



Inclusive Conversations

A GUIDE TO CULTIVATING EMPATHY AND EQUITY

**CHOOSE COURAGE
OVER COMFORT**

*choose whole hearts over
armor*

**AND CHOOSE THE GREAT
ADVENTURE OF BEING BRAVE
AND AFRAID,
AT THE EXACT SAME TIME**

Dr. Brené Brown

INCLUSIVE CONVERSATIONS: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this guidebook, we walk facilitators through our four-part process to engage in courageous conversations that surround issues of diversity and inclusion. The goal of this document is to reduce obstacles to communication, address the needs of all those involved, and optimize the discovery of a mutually beneficial resolution. Our approach establishes norms and boundaries at the onset, encourages empathy and trust-building throughout, and provides a framework for implementing strategies and action plans at the conclusion. We view this guidebook as a template that should be adapted to align with the needs of the participants and the culture of the division engaging in this work.

FRAMEWORK



The guidebook aims to ensure the psychological safety of participants by asking them to consider alternative perspectives and adapt aspects of the B.R.A.V.I.N.G framework created by Dr. Brené Brown.

BEST PRACTICE



Ahead of the conversation, ask the participants to write down their reservations as well as their goals. Doing so will help the facilitator prioritize each participant's personal wellness and become aware of the participant's specific needs.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION: VALUES & VULNERABILITY

"While vulnerability is the birthplace of many of the fulfilling experiences we long for in life – love, joy, creativity, and trust to name a few – the process of regaining our emotional footing in the midst of struggle is where our courage is tested and our values are forged."

(p.xviii, Rising Strong)

PART #1

Setting the tone for inclusive conversations is critical. Encouraging pre-work, creating a sense of psychological safety, and evaluating your own biases as a facilitator are critical to ensuring participants can be vulnerable and fully engage in an inclusive conversation.

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1. **Set the Tone and Check Your Biases.** Actively listen, note body language, and come from a place of curiosity and not judgment.

 2. **Outline Norms, Goals, and Objectives.** Outline a set of norms that govern how participants will engage in a thoughtful conversation. The norms you outline can be based on Brené Brown's B.R.A.V.I.N.G model or they can be developed by the participants themselves (we provide examples on the next page). Explicitly ask participants what their goals for the mediation exercise are, and establish the three to five objectives you have for your time together.

 3. **Acknowledge and Demonstrate Appreciation for Participant's Vulnerability and Discomfort.** Acknowledge and affirm the challenges that come with being open and vulnerable in this space. Demonstrate appreciation for their willingness to engage in courageous conversations and the discomfort that will come from that. Affirm that they will not be punished for asking questions, advancing their ideas, or making mistakes.

REFLECTIONS:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS, & NORMS

The Guiding Principles for mediation participants are:

- We agree to take turns speaking and to not interrupt each other.
- We agree to come from a stance of curiosity as opposed to judgment - we agree to assume positive intentions from all involved.
- We agree to call each other by our first names, not "he," "she," "they," or worse.
- We will ask questions of each other for the purposes of gaining clarity and understanding and not as attacks.
- We agree to avoid establishing hard positions and express ourselves in terms of our needs and desires and the outcomes that we wish to create.
- We agree to listen respectfully and sincerely try to understand the needs and interests of others.
- We recognize that others are entitled to their perspectives, even if we don't agree with them.
- We will seek to avoid dwelling on things that did not work in the past, and instead focus on the future we want to create.
- We agree to make a conscious, sincere effort to refrain from unproductive arguing, venting, and narration and agree to use our time in mediation to work toward what we perceive to be our most constructive agreement possible.
- We will speak up if something is not working for us in the mediation.
- We will request a break if helpful.

The Goals of this resolution meeting are:

The Norms of this resolution meeting are:

REVIEWING THE SITUATION: PARAPHRASING AND PROCESSING

*"When we have the courage to walk into our story and own it, we get to write the ending.
And when we don't own our stories of failure, setbacks, and hurt -- they own us."
- Brené Brown*

PART #2

This section allows the facilitator to dive deeper into the participant's perspective of the situation, and allows participants to clarify their motivations, articulate their rationale, and provide insight into how the event impacted them.

4. **Ask Clarifying Questions.** "I want to make sure I understand your perspective on the situation. Can you share with me how you perceived the interaction to have gone or to have occurred?" OR "Can you recap with me how you perceive things went, given there are a few different perspectives? What can we see again?"

5. **Paraphrase.** "I want to make sure I understand your perspective. Were you saying...?"

6. **Encourage Active Processing.** "Can you tell me more about what you mean by [direct quote]?" "And how did you feel in that moment?" "What motivated you to say or do XYZ?"

7. **Direct Toward Empathy.** "This may not have been your intent to say [XYZ]. I know we often say things we don't mean. What was your intent?" OR "This is how your message can be perceived."

REFLECTIONS:

PERSPECTIVE TAKING: UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS

*"Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; It's choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and it's practicing your values, not just professing them.
You can't get to courage without rumbling with vulnerability. Embrace it."*

- Brené Brown

PART #3

This section provides an opportunity for each participant to evaluate an alternative perspective and gain greater insight into how the other person may have experienced the same experience.

8. **Intent vs. Impact.** "I understand you may not have intended to hurt or alienate your co-worker, however, in my experience, statements such as the one you expressed have been perceived as dismissing or undermining others."

9. **Perspective Taking.** "If we were to look at the complete opposite side of the spectrum and do a mental experiment to take the perspective of X person, can you see an alternative way of viewing the events?" "What do you think they were thinking? What do you think may have been the intention behind some of their thoughts or expressions?"

10. **Moving Forward.** "If you were this person, though it is impossible to get into someone's head, what are a few things you would like to see/feel in an environment moving forward productively and thoughtfully?" "What are some characteristics you would like to see?"

REFLECTIONS:

STRATEGIZING: IDENTIFYING NEXT STEPS AND ESTABLISHING ACCOUNTABILITY

"Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement."
- Brené Brown

PART #4

This section provides actionable and tangible strategies and accountability measures that participants can implement to ensure a productive and positive working relationship moving forward.

11. **Identify Strategies and Next Steps.** "In my experience, I've seen things work when everyone engages in a way that makes them feel safe, and like their voice is heard. I want to ensure we achieve the goals you set forth earlier today, so here are some strategies we can implement..."

12. **Affirm Their Value.** "I really value the work you do and the work we do together. Your work brings valuable contributions to UTSW. I want to ensure you feel comfortable bringing your full, authentic self to the workplace, and that we can all work together to build an inclusive environment. Please let me know how I can help in that endeavor."

13. **Establish Accountability Measures and Check-Ins.** "What are a few measures we can put in place to ensure these strategies are implemented?" "When is it appropriate for you two to check in with each other regarding progress?"

REFLECTIONS: