



**Western**  
Equity, Diversity  
& Inclusion



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# GUIDE FOR COURAGEOUS AND RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapéewak Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers.

We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.

As we prepare to learn about courageous conversations, we acknowledge the Two-Eyed Seeing Indigenous Principle for co-learning presented by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall.

The Two-Eyed Seeing guiding principle, explains Elder Albert Marshall, encourages the realization that beneficial outcomes are much more likely in any given situation when we are willing to bring two or more perspectives into play.

“ As such, Etuaptmumk / Two-Eyed Seeing can be understood as the gift of multiple perspectives, which is treasured by the Mi'kmaw people and probably most Indigenous Peoples.

Our world today has many arenas where this principle, this gift, is exceedingly relevant including, especially, education, health, and the environment. I've often described Etuaptmumk / Two-Eyed Seeing this way:

I, you, and we need to learn to see from one eye with the best or the strengths in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing... and learn to see from the other eye with the best or the strengths in the mainstream (Western or Eurocentric) knowledges and ways of knowing... but most importantly, I, you, and we need to learn to see with both these eyes together, for the benefit of all.”

(Elder Albert Marshall, 2018)



## Acknowledgements

The Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion would like to recognize the work and time many reviewers put into revising the Guide for Courageous and Respectful Conversations.

To all reviewers, we thank you for your dedication and participation in creating this resource to make Western a place where students, staff, and faculty can feel heard and welcome.

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# INTRODUCTION

Western University's Strategic Plan: [Towards Western at 150](#) prioritizes fostering a campus environment that is both equitable and inclusive, aiming to flourish by nurturing a sense of belonging for all.

At Western University, our primary focus is fostering an environment conducive to courageous conversations on equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, Indigenization, and accessibility, while also recognizing the complexity and sensitivity of these topics, and bringing different understandings into dialogue with each other in the classroom and workplace.

Our commitment extends to acknowledging the social tensions stemming from diverse perspectives and shared historical contexts that are evident in classrooms, workplaces, and social settings. Whether among colleagues, leaders, students, professors, or supervisors, these discussions require openness, inclusivity, and courage.

The Guide for Courageous and Respectful Conversations helps equip the Western community with necessary tools for navigating such dialogues effectively. By cultivating skills in reflective listening, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness, we aim to facilitate meaningful exchanges that promote understanding and collective growth.



This guide aims to:

- **Promote the importance of belonging** by ensuring that all voices, perspectives, and experiences are heard and valued in discussions related to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization, Indigenization, and Accessibility, among other topics.
- **Facilitate understanding** by taking into consideration a framework for navigating complex and sensitive topics and helping participants comprehend diverse viewpoints.
- **Build skills** by equipping individuals with practical tools to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue.
- **Foster collaboration** by encouraging open-mindedness and empathy, as well as cultivating an environment conducive to collaboration and collective problem-solving.
- **Create brave and accountable spaces** by creating safer and inclusive spaces where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment or reprisal.
- **Reframe assumptions** around conflict and encourage self-reflection to examine biases, positionality, intercultural communication, and additional factors that impact how conflict might be viewed and addressed.
- **Reinforce Western University's commitment** to equity, diversity, inclusivity, decolonization, and accessibility to promote its values.



# KEY DEFINITIONS

## Respectful conversations

**Respectful conversations** are grounded on the premise that people involved in the conversation value and are willing to listen to each other's ideas and perspectives, while recognizing that there could be diversity—and even opposition—between these perspectives.

Respectful conversations focus on considering a variety of voices and giving people time and space to fully express their honest opinions or ideas without being interrupted or invalidated.

## Courageous conversations

**Courageous conversations** are conversations in which people express themselves openly and candidly as they speak their truth on topics that are usually challenging or sensitive. These conversations take place with the goal of moving forward and creating a space for understanding differing perspectives despite fear.

For courageous conversations to be successful, they require reflective listening, open mindsets, and trust. They provide an opportunity for growth and a better understanding between parties.

Courageous conversations can feel uncomfortable, but it is important to recognize the distinction between feeling "unsafe" and feeling "uncomfortable," as they are not the same.

- Feeling "**uncomfortable**" often involves experiencing awkwardness, unease, or distress in response to challenging or unfamiliar topics.
- In contrast, feeling "**unsafe**" implies a sense of being at risk or in danger, either physically or emotionally.

While discomfort can be a natural part of engaging in courageous conversations and can lead to personal growth and understanding, true safety concerns require immediate attention, action, and accountability.

