

# Navigating Triggering Events: Critical Competencies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues

## NCORE 2016

Facilitated by:

**Kathy Obear, Ed.D.,**

*Alliance for Change Consulting and Coaching  
Social Justice Training Institute*

[www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com) [kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com)

[www.drkathyobear.com/NCORE-resources](http://www.drkathyobear.com/NCORE-resources)

**Micia Monique Mosely, Ph.D.**

*Executive Director, The Black Teacher Project*

[www.blackteacherproject.org](http://www.blackteacherproject.org) [Micia@blackteacherproject.org](mailto:Micia@blackteacherproject.org)

## BINGO!

### Directions:

- \* Find someone to talk about a topic in one of the squares.
- \* Both share your responses. \* Sign each other's sheet.
- \* Each find a new person to discuss a new topic.
- \* When you have filled in ALL the blocks, yell BINGO! And help others win!

Identify some of the comments or behaviors (related to race and racism) that are "triggers" for you or others in meetings, discussions, trainings, etc.	Talk about a triggering situation in a session or discussion that you navigated particularly well.
Talk about a time you reacted in a triggering situation in a way that undermined the goals of the conversation or training session.	What could happen if triggering events aren't navigated effectively?

## ***Learning Guidelines***

1. ENGAGE IN OPEN AND HONEST DIALOGUE
2. PARTICIPATE FULLY (@ COMFORT LEVEL +1)
3. SPEAK FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
4. LISTEN RESPECTFULLY; SEEK TO UNDERSTAND; LISTEN HARDER WHEN YOU INITIALLY DISAGREE
5. MOVE IN, MOVE OUT; ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO PARTICIPATE
6. BE FULLY PRESENT
7. BE OPEN TO NEW AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
8. ASSUME GOOD INTENT; EXPLORE THE UNINTENDED IMPACT OF COMMENTS AND BEHAVIORS
9. TAKE RISKS: LEAN INTO DISCOMFORT; BE BRAVE
10. RESPECT AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY
11. NOTICE AND SHARE WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE GROUP, IN YOU
12. RECOGNIZE YOUR TRIGGERS; SHARE IF YOU FEEL TRIGGERED
13. TRUST THAT THROUGH DIALOGUE WE WILL REACH DEEPER LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING
14. ENGAGE THIS OPPORTUNITY!

## ***Diverse Community Foundations***

1. Communities are built through building relationships of trust and commitment
2. We are all doing the best we can (most of the time)
3. We don't know all there is to know
4. Just because you are, doesn't mean you understand: Just because you're not, doesn't mean you don't understand
5. Oppression is pervasive and impacts us all
6. It is not our fault, but we must accept responsibility to create change
7. Conflict and discomfort are often a part of growth
8. Seek first to understand, then to be understood
9. Practice forgiveness and letting go
10. Self-work, healing and self-love are necessary for acceptance of others
11. Acknowledge, Appreciate, and Celebrate Progress
12. There are no quick fixes
13. Individuals and organizations DO grow and change. There is HOPE
14. We're better together, and deeply connected soul to soul.

Developed by Jamie Washington, Ph.D., Washington Consulting Group, (410) 655-9556

**Increase your awareness of what is happening inside of you and around you by using the skill:**

## ***PANNING***

Just as a movie camera “pans” the environment to see the whole picture, we need to continuously **PAN** all around us and inside of us as we increase our ability to notice the patterns of treatment and experiences of members of both dominant and subordinated groups.

**Some guidelines for using the skill of PANNING:**

**PAN:**

**PAY**

**ATTENTION**

**Now**

- Intentionally observe and notice behaviors, comments, feelings, patterns of treatment...
- Wonder: Is this an isolated incident or a possible pattern of experience?

**\*\*\*AVOID falling into the trap of making a *SNAP JUDGMENT* ~ creating a “story” about what you see.**

- **PAN** the specific details and facts of what you see, feel, hear...
- Describe what you **PAN** without any assumptions, interpretations, conclusions, or prejudgments
- Notice the group memberships of people involved as you **PAN**, and describe the group memberships ***if this information is useful to the discussion...***

Adapted from materials developed by Elsie Y. Cross Associates, Inc. 1994 Delyte Frost, et al

# Panning Group Dynamics with an Inclusion Lens

**Observers ~ Use the following prompts as you use an Inclusion Lens to observe and track/pan group dynamics:**

1. What differences are present in the group? Which group memberships? and how many from various groups?
2. Who is talking?
3. Who initiates the topics?
4. Whose ideas get discussed in-depth? Whose ideas don't get much discussion and/or are discounted?
5. Who is quiet? Doesn't speak as often as others?
6. Who interrupts others? Who gets interrupted?
7. How much air-time do people take?
8. Who do people look at when they are talking?
9. Who has eye contact with whom while others are talking?
10. Who engages in side conversations?
11. How do decisions get made?
12. Who brings up issues of inclusion and diversity?
13. How do people respond when different issues of inclusion are raised?
14. As you notice interpersonal dynamics that are not inclusive, wonder: Is this an isolated incident or a possible pattern of experience?
15. What issues of inclusion are not being discussed?
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.

## Common Unproductive Reactions During Difficult, Triggering Situations

### Directions:

1. Check-off (✓) any of the following that you have experienced or observed from others during difficult situations.
2. Then, star (\*) any that you have done when you felt triggered in difficult situations.

### Fight Responses

- Aggressively argues and debates
- Raises their voice, yells
- Tries to silence others
- Tries to compete, win at any cost
- Interrupts
- Self-righteous, arrogant, or condescending behaviors
- Controlling, manipulative behaviors
- Intimidating, threatening behaviors
- Forces change
- Aggressively attacks and berates
- Dismisses or minimizes the comments of others
- Explodes and directs their feelings onto others
- Sarcastic or off-handed remarks
- Belittling comments
- Intentionally tries to embarrass others
- Criticizes or accuses with the intent to humiliate and shame
- Bullies others into submission
- Turns their words against them

### Flight responses

- Gets defensive
- Becomes overly guarded
- Withdraws
- Ignores or avoids issues
- Tries to smooth over conflict
- Placating to keep things under control
- Minimizes, downplays the issues or conflict
- Shuts down
- Disengages
- Uses humor and jokes to distract and smooth things over
- Quickly changes the subject
- Pretends to agree to avoid conflict
- Uses crying to distract and not engage

### Freeze responses

- Blanks out, forget what wanted to say or do
- Zones out
- Immobilized
- Doesn't respond or interrupt exclusionary comments and actions
- Overly anxious and scared

# Navigating “Hot Buttons” and Triggering Situations

## Characteristics of a Triggering Event

***Any stimulus, either external or internal to the person, through which they experience an emotional reaction that may have some or all of the following characteristics:***

- unexpectedness, the person is surprised by the arousal of their feelings
- strong intensity of feelings, the person experiences their emotions as overwhelming and disproportionate to the original stimulus
- disorienting, the person is disoriented and distracted from the flow of the workshop and the planned agenda: “stopped in their tracks”
- feeling out of control and overwhelmed by the situation
- feeling “de-skilled” and reacting less effectively
- requiring extra effort to manage the situation effectively



## Common Examples of Triggering Events

**Directions: Use a 0-10 scale to rate how much of a “trigger” each of the following is for you when you are engaging in dialogues about issues of inclusion.**

0 = no emotional reaction

1 -2 = mild level of emotional reaction

3-4 = low-moderate degree of emotional reaction

5-6 = moderate degree of emotional reaction

7-8 = high degree of emotional reaction

9-10 = extremely high level of emotional reaction

### **Identifying my common EXTERNAL triggers**

#### **A. When a participant(s):**

- 1. makes an insensitive, stereotypic, or offensive comment
- 2. acts in ways that are classist, racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.
- 3. interrupts or speaks over me or the participants
- 4. dismisses my point or that of a participant
- 5. demonstrates disruptive behavior including joking, side conversations, or laughing at me or participants
- 6. makes snide or sarcastic comments
- 7. is belittling or demeaning
- 8. demonstrates domineering or controlling behavior
- 9. demonstrates bullying or threatening behavior
- 10. is arrogant or self-righteous
- 11. is patronizing or condescending
- 12. has a very blunt or impersonal style
- 13. has an aggressive or forceful style
- 14. tries to derail the planned format and agenda
- 15. refuses to participate in the discussion or the activity
- 16. is silent, shut down or withdrawn
- 17. is “set in their ways” and unwilling to shift their perspective
- 18. will only focus on their intent, and not the impact of their behavior
- 19. refuses to consider feedback from me or others
- 20. is crying and expressing deep emotions of pain or grief
- 21. is expressing deep anger or rage
- 22. is engaged in an intense, emotional conflict with me or others
- 23. challenges the validity of the information or statistics being presented
- 24. strongly disagrees with what I am saying
- 25. questions the usefulness of an activity or a discussion
- 26. criticizes my style, design, or approach
- 27. questions my competency as the facilitator
- 28. calls me classist, racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.

