

# Norms for Facilitating Courageous Conversations

## **Stay Engaged**

- It's important that you try to stay present in the room. Pay attention to when you are shutting down. Discomfort and anxiety are normal parts of courageous conversations.
- If you find yourself needing to stand up, please do so.

## **Speak Your Truth**

- We often avoid speaking our truth for fear of what others might say. It's important that we create a safe environment where everyone is free to speak openly.
- Keep in mind that people are in different places in this work. In order for us to grow, it's important that people are able to share their thoughts in a way that's comfortable for them.
- When we share our thoughts, it often creates an emotional reaction from others. Being able to speak your truth does not mean that people will not respond emotionally. Be prepared to experience the discomfort that race conversations bring.
- Speaking our truth does not mean stomping on each others heads. Before speaking, think about what it is that you want others to know. How can they best hear you?
- Remember that everyone does not communicate in the same way that you do. If someone gets loud in the room, it doesn't mean they are angry. If they are angry, it doesn't necessarily mean they are angry with you. If they are angry at something you said, it doesn't mean that that person no longer has a relationship with you. Often times these conversations bring up a lot of emotions from past and present experiences. Try and allow others to experience their emotions without your shutting down.

## **Experience Discomfort**

- One way to think about this is, "Be comfortable with being uncomfortable". In other words, discomfort is to be expected.
- If you are not feeling any sense of discomfort in the dialogue, ask yourself are you fully engaged? Are you giving of yourself fully and taking risk.

## **Expect and Accept Non-closure**

- In our society today, we often want to feel some sense of closure, regardless of the issue. Engaging in race conversations means there will be times of no closure. This is on-going work that does not necessarily leave one walking away feeling like everything turned out the way you hoped. Be willing to take risks and accept that much of this is about changing yourself not others.

## **Listen for Understanding**

- Try and understand where another person is coming from as best you can.
- Be careful not to compare your experiences with another persons. This often invalidates or minimizes a person's experiences.
- Listen without thinking about how you are going to respond.
- Stay present in their pain and your discomfort as you listen.
- If someone is pointing out how what you said left them feeling, try not to explain or rationalize what you said or why you said it. For example, sometimes it's necessary to just say, "I didn't realize what I said was inappropriate...or hurt you in that way, I'm sorry," etc.
- Think about your comments before saying them. Resist the need to explain. Sometimes positive intent is not enough (intent vs. impact). Be careful not to lose the opportunity to just listen by putting the focus back on you.

*Four of the Norms (without descriptions) come from G. Singleton "Courageous Conversations About Race" 2006.*