Understanding and recognizing this difference is crucial for fostering open, respectful, and productive dialogue.



# FOUNDATIONS TO CREATE SPACE FOR COURAGEOUS AND RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

1. Consider positionality
2. Clarity
3. Respecting different ways of understanding and communicating
4. Emotional intelligence
5. Reflective listening
6. Curiosity
7. Communications/Compassion roadblocks
8. Compromise

# 1. Consider positionality

Positionality refers to how social, cultural, and political contexts influence people's identities and shape their view of the world and their access to power and privileges in society.

Before participating in a courageous conversation, leverage your knowledge of the history, background experiences, and possible struggles of the participants to ensure you can fully engage in the conversation.

Participants can ask themselves the following questions to reflect on their positionality:

- How do my social identities determine how I view the main topics and purposes of the conversation? What are some alternative perspectives?
- How do my social identities determine my access to privileges? How can these be a source of oppression?
- How might this be similar or different for the rest of the participants?
- What are the knowledge gaps that I should consider addressing before the conversation?
- What are the power dynamics between people and communities who will be taking part in the conversation?
- How might the power dynamics create tension, stress, and defensiveness for people involved in the conversation?
- What biases might I have towards people or communities who are part of the conversation?
- What practices might silence or privilege specific individuals in the conversation?



To learn more about positionality and privilege, please visit the websites of the Office of EDI and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Western University.

Some additional resources are:

- [Transforming Power and Privilege](#). E-learning module.
- [Bias and Microaggressions: Impact, Prevention, and Intervention](#). E-learning module.
- [12 ways to Engage in Truth + Reconciliation at Western](#).
- [KAIROS Blanket offerings](#).
- [Biindigen: Indigenous Learning Circle](#).
- [Mbwaach'idiwag Podcast](#)



## 2. Clarity

Setting clear objectives or desired outcomes is crucial when seeking satisfaction and resolving differing interests. Engaging in a brave and respectful dialogue can not only maintain the relationship, but also strengthen it and eliminate obstacles for both parties. Often, only the party or person starting the conversation will have an outcome in mind, which means the conversation might be unexpected for the second party or person. If both parties are aware of the topic being discussed, it is important to prepare for the conversation and have at least a few outcomes in mind that can be shared as you begin the conversation.

Some questions that can guide this process are (adapted from Matuson, 2022, p. 50):

- What is the purpose of this conversation?
- How would you describe your relationship with the person or people in the conversation? Do you care about this relationship? How important is it for you to protect the integrity of the relationship?
- What do you think are some common goals for both parties?
- What changes would you like to see in their behaviour or attitude?
- What, if anything, are you willing to commit to reach the established outcomes? Is there anything that you could do differently to achieve those goals?
- What do you think are the necessary steps to move forward together?

The way we begin a courageous conversation is fundamental to setting the tone for the rest of the conversation and can significantly impact the outcome.

Some conversation starters that might be helpful in circumstances where you are the one starting the conversation are (Matuson, 2022, p. 114-5):

- I need your help with something. Do you have a moment to discuss this with me?
- I'd like to understand your feelings about\_\_\_\_\_ better and share my perspective as well.
- Something has been on my mind lately that I'd like to discuss with you.
- I think we have different ideas on how to approach this project. I'd like to hear your thinking on this and then share mine.
- I'm wondering if you can share your thinking regarding a particular situation, so I can better understand your response.
- I'm curious. What made you go in this direction?





### 3. Respecting different ways of understanding and communicating

Since Western University is an intercultural space, it is pertinent to acknowledge that cultural differences play an important role in courageous and respectful conversations.

LeBaron and Pillay (2006) defined culture as “the shared, often unspoken, understandings in a group.... It is a series of lenses that shape what we see and don't see, how we perceive and interpret, and where we draw boundaries” (p. 14).

The authors also explained that culture is dynamic, constantly shifting, and that human beings belong to multiple cultures. A person's cultural background, then, will influence how they give and receive a message in a courageous conversation, particularly because communication and conflict management styles are inextricably intertwined with culture.

Given that conflict can emerge due to people using different communication styles during a courageous conversation, in this section, we will explore intercultural communication styles and provide some resources on conflict management for your consideration.



#### 3.1. Braiding between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous People

In “Towards Braiding,” Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti (2019) presented guidelines and reflection questions to foster interconnectedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and commit to long-term transformative processes. As a starting point, the authors use the metaphor of bricks and threads for differentiating ways of knowing and being.

**“Brick” sense and sensibilities** represent a mindset and a set of ways of being focused on individuality, structure, and progress within a linear timeline.