- 29. criticizes or minimizes efforts related to equity, inclusion, and social justice
- 30. dismisses the conversation as “political correctness”
- 31. portrays themselves as the “victim” of “reverse discrimination”
- 32. proclaims that they are “a good one” without acknowledging their unearned privilege
- 33. continually points out what others do that is oppressive without acknowledging their own participation in the dynamics of oppression
- 34. shifts the conversation away from their privileged group and to their marginalized group
- 35. only engages in the conversation out of marginalized identities
- 36. “coaches” members of marginalized groups on how to act, think and feel
- 37. is colluding with their own oppression, “going along to get along”
- 38. defends members of privileged groups who are acting out of privilege or prejudice
- 39. publically criticizes other members of their marginalized group(s)

**B. For me, when**

- 40. I make a mistake or error
- 41. I do or say something biased, offensive or oppressive
- 42. I do not know the answer to a question
- 43. I fear I not know how to effectively respond in a situation
- 44. I start to cry or lash out in anger
- 45. I believe the conversation is about to “get out of control”

**C. When a colleague:**

- 46. is triggered and experiencing deep emotions
- 47. mismanages an activity or makes an ineffective intervention
- 48. makes an offensive or stereotypic comment
- 49. changes the planned agenda without checking in with me
- 50. steps in as I am leading and takes over
- 51. tries to “correct,” coach, or criticize me in front of the group
- 52. is silent and “disappears” during a group discussion in which they are a member of the privileged group
- 53. is silent and “disappears” during a group discussion in which they are a member of the marginalized group
- 54. takes credit for my ideas or work

**Additional common triggers for you:**



## **Identifying my common INTERNAL triggers**

Below is a partial list of internal stimuli (thoughts, memories, attitudes, beliefs) that can be triggering for you. As you read each option, use the 0-10 scale to get an overall sense of how deeply triggered you might generally feel. Note your rating to the left of each item.

0 = no emotional reaction

1-2 = mild level of emotional reaction

3-4 = low-moderate degree of emotional reaction

5-6 = moderate degree of emotional reaction

7-8 = high degree of emotional reaction

9-10 = extremely high level of emotional reaction

- \_\_\_ 1. I can't handle this!
- \_\_\_ 2. The last time I just froze and fell apart
- \_\_\_ 3. I am not smart enough, good enough, competent enough, creative enough....
- \_\_\_ 4. I will never be able to get this done in time
- \_\_\_ 5. I am a fraud
- \_\_\_ 6. I will never learn this
- \_\_\_ 7. What I do won't make any difference
- \_\_\_ 8. What do I have to offer?
- \_\_\_ 9. What if I completely ruin this?
- \_\_\_ 10. I have to get this right!
- \_\_\_ 11. I will let people down, disappoint them
- \_\_\_ 12. This could hurt my career
- \_\_\_ 13. I will make a fool of myself
- \_\_\_ 14. What if no one likes me
- \_\_\_ 15. I could be all alone in this situation
- \_\_\_ 16. What if I lose control?
- \_\_\_ 17. This is out of control!
- \_\_\_ 18. They will be angry when they hear about this
- \_\_\_ 19. They won't understand
- \_\_\_ 20. I won't fit in or be accepted
- \_\_\_ 21. Things won't change
- \_\_\_ 22. I could make it worse
- \_\_\_ 23. People could be hurt if I don't do this well
- \_\_\_ 24. They will attack me just like last time
- \_\_\_ 25. No one appreciates all I do for them
- \_\_\_ 26. If I confront them, they will ostracize me
- \_\_\_ 27. They are so biased and prejudiced
- \_\_\_ 28. They are such @!\*^#! jerks
- \_\_\_ 29. They don't know what they are doing
- \_\_\_ 30. I am smarter than any of them
- \_\_\_ 31. They are so incompetent
- \_\_\_ 32. They are all hypocrites
- \_\_\_ 33. This will be such a waste of time just like it always is

- \_\_\_ 34. They always make things so complicated
- \_\_\_ 35. This is going to be so hard and difficult
- \_\_\_ 36. No one else will ever step up to do any meaningful work on this project
- \_\_\_ 37. Everyone is always so difficult and unreasonable
- \_\_\_ 38. She was so rude and obnoxious in the last meeting
- \_\_\_ 39. No one cares about what I think or feel
- \_\_\_ 40. They are so self-centered
- \_\_\_ 41. They'll just drop the ball again and I'll have to clean it all up as usual
- \_\_\_ 42. This reminds me of that time everything was such a disaster

**Additional common INTERNAL triggers for you:**

- 
- 
-

## Journaling: The Triggering Event Cycle

**Directions:** Choose one situation when **you were not satisfied** with how you reacted when you felt triggered when engaging in authentic dialogue about issues of race, equity, and inclusion.

1. What was the **specific situation** in which you felt triggered (Step 1)?
  
2. What were some of your **intrapersonal roots** fueling your triggered reactions? (Step 2) (see next page)
  
3. How did you **make meaning** of the situation? **What “story” did you make up** about what you thought was happening (Step 3)?
  
4. **How did you know** you were triggered (Step 4)?
  - \*physiological reactions:
  - \*self-talk/thoughts:
  
  - \*feelings:
  - \*unconscious behaviors or responses:
  
5. What were your **intentions** and motives? Hoped for outcome? What were you trying to accomplish (Step 5)?
  - \*unproductive motives:
  - \* more productive motives:
  
6. How did you **react** when you were triggered? Please note both your actions as well as your intrapersonal processes, such as your feelings and fears, thoughts and “self-talk” (Step 6)?
  - \* less effective reactions/responses:
  - \*more effective reactions/responses:
  
7. **How was your effectiveness impacted by feeling triggered? How did your reactions impact you? Others (Step 7)?**

Developed by Kathy Obear, [kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

## Intrapersonal “Roots” of Triggering Events

**Directions:** Think about your triggering event. What do you believe were the various factors or “roots” that contributed to your feeling triggered?

1. **Current life issues and dynamics** (fatigue, illness, crises, stressors, etc.)
  
2. **Cumulative impact of recent experiences:** Does this situation remind you of recent events?
  
3. **Unfinished business, unresolved or unhealed past issues, traumas, and “wounds:”** Does this person remind you of anyone? Does this situation remind you of past traumas?
  
4. **Fears** (check-off all that are related and add any others)
  - My personal issues will become the focus of the conversation: all eyes will be on me.
  - I will lose credibility and be seen as less competent.
  - If I cry and show emotion, people will think less of me....I won't be able to manage the situation.
  - The conversation will “get out of control.”
  - People will get too emotional and I won't have the skills to manage the situation.
  - I won't know enough about the issue to engage in conversation.
  - If I challenge this issue I will be all alone without any support.
  - I won't be able to express myself clearly; I'll be misunderstood.
  - If I am too confrontational or angry, then people will judge me, be mad at me, reject me, ostracize me, etc.
  - I will be seen as incompetent and “not good enough.”
  - They will see how prejudiced I really am.
  - I'll let people down and disappoint them.
  - People won't like me or approve of me.
  - Things won't change.
  - I will make a mistake and be wrong.
  - People will be disappointed in me.
  - If I don't handle this well, people could feel uncomfortable...be hurt.
  - Things will be worse off than before.

