

Multicultural Guidelines for Communicating Across Difference¹

Try things on

- **Try on** each other's ideas, feelings, and ways of doing things for the purpose of greater understanding. Keep what you like and let go of the rest at the end of each interaction, discussion, session.

It's OK to disagree

- **It's okay to disagree and NOT okay to blame, shame, or attack ourselves or others because** of our differences. 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.

"I" statements work!

- Begin by **talking about your own experience**. It is helpful to make "I" statements when speaking about your experience, rather than saying "you", "we," or "someone." When you intend to refer to others, be specific about them by name or group. This invites and creates space for multiple perspectives to be shared especially when they are different than yours.

Intent and impact matter

- Be aware that **your good intentions may have a negative impact**, especially across racial, gender, or other cultural differences. Be open to hearing the impact of your statement.

Think both/and

- Look for ways to **fit ideas together** and not set up an "either/or" process or a competition between ideas. Look for the existence of many truths from the perspectives of the many cultural backgrounds involved or that you are serving.

Process and Content

- **Notice both process and content** during work sessions. Content is what we say, while process is how and why we say or do something and how the group reacts. Notice who is active and who is not, who is interested and who is not, and ask about it.

Confidentiality

- **Confidentiality** with regard to personal sharing is important. Allow others to tell their own stories. Ask first to see if an individual wants to follow up on the initial conversation. Do not use any information shared negatively toward a progress report or against a supervisor.

It's OK to be uncomfortable

- **Learning from uncomfortable moments** is an important part of this process, so pay attention to your feelings.

¹ Adapted from the Multicultural Tool created by VISIONS, Inc.—added info by Amy Cipolla-Stickles. VISIONS, Inc. is a nonprofit training and consulting enterprise providing a variety of services that support organizations, communities, and individuals as they continue to clarify their diversity-related goals and engage in a dynamic process of multicultural development. VISIONS, Inc. was established in 1984 as a nonprofit, educational organization. Today it is a 501(c)(3) entity with offices in Roxbury, Massachusetts and Rocky Mount, North Carolina and is supported by a team of consultants around the United States and abroad. www.visions-inc.org