



Creating Brave Spaces

Talking about race and other facets of identity can engender strong feelings. It is important to create environments in which students can participate in these conversations constructively, and express opinions and questions without fear of judgement. This requires that educators create time to teach and practice social and emotional skills, including developing an awareness of one's own biases, building empathy, managing conflict and appreciating the perspectives of others.

"Safe spaces" is often used to describe settings that are conducive to positive dialogue. However, social justice educators have more recently reconceptualized these settings as "brave spaces." "Safe space" suggests that participants will not need to experience discomfort when discussing sensitive topics, but talking about issues such as race often involves difficulty and risk. Since members of marginalized groups often experience such struggles in their everyday lives, the expectation of "safety" for majority group members can be seen as an exercise of privilege. "Brave spaces" conveys the idea that all participants will embrace the discomfort of hard conversations with courage and openness.¹

The following group expectations are offered as a set of understandings that can be introduced to students as you work to build brave spaces. They can be adapted to suit the age and experience level of students.

¹ Arao, Brian and Clemens, Kristi. "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice." *In The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators*, edited by Lisa M. Landreman, 135-150. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.

GROUP NORM	EXPLANATION
Recognize your own bias	We all have prejudices. They have been learned and can be unlearned over time. Change is a process.
Respect others	Value the perspectives of others. Listen openly and communicate nonjudgmentally.
“Try on” new ways of thinking	Let your guard down in response to ideas that are different; consider points of view that are new.
Speak from your own experience	Use “I-statements” that express your personal feelings; avoid “you should statements” that pass judgement on others.
Assume good will	Look for the good intentions of others before taking offense. At the same time, challenge biases in others directly and constructively.
Own your intentions and impact	Avoid being defensive when your words or actions hurt others. Reflect on your meaning and how you have affected others.
Ask questions	Be curious and open-minded. Don’t avoid questions for fear that they won’t come out right. Try your best to frame questions respectfully.
Find comfort in discomfort	Some discussions will make us feel uneasy. Remember that these feelings are a necessary part of learning and growing.
Conflicts may arise	Disagreements and hurt feelings will happen. Use conflict resolution skills and manage disagreements with civility.
Confidentiality	Don’t reveal the identities of actual people when sharing instances of bias. Everything said in the room stays in the room.
Take space, make space	Participate and add your voice to the conversation. If you are taking too much space, step back and make room for others.