

Facilitating Difficult Dialogues: Navigating Triggering Events

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Facilitated by:

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For a free copy of my books:

Turn the Tide: Rise Above Toxic, Difficult Situations in the Workplace:

www.drkathyobear.com/book-pdf

<http://drkathyobear.com/book-worksheets> (more resources)

...But I'm NOT Racist! Tools for Well-Meaning Whites

www.drkathyobear.com/imnotracist

www.drkathyobear.com/racebook (more resources)

Learning outcomes:

Part 1:

- Identify the types of comments and actions that are common “triggers” for you
- Explore less productive reactions during discussions about creating inclusive campuses
- Learn how to use the Triggering Event Cycle as a tool to respond more effectively in the moment

Part 2:

- Identify and practice strategies to effectively navigate your triggered reactions
- Practice how to respond effectively when others feel triggered and “in the moment”

Learning Guidelines

1. ENGAGE IN OPEN AND HONEST DIALOGUE
2. PARTICIPATE FULLY (@ COMFORT LEVEL +1)
3. SPEAK FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE; SHARE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS
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!

Classroom/Meeting Guidelines ~ Your Intentions & Guidelines

*Create an environment where everyone feel heard, involved, supported, and respected

*Create a productive and engaging environment for the open and respectful exchange of ideas, perspectives, and opinions

*Promote respectful dialogue, fair discussion of issues, and mutually respectful conversations

- Engage in respectful discourse
- Create a positive, collegial atmosphere
- Demonstrate mutual respect for the comments and views of all
- Speak and act in ways that do not disrupt or interfere with the learning or work of others.
- Explore controversial issues through open dialogue and respectful deliberation.
- Consider and explore new ideas and perspectives
- Express opposing ideas in a respectful manner
- Consider the potential impact of your comments and actions
- Accept responsibility for the overall welfare of the entire group
- Engage in respectful disagreement: Disagree with a person's ideas without attacking their humanity
- Respectfully address unproductive and exclusionary behaviors from others

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

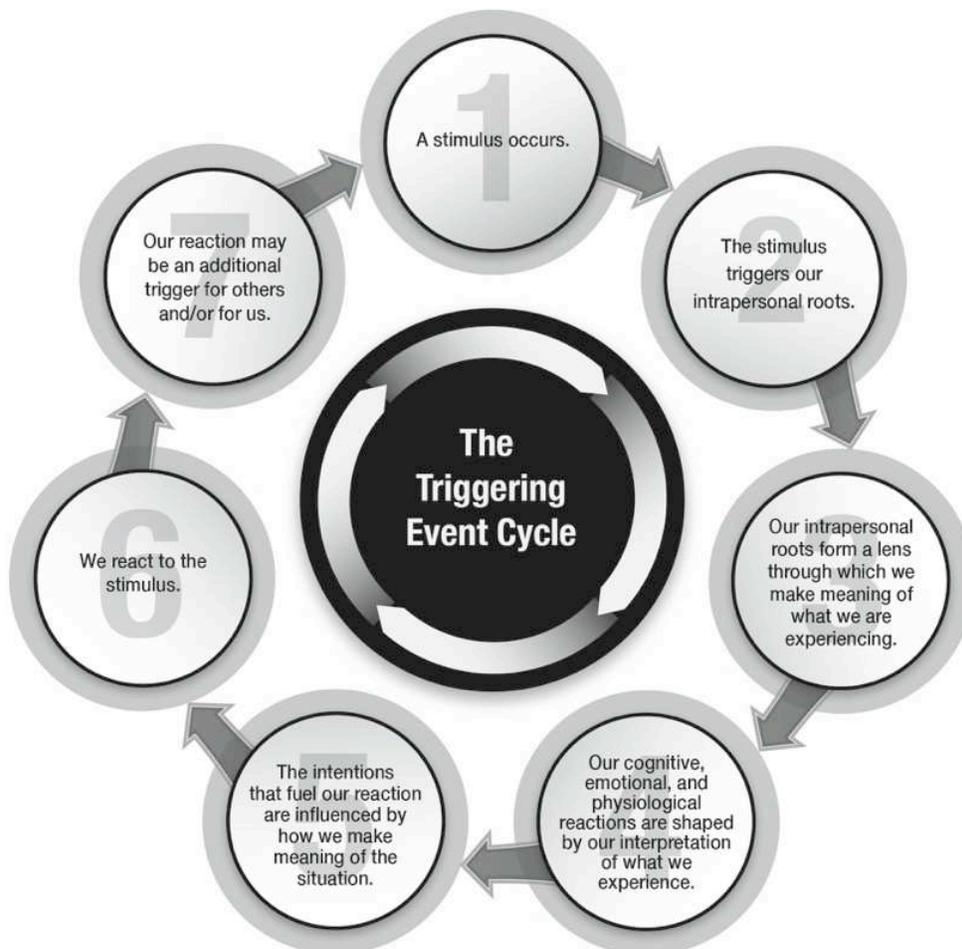
- Blanks out, forget what wanted to say or do
- Zones out
- Immobilized
- Doesn't respond or interrupt exclusionary comments and actions
- Overly anxious and scared

