

Navigating Triggering Events: Critical Competencies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues

NCORE 2017

Facilitated by:

Micia Monique Mosely, Ph.D.
Executive Director, The Black Teacher Project
www.blackteacherproject.org Micia@blackteacherproject.org

Kathy Obear, Ed.D., *Center for Transformation & Change*
www.drkathyobear.com kathy@drkathyobear.com

For a free copy of Kathy's books and other resources:

Turn the Tide: Rise Above Toxic, Difficult Situations in the Workplace:
www.drkathyobear.com/book-pdf www.drkathyobear.com/book-worksheets

...But I'm NOT Racist! Tools for Well-Meaning Whites
www.drkathyobear.com/imnotracist www.drkathyobear.com/racebook

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

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, race, and racism.

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:

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 and racism.

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.

Copyrighted, April 2000, Kathy Obear, *ALLIANCE FOR CHANGE*, (413) 537-8012

kathy@drkathyobear.com 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

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 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...

kathy@drkathyobear.com www.drkathyobear.com

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...