

Community Agreements for Online Discussions

Awareness and Self-Knowledge

Self-knowledge allows you to see what causes you pain and conflict and enables you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things about yourself that you are not happy with. In turn, self-awareness helps to prevent you from projecting your negative aspects onto other people. Bringing your best self also requires that you have a positive attitude, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others. While engaging with peers and content, make space for others to engage as well. **Online this looks like a sharing of the time and space and being precious with your words. It also looks like calling others into the conversation you have not heard from. It looks like your camera on and your full presence in the conversations.**

Listening for Understanding

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, looking them in the eye, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives and sharing your own. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears and/or concerns. **Online this looks like your camera on and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Being Gracious

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives, as well as the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for others around you, wanting the best for them and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better with others, to be more self-compassionate and to be a positive force in other people's lives. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. **Online this looks like your camera on and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window. Online, kindness in a discussion is being direct and judicious with your words.**

Staying Engaged

Staying engaged requires you to be morally, emotionally, intellectually and socially involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. This means a commitment to keeping your electronic communications to a minimum with folks not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda. **Online this looks like your camera on and your attention within the meeting. Answering phones and email during our short time together is not an example of being engaged. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Being Open and Suspending Judgment

Listening with an open mind includes being receptive to the influence of others. You can suspend judgment by becoming aware of preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before jumping to conclusions. Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not just to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This does not imply that you have to accept another's influence or opinions or that you are prohibited from seeking clarity about their opinions and influence. This means that we recognize each of us will make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. We should expect imperfections. **Online this looks like your camera on and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Saying "I"- tell your truth

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be absolutely honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the "first person" and use "I"

statements. **Online this looks like your camera on and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Lean into Discomfort

Leaning into discomfort will require you to let go of `understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding onto in order to move forward. Leaning in means that you will avoid pre-judgment and be open to the kernel of wisdom in each individual's experiences. Leaning into discomfort will require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear. **Online this looks like your camera on and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Reaching Empathy

Empathy and compassion allow you to understand the other person's point of view. When you are empathetic, you are more understanding, patient and kind. Expanding your capacity to feel empathy will also allow others to enter your circle of human concern. Sharing, using, and respecting pronouns is a very simple form of empathy. **Online this looks like your camera on, your video renamed with your name and pronouns, and your emotional presence when listening to others. It means pausing before responding. I can also look like active sharing in the chat window.**

Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. It is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person's racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about race or other issues with another person, the more you learn and the more they will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts. **Online this looks like understanding that facilitator timing and constructs to move us through the meeting come from the value of Fairness – not from a value of Control. Your conversation may be cut off, you might not get called on, and all the content might not be covered. It also means that you will need to make good use of the resources and experiences provided before and after the meeting.**

**Adapted from "Embracing equity and inclusion", Annie E. Casey Foundation*

What questions do you want to ask about any of the ideas in these agreements?

What additional agreements do you need in order to be a fully participating member of our learning community?

Can you commit to these agreements? If not, what would it take for you to be able to commit?