

# Constructive Candid Conversations



**“At its best, conversation is  
a potent force for good.  
But when it goes wrong,  
that force can be  
equally damaging, equally harmful.”**

***We Need to Talk: How to Have Conversations that Matter***  
**by Celeste Headlee**



**“After watching so many people have so many conversations about race that went nowhere – or worse, that caused real harm... I wanted people to... talk about race more effectively, and with more kindness.”**

*So you want to talk about race*

**by Ijeoma Oluo**



**“Inclusive conversations are sorely needed if we, as humans, are going to figure out how to share the planet in ways that foster peace and mutual understanding rather than hate, polarization, and divisiveness.”**

*Inclusive Conversations: Fostering Equity, Empathy, and Belonging Across Differences*  
by Mary-Frances Winters

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace





# Constructive Candid Conversations

*dialogue that is both open and productive*

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace



	Calling Out	Calling In
WHAT	Denouncing harmful words or behavior	Invitation to discuss harmful words or behavior
WHEN	Urgent need to prevent further harm and express disagreement	Safety is not threatened
	Severe power imbalance that makes conversation unlikely or unsafe	Relationship with potential for influence
	Previous unsuccessful attempts for conversation	Evidence of openness to conversation and learning

“Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In” by Dr. Rebecca Eunmi Haslam, Seed the Way, LLC

“Calling In and Calling Out Guide,” Harvard Diversity Inclusion & Belonging

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**Listen** to understand, not to judge or answer

Attention

Questions

Empathy



**Respond** without attacking

Common value or belief

Different perspective or Personal experience

Request

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# Empathy

sympathy

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace





# Empathy

~~sympathy~~

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace



# Empathy ≠ sympathy



“You think *that’s* bad...”

“At least it’s not...”

“Everything happens for a reason.”

“What you need to do now is...”

“I understand.”

# Empathy ≠ sympathy



“I can’t imagine...”

“Thank you for sharing this  
with me.”

“I don’t know why...”

“What do you want right  
now?”

“What I’m hearing is...”

“You think *that’s* bad...”

“At least it’s not...”

“Everything happens for  
a reason.”

“What you need to do  
now is...”

“I understand.”



# Empathy

projection

~~sympathy~~

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace





# Empathy

~~prejudice~~

~~sympathy~~

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace





**Empathy**

*imagination*

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace





# Empathy *imagination*

how another person is experiencing a situation

*prejudice* → acceptance, *inequity* → justice, *hostility* → peace



# Practice

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Aline is a new member of a project management team and is the only female on the team. Aline's performance is competent to very good and is meeting deadlines. Her supervisor, Ken, frequently describes ways she could do better. After about 4 months Aline tells Ken she thinks he's critiquing her harshly because she's female. Ken says he wants to be sure she can do the work.

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