

ASB Challenging Conversations Training Script

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[Link to Slide Deck](#)

Slide 1: Introduce self (5 min)

- Name, Role, Location, Pronouns
- If time and size permits, go around for quick intros
- I'm here to facilitate your process of preparing for challenging conversations, offering a chance to practice, and making space for what YOU know.
- You are all very practiced at challenging conversations, so maybe this just affirmed what you already do, as a way to coach people listening to the recording, or to be in community together knowing you're sharing some similar experiences.
- This training is geared toward having challenging conversations in districts with parents, staff, and students and draws lessons from deep canvassing.

Slide 2: Keeping love central

- “May we remember that if love isn't central to our movements not many will be able to stay and not many will want to join, including ourselves.” - Chani Nicholas
- Know this: For person to person conversations, talking points don't really work - human connection does.
- These are the hardest conversations to have because they affect us
 - We feel at risk of either being unable to shift someone else or being at risk of shifting away from where our moral compass guides us.
 - We also know that people are dedicated to the extreme misinformation that fuels a prejudiced stance, so some challenging conversations can feel hopeless
 - People tend to reject arguments that don't already fit into their worldview, no matter how clever those arguments or talking points are.
 - AND we still may have to have them...
- Begin with a story...

Slide 3: Agenda review (quick)

1. The Opportunity in the Challenge (5 min)
2. Pre-Conversation: Values, Boundaries, and Goals (5 min)
3. Start of Conversation: Asking for Clarity (5 min)
4. Flow of Conversation: Speaking Truth and Sharing Values (10 min)

5. Practice Relevant Talking Points (10 min)
6. End of Conversation: A Graceful, Yet Firm Exit (5 min)
7. Hearing from You: What Tactics Work? (10 min)

We're recording this for others, so I'm hoping for quick unmuting today and if you're the brave volunteer then you get to name the next person to read or invite them to share!

Slide 4: The Opportunity in the Challenge (5 min)

- 1. Living one's values is rarely both easy and meaningful**
 - a. It's either easy and not very impactful - not resulting in change
 - b. Or it's difficult and risky with a serious opportunity to bring about change
- 2. Trust is not built through constant agreement.**
 - a. A person will know you're being honest when you're willing to express your own opinion, even if it's different from theirs
 - b. Arrive at deeper understandings through dialog - great dialog has tension and is generative
 - c. You can build stronger relationships with people you disagree with but stay in relationship with than someone you tacitly agree with but never go deeper with
- 3. You can earn respect and trust even if you remain in disagreement**
 - a. If people know you stick to your values even if it puts you at risk, that is worthy of respect
- 4. You likely can't cause a 180 turn in perspective, but you can plant a seed or start a relationship.**
 - a. Remember, if you're just having a conversation, then it's not an argument and winning is off the table anyway, and then a productive discussion can occur

Slide 5: Pre-Conversation: Values, Boundaries, and Goals

Before we start - FYI I am going to ask two people to share a story at the end of this slide about a difficult conversation that resulted in a closer relationship or surprised you in some way.

- 1. It's a good idea to prepare both your heart and your mind.**
 - a. Have you ever had a stressful day and then you go into a conversation with a loved one and realize too late you brought your stress level with you?
 - b. Or have you ever accidentally gotten into an argument and left feeling really drained or upset, unexpectedly?

- c. It's worth taking care of yourself and the person or people you're talking to by taking a short break to breathe deeply before you begin.
- d. It can feel far away from your moral compass to give space to abhorrent views or racist paradigms. Holding space for that conversation, at this time in history, is the responsibility of those of us who are White, as best we can.
- e. And for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color in positions requiring these conversations, where you are also risking yourselves, preparation can be helpful to take care of yourself, decide on your boundaries in advance, set a plan, and build in some community care too.

What do you need? Your needs count.

- a. What ground rules do you need to feel ok with having the conversation? Is it possible to set those in advance with the person or people? Is it possible to agree on those at the beginning of the conversation?
 - i. You might say or write something like, "I'm looking forward to having a constructive conversation."
- b. Engaging in these conversations, especially with someone who has different views from you, can potentially be triggering, uncomfortable, and a lot of hard work. Reflect on what you need to do before, during and afterwards to care for yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - i. If you are not able to continue the conversation, you can end it by saying something like, "Thank you for having a conversation with me. I'm going to end the conversation for now. I will follow up with you afterwards."

We'll talk about the other items in the next few slides.

- What are some values you might share?
- Where is the person or people on a spectrum from violence to advocacy?
- What is your goal?

Slide 6: Your Story

Who is ready to share a story about a difficult conversation that resulted in a closer relationship or surprised you in some way?

