

How to facilitate a dialogue.

Managing Hot Topics in and out of the classroom

Universities are, ideally, places where we encourage each other to expand and challenge our thinking.

Why, then, is it so hard to understand another person.

Our urge to BLAME interferes with our ability to listen authentically.

It is natural to want to identify the "bad guy" when a conflict erupts. Focusing on blame distracts us from listening and understanding complex problems.

What are the thoughts that may bubble up during a "hot" conversation?

- I'm not safe here.
- My opinion doesn't matter.
- I'm being attacked.
- People don't take me seriously.
- I have no allies in this conversation.

What are some of the feelings?

- I feel furious.
- I feel rejected.
- I feel scared.
- I feel alone.

Reference:

Acknowledge the conflict.

- "I'm noticing that people are angry. Let's set some ground rules for how we want to talk to each other."
- "This discussion is important. Sounds like we need to change the focus of our plan for today." **OR**
- "This discussion is important, but I'm aware that we have a lot to cover [before the exam, in this meeting]. Let's table this conversation until next week."

Listen authentically.

- "I'm curious about your point of view. Tell me more."
- "Help me understand where you're coming from."
- "It sounds like you disagree with that person because...[paraphrase for clarity]."

Validate feelings.

- "I can sense that this topic is really emotional, even distressing for you."
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