

Love & Freedom

A ready-to-run philosophy session for aged care and community groups

Anchoring question

If you love someone, should you set them free?

This session begins with an ordinary saying and opens it up philosophically. Participants explore what we mean by love, distinguish between being free from something and being free to do or become something, then return to the original question with richer conceptual tools.

Time	About 45 minutes
Group	Small or large groups; especially suited to residential aged care
Preparation	Question cards, butcher's paper or whiteboard, marker pens, optional concept cards
Philosophy	Love, freedom, autonomy, care, change and responsibility

Facilitator stance: The aim is not to teach a correct theory of love. Create the conditions for participants to make distinctions, test ideas against lived experience, change their minds, and teach one another.

Session at a glance

1. Warm up - about 5 minutes

Use a short, easy quiz about love to get the room participating. Keep it light. The final item should begin to blur the line between trivia and philosophy:

True or false: If you really love someone, you should always let them do whatever they want.

There is deliberately no official answer. Take two or three reasons, then move to the anchor.

2. First pass at the anchor

If you love someone, should you set them free?

Invite a quick yes / no / depends, then ask for a few 'because...' reasons. Do not resolve the question. This is the group's starting position.

3. Build a working picture of love

On butcher's paper, draw a simple continuum: NEVER - SOMETIMES - ALWAYS. Invite participants to place words associated with love along it. Useful candidates include:

care · devotion · longing · sacrifice · pleasure · responsibility · jealousy · possession · control · trust · patience · freedom

Disagreement is useful. The goal is not a perfect definition; it is a visible, shared-enough understanding of what the room means by love.

4. Let the freedom distinction emerge

I want someone I love to be free...

Let participants complete the sentence before supplying categories. Scribe their answers. When the language appears, notice the difference between being free FROM something and being free TO do, choose or become something.

You may name these as negative and positive liberty if that helps, but the ordinary-language distinction is enough.

Test the idea with cases

Use only as many cases as the group needs. Two good cases may be enough. Start simple and move toward ambiguity. For each, ask: Free from what? Free to do what?

1. Dog behind a fence

A dog is kept behind a fence so it cannot run onto the road.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

2. Toddler and the power point

A parent stops a toddler from touching a power point.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

3. Grounded teenager

A teenager wants to go to a party. Their parents say no because they believe it is unsafe.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

4. Adult child

An adult child makes an important life choice their parent strongly disagrees with. The parent does not stop them.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

5. Long marriage

One person in a long marriage has an opportunity to do something important to them that will mean spending significant time away from their partner.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

6. Independence and risk

Someone you love wants to keep doing something independently, but you believe it is becoming unsafe.

FREE FROM WHAT? FREE TO DO WHAT?

Facilitator cue: Stop once participants begin using the distinction themselves. The cases are a toolkit, not a checklist.

Return, deepen, reflect

5. Return to the anchoring question

If you love someone, should you set them free?

Remind the group how they answered earlier. Ask whether anyone now wants to change, qualify or complicate their answer. Listen for questions such as: Free from what? Free to do what? Can restricting one freedom protect or create another?

Optional deepeners

Could you genuinely love someone while wanting them never to change?

If I 'set someone free', does that imply they were mine to set free in the first place?

Use these only if the conversation needs another push. If the room is already doing rich philosophy, leave them alone.

6. Reflection and close

Think of someone you love.

What do you hope they will always be free FROM?

What do you hope they will always be free TO do?

Give people a little silence before inviting responses. The reflection brings the conceptual distinction back into lived experience. There is no need for a final philosophical verdict.

What success looks like

Success is not everybody agreeing that love means freedom. It is the room moving from a simple yes/no response toward more precise questions about what kind of freedom love supports, limits or makes possible.

Facilitator notes

Start ordinary; earn the right to go deep.

Love, freedom, dependence, care and letting go can connect to grief, family conflict, loss of independence and end-of-life experiences. Do not manufacture emotional intensity through dramatic examples. If participants bring lived experience into the room themselves, receive it respectfully and let it inform the inquiry.

Do not sanitise ageing.

Questions about autonomy, bodily dependence, safety, dignity and care are philosophically legitimate. Participants should be free to discuss them without being pushed into personal disclosure.

Follow the energy.

You do not need to use every case or every deepener. The session is designed as a spine with pocket prompts. If participants are already thinking together, keep listening and questioning.

Optional warm-up quiz

#	Question	Answer / purpose
1	True or false: Valentine's Day is named after a saint.	True.
2	Which famous band sang 'All You Need Is Love'? The Rolling Stones, The Beatles or ABBA?	The Beatles.
3	True or false: The traditional gift for a 50th wedding anniversary is gold.	True.
4	Romeo was in love with whom? Juliet, Cleopatra or Lady Macbeth?	Juliet.
5	Finish this saying: 'If you love something...'	'...set it free.'
6	True or false: If you really love someone, you should always let them do whatever they want.	No official answer - use it to begin the philosophy.

P4E - Philosophy for Everyone

A practical inquiry resource for thinking together about love, freedom and the lives we share.