



Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion

Inclusive workplace guide

Creating a safe space for dialogue on anti-racism

In the current global context of much discussion and action with respect to Black racism and anti-racism more broadly, it is critical that we provide a safe space for dialogue in general and more specifically, in our workplaces.

The cornerstone for a productive and respectful conversation on racism or other related issues, is centered on ensuring the psychological safety of everyone who is part of the conversation.

Establishing and facilitating safe spaces is a tool that can help create and preserve everyone's psychological safety. This allows different voices to be heard, acknowledged and valued.

How do you create and maintain a safe space for dialogue?

Safe space for dialogue defined

Safe space: A space where people can express honest impressions, thoughts, and attitudes without fear of ridicule. A safe space can as small as between two people, or can be expanded to include all of the members of a larger group; at a specific work location or organizational unit or department and can even be an expectation of the organizational culture overall.

- » Do: Provide the definition of a safe space for any conversation at the beginning and remind participants about that definition, if required.
- » Don't: Simply state that the space is safe; be explicit.

Establish rules of engagement for the conversation

It is important to agree on what is and is not permitted as you engage.

- » Do: Provide a suggested basic set of rules right from the beginning. See suggested rules at the end of this guide.
- » Do: Ask the person or group members if there are any other rules that they would like to add to the list.
- » Do: Ask the person or group members to agree to abide by the established rules before you begin the conversation.
- » Don't: Assume that everyone has the same set of rules in their head about how to have a productive and safe conversation.

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Adopt an open mindset

A safe space demands that participants be open minded and attempt to empathize with others' feelings and attitudes, even those with whom they differ.

- » Do: Be prepared to entertain new ways of interpreting your work environment or new experiences, without judgment.ⁱ
- » Do: Actively listen and park the immediate urge to feel that you need to accept, agree or change your beliefs based on what you hear.
- » Don't: Try to convince others that your experience is the right experience. We are all "right", from our own perspective.

Acknowledge the impact of racism

As well as sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, antisemitism, and ableism on the lives of Canadians and that it is reflected in our workplaces.ⁱⁱ

- » Do: Educate yourself about the impact of racism in Canada on Black, Indigenous and persons of colour (BIPOC) by reading, watching or engaging in discussions online and with credible sources.ⁱⁱⁱ
- » Do: Be sensitive about the extra psychological load that this may create for BIPOC employees in particular, and their friends and loved ones.
- » Do: Be prepared for BIPOC employees or colleagues to tell you that they do not want to discuss it or are not prepared to discuss it on your timeline.
- » Don't: Expect a BIPOC colleague to educate you or the group members on racism and anti-racism.
- » Don't: Assume a BIPOC colleague can, and is willing, to be the representative or to speak for an entire community that is extremely diverse.

Bring humility to the table

Remaining passive is no longer an option. Engaging in difficult or uncomfortable conversations is the new expectation. Sometimes you will make mistakes because you are human, and you don't know what you don't know.

- » Do: Be willing to admit you made a mistake or you got your facts wrong.
- » Do: State your commitment to learning more.
- » Do: Expect emotions to rise to the surface; yours own included.
- » Do: Say things like: "I can see that this has really impacted you."
- » Do: Offer the opportunity for each person to speak, or not, as they choose.
- » Don't: Perpetuate the idea that emotions have no place at the workplace.
- » Don't: State things like "I don't want to cry" or "you're being overly-sensitive or dramatic."
- » Don't: Minimize anyone's experience or allow the experience of privileged voices to dominate or become the focus.
- » Immediately focus on solutions; instead, state your commitment to be a part of developing sustainable solutions.

Suggested rules of engagement to create a safe space for dialogue^{iv}

- » Assume positive intent; we are all doing our best, to the best of our abilities, with the knowledge that we have.



- » It is okay to make mistakes; be humble if you do make a mistake.
 - » Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to the discussion.
 - » Practice active listening - listen to understand, not to respond. Ask clarifying questions.
 - » Avoid interrupting.
 - » Pause and think through your comments before you make them.
 - » Never make derogatory comments toward another member or make sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist or victim-blaming comments
 - » Challenge ideas not people. Never demean or embarrass a person.
 - » Be open to being challenged or confronted on your ideas or prejudices.
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ⁱ Resnick, Brian. "Intellectual humility: the importance of knowing you might be wrong." <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/4/17989224/intellectual-humility-explained-psychology-replication>. January 4, 2019.

ⁱⁱ McRae, Matthew. "The story of Africville." *Canadian Museum for Human Rights*. <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-story-of-africville>. Accessed June 17, 2020.
"Legalized Racism." *Canadian Race Relations Foundation*. <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/images/stories/pdf/ePubFaShLegRac.pdf>. Accessed June 18, 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ "Navigating race in Canadian workplaces. A toolkit for diversity and inclusion practitioners." *Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion*. <https://ccdi.ca/media/1849/20180731-toolkit-navigating-race-in-canadian-workplaces.pdf>. July 2018.

^{iv} Adopted from: "Guidelines for Creating a Safe Space for Discussion". *Oregon State University*. 2016.