

Guidelines for Social Justice Conversations and Personal Growth – Listen Up! (WLA, November 2017)

This collection of guidelines, or norms, for discussion was gathered from many sources, starting with Peggy Erickson's adaptations of Glenn Singleton. Thinking carefully about guidelines and genuinely trying to understand them is valuable personal work. The guidelines are really what we are trying to learn. Sources are listed at the end. ~Carrie Bowman, Teen Services Librarian, Mercer Island Library, KCLS, cbowman@kcls.org

1. Stay Engaged and Listen to Understand

- Try to stay present in the room and pay attention to what causes you to shut down.
- Value the opportunity to listen. Everything is an offer, a chance to learn.
- Not everyone communicates in the same way. These conversations bring up emotions from past and present experiences. Try to allow others to experience emotion without shutting down. Don't take what people say personally and try to understand where another person is coming from.
- Be careful not to compare your experience with another person's experience, even internally. This can invalidate or minimize the experiences of others.

2. Speak Your Truth

- Remember that people are at different places with this work. Meet people where they are. In order to grow, it's important that people are comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.
- There are multiple truths and they all have value. Avoid generalizing and speak for yourself.
- Own your intentions and impacts. Respect others' experiences and feelings by taking responsibility for the effects of your words. Resist the need to explain. On the other side, if you have a strong reaction to something, let the group know and be open to dialogue. (AWARE-LA)
- Share the air space and give others a chance to speak. Don't interrupt. If you are not inclined to speak, give it a try.
- "You can't get to a good place in a bad way." Speak with the goal of new learning. Ask questions to clarify and gain understanding. Find ways to respectfully challenge others and be open to challenges to your own views.

3. Experience Discomfort – "Be comfortable with being uncomfortable"

- If you are not feeling any discomfort, you may not be fully engaged. (See #1)
- Allow yourself to be vulnerable. Meaningful learning can occur when we take risks.
- Sometimes we confuse safety and comfort. Safe conversations may still be uncomfortable.
- Stay present with the emotion and pain of others, and your own discomfort, as you listen.

4. Expect and Accept Non-closure

- Trust the process. Let go of control. Social justice work is difficult and ongoing. Having difficult conversations again and again fosters awareness and leads to change
- Be open to confusion. Sometimes you will leave a discussion with more questions than answers.

5. No Fixing

- Don't assume that you know best, or that you can help a person process their pain or discomfort. Trust that people have what they need to take their own path to learning and growth.
- If someone points out the impact of what you said or did, try not to explain or rationalize it. Sit with the impact and recognize that it is more important than your intentions.
- If you find yourself wanting to change or fix someone, explore what might be coming up about your own identity.
- Do your own work. Know yourself. Consider your biases and confusions around an issue. What are your sources of information and why do you value them? How have your experiences influenced you? Be open to mistakes, accept that you might be wrong, and be willing to change.

6. Appreciate and Acknowledge what people say

- Even when you do not respond directly or specifically, thank others who have spoken.

7. Confidentiality – Share the message, not the messenger

Sources

Thanks to Peggi Erickson for her Conversations on Racism (contact Peggi at peggi.erickson@comcast.net)

Glenn Singleton's Courageous Conversations <https://courageousconversation.com/about/>

Cultures Connecting <http://culturesconnecting.com/>

AWARE-LA (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-Los Angeles) <https://www.awarela.org/>

Center for Ethical Leadership, Peacemaking and Healing Initiative <http://www.ethicalleadership.org/peacemaking-circles.html>

Cheryl Gould, Fully Engaged Libraries <http://www.fullyengagedlibraries.com/>

Teaching Tolerance: "Civil Discourse in the Classroom" <http://www.tolerance.org/publication/chapter-4-teaching-controversy>

PBS: Slavery by Another Name – Ten Tips for Facilitating Classroom Discussions on Sensitive Topics
http://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf

Resources for Personal Learning – Social Justice Conversations in the Library: Listen Up! Let’s Break It Down WLA Tacoma, November 3, 2017 – in no particular order and not exhaustive! ~ just a place to start ~

Carrie Bowman, Teen Services Librarian, Mercer Island Library, KCLS, cbowman@kcls.org

Organizations

The People’s Institute Northwest for Survival and Beyond - <http://www.pinwseattle.org/>

