
Suggestions for Using “Discussing Differences Respectfully and Constructively”

Objectives:

- Enable employees to discuss emotionally-laden issues in a safe environment
- Give employees a way to share their perspectives and feelings
- Enable staff to learn from each other

Intended Audience:

- Staff members experiencing difficulties around a particular dimension of diversity
- Employees on a team with a range of differences in a particular dimension of diversity

Time:

30–60 minutes

Materials:

- Sheets with the open-ended statements to be used, or a slide or a chart with the statements on them

Processing the Activity:

- Explain the dimension to be focused on (e.g., generation, religion, gender, etc.) and the reason for the discussion (e.g., “There have been some comments or complaints, a suggestion, questions or some misunderstanding about ...”).
- Show people the open-ended statements selected, or give them the full sheet and ask them to select two from each section.
- Allow time for people to think about their responses. Some may wish to jot down notes.
- Go around the group with each person sharing one response from the Increasing Understanding section.
- Lead a total group discussion of insights and questions.
- Go around the group again, having each person share one response from the Sharing Needs and Expectations section.
- Lead a total group discussion of insights, questions, and suggestions.
- Ask each person to share one action they will take to create more inclusion around the dimension.

Caveats, Considerations, and Variations:

- Participants group into pairs in which each is from a different generation or religion, and share responses.
- Participants can formulate ground rules or guidelines to follow for dealing with each other across differences in the particular dimension.