment where only positive or conforming views are welcome. It can make participants feel unsafe to be honest and can lead to resentment	<b>Acknowledging and validating differing opinions.</b> For example, "That's an important perspective to consider. Can you tell us more about why you see it that way?" This shows you value their honesty.
Laughing at or making a joke about a participant's question or idea	Even if a joke is well-intentioned, it can be perceived as belittling. This creates a hostile environment and can cause the participant to feel embarrassed, preventing them and others from taking the risk of asking questions again.	<b>Treating every contribution with respect and professionalism.</b> If you don't understand an idea, ask for clarification with a neutral and supportive tone.



## 5. Good Practices

**1. Establish group agreements early:** co-create ground rules with the group at the start of the session. This could include norms like "one person speaks at a time" or "listen to understand, not just to reply." This sets a foundation of respect and shared accountability.

**2. Use a variety of participation methods:** don't rely solely on open group discussions. Use methods like 'think-pair-share,' small breakout groups, written reflections, or polling. This caters to different communication styles and comfort levels.

**3. Actively monitor airtime:** pay attention to who is speaking and how often. Be prepared to gently interrupt dominant speakers by saying "That's a great point, let's hear from someone else now" or "Thanks for your input, I want to make sure everyone has a chance to share".

**4. Affirm and paraphrase contributions:** when a participant shares an idea, rephrase it in your own words to show you were listening and to ensure clarity for the group. For example, "So what I hear you saying is...". This validates their contribution and reinforces their value.

**5. Call for specific voices:** instead of just asking, "Does anyone else have a thought?", you can be more intentional. For example:

"We've heard from a few people on this side of the room, what about over here?" or

"I'd love to hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet"





## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Promoting fair and equal participation.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

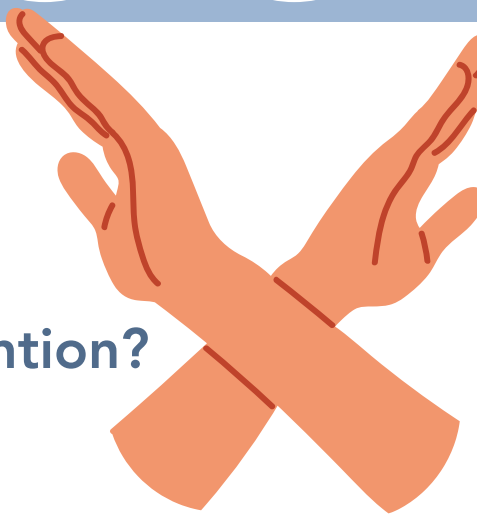
You can take your first step right now. No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below. Or go ahead and try all of them:

- **How did it feel working on this competency?**
- **What behaviors can you start using immediately?**
- **Did anything bug you?**
- **What parts did you want to skip?**
- **What does your reaction tell you about yourself?**





# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention



## 1. What is Anti-Discrimination Intervention?

### 1.1 Definition

Anti-Discrimination Intervention is the skilled ability to recognise, address, and transform moments of discrimination, bias, or exclusionary behaviour in real-time during training sessions.

It requires courage, emotional regulation, and practical skills to interrupt harmful dynamics whilst maintaining psychological safety and turning these challenging moments into learning opportunities.

This competency goes beyond simply stopping problematic behaviour; it involves creating constructive dialogue, supporting affected individuals, and helping groups develop greater awareness and accountability around issues of equity and inclusion.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Bystander Intervention Theory: Research by John Darley and Bibb Latané on the bystander effect shows that people are more likely to intervene when they have specific skills and preparation. Training in intervention techniques significantly increases the likelihood that individuals will take action when they witness harmful behaviour (The Unresponsive Bystander, 1970).
- Microaggressions Research: Derald Wing Sue's extensive work on microaggressions (subtle, often unconscious discriminatory comments and actions) provides frameworks for understanding and addressing these common but harmful interactions (Microaggressions in Everyday Life, 2010).
- Restorative Justice Practices: Research by Howard Zehr and others demonstrates that focusing on repair and learning, rather than punishment, creates more effective and lasting behavioural change (The Little Book of Restorative Justice, 2002).



# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention

## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Maintain psychological safety when tensions arise: skilful intervention prevents discriminatory incidents from escalating and damaging the trust and safety that participants need for effective learning.
- Transform difficult moments into powerful learning opportunities: when handled well, discrimination incidents become chances for the entire group to deepen their understanding of inclusion and develop greater empathy and awareness.
- Build credibility as a trainer who can handle complexity: participants and organisations trust trainers who can navigate difficult interpersonal dynamics with skill and professionalism, leading to more opportunities and referrals.

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
Addressing discrimination will make things worse or create more conflict.	This avoidance allows harmful behaviour to continue and escalate, signals to affected participants that they're not protected, and normalises discrimination within the learning environment.
I don't want to embarrass or shame anyone by calling out their behaviour.	Whilst good intentions around dignity matter, this belief prioritises the comfort of those causing harm over the safety of those being harmed, often allowing discriminatory patterns to continue.
People should work these issues out themselves without my intervention.	This belief places an unfair burden on those experiencing discrimination to educate or confront those causing harm, often in situations where power dynamics make this unsafe or ineffective.



# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviours that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviours are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Ignoring or pretending not to notice discriminatory comments or "jokes".	This silent approval signals that such behaviour is acceptable, encourages its continuation, and tells targeted individuals that they cannot expect protection or support.
Making excuses for discriminatory behaviour (e.g., "They didn't mean it that way" or "That's just how they are").	This minimises the impact on those harmed, removes accountability from the person causing harm, and teaches the group that discrimination will be tolerated if there's a plausible excuse.
Addressing discrimination privately only, without acknowledging the public impact.	While private conversation may be needed, exclusively private responses leave the harmful public message uncorrected and don't provide learning opportunities for witnesses.
Rushing past discriminatory incidents without processing or learning.	This approach misses valuable opportunities to build group understanding and skills, and may leave participants feeling that their experiences of discrimination don't matter.



# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviours look like in anti-discrimination intervention, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Excluding behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Ignoring or pretending not to notice discriminatory comments or "jokes".	This silent approval signals that such behaviour is acceptable, encourages its continuation, and tells targeted individuals that they cannot expect protection or support.	Address problematic comments directly and promptly. Use phrases like "I want to pause here because that comment doesn't align with our values of inclusion" or "Let's unpack what was just said because it could be hurtful to some group members."
Making excuses for discriminatory behaviour.	This minimises the impact on those harmed, removes accountability from the person causing harm.	Focus on impact rather than intent. Say "Regardless of what was intended, that comment could be experienced as hurtful by people with [specific identity]. Let's talk about why and how we might phrase that differently."
Addressing discrimination privately only, without acknowledging the public impact.	While private conversation may be needed, exclusively private responses leave the harmful public message uncorrected.	Address the public harm publicly, whilst offering private follow-up. Acknowledge what happened to the group: "I want to address what just occurred because it affects all of us." Then offer individual conversation afterward for deeper processing.
Rushing past discriminatory incidents without processing or learning.	This approach misses valuable opportunities to build group understanding and skills.	Create intentional space for learning and repair. Ask questions like "What did others notice about that interaction?" or "How might we handle similar situations differently?" Help the group process and learn together.

