

Straight A's for Facilitating Discussions about Diversity and Social Justice

AFFIRM--Affirm and appreciate people's comments and questions.

- Thank you for asking that question. I'm sure others were wondering about that too.
- Great point. That's important to consider.
- I appreciate your taking the risk to share that with us.
- I appreciate your willingness to stay open and consider other perspectives.
- I know this isn't easy to think or talk about. Thanks for doing the hard work.

ACKNOWLEDGE-- Acknowledge what people are saying. Make sure you understand what they're expressing. Paraphrase their words and feelings. Acknowledge areas of agreement or commonalities with others.

- I'm hearing you say that..... Is that correct?
- It sounds like you feel.....
- So from your perspective....
- It seems like you're both concerned abouteven though you're approaching it differently.
- Those are both good examples of the effects of racism because....

ASK--Ask questions to better understand individuals' behaviors and perspectives and to help them reflect on their views.

- Can you tell me more about how you came to think that?
- What experiences led you to that belief?
- How would you make sense of?
- What would it mean for you if this was true?
- How were you feeling when?

ADD--Add more information, historical/social/political context, or alternative explanations. Challenge misinformation, broaden people's perspectives, address differences in power and privilege, and put issues in a larger context.

- This research study found that.....
- What institutional policies might have contributed to these inequalities?
- Let's consider how the history of has impacted what we see today.
- How might people's social identities affect their experiences in this situation?
- What are some other explanations for this?

ASSESS and ADDRESS--Assess individual and group dynamics and your own internal and external responses and decide how to address it. Notice people's reactions, body language, degree of participation, tone in the room. Reflect on your own behavior and feelings.

To the group:

- People are very quiet. I'm wondering what's going on.
- People seem restless. Do you need a break?
- I noticed you just had a reaction. Could you tell us what happened for you?
- I'm noticing that people are interrupting each other. We agreed that we'd let people finish their thoughts before someone else spoke.

To self:

- I'm starting to get more tense and more aggressive. What's triggering me?
- This person is reminding me of the stereotype. I need to refocus on their full humanity.

Some Facilitation Strategies for Difficult Dialogues on Diversity Issues

Creating a Respectful and Inclusive Classroom/Workshop Environment

- Have guidelines and enforce them (e.g. talking from one's own experience, no interrupting, no personal attacks, listening respectfully, sharing airtime, confidentiality)
- Do group-building activities
- Convey that learning stereotypes and misinformation is unavoidable—not about guilt and blame
- Use examples from your own life of the mistakes you've made and how you've learned and unlearned prejudices
- Model responding to challenges non-defensively and respectfully
- Provide opportunities for input and frequent feedback
- Consider reviewing racial/social identity development
- Acknowledge different communication and conflict styles

Dealing with Conflict and Strong Emotions and Viewpoints

- Enforce the guidelines
- Address the behavior directly
- Slow down the interaction: make sure one person is finished before someone else speaks
- Paraphrase: Facilitator or next speaker summarizes what person said before continuing. Make sure everyone feels heard and understood
- Explore why someone believes/feels as they do
- Use a "talking stick"
- Look for areas of agreement or connections
- Keep conversations time-limited
- Use homework assignments or web discussions
- Discuss differences in styles of communication and conflict - clarify how people are feeling
- Agree to disagree - summarize points and move on
- Use fishbowl exercises
- Link the conflict to the class topic – move it away from the personal to larger issue/theoretical
- Remind people it is okay to agree to disagree and that these are sensitive, powerful issues
- Take a time-out (a break, journaling, free writing, reactions in pairs)

Dealing with Feeling Stuck or Triggered as the Facilitator

- Take time-outs to cool off, reflect and/or process whatever happened
- Name what you're observing—ask for suggestions or make suggestions on how to proceed
- Use break out groups, caucus groups, or pairs to process
- Encourage participants to write, journal
- Use fishbowl exercises
- Have structured go-rounds
- Use response cards
- Engage in self-talk
- Consult with colleagues
- Develop strategies for next time