**5. Unmet Universal Needs/What I value\*** (check-off all that are related and add any others)

- Respect, dignity
- Trust
- Planning, order
- Fairness
- Clarity, understanding
- Openness, honesty
- Direct communication
- Respectful disagreement
- Recognition, acknowledgement
- Appreciation
- Competence, effectiveness
- Success, to make a difference
- To be kept informed and updated
- Harmony, peace...
- Safety, security
- Integrity
- Innovation and creativity
- Ease and simplicity
- Connection
- Mutuality, partnering, collaboration
- For approval
- For acceptance, belonging
- Inclusion
- Consideration
- Dependability, follow-through

**6. Ego-driven desires (check-off all that are related and add any others)**

- To assert, regain my power and authority
- To have control
- To win the argument; prove them wrong
- To get my way
- To make people change; “fix” them
- To make people learn
- To be right
- To shut them down, put them in their place
- To make them feel the pain and hurt I feel
- To be seen as the expert, smart
- To prove I am competent
- To gain prestige and status
- To be admired; avoid disgrace
- To be liked
- To fit in
- To be seen as a “good one,” an ally
- To be perfect
- To gain certainty and predictability
- For everyone to feel happy
- To avoid deep emotions and conflict
- To make others engage as I want them to

**7. Biases, assumptions, expectations, shoulds, and judgments**

\*This section was enhanced by the work of Marshall Rosenberg (2005). Nonviolent Communication.

Copyrighted, April 2000, Kathy Obear, *ALLIANCE FOR CHANGE*, (413) 537-8012  
[kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

## Feelings and Emotions

**Major source:** Raj Gill, Lucy Leu, Judi Morin, NVC Toolkit, 2009

Sit with your reactions/reflections/experiences....**Check-off/Circle any emotions that you felt/feel.** Add any others to the list.

Aggravated	Distressed	Jealous
Agitated	Distrustful	Jubilant
Alarmed	Drained	Lonely
Alienated	Dumbfounded	Longing
Ambivalent	Eager	Mean
Amused	Edgy	Mortified
Angry	Embarrassed	Nervous
Anguish	Empowered	Numb
Annoyed	Empathetic	Outraged
Anxious	Enraged	Overwhelmed
Appreciative	Envious	Panic
Apprehensive	Exasperated	Paralyzed
Appalled	Excited	Peaceful
Awe	Exhausted	Perplexed
Ashamed	Exhilarated	Powerless
Bitter	Fascinated	Preoccupied
Bored	Fearful	Puzzled
Burned out	Forlorn	Raging
Calm	Frightened	Regretful
Carefree	Furious	Relieved
Confident	Grateful	Remorseful
Confused	Gratified	Repulsed
Crushed	Grief	Resentful
Defeated	Guilty	Sad
Deflated	Hateful	Surprised
Dejected	Heartbroken	Sympathetic
Depleted	Hesitant	Tender
Depressed	Hopeless	Tense
Despair	Hurt	Terrified
Determined	Impatient	Touched
Disappointed	Incensed	Unsettled
Discouraged	Indifferent	Useless
Disgusted	Indignant	Vulnerable
Disheartened	Infuriated	Wary
Disillusioned	Insecure	Weary
Dissatisfied	Inspired	Worried
Distracted	Irritated	

## Common Universal Needs/Values

(Adapted from R. Gill, L. Leu, and J. Morin (2009). NVC Toolkit for Facilitators.)

acceptance	effectiveness	openness
adaptability	efficiency	order
appreciation	empathy	participation
authenticity	equality	partnership
autonomy	fairness	peace
awareness	follow-through	play
balance	freedom	presence
beauty	fun	progress
belonging	growth	purpose
caring	harmony	reflection
celebration	healing	relaxation
challenge	health	reliability
choice	honesty	relief
clarity	hope	respect
collaboration	humor	rest
communication	inclusion	safety
community	independence	security
companionship	inspiration	self-expression
compassion	integration	self-reliance
competence	integrity	space
consciousness	intimacy	stimulation
connection	joy	spontaneity
consideration	learning	stability
contribution	love	support
cooperation	mattering	trust
creating	meaning	understanding
creativity	mourning	warmth
dependability	movement	wellbeing
dignity	mutuality	
ease	nurturance	

## STEP 3: Shift Your “Story” of What You Think is Happening

Step 3: The “story” I make up about what I think is happening	Given this story, how I would feel and, possibly, react less effectively	1-2 alternative stories that leave me feeling curious, compassionate, and/or caring
	<p>Step 4 ~ <u>Probable feelings:</u></p>    <p>Step 5 ~ <u>Possible intentions:</u></p>    <p>Step 6 ~ <u>Less effective reactions</u></p>	

### Identify Less Productive, “Negative” Intentions (Step 5), such as:

- win the argument
- get even; get them back
- to be right; prove the other person wrong
- to prove you are competent, smart
- assert your power and authority
- gain status and prestige; be admired
- be in control
- intimidate the other person
- “put them in their place,” shut them down
- punish the other person
- embarrass or put down
- make them feel the pain and hurt you feel
- change the other person’s views, feelings or behaviors
- to make people learn
- trick and “out fox” the other person
- keep the conversation “under control”
- avoid intense emotions: in self and others
- make everyone feel happy and harmonious
- avoid feeling or being viewed as “incompetent”
- control how others feel about you
- to be seen as a “good one,” an ally
- use the current opportunity to “right the wrongs” you experienced in the past
- change the other person to account for times you either didn’t or couldn’t change oppressive people earlier in your life
- ignore them
- seek approval of others
- to be liked, to fit in
- avoid confrontation and conflict



**When You Feel Triggered, Shift Your Intentions to Align with Your Inclusion Values:**

- create greater inclusion
- leave people feelings whole
- engage in respectful dialogue
- do no harm
- “go with the flow;” trust the process
- deepen learning and growth
- meet the people “where they are” without judgment
- use the triggering moment to deepen understanding
- relate in to the person; connect with them
- create space for honest, authentic dialogue
- invite people to learn from the situation
- model the social justice behaviors you espouse: authenticity, empathy, self-reflection, engagement...
- model skills to navigate triggering moments: scan yourself, identify unmet needs, shift self-talk, stress management, realigning intentions, exploring intrapersonal roots...
- facilitate open, honest discussion
- create space for the other person to express their feelings, perceptions
- deepen understanding across differences
- identify the deeper issues fueling the feelings, perceptions and behaviors of others
- create safety for the expression of differing viewpoints
- treat others with respect and dignity
- encourage more people to engage in the dialogue
- support people to disagree with each other in respectful ways
- model effective recovery skills after making an inappropriate comment or when your behavior results in negative impact
- re-establish credibility with the person/group
- identify inappropriate behaviors and explore the negative impact
- interrupt unproductive, inappropriate behaviors and group dynamics
- take time to “gather oneself,” navigate personal emotions, gain perspective...
- build a “bridge” and a connection with the other person
- encourage identity development and growth
- demonstrate compassion and empathy

**Step 5: Shift Your Intentions**

My less productive, “negative” intentions	More productive, effective intentions	How I might respond more productively, effectively

## **PAIRS: EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE SKILLS**

**P: PAN** the environment and yourself; describe what you notice or engage others based on what you see (**Pay Attention Now**)

- I'm noticing I'm feeling...anyone else?
- I noticed how quiet everyone got; I'm wondering what is going on for folks?
- It seems some people were impacted by that statement, am I right?
- I'm noticing you're speaking with a lot of energy and emotion...
- I'm noticing that people get interrupted as they try to share...
- You seemed to have a reaction to what I just said...

**A: ASK** about the specifics behind the person's comment or behavior

- Could you say more about that...Tell me more...
- Can you give us an example of what you're saying...
- Help me understand what you meant by that?
- What were you hoping to communicate with that comment?
- Can you help me understand what your intent was when you said/did...
- Can you give me some background on this situation...
- How were you impacted when....What were you feeling when...

**I: INTERRUPT** the dynamics

- Let's slow down the conversation and talk about what just happened...
- I'm going to interrupt and try a different approach to this conversation...
- We are not engaging according to our group norms.
- Let's take a breath...

**R: RELATE** to the person or their comment/behavior

- I relate to what you're saying, I...I have felt the same way...
- I remember a time when I...I did the exact same thing...
- How do others relate to that comment?
- What you're saying seems to relate to what so-and-so just said...

**S: SHARE** about yourself ~ self-disclose with a story or example; your feelings in the moment; the impact of a comment or behavior, etc.

- When I hear you say that I think/feel....
- Just last week I...I remember when I...
- I was socialized to believe...
- I'm beginning to feel \_\_\_\_\_...
- My heart aches as you tell that story...
- I notice I'm feeling a little triggered...

