Skill-Building for Effective Activism: How to Have Difficult Conversations

How to Have Difficult Conversations

• You have options! You can...
  – Decide not to have a conversation
  – Decide to voice a stance
  – Decide to engage in alliance building
• All of these options are valid. They each use different skills.
• This workshop highlights skills in navigating difficult conversation with the goal of alliance building in mind.
Attitude and Approach

- Offer a calm, relaxed, confident, even tone of voice.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and attitude of cooperation.
- Think well of one another.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Present fairly & accurately the concerns of both sides.
- Avoid binary thinking in understanding complex differences.
- Look for common ground.
- Provide safety, reassurance, and love.

Underlying Assumptions (NCBI)

- Listening is not the same as agreeing.
- When we respond to a present situation with intense emotion, we are usually acting out of a past unhealed difficulty.
- If you wish to move a conflict forward, there is no room for two hurts at the same time (park your ouch).
- Risk-taking and mistake making are essential for building close relationships across group lines.
Skills Involved

“Seek to understand before you seek to change.”

- Listen to the other person’s point of view with the goal of repeating back what you heard as precisely as possible.
- Listen for places where you hear “the ring in the voice”–areas of deep emotional resonance
- Ask genuine questions to invite the person to share more about what the issue means to them.
  - Ask open-ended questions to seek understanding.
  - Do not use the questions to advance your own position.

Demonstration

Scenario 1: One way to have a conversation...
  • What did you hear?
  • Attitude and Approach?

Scenario 2: Another way to have a conversation...
  • What did you hear?
  • Attitude and Approach?
Time to Take Risks and Make Mistakes

- In pairs, each of you will have the opportunity to be the listener, the person who is practicing the skills.
- The listener’s partner will select an opening statement, and the listener will repeat back what they said.
- Partner will briefly respond, and listener will respond with a reflective statement that highlights the “ring in the voice,” where the person is coming from emotionally.
- Partner will briefly respond, and listener will ask an open-ended question to gather more information about what this issue means to them.

Role-Practice (Attitude and Approach)

**Role-Play Practice Directions**

1. **Partner makes opening statement**
   - [Repeat back what partner said]

2. **Partner briefly responds with their view.**
   - [Ring in the voice] “So you feel (concerned, frustrated) that...”

3. **Partner briefly responds with their view.**
   - [Question to seek understanding]
     - “Can you tell me more about your experiences with that?”
     - “What concerns you most about...?”

4. Then switch roles.

**Sample opening statements**

- “Everyone’s saying if people voted for Trump because they’re racists. That’s just ridiculous. I’m not racist. I voted for his policies. This country needs to turn things around!”
- “We don’t need any more immigrants in this country, especially refugees. We’ve got our own problems to deal with.”
- “I’m sick of feeling like I can’t say anything because people are so sensitive to any little thing that might offend them. This PC thing is out of control.”
Role-Play Processing

• How did that feel as the listener?

Continued Skill-Building

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• "This was an AWESOME EXPERIENCE overall!"
• "I'm RECOMMENDING THIS to literally everyone."
• "I will NEVER forget this! SO LIFE-CHANGING!"
• "FEEL LIKE I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE."
• "This has PREPARED ME for the rest of my life."
• "Finally, I DON'T FEEL ALONE."

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Skill Building for Effective Activism

Dec 7
LISTEN AND CONNECT
How to have difficult conversations

Jan 18
CALL IN, WRITE IN, GET ACTIVE
How to call and write your legislators

Feb 15
STAND UP, SPEAK OUT, DEMONSTRATE
Direct action, demonstrations, getting arrested

March 22
GO THERE, LEAN IN
How to lobby your legislators

April 19
STEP IN & STOP IT
Bystander intervention skills practice

12noon-1:00 pm  Room 332 North Hall

Students, staff, faculty, field supervisors, across all centers are welcome. Bring a friend!

Thank you for joining us!

Feel free to contact the co-facilitators with any questions or comments

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