

TIPS FOR HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

The following toolkit has been created to give you some guidance on how to have those tough conversations relating to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Things to think about BEFORE you take action:

- Interrupt your own bias first:** One useful way to think about bias interruption is the [ladder of inference](#). The ladder represents the process your mind goes through when making conclusions. Visit the Avarna Resources page for a toolkit on short circuiting your ladder of inference.
- Assume responsibility:** Everyone will assume responsibility differently, based on job titles, identities, etc. Think about what taking responsibility might look for you.
- Think it through:** Where are all parties coming from? What unconscious biases might people be holding? (hint: if you're not sure how to answer some of these questions, that might be a great place to start the conversation!)
- Outcomes:** Be clear about what you hope to get out of the intervention. What change in behavior, awareness, mindset, etc are you hoping for?
- Your identity:** Each person may interrupt bias differently in different situations, based on their identity. There is no one way to do this!
- Support:** Think about who needs support and when. The person or group who were the target of the incident may need immediate support, but the perpetrator may also need support in understanding how they can improve.
- Time:** Getting this incident resolved may take time! You may have to circle back to the incident or facilitate a few conversations with different people for all parties to feel like they can move forwards.
- Failure is ok:** Even if you don't get through to the person who said or did the exclusive thing, you have set a precedent that your program/organization does not condone exclusive actions or behaviors.

When it comes time to interrupt:

- Deep Breath:** Things can get emotional very quickly; take a deep breath before diving in.
- Assume positive intent:** Approach the person with unconditional positive regard.
- Curious inquiry:** Rather than humiliating or shaming the person/people, be curious about where they are coming from.
- Interrupt the interrupters:** When people from a dominant group are taking up too much air time, say, "I'd like to hear what _____ has to say" (focusing on the person who is being silenced) or "_____, it looked like you wanted to say something."



- **Use an appropriate tactic:** The four ways you can take action are:
 1. Direct: Intervene at that moment.
 2. Distract: Move the group’s attention away from the conversation, steer them towards a more positive direction.
 3. Delay: Intentionally wait to discuss bias for a later time.
 4. Delegate: Tell someone about the action/bias and request action from them.

Most likely, you will use a combination of the tactics while interrupting bias. Be sure to use them intentionally and productively, rather than just using the one that feels the most comfortable in the moment.

- **Actions and behavior:** Focus on the person’s behavior or actions, not their character (e.g., “I think what you said could be construed as racist” instead of “you are a racist.”)
- **Impact:** Focus on the impact of the person’s actions, not their intent (e.g., “when you said that, it made me feel like an outsider” instead of “why do you want to make people feel so excluded?”)

- **“I” Statements:** Talk about the impact of their actions on you (“I feel this way” instead of “Some people might be offended by what you said” or “Joe would be so offended right now if he was in the room!”)

- **Helpful phrases:**
 - “What you said just made me bristle a little. Can you tell me what you meant?”
 - “What makes you ask that question/say that _____?”
 - “It sounds like you’re really passionate about this issue. Can you tell me why?”
 - “I was really upset when you said _____ and was unable to hear the rest of what you said. Can we go back and discuss it?”
 - “Ouch! I am really shocked by that statement. Can you give me a minute to think?”
 - “I do not find the joke you just told funny because _____”
 - “So, why exactly is that joke funny?”
 - “I feel that what you just said breaches our (mission statement, D&I statement, group norms, etc).”
 - “Yesterday someone said _____. It made me uncomfortable and we need to talk about before we can move forward with our (trip/work/relationship).”

When someone is interrupting your bias:

- Avoid saying, “But I didn’t mean it”
- Show appreciation (“thank you for that feedback.”)
- Don’t get defensive – own your impact
- Don’t say, “Stop being so sensitive!” or “You’re so PC.”
- Take some time to reflect if you need it.
- Do your homework

