

Tips for Facilitating Challenging Conversations

(adapted from University of Minnesota Office for Equity and Diversity)

1. Assess the situation: Is this one where it makes sense for you to say something or otherwise interrupt some comments and/or behavior?

Consider:

- What kind of risk will I be taking if I do this?
- Is this particular action worth my time and effort?
- Do I know what I want to achieve?

It's OK to decide that the situation is not right for you to confront a person or a group of people.

2. Always model the behavior you want from the person or people you are confronting. If you want a respectful, open, honest conversation, then have that be your guide. It is a good idea to avoid being sarcastic, snide, mocking, or arrogant (even though this can be very tempting). Remember, the goal is education.
3. Model active listening behaviors. Listen not just for what they are saying, but for how you think they might be feeling. Sometimes comments that are overtly racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. mask deeper feelings of anger, confusion, hurt, and even shame.
4. Use yourself as an example. Use your own stories of how you've "unlearned" certain hurtful, inaccurate, and misleading information.
5. Reframe. Help someone understand a particular topic or issues using a different frame – with different assumptions and different conclusions. Examples include:
 - Point out the difference between creating policy based on identity and creating it based on behavior. (What matters is how people act, regardless of their identity.)
 - Affirmative Action. Point out that the U.S. has a strong history of "preferential treatment" (e.g. veterans for civil service jobs, college admission to students whose parents are alums). What is new is WHO the preferential treatment benefits.