

# Social Trust Building

## Having Meaningful, Forward-Moving Conversations: From Conversation Stoppers to Starters

Trust-building conversation starters are based on a deep understanding that acknowledging racism is necessary before healing begins. That healing becomes the gateway for moving forward to new ways of knowing and being and a better quality of life for everyone.

It's a process. Inherent in diversity is tension; yet it can be turned into creative tension with the right competencies for how to manage the tension. With every discomfort there is a learning...if we stay with the discomfort long enough. Moving out of our comfort zone requires building enough racial stamina to sustain an emotionally charged conversations and make them forward-moving conversations about race. Here are some tips for moving from discomfort to learning.

### *Avoid these Conversation Stoppers*

- **Using harsh set-ups:** “you always” “just like...people to...” “this happens all the time”
- **Using inappropriate deflection tactics:** “well, let’s just move on” “you know we all are tired and stressed, let’s just leave this alone” “we are all good people here” “...but you know me!”
- **Providing unsolicited advice:** “you can’t solve all of the world’s problems” “get some rest and you’ll probably see things differently later” “have you thought about seeing someone for professional help? You are really emotional about this.”
- **Switching the focus of the conversation from you to me:** “I really want to help but I don’t know what to do. This conversation makes me feel so helpless.” “Let me tell you what happened to me...”
- **Evangelizing or Teaching:** “Let me educate you...”. “You need to learn...” “You really need to come on board” “Can’t we just all get along?” “You need to be careful when you say that.”
- **Shutting down:** “You can’t possibly understand.” “This is why you can’t talk to \_\_\_ people.” “I’ve been here before, and it never ends well.” “I’ve tried that a million times.”

## Use these Conversation Starters

- **Use healthy deflections:** “Now that was an ouch moment, are you willing to hear why?” “I want to respond but I am so aware of my feelings right now and have to sort out some things...can we commit to coming back to this another time?”
- **Connect the past with the present:** “I am interested in understanding how the past history you’ve named shows up for you in present day.” “I want to hear more about how your past experience relates to what we are talking about right now.”
- **Communicate understanding as a goal:** “I heard you say...and I am struggling to separate your reaction from what I am experiencing as possible racism. Help me to understand...Did I hear you correctly?”
- **Demonstrate empathy:** “I have nothing in my background to draw on to relate to what you are experiencing but I am willing to hear more to understand.”
- **Acknowledge racism:** “I don’t know what to say, but I am glad that you spoke out about it.” “I’m glad that you named it and I’m wondering if I did this...or approached it this way...would be a good next step.” “I am so sorry that racism persists, and I am trying to do my part to eliminate it. I know that is not enough.”
- **Join, Process, Engage:** “I get where you are coming from and I want to share my experience.” “I have never thought of it that way and you have given me something to think about.” “I believe what you said has some factual errors, but it may be directionally correct. We are on the same page about...” “Help me to understand how those ideas are connected?” “Isn’t \_\_\_\_ a human behavior? How is it that it is attributed only to one group of people?” “What do you mean by...?”
- **Move the conversation forward:** “I really appreciate that we do... but what is in my awareness is that when ... happens, we always do... or we don’t do...” “I am wondering how this will impact...” “Help me to understand how...” “What would you like to see happen differently?”