

Tips for How to Handle Tough Conversation

Problems you may encounter during discussion:

Debate vs. Discussion

- The purpose of our discussions in this month are to share experiences and learn from one another
- We are NOT trying to convince others to take a stand on an issue: policing, racism, etc.

Accusations of: _____

- Accusing someone of being a racist, conservative, liberal, biased, anti-police, “too white” etc. is NOT the same as trying to debate
- Accusing someone of being a label is only thinking of them as a “single story” rather than as a complex person
- Making accusations shuts down conversation

Trauma:

- Not everyone who endures a traumatic experience is scarred by it, People are very resilient, and some may face circumstances that make resiliency tough in a given situation
- Don't judge. Don't try to determine for a person if his/her experience is “traumatic”
- The BEST thing you can do for someone when she/he is sharing about a tough, traumatic situation is to LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

What to do when these things happen:

1. Take a deep breath for YOURSELF
2. Remember it is NOT your job to “fix” anything
3. Remind the participants that, “We might not be on the same page and that's OK. We are all just trying to listen and learn from one another”
4. You can also say:
 - a. “We aren't trying to win anything here”
 - b. “Can we all take a break and look at our discussion norms?”
 - c. “We all have our own opinions, but let's return to the book and the current question we are discussing”
 - d. “Listening to what you have to say, is helping me figure out my thoughts”
 - e. “Let's remember that we are just seeking to understand different opinions and experiences right now”
 - f. “Thanks for sharing your experience. It really has helped me further my understanding”
 - g. “Wow, that sounds like it was an intense experience. Thanks for trusting us enough to share.

*IF you feel out of your own comfort zone, it is perfectly OK to ask for help! Do not feel like you “failed”. One of the biggest signs of strength is being able to ask for help.