

# Approaches to Facilitating Difficult or Charged Conversations

As we get started:

- Write in the chat: “What brings you to this conversation today?”
- We also encourage you, if time permits, to call to mind a specific difficult / challenging conversation where you were facilitating

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**HILT CONFERENCE**  
Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching



# **A Few Quick Polls**

# Introductions



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# Motivating Questions



- How do we create valuable opportunities to push and challenge our students?
- How can we facilitate learning and mitigate harm in moments of conflict?
- What changes if these conversations are happening in the online space?

# Session Agenda



- Getting started (~10 min)
- Frameworks and strategies (~15 min)
- Case study (~30 min)
- Wrapping up (~5 min)

# Norms: Courageous Conversations + 1



1. Stay engaged
2. Experience discomfort
3. Expect and accept non-closure
4. Confidentiality

\* Norms 1-3 come from *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (Singleton and Linton, 2006)



# **Frameworks and Strategies**

# “Critical Conversations” Framework



From Teaching Tolerance’s “Let’s Talk” guide to critical conversations:

- Doing Self Work
- Building Community and Discussion Routines
- Planning the conversation
- **Facilitating the Conversation [our focus today!]**





# “Reflective Action Facilitation Framework”



During the Conversation:

1. Name and frame the incident
2. Engage with curiosity and/or redirection
3. Go deeper with reflection and/or response
4. Provide closure and name next steps

*NOTE: You may not choose to use all of the steps in each incident that you address. Practice making choices about which steps to use and when!*



# **Case Study**

# Setting up the small-group case discussion



- Case-let that puts you in the shoes of the professor and invites you to apply the “Reflective Action Facilitation” Framework
- Groups of 4-5, with facilitators popping in to listen
- Spend approximately half the time discussing the “analysis” questions and about half discussing the “action” questions

# Setting up the small-group case discussion



- Take a few minutes to read page 2 (case + discussion instructions) of the handout we are distributing.
- Please type any clarifying questions in the chat.
- As you are discussing, refer to the “Reflective Action Facilitation” Framework on page 1 of the handout to inform your thinking.
- Handout: [bit.ly/HILT\\_DifCon](https://bit.ly/HILT_DifCon)

# Case study debrief



- Applying the “Reflective Action Facilitation” framework
  - Name and frame the incident
  - Engage with curiosity and/or redirection
  - Go deeper with reflection and/or response
  - Provide closure and name next steps
- Takeaways from breakout sessions
- Online considerations



# Wrapping Up

# Wrapping Up: Your Takeaways



Please write in the chat:

**What is one key learning that you're walking away with?**

# Wrapping Up: Summary & Resources



## Planning and Facilitating Difficult Conversation

- Doing Self Work
- Building Community and Discussion Routines
- Planning the conversation
- **Facilitating the Conversation**
  - **Name and frame the incident**
  - **Engage with curiosity and/or redirection**
  - **Go deeper with reflection and/or response**
  - **Provide closure and name next steps**

**Resources...**



# Thank you!

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