

# SYL's Safer Space Policy

## Introduction

SYL is a feminist and anti-racist organisation, and all SYL's events should be free of harassment and discrimination. SYL wants to be a pioneer in promoting equality and non-discrimination. Everyone involved in the university student movement must have a chance to participate in the movement's activities according to their own actual capacities. The university student movement cherishes and respects diversity.

SYL wants to promote the safer space policy in its events so that participants can feel safe and take responsibility in unpleasant situations by reflecting on their behaviour and adjusting it accordingly whenever needed. The policy aims to create ways to prevent unpleasant situations from arising or to remedy these situations, instead of making the participants just put up with them.

The word 'safer' instead of 'safe' refers to the idea that creating a completely safe space for everyone is virtually impossible, even though it is our goal.

## Safer Space Policy

The aim of the safer space policy is to support people participating in SYL's activities to create an inner sense of security. It is important that the participants can trust that their experiences are heard and respected and that everyone is committed to the safer space policy. This also encourages people to handle any conflicts arising within the community in a reflective and solution-oriented manner.

The aim is to get the participants to observe their own behaviour and to take responsibility for it. The policy prevents the creation of hierarchies and unequal situations within groups. It is a way to create a sense of community and inclusion by making everyone feel welcome and that they can contribute together to increasing the sense of security.

A safe space is determined by the mutual interaction between the participants, and no general guidelines can be given as to how the boundaries of individual participants are defined and when they are crossed.

- Acknowledge the different boundaries of different people and respect them. The identity of each individual is up to that individual to determine, and no one's gender, sexual or political orientation or nationality can be inferred from their appearance.
- Acknowledge and be aware of your privileges. Privilege refers to unearned benefits that certain social groups possess. In society, they are defined in relation to one's identity: skin colour, social class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographic identity, health status, religion, etc.
- Be open and listen to others. Avoid making assumptions about other participants, as we cannot understand the experiences, thoughts, life situation and self-determined identity of the other participants for them. However, since we often do make assumptions about other people, try to be aware of your own assumptions.
- Respect each other, acknowledge the diversity of the community, and appreciate the diversity of individuals.
- Give other people space and make sure that everyone's voice is heard and that everyone can take part in conversations. Encourage others to participate.



- SYL's events are free of harassment and discrimination. Harassment may be e.g. words, touching or staring. If someone asks you to stop your improper behaviour, you must stop it. Discrimination can be e.g. assuming the language or languages a person is able to speak based on the colour of their skin.
- Do not ignore disturbing or inappropriate behaviour, but instead take action and address it.
- Do not generalise your own experiences and apply them to others: it is not appropriate to determine someone's experience on their behalf.
- Talk in such a way that everyone understands: try to use language that is understandable also to those outside your own reference group by e.g. explaining the meaning of abbreviations used.
- Do not talk improperly of other people or attack them in your speeches, neither those present nor absent. Do not present or spread stereotypes or offensive analogies.
- Do not distort the views of others or interpret them maliciously.

## Equality Observers

Two equality observers will be elected for SYL's events. The equality observers monitor the implementation of this document and the equality guide. The participants may contact the equality observers if they notice any behaviour that is discriminatory or violates equality or security, or if they face this kind of behaviour themselves. You can report these incidents either face-to-face, via telephone or through an anonymous electronic form.

The equality observers work to support the creation of a safer space and support people in conflict resolution situations. The most important thing is, however, that the participants try to create a safer space themselves instead of outsourcing the task to the equality observers.

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People at the SYL Central Office

*Source: Annika Ojala: Turvallisemmat tilat feministisessä vaikuttamistyössä ('Safer Spaces in Feminist Advocacy Work'), 2017.*