

Principle 3: Attention to safety

So, we've learnt that

- ✓ an awareness of power and privileges in the room **helps you to create conditions for marginalised voices to be amplified** and **recognise and respond** to inappropriate behaviour!
- ✓ integrating care practices into your conversation **provides important space for healing** and helps **sustain our movements!**

But how do we have conversations about sensitive topics that run the risk of triggering anxiety or reminding participants of harmful past experiences?

A topic is sensitive when:

- It relates to a participant's past experiences or the experiences of people close to them
- It requires a participant to take a political stance
- It speaks to participants' personal values
- It relates to a current, evolving political or social moment in our context
- It confronts the collective hurt experienced by certain communities, be they on religious, racial, ethnic, gendered, ability-related, age-related, sexual orientation, or other identity-related grounds.

Things to consider

Here are three points to take into consideration when talking about a sensitive issue:

1. We've learnt that **all participants do not hold the same level of privilege, self awareness or positionality**. Different topics may evoke different responses from different individuals, depending on their personal experiences. While some topics may simply be intellectual explorations for some, those same topics can be emotionally triggering for others.
2. **Trigger warnings are important**. They allow those who are sensitive to subjects of discrimination and violence to prepare themselves for discussing them, and better manage their reactions.
3. **Do not pressurise someone to talk about their experiences**. Forcing a participant to talk about a sensitive event is making them re-live that experience and all the negative emotions that come with it. Understand that some participants are not ready, or

simply may not be willing, to speak openly about their past experiences.

Prepare in advance!

If you anticipate your conversation will cover sensitive topics, you can put precautions in place to support you in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of participants during your event. Here are some ways to prepare:

- **Have a mental health professional present** who can attend to participants that have been triggered
- Have a conversation with participants at the start of the event about some of the things that make them feel **safe, comfortable and welcome** in a space with a diversity of participants. Write them down and place them where they are easily visible to all participants during the conversation.
- **Inform** your participants at the start of the conversation of some of the topics that will be covered and **explain the importance of trigger warnings** from the beginning.

Steps to take when someone feels triggered

Even with the best of preparations, sometimes precautions are not effective, since triggers are very specific to each individual. Here are some steps you can take to support someone feeling triggered:

- **Recognise** that your content could be hurtful to someone.
- **Apologise** for saying something that hurt the person. Remember, the apology is about the person who has been hurt, and not about you. **Avoid justifying or defending your words or actions and be sincere about your apology.** It is not personal.
- **Empathise** by trying to understand why the participant may be hurt. You can do this by actively listening to the person who is feeling triggered.
- **Rectify** by avoiding a repetition of the specific trigger when continuing the discussion.
- **Be open** to participants leaving the conversation if they feel uncomfortable, or if they need some space.

Revision #2

Created 15 June 2022 14:50:06 by Florie Dumas-Kemp

Updated 15 June 2022 18:22:16 by Florie Dumas-Kemp