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 diversity, equity, and/or 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

A. When someone(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 others
- 4. dismisses my point or that of others
- 5. demonstrates disruptive behavior including joking, side conversations, or laughing at me or others
- 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
- 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 I:

- 40. make a mistake or error
- 41. do or say something biased, offensive or oppressive
- 42. do not know the answer to a question
- 43. fear I do not know how to effectively respond in a situation
- 44. start to cry or lash out in anger
- 45. 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:

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Journaling: The Triggering Event Cycle©

Directions: Choose one situation when **you were not satisfied** with how you reacted when you felt triggered.

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 pages)
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)?**

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.

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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	matterng	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

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...

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

Steps to Responding 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.

Obear, K. H. (2016). *Turn the tide: Rise above toxic, difficult situations in the workplace*. Difference Press.

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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. Focus the discussion on the PROCESS of the discussion

- I noticed that you mentioned we need to focus on issues of race and gender, and I wonder why you also didn't mention sexual orientation? Or gender identity or gender expression?
- The list of differences includes 6 areas...I'm curious why issues of ableness and religion aren't on the list...
- I'm noticing that the only time we talk about issues of sexism on campus is when I bring it up...
- It seems that whenever we start talking about issues of race, someone changes the topic back to age or gender....
- I've noticed that when we are discussing the work environment for classified employees, a number of folks look down, start reading a document, check their Blackberry...I'm curious what others have noticed?

4. 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 experience in the organization...

5. Give the "benefit of the doubt"

- I trust you didn't intend this, and I was impacted by your comment...

6. 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?

7. If you think someone is misrepresenting what you said

- I believe I said something different than you heard....What I said was...

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

- 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 similar comments

- 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....

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 other participants to get engaged in the dialogue

- Name your feelings or reaction and test to see where others are: I'm feeling uncomfortable with this conversation, is anyone else?
- 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?
- Ask others to take the "pulse" of the situation and reflect on the process: I'm curious what others are noticing about our group dynamics?

12. 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?

Steps to respond when someone makes an inappropriate remark

1. Check out what you heard:

Ask them to repeat what they said

Did I hear you say _____ ?

I thought I heard you say _____. Am I right?

2. If they disagree with your version, you may decide to end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to “cover their tracks,” you may consider continuing the dialogue:
I’m glad to hear I misunderstood, because, as you know, those types of comments....”

3. If they acknowledge they said the comment:

a. Explore their intent behind making the comment

- Help me understand what you meant by that?
- What were you hoping to communicate with that comment?

b. Explore the impact of their comment

What impact do you think that comment could have?

What do you think others would think of you when you make that type of comment?

What message do you think that comment sends?

c. Share your perspective of the probable impact of these types of comments

- When I hear you say that I think/feel...
- Many people would take that comment to mean....
- That comment only perpetuates negative stereotypes and assumptions...
- Negative comments only cause division, isolation, gossiping...
- People will judge you for making these negative types of comments and could assume you are close-minded, bigoted, difficult to work with....

d. Ask them to change their behavior

- I’d appreciate it if you’d stop making these types of negative comments....
- I respect co-workers who respect me and other team members....
- I expect you to stop making inappropriate comments...

Tools and Tips:

Responding in Cross-Cultural Conflicts

A. Responding to Common Dialogue Blockers

1. Perfectly Logical Explanations (PLEs)

- 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 somewhat 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 a 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

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