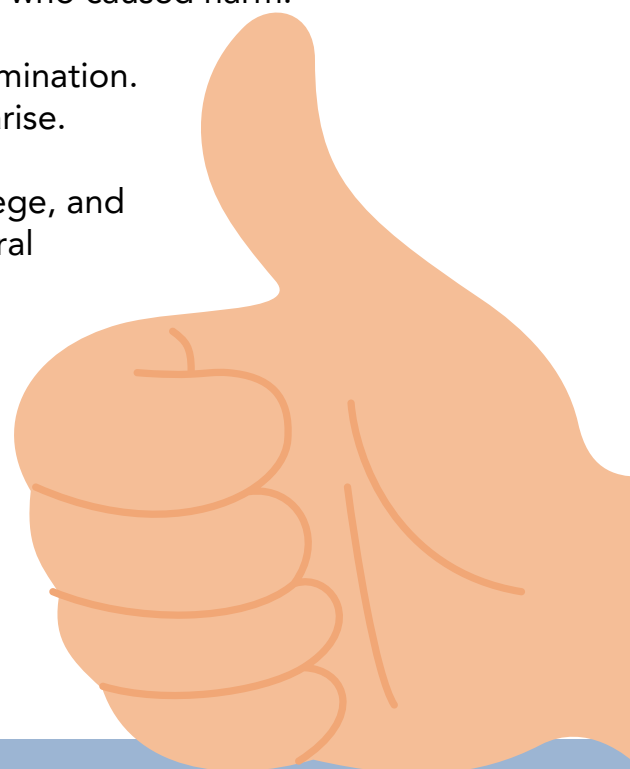


# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention

## 5. Good practices

- Develop a personal intervention toolkit. Practice specific phrases and approaches for different types of discriminatory behaviour. Having prepared language reduces anxiety and increases the likelihood that you'll speak up effectively when incidents occur.
- Establish clear expectations about respectful behaviour early. Include explicit anti-discrimination language in your group agreements. When participants know the standards from the beginning, interventions feel less surprising and more aligned with shared commitments.
- Check in with affected individuals. After addressing discrimination publicly, follow up privately with anyone who may have been targeted or harmed. Ask what support they need and how the situation could be handled better in the future.
- Focus on learning rather than punishment. Frame interventions as opportunities for growth: "This is a chance for us to practice what inclusive communication looks like" rather than shaming or attacking the person who caused harm.
- Normalise the conversation about bias and discrimination. Don't only address these topics when problems arise.

Regular discussion about unconscious bias, privilege, and inclusive behaviour makes interventions feel natural extensions of ongoing learning.





# 6 Anti-discrimination intervention

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Anti-discrimination intervention.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now . No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviours can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?



# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 1. What is Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness?

### 1.1 Definition

Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions in the moment, as well as to empathetically perceive and respond to the emotions of others. It's the practice of being fully present and non-judgmental.

This competency transforms a trainer from an information provider into a skilled facilitator who can navigate the complex, unspoken dynamics of a training session.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Emotional Intelligence (EI) was popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman. He proposed that EI is a crucial factor for success and leadership effectiveness, and it can be developed over time. Goleman's theory breaks down EI into five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, 1995)
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s, MBSR is an evidence-based program that combines mindfulness meditation, body awareness, and yoga to help individuals manage stress, pain, and illness. Studies have shown that MBSR can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving overall psychological well-being (Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, 1990)



# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Navigate difficult conversations with confidence: instead of being caught off guard by a participant's strong emotional reaction, you'll be able to recognize it as valuable feedback. This allows you to respond constructively, addressing the underlying issue directly and preventing it from derailing the session
- Make participants' experience more relevant: your ability to read the room and respond to emotional cues ensures the training meets their real-time needs. They won't feel lectured at but will experience a dynamic session that adapts to their energy and understanding,
- Foster a resilient and open learning environment: by modeling curiosity and openness to all emotions (including your own), you create a psychologically safe space for the group. This helps participants feel secure enough to take risks, ask difficult questions, and engage honestly, which deepens learning.

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
My job is to be an expert, not to manage emotions	This belief can lead to a rigid, one-way delivery of content. You might miss crucial signs of participant disengagement, confusion, or resistance, causing the training to fail to meet their needs and ultimately be ineffective
I can't read people's minds, so I can't know what they're feeling	While you can't read minds, you can observe non-verbal cues. If you believe this, you won't be looking for signs of emotional withdrawal (e.g., slumped shoulders, lack of eye contact) or overwhelm, leaving participants feeling unheard and unsupported
If I acknowledge a negative emotion, it will make the situation worse	Ignoring tension or frustration can actually allow it to fester and grow. What was a minor issue could escalate into a full-blown conflict or passive resistance, creating a hostile or unresponsive learning environment



# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviors that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Reacting defensively to a difficult question or critical feedback	A defensive reaction (e.g., getting flustered, becoming sarcastic) can shut down honesty. It creates a hostile environment where participants feel unsafe to challenge ideas or offer constructive criticism, leading to disengagement and resentment.
Telling participants how they should feel or what their emotional experience is	This dismisses a person's lived experience and can come across as condescending. Phrases like, "You shouldn't be worried about that," invalidate their feelings and prevent an authentic conversation
Ignoring or dismissing non-verbal cues (e.g., someone sighing, crossing their arms, or looking confused)	This behavior shows a lack of awareness and makes a participant feel unheard and invisible. It can signal that their feelings don't matter and discourage them from engaging further.



# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Inclusive behavior
Reacting defensively to a difficult question or critical feedback	A defensive reaction (e.g., getting flustered, becoming sarcastic) can shut down honesty. It creates a hostile environment where participants feel unsafe to challenge ideas or offer constructive criticism, leading to disengagement and resentment.	Thanking participants for their feedback and curiosity. For example, "That's a really important question. Thank you for bringing that up." This models professionalism and shows that you value their input, regardless of whether it's positive or negative.
Telling participants how they should feel or what their emotional experience is	This dismisses a person's lived experience and can come across as condescending. Phrases like, "You shouldn't be worried about that," invalidate their feelings and prevent an authentic conversation	Acknowledging and validating emotions without judgment. Use empathetic phrases like, "I can see why that would be frustrating," or "It sounds like you're feeling a bit overwhelmed." This shows you understand and accept their feelings as valid.
Ignoring or dismissing non-verbal cues (e.g., someone sighing, crossing their arms, or looking confused)	This behavior shows a lack of awareness and makes a participant feel unheard and invisible. It can signal that their feelings don't matter and discourage them from engaging further.	Pausing and checking in with the group. For example, "I'm noticing a few frustrated looks. Is there something we need to clarify here?" This validates their feelings and gives them a safe way to express their concerns.



# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 5. Good practices

### Practice Self-reflection

- Before and after a training session, take a moment to check in with your own emotions. Ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" or "What was my emotional reaction to that question?" This builds your personal emotional awareness.

### Read the room

- Make a conscious effort to observe the emotional climate of the group. Look for non-verbal cues like changes in body language, facial expressions, or energy levels. Use this information to guide your next steps.

### Use a "Parking Lot" for emotional reactions

- If a participant has a strong emotional reaction or a difficult question, acknowledge their feelings and offer to discuss it during a break or after the session. This validates their emotion without derailing the group's progress.

### Normalize all emotions

- Create a space where participants feel safe to express a full range of emotions. Let them know that it's okay to feel confused, frustrated, or excited and that these feelings are a natural part of the learning process.

### Encourage and acknowledge bravery

- When a participant shares a difficult emotion or a vulnerable thought, acknowledge their courage. A simple, "Thank you for sharing that, I know it can be difficult to talk about," validates their feelings and reinforces a safe learning environment





# 7 Emotional awareness and mindfulness

## 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Emotional awareness and mindfulness.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now!

No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviors can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?





# 8 Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

## 1. What is Digital Skills and Innovation in the Service of Equity?

### 1.1 Definition

Digital Skills and Innovation in the Service of Equity is the strategic use of technology and digital tools to remove barriers, enhance accessibility, and create more inclusive learning experiences for all participants.

It involves leveraging digital innovations not just for efficiency or engagement, but specifically to address inequities and ensure that technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier to participation.

This competency requires both technical proficiency and equity-minded thinking, using digital tools to amplify marginalised voices, provide multiple access points for learning, and create more democratic participation in virtual and hybrid learning environments.

### 1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Digital Divide Research: Extensive research by organisations like the Pew Research Center demonstrates persistent gaps in technology access based on income, age, and geographic location. Understanding these disparities is crucial for equitable digital design (Digital Divide 2021, Pew Research Center).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Digital Environments: Research shows that digital tools can provide unprecedented opportunities for personalised learning when designed with UDL principles, offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (UDL and Blended Learning, CAST, 2016).
- Assistive Technology Research: Studies demonstrate that when digital tools include accessibility features from the start, they improve usability for everyone, not just people with disabilities, a concept known as the "curb cut effect" (Design for Inclusion, Microsoft Inclusive Design Toolkit, 2016).