Let's take a minute to think about your story. What story could you share with someone in your district bringing complaints about All Students Belong? What is your unique experience? Two volunteers?

Slide 7: Goals

2. What's your goal? What are you asking of them?

- a. Looking at this diagram - think about where the person or people likely are on the spectrum and where you think you can realistically move them in one conversation - including not much, but still making an ask.
 - i. If the person you're talking with is strongly opposed to your perspective, what's the most important part of the conversation to get through no matter what?
 1. Do you want to show them that they can ask questions about race and hate symbols safely?
 2. Do you want to show that you are a source of information?
 3. Do you want to invite them to question one of their viewpoints?
 4. It's common to feel defensive and want to protect our work and people who call for funding, but starting out in a defensive stance might be counterproductive. You never have to "tolerate" an opinion you disagree with or believe is harmful, but you can think about what responses might be best in advance and you can hold space in the interest of building the kind of relationship that could result in shifting perspectives, especially over time.
 5. Listen closely. Regardless of who you're talking to, we all appreciate the feeling that we are being heard, even while in disagreement.
 - ii. If the person you're talking with is on the fence or you think they are persuadable, maybe you can connect them with information and offer to be there for them with an open mind and heart as they explore more.
 - iii. If you're talking with someone who already supports what you're doing, you can move them into action for the benefit of the community, as well as to connect their support more deeply to the values you share. They may join you in vocally supporting All Students Belong!
 1. Knowing what you want to ask them in advance will help
 - iv. Looking at this diagram - you'll want to think about where the person or people likely are on the spectrum and where you think you can realistically move them in one conversation - including not much, but still making an ask.

Slide 8: Start of Conversation: Boundaries and Clarity (5 min)

1. Set time, tone, and purpose (in advance if you can).

- a. "I'm looking forward to a constructive conversation during our 30 minutes together. First, I'd like to hear more about your perspective, and I'll fill you in about how decisions are being made towards the end."
2. **Find a way to say, "I want to get to know you better..."**
3. **Ask for clarity**
"Help me understand better why you're saying..."
"Tell me more about your safety concerns when it comes to..."
4. **Use tone and non-verbal cues to your advantage**
People remember your tone more than your words after a conversation is over - one might even argue that your TONE carries your primary argument and the takeaway far more than your words, though both do matter.
5. Regulate before you communicate

Pause here and see if one or two people on the call have found other tactics especially helpful at the START of a conversation.

Slide 9: Flow of Conversation: Being Direct and Kind (10 min)

1. Charm and disarm - what can you do or say to surprise the person or people you're talking to? What positive things can you bring to bear? How can you relate or share more personally?
2. Be Direct and Be Kind. Show up as human.
3. Persuade or convince? Persuasion appeals to the emotions and to fear and to the imagination. Convincing requires a spreadsheet or some other rational device.
4. Focus on storytelling. Making direct arguments about why prejudices are bad or wrong is ineffective. The only thing that really works is a "non-judgemental exchange of narratives" which "durably reduced exclusionary attitudes for at least four months." (Vice)
5. Get personal rather than generalize. Storytelling works well here because you can put together emotion and empathy with data, logic, and values. Preparing your story in advance is one of the best things you can do!
 - a. As a bonus - When your point seems part of a narrative plotline, each part of what you're arguing is harder to pick on - they fit into something bigger.

Slide 10: General

Volunteer read:

Black Lives Matter means that a Black person's life or a Black student's life is just as valuable as anyone else's life. And Black students need to know they matter in our classrooms, just like all other students. All students belong.

Slide 11: Personal

Volunteer read:

I've had conversations with people who have lots of different perspectives. When I've talked to people who wear Black Lives Matter t-shirts, they want Black students to know they matter in our classrooms, just like all other students. They want to make sure all students belong.

Slide 12: Talking Points for Clarity on Policy about Hate Symbols

The Basics:

These are helpful when someone is looking for information, they're not meant to be corrective. Read in an informational tone.

1. The policy came about because students asked for the state to prohibit three hate symbols in schools and establish procedures for addressing bias incidents. I think the policy is important because of what I've seen happening...
2. My goal is to get to the underlying roots that drive students to use hate speech and symbols. We can have conversations like this one. We can make sure our curriculum speaks to the history of different symbols, including the history of Black Lives Matter as a declaration that's always been about increasing understanding, tolerance, and love, not hate. [Tell a story about something great a teacher or student has done...]

Slide 13: Talking Points on "Black Lives Matter"

Focusing on BLM because that's what is coming up the most.