Engaging Skills	Examples/Descriptions
<b>Ask the person for more information ~ seek to understand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me more...</li> <li>• Can you give me an example...</li> <li>• Can you give me some background on this situation...</li> <li>• What do you mean when you say...</li> <li>• Help me understand what you disagree with...find frustrating...</li> <li>• Help me understand how you came to that conclusion?</li> <li>• What were you feeling when...?</li> <li>• What's your perspective?</li> <li>• What led you to that conclusion?</li> </ul>
<b>Paraphrase the person's comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So you're saying that...</li> <li>• So you feel that...</li> <li>• So you think that...</li> <li>• Are you saying that...</li> <li>• So from your perspective...</li> </ul>
<b>Explore their INTENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help me understand your intent when you...</li> <li>• What had you wanted to communicate with your comment?</li> <li>• What was your intended outcome?</li> <li>• What is underneath your comment/question?</li> </ul>
<b>TRACK/PAN the person's body language, tone, and comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I notice you had a reaction to what I just said...</li> <li>• I don't believe she was finished with her comment...</li> <li>• I notice you just got very quiet...looked away...shook your head...</li> <li>• I'm noticing your tone of voice...</li> <li>• I'm noticing your body language...</li> </ul>
<b>Explore the IMPACT on them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It seems my behavior had an impact on you...</li> <li>• How did that impact you?</li> <li>• What were you feeling when...</li> </ul>
<b>Acknowledge and validate their points as much as possible</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I hear that you feel...</li> <li>• I can see that from your perspective you think...</li> <li>• I'd probably feel ____, too...</li> </ul>
<b>Explore possible solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think we can do?</li> <li>• What do you see as the next steps?</li> <li>• One thought could be to...what do you think?</li> <li>• Might it be possible to...</li> </ul>
<b>State your desired outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is what I suggest we do...</li> <li>• I want to...I need...</li> </ul>
<b>Summarize the dialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize the dialogue without stating opinions or judging the dialogue.</li> <li>• So we've discussed...we agreed to...</li> </ul>

# Commitment Sheet

## Imagine a future difficult dialogue

- How might I prepare?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What tools might I use to navigate my triggered reactions and become more centered and present?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What tools might I use to engage others?

## My next steps

1. What specific skills and capacities do I intend to develop further?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What resources can help me deepen my capacity and competence?
  - a. Who can I consult with and/or observe “in action?”
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What can I read and study?
  
  
  
  
  - c. What videos can I watch?
  
  
  
  
  - d. From whom can I get support and encouragement?

# **Navigating Ourselves: Self-Management Interventions**

## **As soon as you feel triggered, *Begin Within***

1. Conduct a “systems check” to track internal self-talk, feelings, physiological responses and intentions
2. Use stress management techniques (deep breathing, centering exercises) to minimize the impact of physiological and emotional reactions
3. Search for your intrapersonal roots that are fueling your reaction to the trigger
4. Notice how you interpreted the situation: your “story” about what you believe happened
5. Shift your “story” about the situation
6. Notice initial intent for how you want to respond
8. Use self-talk to shift your intentions to align with your values and vision for social justice
9. Assess your part in the group dynamics
10. Relate to the participants whose behavior was the source of your trigger: How are you just like them?
11. Identify your hoped for outcomes: the destination of your response

## **Change your interpretation of the triggering event (Step 3)**

- \* If someone is "resistant":
  - They seem to feel safe enough to be honest about their thoughts and feelings
  - Now we can get to the heart of this issue...
- \* If someone "interrupts":
  - I don't appreciate their timing, but they have a legitimate point/question.
  - They seem to have a lot of energy about this topic....
- \* If someone makes a prejudicial remark:
  - Well, they came by their biases honestly in this society....
  - I wonder what they fear....
- \* If someone is angry:
  - I wonder what feelings of hurt or fear are under their anger?
- \* If someone gives negative feedback:
  - I can model how to be open to feedback....
  - This could be a powerful learning opportunity for me and others....
  - Maybe I have something to learn here....
- \* If I make a mistake or make a prejudicial remark:
  - I can model how to be non-defensive and honestly acknowledge my comment....
  - I can model how to own and apologize for the impact of my behavior....and commit to working on myself and paying more attention...
- Focus on what is positive
  - At least they are willing to engage in this dialogue....
  - A few people are really getting it...
  - He did a nice job of reaching out to support her....
  - I really respect them for hanging in with this topic....

- Focus on their intent
  - I know they don't intentionally try to make my life miserable.
  - These are good-hearted people....
  - They're doing the best they can...

### **Navigate your emotions ~ (Step 4)**

- Monitor your level of emotional arousal
- Stay task-oriented
- Take a time-out
- Practice detachment
- Be still and meditate
- Vent your emotions with a colleague
- Simply name what you're feeling, and then hold your feelings for now, knowing you can explore and release them later
- Journal about the triggering event during a break or time-out

### **Restructure self-talk ~ (Step 4)**

- **Thought stopping: stop your thoughts and refocus on what is happening in the moment.**

- **Restructure irrational beliefs**

- \* I have to be liked and approved of by everyone
  - Some people may not like me. In fact, if this is a useful interaction, people may leave feeling confused and full of unsettling emotions.
- \* I must be competent in all situations and not make mistakes
  - If I make a mistake, I can use it as an example in the conversation. They will see that I am human just like they are.
- \* I have to know all the answers
  - I am not the expert here. My role here is to facilitate their coming to their own answers and finding their voice.
- \* I must remain calm and control my feelings
  - If I get upset, I know I can manage my emotions. I could even use the event as a learning opportunity in the conversation.
- \* I am responsible for their learning and growth
  - I will do the best I can. I am not responsible for everyone's learning. People will take away from here what they need.
- \* People who are bad should be blamed and punished
  - I was just like them not too long ago....I see myself in them. I want to help them learn from this experience.
- \* I must try to change people to think and behave as I think they should
  - I have no right to try to change people. I can share my experience, strength, and hope, and talk about the impact of their behavior on me and others. Who am I to know what they need?

- **Positive self-talk**

- I can handle this
- I've done this before
- I am a competent, talented person...
- I have a lot to offer these folks...

- **Calming self-talk**

- Breathe...steady....
- I don't have to know everything
- I don't have to have the "perfect" answer...
- Everything works out for the best...
- What's the worst thing that can happen....
- Trust the process.....
- I'm doing the best I can. I don't have to be the expert....
- This isn't about me.....don't take this personally
- Everything happens for a reason....
- This, too, shall pass....
- How important is it....

- **Explore your part in the situation**

- I wonder why I am so triggered...
- What else is going on for me?
- Which of my issues and needs are being triggered in this interaction?
- What needs of mine are not getting met?
- Who does this person remind me of?
- What personal issues are interfering with my willingness or ability to be helpful?
- I wonder if I did something that triggered them...
- What am I doing that is contributing to their behavior?
- How have I acted inappropriately?
- What rules or expectations have I set-up that are not working?

- **Empathetic self-talk**

- I wonder what this person really needs, what they are really feeling...
- I wonder what they feel threatened about? scared about?
- How can I better understand where this person is coming from?
- How am I like this person?
- When have I felt similarly?

- **Recognize the person's level of competence**

- They don't understand...
- They don't have the ability to do what I want them to do...
- I know they're doing the best they can with what they know.
- This work takes significant skill...
- It takes a long time to unlearn all this prejudice....

