

Community Agreements

1. Keep in mind that differences in perspective are not the problem; the problem is our great difficulty talking across those differences. Also keep in mind that getting everyone to agree with a particular point of view may not be the goal of discussion. Rather, the main goal may be to understand other points of view. In other words, you should seek understanding, not necessarily agreement.
2. It is OK, and often helpful, to speak from your own personal experience. (Speak from the I.) At the same time, recognize that you can't generalize from your experience. Your experience is true for you, it may or may not be true for other people.
3. When someone else speaks from personal experience, listen and do not deny the validity of that experience. You can ask questions for clarification. But watch for conversation stoppers, such as
 - "Yes, but..."
 - "You must have been misinterpreting what happened."
 - "You shouldn't feel like that."
 - "Why does it always have to be about race? It could have been because..."
4. Don't interrupt; wait for the other person to finish, and make sure you actually heard and followed what the other person was saying before jumping in with what you have to say. (Seek first to understand, then to be understood.)
5. If you aren't sure you understood what the other person was saying, try paraphrasing what you heard back to the person, and ask if that is what the person said or meant. ("What I understood [from what you shared] was...What I heard you say is...") Don't simply dismiss or ignore what the other person said.
6. Express disagreement with someone else in a way that acknowledges and respects the point of view that person has articulated. (I think I see what you are saying. I see the issue differently, though, because. . . .)
7. If you feel attacked or threatened by what another person is saying, it's OK to express your feelings, but own them. (I am feeling XYZ about what you just said.) But do not attack the other person with statements like, "You are being really biased!" You might also take a short time-out before saying anything.
8. You don't have to disclose anything you do not wish to disclose. If you feel threatened or uneasy and would rather keep your thoughts private, you have a right to pass. Recognize, however, that if all of us never disclosed anything controversial, there would be even less understanding of differences than there is now.
9. Keep everything that is said confidential; do not undermine trust by telling other people who said what. There's wisdom in "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."



Thanks to any and all we may have borrowed from when creating this guide.