Visualization: Attitude and Belief Formation

Goal: To increase awareness of how attitudes and beliefs are formed through our experiences. To encourage participants to reflect on what they were directly and indirectly taught about diversity and oppression.

As you prepare the group for the exercise you can explain that you are going to do a quiet visualization exercise and ask participants to ensure that phones and other electronic equipment are turned off. Remember to read slowly. You may want to practice out loud before trying this exercise.

Facilitator states:
Get into a comfortable sitting position. Put your feel firmly on the floor. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. If you are comfortable, close your eyes or find a place in the room on which to focus. Again, take a deep slow breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you take another deep breath feel the stress leave your body as you blow out of your mouth.

Silence – count to ten to yourself.
Notice your neck and head. Let the tension and heaviness leave your body. Let go and find quietness. Relax your shoulders and arms. Imagine the stress of the day flowing away.
Take a deep breath and let it go slowly out your mouth. Notice your relaxed breathing and let your leg muscles relax. Let tension roll right down your legs and out of your body.

As we move through the exercise, continue to notice your slow breathing. Now, travel back in time to when you were five. Where did you live? Remember what it looked like – the furniture, the paint or wallpaper, the smells of your neighborhood. Where did you play? What is outside? Who was there? What did they look like?

During this period of time in your life, what if anything do you remember learning about people who were different form you?

Now, move to a situation, maybe at this age or during a different time in your life, when you noticed racial or ethnic differences between people. Where were you? How did the difference make you feel? What, if anything were you told about these differences between people? How did what you were told make you feel?

Take a deep slow breath, and let go of any tension you feel in your body.

Move ahead in time. Take a breath in through your nose and out slowly through your mouth. Try and think of a time when you were 9 years old. What as the “in” thing to play with or wear? What did kids, in general, within your neighborhood, school or place of worship covet? Who had the cool toys or clothes and who didn’t? How did you know? Remember what it felt like to have or not have those things.

Take a deep breath and relax your shoulders.

Now, move ahead to when you were a teenager. Who was dating whom? Who had dates/relationships and who didn’t? What did you and your friends think about gay, lesbian or bisexual people? If you went to high school, were there classes or activities that were segregated by sex, like volleyball or shop class? Were there people with physical disabilities around you? How were they treated?
Take another slow deep breath.

Move forward to today. Think about where you live. Who are your neighbors? What do they look like? Who are you in class with or at work with? What do you notice about the differences between you and others? Do you notice? How do differences make you feel? How do you view issues of oppression and diversity today? How is it the same or different from your parents or other family members?

Take a deep slow breath and slowly open your eyes and gently move your body to help bring you back to the present.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do we do this exercise – why make us reflect on the past?
   Emphasize that we learn attitudes and beliefs and we are not responsible for what we learned. We can regret it, in some cases perhaps be thankful for them, and acknowledge that to change attitudes and beliefs that do not serve us in our lives, we must take responsibility to change hurtful beliefs and attitudes.

2. Who do we emphasize that we must now take responsibility for understanding the impact of what we learned and change it?
   Because attitudes and beliefs predict behavior.

3. What did you remember about what you were told about racial or ethnic differences? How about other differences?

4. What did you remember feeling?

5. Did anything that came into your head surprise you?

6. Anything else you want to share?