## **Get Clear on Your Intentions ~ Identify Less Productive, “Negative” Intentions (Step 5), such as:**

- win the argument
- get even; get them back
- to be right; prove the other person wrong
- to prove you are competent, smart
- assert your power and authority
- gain status and prestige; be admired
- be in control
- intimidate the other person
- “put them in their place,” shut them down
- punish the other person
- embarrass or put down the other person
- make them feel the pain and hurt you feel
- change the other person’s views, feelings or behaviors
- to make people learn
- trick and “out fox” the other person
- avoid confrontation and conflict
- keep the conversation “under control”
- avoid intense emotions: in self and others
- make everyone feel happy and harmonious
- avoid feeling or being viewed as “incompetent”
- control how others feel about you
- To seen as a “good one,” an ally
- use the current opportunity to “right the wrongs” you experienced in your past
- change the other person to account for times you either didn’t or couldn’t change oppressive people earlier in your life
- ignore them
- seek approval of others
- to be liked, to fit in

## **When You Feel Triggered, Shift Your Intentions to Align with Your Social Justice Values, such as:**

- create greater inclusion
- leave people feelings whole
- engage in respectful dialogue
- do no harm
- “go with the flow;” trust the process
- deepen learning and growth
- meet the people “where they are” without judgment
- use the triggering moment to deepen understanding
- relate in to the person; connect with them
- create space for honest, authentic dialogue
- invite people to learn from the situation
- model the social justice behaviors you espouse: authenticity, empathy, self-reflection, engagement...
- model skills to navigate triggering moments: scan, yourself, identifying unmet needs, shifting self-talk, stress management techniques, realigning your intentions, exploring intrapersonal roots...
- facilitate open, honest discussion
- create space for the other person to express their feelings, perceptions
- deepen understanding across differences
- identify the deeper issues fueling the feelings, perceptions and behaviors of others



- create safety for the expression of differing viewpoints
- treat others with respect and dignity
- encourage more people to engage in the dialogue
- support people to disagree with each other in respectful ways
- model effective recovery skills after making an inappropriate comment or when your behavior results in negative impact
- re-establish credibility with the person/group
- identify inappropriate behaviors and explore the negative impact
- interrupt unproductive, inappropriate behaviors and group dynamics
- take time to “gather oneself,” navigate personal emotions, gain perspective...
- build a “bridge” and a connection with the other person
- encourage identity development and growth
- demonstrate compassion and empathy

### **Navigating Triggering Situations: Engaging Others (Step 6)**

1. Get grounded in process outcomes: demonstrate respect and dignity; an opportunity to build relationship, connection, allies...
2. Avoid the “ABC’s” of Potholes: Attacking, Belittling, Convicting
3. Explore, clarify, ask questions...to gather more information and understand their perspective....and gain time to re-center yourself and choose an effective response
4. Explore their intent: Help me understand what your intent was when you said...
5. State your truth, feelings, the impact on you...with care and compassion
6. Name the impact on organizational goals...with care and compassion
7. “Put a face on the issue”
  - a. Individual Level: Share your past and/or current diversity-related experiences (personal and work-related)
  - b. Group Level: Share others’ diversity experiences (personal and work-related)
  - c. Organizational Level: Discuss policies, practices, and procedures that have a negative differential impact on staff, faculty, and students across social identity groups, and organizational goals

### **Use "meta-interventions"**

Ask the person(s) to take the "pulse" of the situation reflect on the process:

- What do you notice happening right now?
- How are we working together?
- How well are we respecting each other?
- How would you describe how people are treating each other?

**Begin Within** ~ Keep the focus on yourself; start by sharing what is going on for you, about you...

1. Here's what's going on for me as I hear you....
2. Here's where I relate....
3. Here's what I wonder about as I hear you....
4. Another way I might approach this is....
5. I hear what you're saying about.....a place where I have a different perspective is....
6. A dilemma for me is....
7. I'm on a learning edge here...what I'm curious about is....

### **Use the “self as instrument”**

It takes great skill, personal awareness, presence, and self-confidence to effectively use triggering events as "teachable moments;" however, when managed effectively these moments can be some of the more powerful learning opportunities for others. The dynamics in the room often mirror those that others experience in their lives and in society. Triggering events can provide a microcosm within which people develop greater insight, knowledge, and skill to more effectively handle incidents they confront in everyday life. The following strategies can help people to use their emotional reactions to triggering events to inform their response and as a part of their intervention strategy.

#### • **Name your feelings and reactions**

- Describe your experiences, feelings, and perceptions to create a shared understanding of the situation
- Name the triggering event from your perspective and try to engage others in dialogue

#### • **Test for similar reactions**

- "I'm feeling frustrated, does anyone else feeling this way?"
- "I'm feeling anxious right now. Do others feel nervous, too?"

## **Conversation stoppers**

The following behaviors may negatively impact the quality of the discussion:

- Interrupting, speaking over each other
- Mostly using a telling and directive style
- Giving too much advice without asking questions to help others come up with their own solutions
- Pushing your point; insisting others do things your way
- Avoiding giving constructive feedback or using vague generalizations
- Overly critical focus on what they did wrong, what needs to change
- Always jumping right into task mode, without spending time developing and deepening relationships
- Assuming responsibility for the others' situations and trying to fix it for them
- Inappropriate jokes, gossip or stereotypic comments
- Making assumptions based on social group memberships, including gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality/ways of knowing, age, sexual orientation, nationality, im/migration status, educational background, disability status, veteran status, etc.

**Common Dialogue Pitfalls/Traps** (\*Adapted from materials developed by Elsie Y. Cross Associates)

1. PLEs (perfectly logical explanations)
2. Yea, but....
3. That happens to me/my group, too....
4. I know someone who...and they don't agree with you....
5. I don't see it that way; therefore, it doesn't really happen....
6. That doesn't happen to me...(so it doesn't exist)
7. Don't you think that...
8. You're overreacting...you're too sensitive...
9. He/she/hir's a good person...they never meant to do that....
10. That was not my intent! You misunderstood me!
11. But don't you think we have come a long way? There's been so much progress....
12. That was an isolated incident....
13. Well, maybe you should have reacted differently...approached them differently...(blaming the victim)
14. That had nothing to do with race (or gender identity or class or religion....)

## Effective Interventions Worksheet

**Directions:**

For each situation, write out the *possible intent* behind the person’s actions, as well as the *probable impact on others*. Then note 1-2 *effective responses* that would do no harm, deepen authentic dialogue, promote respectful engagement, stimulate learning and understanding, help people see others’ perspectives, etc.

Dynamic/ situation	Possible Intent; Probable Impact	<u>More</u> Effective Responses
1. During a discussion someone makes an offensive “joke.”		
2. During a group dialogue, several participants are having a “side conversation.”		
3. A group member shares their frustration with how they were treated on campus, and someone say, “You’re too sensitive.”		
4. A group member rolls their eyes and shakes their head as others are talking passionately about what they experience on campus.		
5. Several participants are engaged in a passionate, heated disagreement. As someone is sharing their perspective, another participant starts to speak, and both are talking at the same time.		
6.		

# Steps to Engage in Difficult Dialogues

## 1. Get grounded in positive intentions ~ The DESTINATION:

- Create a teachable moment
- Stir cognitive dissonance
- Demonstrate respect and dignity
- Leave them feeling whole...
- Plant seeds...Influence hearts and minds...
- Help person(s) explore the impact of their behavior, understand the reasons their behavior has a negative impact on others/building an inclusive community
- Re-establish the boundaries for civil discourse
- Do no harm!
- Make a human connection; build the relationship for future dialogue
- Support those impacted by the comments/actions

## P.A.I.R.S. ~ Skills to Engage

**P: PAN the environment, yourself ~ as data to diagnose; name your pan as an intervention**

**A: ASK questions to explore**

**I: INTERRUPT the process**

**R: RELATE to others, their comments**

**S: Share, use self-disclosure as your response**

## 2. Based on what you PAN, engage others in the conversation

- I noticed that....I overheard your conversation and thought I heard you say....
- I notice that folks were laughing...I'm curious what that's about?
- I noticed how quiet everyone just got...I'm wondering what is going on for folks?
- It seems some people were impacted by that statement.
- I'm noticing you're speaking with a lot of energy and emotion...
- We've had some comments from this side of the room, what are your thoughts and reactions? (looking at the other side of the room)
- I'm wondering if people are feeling triggered right now?
- The energy in the discussion seemed to shift after...

## 3. A: ASK about the specifics behind the person's comment or behavior

- Gives you time to center, better understand the comment, choose a response
- May help the person hear themselves and reflect on what they said, the impact...

#### **4: A: ASK clarifying questions**

- I want to make sure I understand your point...you think that...
- Are you saying that...
- Help me understand what you meant by that?
- I don't understand your point...
- What do you mean when you say...
- Come again? Or Can you repeat that?

#### **5. A: ASK questions to gather more information**

- Could you say more about that...Tell me more...
- Can you give us an example of what you're saying...
- Help me understand what you disagree with...find frustrating...
- Help me understand how you got to that conclusion?
- What has been your experience that led you to that conclusion?
- What readings or research are you referencing?

#### **6. A: ASK questions to get them to reflect on their comment**

- When was the first time you heard that?
- How do you think others could be impacted by your comment? Behavior?
- Why might others disagree with your comment?
- What if I gave you a convincing argument and data that was counter to your perspective? What might that mean for you?
- How do you think others will view you when you make similar comments?

