

William C. Friday Fellowship for Human Relations

GUIDELINES

Speak from the “I”

Speak your truth, expressing your thoughts, feelings and experiences by making “I” statements rather than “you,” “we” or “one.” In our culture, it is very common to use you instead of I. As you pay attention you will see how much more powerful using “I” statements will be-- speaking only for yourself, not for a community as a whole, not for the person sitting next to you.

Disagree but do not shame, blame or attack

Disagree with each other; it is absolutely okay to. One of the necessary ingredients for differences to be expressed and valued is that people let go of the need to be, think or act the same. Asking someone to feel shame for what they believe to be true, blaming someone for his/her experiences or for thinking or feeling the way he or she does, attacking each other, because of anger or feeling offended because of another’s perspective, all undermine continued effective dialogue. Please be open to disagreements on perspectives and do so respectfully.

Accept messiness and practice non-closure

Be messy and realize that complex issues will not be resolved in one dialogue. You don’t have to have your statements worked out before you start talking or have any answers--your perspectives and thoughts are enough. A common fear is that you will offend someone—but we are here to learn from one another and get as much as we can into the dialogue. Please accept both yourself and others being disorganized in their thoughts and share as openly as possible. And, know that learning comes from the process of delving into complex perspectives, issues and identities, a process that is never ending.

Embrace paradox and use both/and thinking

Look for ways in which ideas fit together and avoid setting up an either/or process or a competition between ideas. One does not have to be false to make the other true. It is quite possible that both are true. Being able to accept that two seemingly contradictory views of the world could both be true is challenging and important, as we know people experience realities differently for quite authentic reasons.

Lean into discomfort and each other

By design, authentic dialogue challenges participants. Discomfort signals that you are being challenged and perhaps even growing from the experience. Support each other to reflect on discomfort with a spirit of inquiry and wonder, in order to reach new awareness and meaning individually as well as collectively. The process can be useful and meaningful only with everyone’s full participation. Support each other to participate fully.

Maintain confidentiality

In agreeing to maintain confidentiality it will be much safer to share your thoughts, perspectives and ideas. We must agree that nothing that is said here is shared elsewhere and that nothing that is shared is used against each other either, in any way. In addition, it will be important when you see each other outside of this context to respect that people may or may not want to discuss issues raised here after they leave.