-Check out their workshops

-Youth Undoing Institutional Racism and the Freedom School are associated with PINW

Cultures Connecting - <http://culturesconnecting.com/>

-Check out their workshops and their resources page

El Centro de la Raza - <http://www.elcentrodelaraza.org/>

Seattle Human Rights Commission - <https://www.seattle.gov/humanrights>

Seattle Young People’s Project - <http://sypp.org/>

World Trust (source of *Cracking the Codes* and *Healing Justice*, but CtC can be found on YouTube) -

<http://world-trust.org/>

Information and Resources for Librarians and Educators (see also Resources at the end of Guidelines)

For valuable suggestions about how to approach discussions on race, social justice, and equity, check out Amita Lonial’s YALSA webinar on YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUxhIMuElHM&feature=youtu.be>

Teaching Tolerance (Southern Poverty Law Center) - <http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

New York Times blog, The Learning Network (for example, search <25 mini films for exploring> to get some films for leading discussions with students and possibly adults:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/learning/lesson-plans/25-mini-films-for-exploring-race-bias-and-identity-with-students.html? r=0>

Teaching for Change - <http://www.teachingforchange.org>

Zinn Education Project - <https://zinnedproject.org/>

Multicultural Pavilion (an EdChange project) - <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

Books, Articles, and Videos – compiled by a white woman trying to educate herself

Between the World and Me and *We Were Eight Years in Power – an American Tragedy* (Ta-Nehisi Coates)

The Color of Law – the Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America (Richard Rothstein)

Dog Whistle Politics – How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class (Ian Haney-López)

Evicted – Poverty and Profit in the American City (Matthew Desmond)

The Forgotten Queens of Islam (Fatima Mernissi)

Hillbilly Elegy – a Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis (JD Vance)

Just Mercy (Bryan Stevenson) – try the audio book, the author reads

The New Jim Crow – Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (Michelle Alexander)

Notes of a Native Son (and other works) (James Baldwin)

A People’s History of the United States (Howard Zinn)

Racism Without Racists – Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva)

Roll, Jordan, Roll – the World the Slaves Made (Eugene D. Genovese)

The Souls of Black Folk (W.E.B. Du Bois)

Stamped from the Beginning – the Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America (Ibram X. Kendi)

Tears We Cannot Stop – a Sermon to White America (Michael Eric Dyson) – try the audio book, the author reads

The Third Reconstruction – Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement (William J. Barber II)

We Gon' Be Alright – Notes on Race and Resegregation (Jeff Chang)
Whistling Vivaldi – How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do (Clyde M. Steele)
White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide (Carol Anderson)

How to Argue Fairly and Without Rancor

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/health/how-to-argue-fairly-and-without-rancor-hello-thanksgiving.html?_r=1

Bill Moyers - [How Our Brains Perceive Race | BillMoyers.com](#)

Harvard's Project Implicit - <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

Take the Project Implicit Test to check implicit bias in 14 areas, including race and sexuality
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

“Under Our Skin: What do we mean when we talk about race?” (*Seattle Times*)

<https://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/under-our-skin/#>

Clint Smith's TED Talk on “The Danger of Silence”:

https://www.ted.com/talks/clint_smith_the_danger_of_silence?language=en

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story”:

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Extras for White Folks

“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (Peggy McIntosh):

<https://www.csusm.edu/sjs/documents/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf>

A 2014 article in *The New Yorker* gives good background on Peggy:

<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-origins-of-privilege>

“Why Talk About Whiteness?”

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-53-summer-2016/feature/why-talk-about-whiteness>

What Does It Mean to be White? (Robin DiAngelo)

“White Fragility” (Robin DiAngelo):

<https://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/ijcp/article/view/249/116> and also:

<https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-why-its-so-hard-to-talk-to-white-people-about-racism-twlm/>

Raising Race Questions: Whiteness and Inquiry in Education (Ali Michael)

“What White Children Need to Know About Race” (Ali Michael and Eleonora Bartoli):

<http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/What-White-Children-Need-to-Know-About-Race.aspx>

“Curriculum for White Americans” (Jon Greenburg, Seattle educator):

<http://citizenshipandsocialjustice.com/2015/07/10/curriculum-for-white-americans-to-educate-themselves-on-race-and-racism/>

“10 Ways White Liberals Perpetuate Racism”

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/10/white-liberals-perpetuate-racism/>

