

Hard Conversations in Difficult Times

Helpful Hints for Keeping the Discourse Civil in a Classroom



1. Know the purpose of the conversation

1. Establish and/or Repeat Anti-Bullying Policies, Classroom Ground Rules
 - a. Be clear from the start: There is no time when someone should feel forced or compelled to engage in a difficult conversation
 - b. Watch for peer pressure and attempts at coercion
 - c. Build on strengths yours' and your classes'
 - d. Begin the conversation start slowly
 - e. Brushing it under the rug does not make it easier to deal with
 - f. Have a plan in case the conversation becomes uncivil
 - g. Recognize that "Freedom of Speech" sometimes is limited in a classroom setting
2. Be Cautious and Sensitive:
 - a. Be a role model
 - i. Respectful Listening
 - ii. Speak for yourself, not for others
 - b. Pay attention to those who are speaking, and those who are not.
 - c. Manage the personal aspects. Controversial topics can be tied to personal identity and experience.
 - i. Personal/national/cultural narratives are often revealed with deep devotion and conviction of the correctness of their point of view
 - ii. For many students Facts may be secondary to Feelings
 - d. Reflect on experiences, not debate "facts"

TRY TO	TRY NOT TO
Be Patient	Be Judgmental
Show Respect	Take Offense
Acknowledge Conflict	Question Motives
Appeal to Shared Values	Go "Fact-for-Fact"
Seek Understanding	Seek Victory
Seeking Ongoing Dialogue	Seek Immediate Resolution
Lead with Curiosity	Make Assumptions

3. Move from the challenging conversation to a creative learning activity such as journaling
4. **Self Care:** Be aware that this conversation may impact you, and that sometimes being an impartial facilitator may be personally difficult.
 - a. If something feels personal to you, own it and take a break
 - b. Beware of attempts to shock the listener or trigger a strong response.
5. **Resources:** Below are a list of some academic resources on managing conflict. Please refer to your school system's recommendations along with these

EdWeek.org
<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-an-urgent-message-to-school-leaders-your-arab-and-muslim-students-need-you/2023/10>

Bowling Green State University
<https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/center->

for-faculty-excellence/docs/
 ManagingClassroomConflict/
 Difficult-Conversations-Strategies.
 pdf

Social Studies Association
https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/3_steps_to_civil_discourse_teacher_version_1.pdf

Learning for Justice
https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Civil_Discourse_in_the_Classroom_o.pdf

Facing History in Ourselves
https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf

US Department of Education
<https://sites.ed.gov/cfbnp/free-to-learn-inclusion-rights-and-accommodations-for-students-of-all-faiths-and-none-conference-resources/>