

# Creating a Safe Space: Establishing Ground Rules

## Why It Matters

We aim to establish clear and straightforward ground rules to create a safe space for sharing your thoughts and feelings about discussion topics. Below, your group has been provided a list of suggested ground rules for your team to consider. Remember that how you perceive your cultural background may influence the proposed ground rules.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Read the following rules as a group.
2. **As a team, discuss which rules are most important for creating and establishing meaningful engagement while maintaining a safe environment.** You may edit or adjust or write new rules your team creates.
3. Protect the safety and effectiveness of the team environment by encouraging respectful and inclusive dialogue and addressing issues as they arise. If you need additional support, please reach out to your college's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion officer (names and contact information are available on Carmen).

## Suggested Rules

1. We agree to approach discussions concerning people from cultures and backgrounds different than our own with **humility**.
2. Do not speak for others in your demographic or cultural group. We want to know your personal viewpoint or perspective about discussion topics. For example, "I" support equal pay for equal work.
3. **Ask to understand.** Don't assume that you know about another student's thoughts, perspective, or perceived intent based on group identity or stereotype.
4. We agree to **respectfully listen** and provide feedback without hostility in response to disagreement. We aim to create opportunities to learn from the diversity of ideas shared.
5. **Criticism should be directed at the idea and not the student.** This will help facilitate discussion about areas of disagreement and make it less likely that a student's feelings will be hurt.
6. We recognize that a group member may unintentionally make an unartful, offensive statement. **An apology is an excellent place** to start upon recognition of this miscommunication. When an apology is received, we'll do our best to make it a point of education, not a point of contention. **Forgiveness is powerful.**
7. Discussions during our small group sessions are **confidential** and should not be shared with others outside this group. However, in the rare event of a threat directly harming oneself or

others, communication outside the group involving appropriate professional intervention is likely.

8. Verbal, electronic, and social media communication, e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, must maintain **confidentiality, a respectful tone, and guard against disparaging remarks** against persons or groups.
9. Discussions within the small group will focus on the topic with **only one person speaking at a time**. Distractions caused by side conversations will not be permitted.
10. All small group members agree **to contribute and take responsibility** for the success of this learning opportunity. If improvements are needed, we'll thoughtfully engage other group members, including the facilitator, to enact helpful changes.
11. **Do not belittle or disparage others through the use of sarcasm or other otherwise based on group identity**, e.g., Disability, weight, immigrant, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation/gender identity (SO/GI), religion, limited English proficiency (LEP), or socioeconomic status. This includes **verbal, electronic, or social media communication** within or outside the group meeting.
12. Establish an **"ouch list"** to provide an outlet for students when something hurtful is stated during the discussion. Hurtful statements should be posted on a visible surface, such as a designated whiteboard or wall. The facilitator will help the group decide when and how best to respond to the hurtful statement.
13. Questions from all group members are encouraged, and we consider all questions as **good** for learning and exploration.
14. To provide opportunities for everyone to contribute to the discussion, please limit exchanges between two people to no more than three exchanges.
15. We will reach an agreement on how best to address unexcused tardiness or when a student has to leave a small group session before it ends.

## References

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- Sorcinelli M. (1994) Dealing with troublesome behavior in the classroom. In Handbook of College Teaching, ed. K. Prichard and R. Sawyer, 365-73. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. Harvard University. Teaching Racially Diverse College Classrooms.
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