

Conversations in the Classroom

Know Your School

CHECK FOR RESOURCES

Make sure your school embraces an environment that encourages compassion, understanding and acceptance of difference. Peer pressure also often is a strong motivator, in both positive and negative ways, at school. Allies are important; seek them out, and be an ally for others.

Know Yourself

RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN BIAS

You can begin to recognize your own biases using the [Implicit Association Test](#). Understanding the nature of bias is also essential. Sharing your biases can help others feel more secure about exploring their own biases. It's important to have these conversations in a safe space-individuals must be open to alternative perspectives and viewpoints.

Clarify Comments

INQUIRE

Ask the speaker to elaborate.

KEY PHRASES:

"Say more about that."

"Can you elaborate on your point?"

"It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Tell me why."

"What is it about this that concerns you the most?"

Clarify Comments

REFRAME

Create a different way to look at a situation.

KEY PHRASES:

"What would happen if..."

"Could there be another way to look at this..." "Let's reframe this..."

"How would you feel if this happened to your_____?"

Clarify Comments

RE-DIRECT

Shift the focus to a different person or topic. (Particularly helpful when someone is asked to speak for his/her entire race, cultural group, etc.)

KEY PHRASES:

"Let's shift the conversation..."

"Let's open up this question to others..."

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Clarify Comments

PARAPHRASE

Paraphrasing demonstrates understanding and reduces defensiveness of both you and the speaker. Reflect both content and feeling whenever possible.

KEY PHRASES:

“So, it sounds like you think...”

“You’re saying...You believe...”

Revisit Conversations

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Even if the moment has passed, go back and address it. Research indicates that an unaddressed incident can leave just as much of a negative impact as the incident itself.

KEY PHRASES:

“I want to go back to something that was brought up in our conversation/meeting/class”

“Let’s rewind ___minutes...”

Find Common Ground

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Seek out areas of agreement and then areas of compromise while listening carefully and respectfully. Looking for areas of compromise doesn't mean giving in to ideas that aren't right.

Considerations

ENSURE EVERYTHING'S IN ORDER

- The communication approaches are most effective when used in combination with one another.
- Don't call out the person, call out the behavior.
- Avoid starting questions with “Why”—it puts people on the defensive.
- Avoid using “you.” Use “I” statements describing the impact on you instead or refer to the action indirectly.
- How you say it is as critical as what you say, e.g., tone of voice, body language, etc. The message has to be conveyed with respect for the other person, even if one is having a strong negative reaction to what’s been said.
- Sometimes humor can defuse a tense situation.