#### **7. A: ASK questions to explore their intention**

- What were you hoping to communicate with that comment?
- Help me understand your intent when you said...
- What did you mean to say with that comment?
- What is underneath your comment/question?

#### **8. I: INTERRUPT the process and give space to process**

- Let's slow down the conversation and talk about what just happened...
- I'm going to interrupt and try a different approach to this conversation...
- We are not engaging according to our group norms.
- Let's take a breath...

#### **9. R: RELATE to the person who made the comment (Reflectively)**

- How are you just like this person? Were just like them? (search in other categories of difference)
- When have you said or done something similarly?
- When might you say or do something like this in the future?

## **10. R: RELATE to the person or their comment/behavior**

- I relate to what you're saying, I...
- I have felt the same way...
- I remember a time when I...
- I did the exact same thing...
- How do others relate to that comment?
- Who can relate?
- What you're saying seems to relate to what so-and-so just said...

## **11. S: SHARE: "Put a Face on the Issue"**

- Share a personal example or one you have heard from a credible source
- Invite others to share personal examples and stories ~ verbally; in writing
- Offer to share resources, articles so they can review different perspectives
- Offer to meet with them and talk about your life experiences on and off campus
- Ask them to talk with 2-3 other people in the near future to hear their experiences and stories

## **12. S: SHARE: Share about yourself ~ self-disclose with a story or example; your feelings in the moment; the impact of a comment or behavior, etc.**

- My heart aches as you tell that story...
- As a \_\_\_\_, I... (tell a story, give an example)
- I'd like to share the impact of your comment...
- I'm feeling uncomfortable with what you're saying...
- I'm noticing I'm feeling \_\_\_\_, anyone else?
- I notice I feel triggered right now....
- That's a trigger word/phrase for me...
- I need to stop a moment and talk about what just happened. I...

## **13. Give the "benefit of the doubt" if you directly confront their comment**

~ a face saving tactic

- I trust/know you didn't intend this... I
- You're probably not aware of the impact of your comment...

**Obear, K. H. (2013). Navigating triggering events: Critical competencies for social justice educators. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus.**

Developed by Kathy Obear, [kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

## **Helpful Tactics**

### **1. Gather more information**

- Help me understand more about what you mean?
- I'm curious when you first heard that term or phrase?

### **2. Clarify what you "heard"**

- I want to make sure I understand your point...you think that...
- Are you saying that...
- So you feel...
- You believe that...

### **3. Ask the person to walk you through their thought process so you can better understand how they came to their assumptions and conclusions**

- Can you help me understand how you came to that conclusion?
- What has been your experience that led you to that conclusion?
- What assumptions are underneath your conclusion?

### **4. Focus the discussion on the PROCESS of the discussion**

- I noticed that we tend to spend more time talking about these issues, and far less time talking about these other ones...
- I'm noticing that the only time we talk about \_\_\_ is when I bring it up...
- It seems that whenever we start talking about \_\_\_, someone changes the topic back to something else.
- I've noticed that when we are discussing \_\_\_\_, a number of folks look down, start writing notes...I'm curious what others have noticed?

### **5. Name the group's process or dynamic and shift the focus to be more inclusive**

- We've talked about how this policy could impact people of color and white women....I'm wondering how it may impact GLBT employees across gender and race?
- I'm noticing that whenever we talk about race, whites turn and ask a question of one of the people of color. I'd like to hear from some of the whites in the room: What do you notice that whites, as a group, tend to say, do, and feel around issues of race in the workplace?
- This has been a great discussion about the chilly climate for women and men of color. I don't want to move off this too soon, and I also want to make sure we have time to have a similar conversation related to dynamics of age and length of service in the organization...

### **6. Give the "benefit of the doubt"**

- You probably already thought of this... You probably noticed that...
- An unintended outcome of that idea could be that...



- I know you didn't intend this, but when you have a side conversation while I'm speaking....

### **7. If you think someone misunderstood or is misrepresenting what you said**

- I believe I said something different than that...What I said was...

### **8. Recognize comments and behaviors that help create greater inclusion before you give further feedback**

- I appreciate the several best practices you've gathered for us to review, and I was wondering if there also were some that more specifically address...
- I appreciate your working to be inclusive in your language...and I understand the term "GLBT" to be more inclusive and current than "homosexuals"

### **9. Acknowledge the accumulative impact of what you are experiencing**

- I know I'm having a strong reaction to what you said....and this is only one of many times I have heard similar comments recently....OR .and, as you know, this seems to be a pattern we keep running into that creates an obstacle...

### **10. Ask questions to raise their awareness**

- When did you decide/choose to be heterosexual?
- What are some of the ways that Christianity is embedded in the way we interact and in the policies and practices of our nation? Organization?

### **11. Invite others to get engaged in the dialogue**

- I'm curious what others are thinking? What other ideas do people have?
- Name your reaction and test to see where others are: I'm feeling unsettled about this possibility, is anyone else?
- Ask if others feel differently than what is being proposed: This is one way we could proceed. Does anyone have a different suggestion?
- Ask others to take the "pulse" of the situation and reflect on the process: I'm curious what people are noticing about our group dynamics?
- Ask if others have heard and experienced the situation as you did: That scene in the video hit me as Islamophobic...What do others think?

### **12. How to Confront Repeated Inappropriate Behaviors...1st, 2nd, 3rd time...**

#### 1st time:

- Describe the behavior you observed
- State what you want to be different
  - \* I'd appreciate it if you'd...

#### 2nd time:

- Describe the behavior: I believe this is the 2nd time we've talked about this...This is the IMPACT when you do that....I need you to change your behavior ....

3rd time: Give clear consequences if they continue this behavior: This is the 3rd time I've asked you to...If you do this again...

**13. Questions to explore possible and unintended (hopefully) exclusionary practices and attitudes in planning and decision-making discussions:**

- Do we have the full breadth of social identity groups and perspectives at the table? Involved in the process?
- Does our process seriously consider the input and perspectives of a broad range of group memberships?
- How might our unconscious attitudes and assumptions about \_\_\_\_ be playing out in this decision?
- What could be the impact of this on students, staff, and faculty from various and multiple dominant and subordinated groups?
- How might this inadvertently advantage some and disadvantage others?
- How can we make this inclusive for members of various and multiple group memberships?

**14. Partial List of Social Identity Groups**

ableness/disability	geographic region	religion/spiritual practice
age	gender identity/expression	sexual orientation
athleticism	hierarchical level	skin color; physical features
biological sex	job function	size/appearance
citizenship status	marital/relational status	use of English (fluency, accents)
economic class	national origin	veteran status
educational level	parental status	years of experience
ethnicity/culture	race	

**15. Diagnosing Dominant and Subordinated Group Dynamics**

Use the following prompts to diagnose the potential privileged and marginalized group dynamics as you analyze a recent situation, case study, etc.

1. What are the various group memberships of the people involved, and which privileged and marginalized group memberships seem central to this situation?
2. What are the probable perspectives and feelings of each party?
3. How might unconscious attitudes, assumptions, and bias be playing out in this situation?
4. What are the possible privileged and marginalized group behaviors and dynamics in the situation?
5. What organizational issues are relevant in this situation, such as formal and informal policies, norms, procedures, organizational practices, etc.
6. What are the probable outcomes if this situation is left unaddressed? For members of marginalized groups? Members of privileged groups? For the team? For the organization?
7. Given your diagnosis, what and/or who should be the focus of a response and why?
8. What might be some effective ways to respond? And by whom?

## **16. Different Communication Styles**

### **a. Direct**

- I think that...I need...
- It's important that....We need to...

### **b. Pose possibilities**

- It might be useful...
- I'd suggest we consider...
- One way to proceed could be....

### **c. Competing style**

- State your thought or opinion right after another person, no connection
- I think...Well I think....My idea is to...this is how we should proceed...

### **d. Debating style**

- Reference the other person's ideas in order to negate them or disagree with them

### **e. Connecting style**

- Acknowledge what was said by others
- Connect your comment to theirs
- Build on what has been said, i.e., Connected to what you're saying; Building on that thought; Similar to what she said, I think; I like your idea and another way to go about this is...