# 8

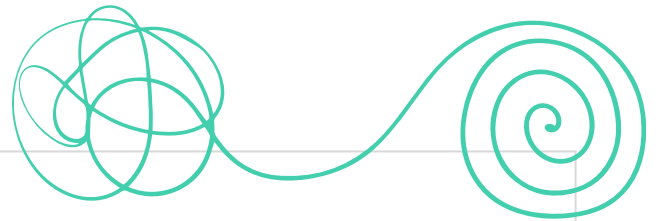
## Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

### 1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Expand your reach to participants who couldn't access traditional formats: digital tools can eliminate geographic, mobility, and scheduling barriers, allowing you to include participants who might otherwise be excluded from in-person training.
- Create more engaging and personalised learning experiences: technology enables adaptive content delivery, real-time feedback, and multiple interaction modes, leading to improved learning outcomes and participant satisfaction.
- Future-proof your training practice: as digital and hybrid learning become standard expectations, equity-focused digital skills ensure you remain relevant and competitive whilst serving diverse learners effectively.

## 2. What might hold you back?

### 2.1 Common thinking traps:



Beliefs	Possible consequences
Technology is too complicated and will exclude less tech-savvy participants.	This assumption prevents you from using tools that could actually increase accessibility. Many participants are more comfortable with technology than trainers assume, and proper support can help others develop confidence.
Digital tools are impersonal and reduce human connection.	Whilst poorly implemented technology can feel cold, thoughtfully used digital tools can actually enhance connection by providing more ways for participants to share and interact, especially for those who are shy in face-to-face settings.
Everyone has the same access to technology and internet.	This belief leads to digital exclusion of participants with limited devices, slow internet, or technology restrictions. It assumes universal access that doesn't reflect reality for many communities.



# Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

## 3. Identify excluding behaviours



Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviours that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers. In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviours are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Using digital platforms without considering accessibility features (captions, screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation).	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities who rely on assistive technologies, effectively preventing them from participating fully in digital learning experiences.
Assuming all participants have high-speed internet and latest devices.	This assumption excludes participants with limited economic resources, those in areas with poor connectivity, or those using older technology, creating a technology-based class divide in learning access.
Providing digital content in only one format without alternatives.	When materials are only available as videos without transcripts, or only as text without audio options, participants with different processing needs or accessibility requirements cannot engage with the content.
Rushing through technology instructions without ensuring everyone can follow.	This leaves less tech-savvy participants behind, creating anxiety and disengagement, and signals that technological fluency is required for participation.



# 8 Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

## 4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviours look like in digital skills and innovation, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these same situations.



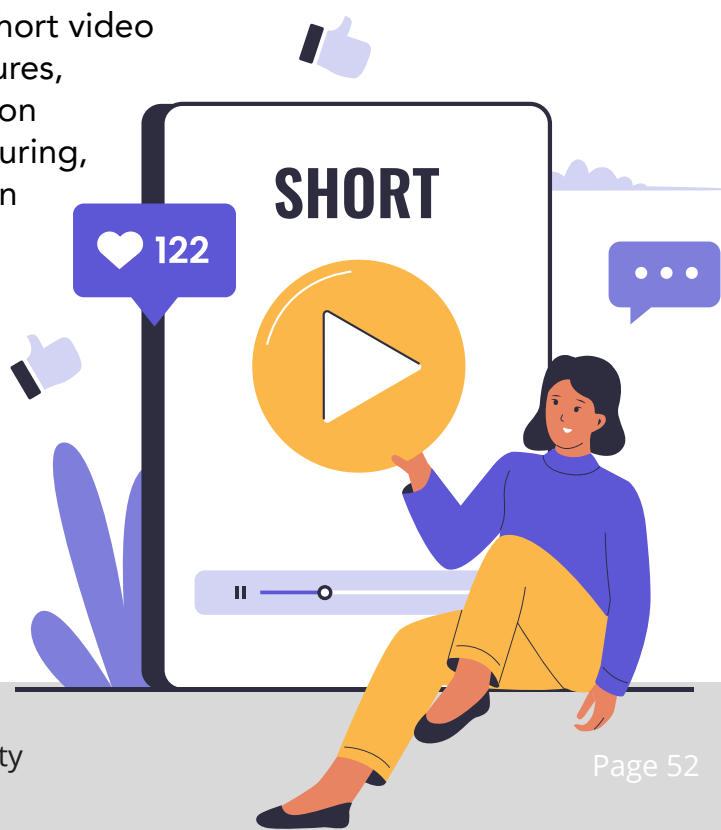
Excluding behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Using digital platforms without considering accessibility features.	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities who rely on assistive technologies.	Always enable and highlight accessibility features. Start sessions by showing how to turn on captions, adjust text size, and use keyboard navigation. Provide tutorials on accessibility features before the main content begins.
Assuming all participants have high-speed internet and latest devices.	This assumption excludes participants with limited economic resources or poor connectivity.	Design for low-bandwidth and older devices. Provide phone dial-in options, use platforms that work on mobile devices, share materials in advance for offline access, and offer simplified interfaces when available.
Providing digital content in only one format without alternatives.	When materials are only available in one format, participants with different needs cannot engage.	Create content in multiple formats from the start. Provide videos with captions and transcripts, audio recordings with written summaries, and interactive elements with text-based alternatives.
Rushing through technology instructions without ensuring everyone can follow.	This leaves less tech-savvy participants behind, creating anxiety and disengagement.	Build in dedicated technology orientation time. Start sessions 15 minutes early for tech setup, provide step-by-step visual guides, and assign tech-savvy participants as helpers for others.



