

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you prepare to engage students in difficult conversations, consider this question: What will a discussion about race and racism potentially expose about me? This self-reflection is very important.



SUGGESTIONS TO SAFELY ENGAGE YOUR STUDENTS:



- **Fist-to-Five.** You can quickly gauge a number of things — readiness, mood, comprehension — by a show of **5 fingers** (indicating “I completely understand”), **4 fingers** (“I mostly understand”), **3 fingers** (“I somewhat understand”), **2 fingers** (“I need help”), and **1 finger** (“I don’t understand at all”). Alternatively, **Thumbs Up**, **Thumbs Down**, and **Thumbs to the Side** could serve to quickly communicate.



- **Stoplight.** Use the colors of a traffic light to signal student readiness and comfort.
- **Talking Circles.** Gather in a circle and create, or review, the norms that will help build trust.



- **Journaling.** Personal reflection through writing can be extremely effective after having difficult conversations.
- **Puppets.** Allow time and space to reflect and role play with puppets. Puppets allow students to communicate playfully and safely.
- **Drawing.** Like journaling for older students, drawing can provide young students a valuable opportunity for personal reflection and emotional processing.



- **Use age-appropriate language** and these steps to communicate while feeling difficult emotions:
 - **Reiterate** - Re-state what you heard.
 - **Contemplate** - Pause before responding.
 - **Respire** - Take a breath and check in with yourself.
 - **Communicate** - Assume positive intentions and seek to understand.
- **Allow time and space to reflect.** After engaging in an emotionally charged conversation, we need to be able to safely discharge our emotions.



Facilitating difficult conversations can be emotionally draining or even painful for educators. Make time to process, reflect, and recharge in positive ways, such as:

- Find colleagues or friends who can listen while you reflect on conversations about race and racism.
- Take advantage of professional learning communities where you can discuss the dynamics in your classroom and school.
- Keep a professional journal and use writing to process and reflect.



Adapted from: Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism, and Other Difficult Topics with Students