### **f. Engaging style**

- If a direct statement is made, ask a question to gather more information, deepen understanding, gain time to respond...
- Tell me more..
- Can you give me an example?
- What's your intended outcome? your intent behind that?
- How might that impact others?
- What's your thinking behind how that helps us meet our goal?

# How to be an Ally: Things to Keep in Mind

## A. Avoid Common Dialogue Pitfalls

1. PLEs ~ Perfectly Logical Explanations
2. Yea, but....
3. That happens to me/my group, too....
4. I know someone who...and they don't agree with you....
5. I don't see it that way; therefore, it doesn't really happen....
6. That doesn't happen to me...(so it doesn't exist)
7. Don't you think that...
8. You're overreacting...you're too sensitive...
9. He/she's a good person...they never meant to do that....
10. That was not my intent! You misunderstood me!

## B. Be Aware of Cumulative Impact

This concept occurs when a subordinated group member experiences repeated negative oppressive incidents, either in a short period of time or over a long period. Their feelings of anger, fear, distrust, frustration, etc., may build up and then they might “over-react” and respond out of cumulative impact for a number of reasons, including:

- it is not safe for them to challenge the people who treated them negatively
- they are tired of intervening and trying to educate others

A good ally understands that many subordinated group members may be carrying the cumulative impact of a long series of negative treatment. If they seem irritated or unusually upset, the ally tries to not take it personally, but instead, tries to offer support to the subordinated group member by:

- acknowledging the degree of feelings the subordinated group member is experiencing
- offering to listen to stories of how the person has been negatively treated (without interrupting, arguing, justifying, or trying to “give advice” and “fix it”)
- asking if there is anything they can do to be supportive

## C. Recognize Intent AND Impact

When a member of a dominant group says/does something hurtful or inappropriate, their tendency is to want to EXPLAIN their INTENT (I didn't mean it! It was just a joke! I didn't do it on purpose...). However, the pain and hurt, the IMPACT, is still very real to the subordinated group members.

A good ALLY first acknowledges their impact, apologizes, and asks to hear more about how they have negatively impacted the subordinated group member. And then asks how they can help, be supportive, make amends, avoid similar transgressions in the future, etc.

#### **D. Recognize Varying Levels of Differential Risk and Credibility**

It is important that all people, subordinated and dominant group members, work to intervene and stop oppression wherever they see it. AND dominant group members are generally given more credibility, listened to more seriously, and have fewer risks when they intervene, as compared to members of subordinated groups. A good ally consistently recognizes opportunities to speak up and intervene, knowing that it is their responsibility to take action, regardless of the risks involved.

#### **E. Recognize and Use your Discretionary Power**

All people have some personal power, and possibly position power from which to speak up and intervene. They have the discretion/the choice of when or how or if to intervene.

Dominant/dominant group members tend to have MORE discretionary power, given how often they are in positions of authority, and because of the greater credibility they have in society.

#### **F. Distinguishing Behavior**

Most dominant group members will be perceived as “just another man...white...administrator” UNTIL they show THROUGH THEIR ACTIONS that they are actively working as an ally against oppression. When dominant group members speak up and intervene, they DISTINGUISH themselves from the overall dominant group who generally both consciously and unconsciously perpetuate oppression.

#### **G. Intervening in Oppressive Situations**

Good allies take the initiative to try to STOP inappropriate behaviors and situations. They then look for ways to EDUCATE the person(s) who made the comment/took the action, in hopes that they may learn why what they did was harmful, and to not repeat it in the future. Allies also offer SUPPORT to the target of the negative treatment when possible.

Adapted from materials developed by Elsie Y. Cross Associates by Developed by Kathy Obear,  
[kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

# Tools and Tips: Responding in Cross-Cultural Conflicts

## A. Responding to Common Dialogue Blockers

### 1. PLEs ~ Perfectly Logical Explanations

- That may be true, but here's how I see it....or another way to view it...
- There may be a number of factors that contributed to this situation. Another one that does have to do with diversity might be.....
- When you say that, I feel you're discounting my experience. In that situation I felt...
- You could be right that this one specific time it had nothing to do with prejudice. But it feels so similar to so many other times in my experience when I have been treated negatively/experienced discrimination...it's hard to not assume this is just like all those other times....
- Your opinion that this has nothing to do with prejudice could be true...But what would it mean if my perception was true: that this person reacted to me out of their bias and stereotypes?

### 2. Yea, but....

- What do you think the impact on me is when you say that?
- You may not have intended this, but when you give a "YEA, BUT" I feel discounted and that you have dismissed my perspective and experience.
- I'm curious what you were hoping to communicate with that statement?
- Honestly, I'm rather upset about what happened. And I can't hear your perspective right now. What I need is for someone to just listen to me and acknowledge what I experienced and am feeling....
- I'm curious why you chose to give me a "Yea, But" just then?

### 3. That happens to me/my group, too....

- This dynamic/situation does happen to other groups, too. The difference might be HOW OFTEN how often it happens to them, and WHY it happens to them. For instance: most whites have received bad customer service. It rarely happens to them because some has prejudice towards them because of their race. And it probably doesn't happen to them as frequently.
- How does it feel when it happens to you? How often does that happen? Why does it happen to you? So you have a "window of understanding" to connect to what I and my group experience much of the time.

### 4. I know someone who...and they don't agree with you....

- There might be some people who don't see this as I do. That doesn't discount my experience or perception.
- Not all \_\_\_\_ may feel like I do. And, unfortunately, there are many around here that do agree with me and have had very similar experiences. Are you open to hearing more about my experiences?

**5. I don't see it that way...(therefore, it doesn't really happen....)**

- You might not have ever recognized this dynamic before or seen it happen. There was a time I didn't see it this way, either. But after having it happen SO MANY times and when I can't find any other explanation, that I now believe that there most often is some prejudice underneath this type of reaction....

**6. That doesn't happen to me...(so it doesn't exist)**

- I'm glad and hopeful that it doesn't. And hope you never do experience this. And this is what happened to me, and I've heard many other folks describe all too similar experiences....
- It might not, or you may not notice it happening to you....but here's what I've tracked and noticed in my life....

**7. Don't you think that...**

- I'm wondering if you have a statement behind your question.....
- Do you have a specific example that illustrates what you're trying to ask or say?
- I'm curious what you think about that....

**8. You're overreacting...you're too sensitive...**

- You may not agree, but I feel very strongly about this. And I would appreciate your respecting me enough to at least acknowledge my perspective.
- When you say that, I want to end the conversation and would probably never talk to you about these serious issues again.
- Your intent might be to try to help or support me, but the impact of that statement is infuriating.

**9. He/she's a good person...they never meant to do that....**

- That comment just dismissed and discounted my experience.
- Many "good people" do very inappropriate and harmful things.
- Regardless of the intent, this was the impact of their actions....
- I'm not questioning if they're good or bad, I'm talking about the impact of their actions.

**10. That was not my intent! You misunderstood me!**

- I'm open to hearing your intent, but I'd first appreciate your acknowledging the impact of your comment/actions....
- What was your intent....I hear your intent was \_\_\_\_\_, and I hope you can also realize the impact was different than what you intended.

**11. That had nothing to do with \_\_\_\_\_ (an "ism")!! It's just their personality!**

- That may be what you believe, and I have observed/experienced this type of situation so many times...and I have tracked a diversity cut to this...Here's the way I see it...

## **B. Responding When Someone is Triggered**

- I'm noticing you're speaking with a lot of energy and emotion...
- I'm wondering if you're feeling triggered right now?
- This response is unusual for you....I'm wondering what else is going on for you?
- I'm wondering if something else is going on or did something happen that's related to why you're feeling this way?
- You're raising issues I want to talk about, and I'm also noticing that the depth of your emotions seems out of proportion to this situation...
- I notice I'm feeling a little triggered, and I wonder if you are, too?
- I think we're both a bit triggered right now....
- I want to talk about this further, and I can hear you better when you're not so triggered. What if we take a break and then come back to talk about this...

## **C. Responding When Someone is Reacting out of Cumulative Impact**

- Obviously I've said/done something to trigger you. What's going on?
- I can see you have a strong reaction to this. What happened?
- My guess is this is:
  - an example of what has happened to you a lot in the past....
  - what happens to you all the time...
  - not the first time something like this has happened...
- I'm open to hearing what happened if you want to talk....
- Is there anything I can do to be supportive of you?

