**Comfort Zone, Learning Edge, Danger Zone**

*Large Group  101  Low Trust  30 mins*

**Materials & Media:**
- Three circles of rope or webbing—ideally one red, one yellow, and one green

**Set Up:**
- Using different colors of rope or webbing make three concentric circles on the floor

**Goals & Learning Outcomes:**
- To introduce to participants the concepts of comfort zones, learning edges, and danger zones
- Help participants recognize what their learning edges, comfort zones, and danger zones are
- For participants to begin understand how to identify their triggers and to recognize when they are feeling triggered
- To show that everyone has different levels of comfort with different topics, activities, etc. and that you are the only one who knows when you are in the different zones. So:
  - You have to be the one who pushes yourself and knows when you are learning
  - We should try not to judge other people or make assumptions about what might be comfortable/easy for some people based on what is comfortable/easy for ourselves
- To emphasize that learning happens outside of our comfort zones, and that it requires that we sit in our discomfort sometimes, challenge ourselves, and take risks

**Priming:**
1. Explain the concepts of safety, comfort, learning edges, and danger zones:
2. “We are going to talk about the concepts of comfort zones, learning edges, and danger zones. These circles on the ground represent the three different zones. The middle one is the Comfort Zone. (Ask people to move to the innermost circle) We all have zones of comfort about different topics and experiences. Having difficult conversations and doing social justice work often asks us to move beyond our traditional areas of comfort so that we can open ourselves to new challenges, knowledge, and awareness. Inside our comfort zone we are rarely being challenged; therefore, rarely learning.
3. (Ask people to move to the second circle) We call the edge of our comfort zone the learning edge. When we are on the learning edge, we are most open to expanding our knowledge and
understanding - as well as expanding our comfort zone itself. Being on this edge can be uncomfortable or we may feel out of balance. We may experience this as feeling annoyed, angry, anxious, surprised, confused, defensive, or in some other way uncomfortable. These reactions are a natural part of the process of expanding our comfort zones, and are a part of the learning process. The challenge is to recognize when we are on a learning edge and then to stay there, and sit with the discomfort we are experiencing, to see what we can learn.

4. (Ask everyone to move to the outer most circles) Too far outside our comfort zone and we begin to resist new information and withdraw. This is the danger zone. We can shut down or have other strong reactions that make it hard or impossible to comprehend new information.

5. Express that the intention of the activity is not to see where other people are and judge them based on where they are, but to reflect on your own position and what is impacting you being where you are on each statement.

If you have participants who have limited mobility, offer to them that they can stay where they are and encourage them to reflect on which area they would be in for each statement or offer another way for them to indicate their movement by holding up different color signs, flags, or bandannas.

Process Steps & Talking Points:

1. Have everyone spread out and position themselves on the outside of the three circles you have created on the floor. Remind participants that the center circle is your comfort zone, the middle circle is your learning edge, and the outer circle is the danger zone.

2. Explain that you will read a series of statements and that for each one, they should move to the circle that fits with their level of comfort.

3. After each statement, give folks a chance to think for a few seconds about why they are standing where they are and then have the group return to the outside before reading the next one.

4. This is a silent activity, so participants should not be talking until the end of the activity.

Examples of Prompts:

How comfortable would you be...

- Going to a gay bar with a group of friends
- Asking your parents/close family member to cover your phone bill for the month
- Having a conversation with your family members about interracial dating
- Giving a speech in an auditorium in front of 400 people
- Going to a religious service at a catholic church
- Taking a depression screening in Psych 270 and sharing results with the class
- Leading a team building activity for a group of 50 peers
- Applying for an internship at a US based company for the summer
- Telling a friend you’re not buying season tickets because you cant afford them
- Correcting a coworker who is using the wrong gender pronouns for another coworker
Debrief/Process Questions:
Try to get the group to understand 1.) Where their own learning edges are, 2.) That everyone has different levels of comfort with concepts, topics, activities, etc., 3.) That optimal learning happens when they are being challenged or challenging themselves, and 4.) That their own social identities (race, socio-economic class, gender, etc.) impact their comfort with certain things.

Any initial reactions to the activity?
What did you notice about yourself in this activity?
What did you notice about the group?
What were some ways you noticed your social identities effected your placement that you’d like to share?
Anything else you’d like to add to our discussion of this activity?

Wrap Up:
Now we are going to move into the next activity. We would like you to keep this activity in mind as we move through the rest of the day/retreat/workshop. Remember that we want you to be challenged while you are here and we also want to make sure that you feel safe and do not enter the danger zone.

Co-Facilitator Notes:
Decide how you want to split up giving the instructions, defining the different zones, and reading off the prompts.

Bring Your Style:
These prompts were written for a workshop with undergraduate and graduate students in a University setting. Some of them are specific to that age group and setting so feel free to adapt as fitting! Switch up the prompts! Make ones that work for your groups.

Challenges & Tips:
As a facilitator, walk through the questions in your head also and take time to think about where you are in terms of comfort so you can bring your experience into the debrief as well.

Make sure that you are noticing any patterns in who is where throughout the activity. For example, were there certain people who were “comfortable” the entire time? Were there certain prompts where everyone was in the same zone? Were there certain prompts where all the men or all the white people or all the ___ people were in the same section?
While this is a low trust activity it can often challenge participants to disclose personal information or what may feel very personal. Consider this when placing the activity in your workshop and in how you’re framing the activity.