1. As a principal/superintendent, it's my responsibility to make sure that all of our students are safe and welcome, and to be intentional about making sure that our most historically marginalized students, Black and Brown students, are being fully supported.
2. In our school/district, we use an equity lens as a guide for all of our decisions, and we encourage thoughtful debate when disagreements arise. We've seen Black Lives Matter enter into conversations in our schools as a statement about justice, which aligns with our commitment to authentically affirm the identities of students, families, and staff. [This means our students are able to...share data or a compelling change.]

Slide 14: Specific situations of teachers and students wearing or displaying BLM message

1. A classroom educator wearing a Black Lives Matter shirt is showing Black students that they are safe and have an adult they can talk to if they are bullied. [Educators/teachers in our school district are doing amazing work to make sure all students feel welcome...]
2. While Black Lives Matter may be controversial for some members of the community, it is not associated with a specific candidate or political campaign. It is not a violation of state policy for staff or students to have BLM-branded items, such as clothing or email signatures.

You can say it's not political, but some people might not respond well given protests happening and during political turmoil, but you can make the distinction between politics and humanity and make it clear that BLM isn't supporting a political figure or party, partisan.

It's ok to say "justice" but if you say "social justice" certain people may immediately go into the mindset of you being a "social justice warrior" (ie. their enemy or opponent).

Slide 15: Talking Points: Symbols of Hate vs. Love

1. In my time as a superintendent/principal, I've seen a big difference between symbols that promote hate and symbols that promote love/tolerance. I hear directly from students that they don't want to be excluded, feel less than other kids, or be bullied....
2. I have been asking myself a lot, "What side of history will our district/school end up on?" Are we going to say, "Yes, we affirm the dignity and humanity of Black people when it's been the opposite for centuries." The decisions that are coming up right now are never easy, but I believe...

Slide 16: End of Conversation: A Graceful, Yet Firm Exit (5 min)

I'm so glad you came to me with your concern.

It means a lot that you're willing to be direct with me and talk face-to-face...

You've been direct with me, and I'll be direct with you too...

Decisions in our school/district are made by...

We always prohibit violence and bullying, no matter the topic...

Thank you for having a conversation with me. I need to end our time together for now...

I'd be happy to follow up with you [in what way...]

1. I'm so glad you came to me with your concern. You've been direct with me, and I'll be direct with you too. Decisions to prohibit hate symbols are made carefully and through an equity lens. Often, it's a student or group of students who have been seriously harmed who come forward and ask for this to happen. I don't mean they just saw a Confederate flag, I mean continuously harassed, bullied, and threatened.
2. Also, to be clear. Black Lives Matter is not currently on the table to be prohibited in our school or district. But, I will be here for conversations with you and everyone in our school/district community to find the best path forward. For me, that path has to be towards care for each other, not hate, for the sake of our students.
3. We always prohibit violence and bullying, no matter the topic, even if it's between two individuals with no symbols involved at all.
4. I appreciate that we could discuss this decision together, and I appreciated hearing more about your experiences.
5. Thank you for having a conversation with me. I need to end our time together for now...
6. I'd be happy to follow up with you [in what way...]

Slide 17: Hearing from You: What tactics work in your experience?(10 min)

Additions from Group:

If a parent or student says something on Zoom:

- Acknowledge and write it down.
- Say, "I need to move on with the lesson, but I'd like to follow up with you later."
- Bring Admin to conversation.

Integrate student voices, perspectives and stories when possible & appropriate.

More talking points:

"Let's figure this out together..."

We recognize the historical context of what it means to be Black in the United States, and in Oregon, and that we actively make decisions that take us in the opposite direction, towards understanding and tolerance, especially for children in our educational systems.

An educator who wears a BLM shirt to a Zoom class wants to look back at their actions in this critical time and feel proud that they stood up for students who've been excluded and put down. This is about humanity, not politics.

I think we all have symbols we don't agree with or that don't make us feel comfortable. I understand you might disagree with the teacher/slogan, and I'm wondering what you fear will happen? How is it making you feel unsafe? Do you think the slogan means people want to commit violence against White people that the hate symbols in question, including the Confederate Flag, contain against people of color, especially Black people.

A statement like "Black Lives Matter" arises when a group without power (in this case, Black people) are actively and bravely objecting to the fact that another group has oppressive power over them (in the U.S. and in Oregon, that is White people).

For years, the use of these specific symbols have created atmospheres of fear, intimidation, even violence toward a multitude of students and staff in Oregon's public schools. By explicitly prohibiting these symbols, we honor the dignity of all students, families and staff by ensuring a high quality educational experience and environment free from discrimination and harassment.