## **D. Responding When Your Comment/Action Has Had a Negative Impact on Someone Else**

- It seems what I said had an impact on you. I'm open to hearing it.
- I want to apologize for what I said/did....I was wrong...and I'm open to hearing how I've impacted you....
- Thank you for letting me know this. It is my intention to change my behavior in the future...
- Is there anything I can do to make amends...

## **E. Responding When You Are Triggered**

- I notice I feel triggered right now....
- That's a trigger word/phrase for me...
- I need to take a break and come back to this later....
- I need to stop a moment and talk about what just happened. I'm feeling triggered and this is why....
- This may have more to do with me than you, but I'm feeling triggered by what you just said....

**Adapted in part from materials developed by Elsie Y. Cross Associates (215) 248-8100**

Developed by Kathy Obear, [kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)



## ***Navigating Difficult Situations: Self-Assessment Checklist***

Use the following scale to assess on your current skills and abilities during Difficult Situations:  
**5=Almost always 4=Most of the time 3=Much of the time 2= Sometimes 1= Rarely**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I acknowledge comments that seem inappropriate or triggering.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I effectively name and discuss group dynamics in the moment and use them as “teachable moments” to facilitate deeper learning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I recognize that “resistance” and challenges are often doorways to deeper understanding and learning for the group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I engage people in dialogue when they make inappropriate or triggering comments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I encourage other group members to participate and engage in the discussion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I effectively navigate conflict and disagreement among group members.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I can respond effectively to challenges and engage resistance from group members without taking it personally or feeling triggered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I effectively navigate behaviors I believe are distracting, including dominating, interrupting, side-tracking, side conversations, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I effectively navigate situations where group members are feeling and expressing deep emotions, including anger, sadness, fear, frustration, hopelessness, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am able to be “in the moment” ~ fully present and focused on what is happening in the group and in myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I use self-disclosure and share feelings, thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences as appropriate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I easily “go with the flow” and am flexible with the agenda as I adjust to the needs of the group in the moment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I can “meet the people where they are” and not demand or expect them to be farther along in their understanding or skill development.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I use silence effectively.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I use “Connecting Language” that bridges one person’s comments to another’s.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I effectively find some relevant point in each person’s comments, even those that seem way off the topic.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. If I believe someone is on a tangent, I can effectively acknowledge their point, and redirect the conversation back to the group’s topic.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I minimize how much I use the “telling” style, and maximize how often I pose questions or dilemmas to facilitate dialogue among others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I am aware of how I use my body language and nonverbal behavior to facilitate learning and engage others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I am aware of the how people/I may experience and interpret body language and nonverbal behaviors differently based upon their cultural perspective, and their experiences in their multiple privileged and marginalized groups.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I am able to “relate in” and “see myself in others” to find compassion and connection, rather than judging them or distancing from them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I pay attention to the social group identities of others and notice patterns of participation, including who’s talking, who is quiet, who interrupts, who gets interrupted, who assumes leadership, who’s ideas “plop,” etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I am aware of my biases, assumptions, and stereotypes for various privileged and marginalized groups.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I continually interrupt, reframe, and unlearn my biases, stereotypes and assumptions about privileged and marginalized groups.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I understand how my various privileged and marginalized group identities impact how I am often perceived and experienced by others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I understand how my various privileged and marginalized group identities impact how I often make meaning of situations, and then how I react/respond.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I continuously self-reflect to examine my behaviors, assumptions, feelings, and attitudes and their impact on others across social group memberships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I continually seek and utilize feedback about my behaviors and attitudes from members of privileged and marginalized groups; and utilize their input to improve my practice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I am aware of my “early warning signals” that I am beginning to feel triggered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I am able to notice and navigate my own triggered feelings of anger, fear, stress, grief, etc., so that I don’t “work my issues on the group.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I am aware of my triggers and their intrapersonal roots.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I actively do my work around my triggers: explore their intrapersonal roots; do my healing work; etc.

## **Internalized Oppression as an Internal Trigger**

Internal triggers can be the result of many beliefs and messages that we receive(d) at the hands of systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, gender oppression and religious oppression resulting in internalized subordination and domination.

- “Internalized domination is a self-belief system grounded in miseducation and in the politics of social inequality. This belief system is the result of advantaged relationships to privilege, power and cultural affirmation. The premise of dominant group superiority undergirds the various attitudinal and behavioral expressions of internalized dominance.” (Larkin and Walker, 1994)
- Internalized [subordination] results from oppressed groups of people being immersed in negative images of themselves and accepting (either consciously or unconsciously) a “truth the misinformation, prejudicial perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, symbols, and stereotypes of the dominant group (Fletcher, 1999).

For those wrestling with internalized subordination, it can manifest in a significant number of ways:

### **Examples of Internalized Subordination Manifestations**

- Questions of Adequacy and competency
- Apathy, Ambivalence, fatalism
- Attribution of superiority of the dominant group
- Belief in victimization status or sense of victimhood/suffering
- Care-taking/focus on needs and desires of dominant group
- Collusion
- Hopelessness, Despair
- Identify with those in power/ Dom. Group
- Focus on individual empowerment/ individualism/ no group attachment
- Inter-generational transmission of patterns, historical trauma
- Lack of agency, and personal sense of no power, powerlessness
- Lack of self knowledge, distortion of self knowledge
- Loss and restriction of identity, history, culture, deculturalization, cultural estrangement
- Low self esteem, self respect, self worth & self confidence, negative self concept, self-doubt, self blame, self depreciation
- Mental Illness and vulnerability to mental illness
- Mutual distrust among group
- Physical symptoms
- Practice exclusion of other groups or members of own group
- Preference for Dominant group and things associated with it
- Psychological & emotional Dependence, lack of autonomy
- Restriction/modification of action
- Self Hatred
- Self medicating and destructive or Addictive behaviors
- Desire to emulate Dominant Group

- Duality
- Failure to rebel, docility, compliance
- Fear & Terror
- Feelings of inferiority (self & group) and failure
- Feeling of failure
- Shame
- Unconscious application of Internalized beliefs
- Unwillingness to admit weakness or vulnerability
- Violence and abuse
- Violence and destructiveness- physical, emotional, verbal
- Worthlessness, self degradation

Building the skills of Navigating Triggering Events is one way to move towards liberation and away from Internalized Subordination.

- **Liberation:** the creation of relationships, societies, communities, organizations and collective spaces characterized by equity, fairness, and the implementation of systems for the allocation of goods, services, benefits and rewards that support the full participation of each human and the promotion of their full humanness. (Love and Dejong, 2013)
- **Liberatory Consciousness:** a way of living in a world characterized by oppressive systems with awareness and intentionality. It enables us to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression without giving into despair and hopelessness and an awareness of the roles played by each individual in the maintenance of that system without blaming them for the roles they play. And it enables humans to live outside the patterns of thought and behavior learned through oppressive socialization process to support us in being intentional about our role in working toward transformation and the elimination of internalized dynamics (Love, 2003)

### Examples of Actions of Liberation

- Knowledge of self/ culture is key ; strengths of culture – replace racist socialization with racial socialization
- Celebrate culture and self to increase healing
- Be brave about claiming mental liberation; take responsibility for inner world (health, diet, stress)
- Umoja / unity – find the strength in the solidarity of others working to release the chains of mental slavery
- Have faith that change is possible/educate future generations on inherent worth
- Integrity to their fully actualized racial selves
- Identifying and facing pain; refusing addition to dull painful realities
- Acknowledging that you have the capacity to heal yourself
- Critically examine all factors holding people of color back – not just race
- Start expressing self/anger/discomfort with the system
- Remaining critically vigilant, willing to interrogate patterns of internalized subordination
- Critique a politic of representation that values (colorism)

Copyrighted, May 2015, Tanya Williams, *Authentic Consulting*, (413) 329-5847  
[www.tanyawilliams.org](http://www.tanyawilliams.org), [tanya@tanyawilliams.org](mailto:tanya@tanyawilliams.org)

- Develop a clear sense of racial identity
- Identifying with something other than how the oppressor identifies you
- Actively letting go of white supremacist thoughts
- Critical thinking/ living consciously to circumvent racist exploitation
- Politic and practice of self-reliance
- Gain awareness / realize ways individual and group has been dehumanized
- Though attempts at assimilation are attempts at survival, colonized must forsake assimilationist perspective
- Self-recovery/movement toward authentic nature is essential
- Unification with others in group