# 8 Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

## 5. Good practices

- Create technology equity checks. Before digital sessions, survey participants about their technology access, internet speed, and comfort level. Use this information to adjust your platform choices and provide additional support where needed.
- Develop a digital accessibility standard. Create a checklist that includes captions, screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, colour contrast, and alternative formats for all digital content. Make accessibility a non-negotiable part of your digital design process.
- Provide multiple participation pathways. Use platform features that allow participation through chat, voice, reactions, polls, and breakout rooms. This gives participants options to engage in ways that feel comfortable and accessible to them.
- Create technology mentorship opportunities. Pair tech-comfortable participants with those who need support. This builds community whilst ensuring no one is left behind due to technical difficulties.
- Record comprehensive tutorials. Create short video guides showing how to use platform features, access materials, and troubleshoot common problems. Make these available before, during, and after sessions so participants can learn at their own pace.





# 8

## Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity

### 6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now . No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviours can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?



# Conclusions

The Inclusive Training Proficiency (ITP) framework, developed within the INCLUDE project, provides a holistic model for embedding inclusion, equity, and reflective awareness into corporate learning and development.

By defining eight core competencies—ranging from self-awareness and reflective practice to digital innovation in the service of equity—the framework redefines what it means to be an effective trainer in the modern workplace.

At its heart, ITP acknowledges that inclusion is not a single action or skill, but a continuous, intentional practice that shapes every stage of the training process: from design and communication to facilitation and evaluation. It empowers trainers and training providers to move beyond compliance-based approaches toward a culture of belonging, where all learners—regardless of identity, ability, or background—can participate, contribute, and grow.

Across the eight competencies, several common themes emerge:

- **Self-awareness and reflection** form the foundation of inclusive practice, enabling trainers to understand their biases, values, and triggers.
- **Designing and delivering inclusively** ensures that all participants have equitable access to learning, both physically and psychologically.
- **Communication and emotional awareness** transform training spaces into environments of empathy, authenticity, and respect.
- **Digital equity and innovation** expand participation by harnessing technology not as a barrier but as a bridge.
- **Anti-discrimination and fairness elevate trainers' roles** as advocates for equity, equipping them to address exclusionary behaviours confidently and constructively.

Together, these competencies cultivate trainers who are not only content experts but also facilitators of transformation—professionals capable of fostering learning environments that mirror the diversity, complexity, and potential of the real world.

When you adopt this framework, you invest not only in your instructional skills but also in your capacity to lead with empathy, integrity, and social responsibility.

This shift marks a crucial step toward creating learning cultures that genuinely reflect the inclusive values the modern workforce aspires to uphold.

# “Start with self”

**Inclusive Training Proficiency  
- a competence model for business  
trainers and educators who care.**

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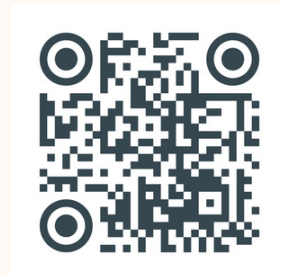
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