“I, Racist” (John Metta):

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-metta/i-racist_b_7770652.html

AWARE-LA (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere, Los Angeles) – great resources

<https://www.awarela.org/>

TIPS for Success

“Social Justice Conversations – Listen Up!” (WLA Libraries Through the Looking Glass, Nov 3, 2017)

~Carrie Bowman, Teen Services Librarian, Mercer Island Library, KCLS, cbowman@kcls.org

1 – Set Goals, not Expectations / Make it Local

There is no “best” or “correct” approach to community conversations. Develop goals for discussions with input from the members of the community (and/or your intended audience). Find out what the audience wants to know. Expect the goals to change and be willing to compromise. Sometimes people just want to be heard, or to listen. Expect lack of closure.

*Make it local with associated opportunities for donating, participating, or listening. Focus on what people can do at home or in their community to “be part of the solution.”

*Connect to current or local events, people, or significant dates when possible.

*Use local newspapers, newsletters, Facebook pages, Nextdoor, and online discussion groups to publicize events. Find people to write about the events—youth are wonderful for this.

*Plan events aimed at different ages to broaden the appeal of the topics. When planning a series of events, include different types of events (i.e., film, panel, presenter—many other possibilities).

2 – Panels and Panelists

If you have a panel of people who are telling their stories, then someone who has a similar perspective is best as a moderator. If you have a panel of experts, choose a moderator who knows the community. It is less important for the moderator to know the subject in this case. Teens are great for the role! Moderators need to spend time getting to know the panelists’ points of view and finding out what community members want to know. Send panelists the questions in advance so that they are prepared.

*Invite each panelist individually. Encourage but don’t pressure people to participate.

*Encouraging moderators and panelists (especially students) to include personal stories adds depth and meaning to events and helps make them relevant. At the same time, be cognizant that telling personal stories may reintroduce trauma and cause harm to both panelists and audience members. Be sensitive about asking people to become vulnerable and remember that their health and safety are more important than the event.

*Phone conversations with the panelists are fine for becoming familiar with their areas of interest or expertise and for letting them know what the goals of the discussion are. Better yet, meetings that include panelists, members of the intended audience, and the moderator are great for sharing perspectives, framing events, and creating questions for panel.

*An alternative to creating questions for a panel is to assign topics (and time limits) to the panelists and then give the audience a chance to ask questions.

*Create a panelist bio sheet so that minimal time is spent hearing the panelists talk about themselves. This keeps the focus on the issues and the questions. Include URLs for their websites and contact information (with their permission).

*Give the panelists name tags. Provide a table for them and make name tents.

*Thank the panelists in writing.

3 – Establish Relationships with Community Organizations, Schools, and PTSAs

Developing relationships takes time and they require work to sustain. Teen-organized events take more time to set up than events organized by librarians! In my experience, community groups, churches, teachers, and parent groups are thrilled when teens step up to educate and advocate and the adults really want to support teen efforts.

*Many organizations have outreach budgets and will happily participate. Ask about what they do, whether they have volunteer opportunities, and how the organization addresses the issues of interest.

*Having school buy-in is really helpful. If students can make a connection between the event and subjects in their curriculum, more students may attend. Members of my Teen Advisory Board secured credit for attendance (and written reflections) for many of our events.

*Working with the school curriculum, and including teachers in discussions about events, can lead to financial support for events (i.e., by purchasing screening rights, offering a venue).

4 – Film Licenses

Licenses to show independent films to the public vary in cost from zero to \$400, in my experience. Try contacting the producer! The license conditions vary, too, from one-time showings to life-time rights. Many films licenses include discussion materials and tips for organizing events. There are inexpensive, short-term streaming licenses available. Two companies I've used are ro*co films <http://www.rocofilms.com/> and the Media Education Foundation <http://www.mediaed.org/>.

5 – Discussion Formats

“Conversations are better than overly facilitated lectures by representatives from organizations [who can dominate, as we learned during one event], especially for films/topics that are controversial, or for which there is a lot of new and intense information. It seems best to have a discussion that draws out the audience rather than one in which they are mostly listening.” (Teen Advisory Board member, Mercer Island Library, KCLS)

*Small groups allow more intimate conversations to occur and give more people a chance to speak. Groups larger than five or six experience fewer of these advantages.

