

Guidelines for Cross Cultural Conversation

These guidelines from VISIONS, Inc. a diversity, equity and inclusion organization, help to create the environment where differences of all kinds (age, race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) can be recognized, understood, appreciated and utilized as strengths. “Try these on” in all your interactions at home, work, church, etc. not only in your discussion group or book study.

1. ***Try On.***

This is an invitation to be open to ideas, thinking and behavior that may be new and different for you. This is about moving closer to someone else’s world.

2. ***It’s OK to disagree. It’s not OK to attack, shame or blame yourself or others.***

“Trying on” doesn’t mean the same thing as agreement. Not looking for a melting pot – trying to make fruit salad. Let go of the need to think like everyone else. What you think matters and what someone else thinks matters. It’s possible to disagree and recognize your own and the other person’s humanity and dignity.

3. ***Practice self-focus.***

Use “I” statements. Speak for yourself. For example, instead of saying, “White people need to stop rushing to judgment and start rushing to justice.” Try on saying this with self-focus, for example: “I’m wondering what a just response to police brutality protests looks like for me. Lately my first reaction has been to criticize the protestors.” Also, practicing self-focus is about paying attention to how you are feeling and reacting, especially when you feel the most uncomfortable. Pay attention to the message your feelings are telling you about your needs. Refer to the “feeling wheel” for help identifying your core feelings of “sad, mad, scared, joyful, peaceful, powerful.” And refer to the “feelings as messengers” tool.

4. ***Practice both/and thinking.***

The invitation is to try on using the word “and” instead of “but” and “either/or.” Practice holding two things together that seem like they don’t belong together. This makes room at the table for everyone. All realities and experiences are valuable. Be open to the possibility we can both be “right.” Examples of this might be holding both joy and sorrow together. Recognizing public protest as both disruptive and constructive, as both uncomfortable and a means of grace. Recognizing that Christian discipleship involves both faith and action, soul and body, personal and community transformation.

5. ***Notice process and content.***

Process is about “how” things are said and done. Content is about “what” is said and done. This is an invitation to notice power differences. Notice whose voice is missing, who is speaking, who is present, who is at the table, who is not speaking, who is not present, who is not at the table, who determines the process, how does the process include and exclude people? The goal is to both “make space (for others) and take space (for yourself).”

6. ***Notice intent and impact.***

There is often a difference between someone's intent and the impact of their behavior. The invitation is to share about the impact of words and actions using self-focus while asking about intent. If you are hurt, consider the intent of the person who hurt you. If you hurt someone, consider how what you said/did impacted them. We encourage you to share about the impact and ask about the intent

7. ***Maintain Confidentiality.***

We agree to tell our own story, not someone else's story unless you get their permission. This helps to grow trust. Be willing to accept "no for now" from someone when you ask to share their story.