*Vary your strategy with small group discussions: give all or some groups the same question; give each group a different question; create questions that are related or follow from one another; give groups different parts of a task or question and then pull it together during a report-back.

*Allow time for everyone to respond/add to each group's report-back for a richer discussion.

*Written reflections are a variation to try as a group or individual activity.

*In very large groups (over 50), it can be helpful to ask people to submit questions on note cards (i.e., during a panel discussion). This gives people who are reluctant or who want to remain anonymous a chance to speak; may encourage people holding a minority view to speak up; allows questions to be sorted and consolidated by topic and answered together; and prevents people from “taking over the mic.” A mic can also be provided—you be the judge. It depends on audience size and composition and on the topic.

*For more sensitive topics, follow-up events led by experts (including panelists) allow people to continue the conversation in more depth. Panelists may be willing to participate.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? I'm all ears! Please contact me at cbowman@kcls.org

Films, speakers/panelists, collaborating organizations / Mercer Island Library, KCLS

This is a chronological list of Library programs in the Mercer Island community, 2013-2017.

What KCLS provides: librarian time, graphics support, online publicity support, film licensing support

What the Friends of the Mercer Island Library provide: food, supplies, fees for presenters, film licenses if needed

What the Teen Advisory Board (TAB) provides: ideas, organization and planning, facilitation, framing and questions for the event, help coordinating with the high school curriculum

What Mercer Island High School PTSA provides: venue support, film licensing support, publicity support

What Mercer Island School District provides: venue support, film licensing support, professional support

What the City of Mercer Island provides: professional support, publicity support

What community groups and churches provide: venue support, ideas and planning, publicity support

1. [A Place at the Table](#) (see also [takepart](#))

representatives from local food bank, [Teen Feed/Seattle](#)
sponsored by KCLS, Friends, Reel Time (TAB-created logo)

2. [The Harvest](#)

[The Dream is Now](#) (YouTube)

representatives from Washington Dream Act Coalition, [Casa Latina/Seattle](#), University of Washington - undocumented UW student

sponsored by KCLS, Friends, Reel Time (TAB)

3. "Conversations About Race and Social Justice" (2 events)

[Dark Girls](#)

[A Girl Like Me](#)

Cracking the Codes (sections available on YouTube)

sponsored by KCLS, Friends, TAB (students planned and moderated both events)

4. [Fixing Juvie Justice](#) (see also [Pacific Islanders in Communications](#))

representative from No New Jim Crow Coalition/Seattle moderated (find them on Facebook) with contributions from TAB

sponsored by KCLS, Friends, Pacific Islanders in Communications (donated the film)

5. "Conversations for Strong Communities" (3 events)

"Islam: What Do You Want to Know?" (panel, student organized and moderated)

"Why We Need to Talk About Racism" (workshop, paid presenter)

"Who Are We?" (panel and discussion about stereotypes, student moderator)

community collaboration: high school student and librarian organized and moderated;

[Stanley Ann Dunham Scholarship Fund](#); Peggi Erickson presented the workshop (Bainbridge Island resident, find her on Facebook); community members, high school students, and high school staff served as panelists; 2 area churches collaborated with venues

sponsored by KCLS, Friends, Stanley Ann Dunham Scholarship Fund, TAB

6. Sexual assault and toxic masculinity (2 events - 2 movies with panel discussions afterward)

[*The Hunting Ground*](#)

[*Tough Guise 2*](#)

panelists included high school and school district staff; Mercer Island Police Department

School Resource Officer; professional counselors;

representatives from [King County Sexual Assault Resource Center](#), [LIFEWIRE](#), and

[Organization for Prostitution Survivors/Seattle](#);

student [Peer Health Educators from University of Washington](#);

Title IX Investigator from UW

sponsored by KCLS, Mercer Island High School PTSA, Mercer Island School District

7. “What’s the Buzz About Bees?” (2 events)

A World Without Bees (documentary about colony collapse disorder) – student filmed and produced

“Give Bees a Chance” (mason bee program, presented by a Master Gardener)

representatives from Puget Sound Bee Keepers Association (volunteers) and King County Master

Gardener (paid presenter)

sponsored by KCLS and Friends

8. “Faces Behind the Ban – Perspectives from Six Nations” (panel discussion, student organized and moderated)

collaboration with local church on venue; local **artist donated** time and artwork for display

sponsored by KCLS, Friends