This perspective perceives the world through fixed concepts, organizing things hierarchically. It values objects and people based on their ability to advance progress and measures self-worth through external validation.

(Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019, p. 13)

**“Thread” sense and sensibilities** encompass a perspective and a set of ways of being that emphasize interconnectedness, adaptability, and layered time.

This perspective engages with the world through sensory experiences like movement, rhythm, and metaphor, recognizing all entities as living beings. Each entity is valued for its intrinsic worth within a dynamic whole, and self-worth is rooted in connection both beyond and within the individual self.

(Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019, p. 14)

Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) also explained:



Braiding is not a form of synthesis in which two approaches are combined in order to create a new, third possibility to replace them both. Braiding is also not the result of selective, “salad bar”-style engagements with both sides, taking the “best” or most convenient elements of each and combining them; nor is it the result of an antagonism in which one side emerges triumphant over the other.

Instead, braiding is premised on respecting the continued internal integrity of both the brick and thread orientations, even as neither side is static or homogenous, and even as both sides might be transformed in the process of braiding.

Braiding opens up different possibilities for engagement, without guarantees about what might emerge from those engagements. Braiding is not an endpoint, but rather an ongoing and emergent process. It is not possible to determine what braiding will look like before it occurs. (p. 21-22)



Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) identified three steps that are required for braiding to take place and add a cautionary note explaining that taking these steps does not equate to braiding, and that these are the minimum conditions necessary for braiding to begin and they need to be continuously revisited (p. 22-23). These steps are:

- 1 It is essential for society to acknowledge and confront historical and systemic injustices and their ongoing consequences, rather than avoiding or downplaying them due to feelings of hopelessness, guilt, or shame.

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- 2 We need a language that can distinguish between generative and non-generative aspects of both “brick” and “thread” perspectives, without being rigid, judgmental, or blaming.

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- 3 There must be a commitment to long-term engagement with this process, even when it is challenging or uncomfortable, including a dedication to persisting through difficulties.

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Recognizing that conflict and tensions may arise before or during braiding when both parties find themselves in a non-generative position, several steps can support their journey of learning and growth:

1. Acknowledge the systemic nature of relationship fractures rooted in historical and colonial patterns, avoiding personalization of issues while recognizing individual responsibility.
2. Recognize the challenging and lengthy process of interrupting these patterns, which requires humility and resilience from non-Indigenous organizations and patience, humility, and generosity from Indigenous communities.
3. Understand that there is no fixed formula for moving forward together; it is a journey of uncertainty and transformation, requiring openness to the unexpected.
4. Non-Indigenous people and organizations are encouraged to hold space for Indigenous Peoples to exercise sovereignty and autonomy while taking responsibility for their own learning and supporting Indigenous efforts.
5. Both sides should reflect on their roles in reaching a non-generative space, be open to accountability from each other and from within their own communities, and practice empathetic critique rather than personal accusations.
6. Recognize that verbal commitments to decolonization may not always align with affective investments in colonial desires and that crises can reveal underlying fragilities and possibilities for change.
7. Acknowledge our limitations as unreliable narrators, practice self-reflection and humility in understanding our desires, intentions, and impacts, and engage with the perspectives of others with empathy.

(Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019, p. 55-61)

### 3.2. Communication styles

Communication styles vary across cultures. Having an awareness of the different communication styles will undoubtedly increase the chances of a successful courageous conversation.

Even if this conversation might be uncomfortable for both parties, being cognizant of different communication styles can aid in maintaining the integrity of your relationship, creating a space for respectful communication, and achieving mutual goals.

However, it is crucial to maintain an open mindset about communication styles, recognizing that they are dynamic. The goal of presenting different communication styles is to help you understand that people communicate in various ways and that culture significantly influences how we communicate.

In this section, we will provide general guidelines on intercultural communication styles.



Edward Hall (1976) provided a framework on intercultural communication styles.

According to Hall, intercultural communication styles can be located on a continuum between high-context and low-context communication.

Within the cultural circles we identify with, each of us fall somewhere along the spectrum of communication styles, ranging from high-context to low-context.

#### High-context communication

People whose communication style is high-context tend to be more indirect and rely on nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, paraverbal communication, gestures, and shared knowledge among members.

Context is relevant to deliver the message. High-context is a “read between the lines” communication style.

High-context is predominantly used in the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, Africa, South America and, to an extent, Eastern and Central Europe.

#### Low-context communication

Low-context communication is characterized by being more direct and focused on verbal or written communication.

People who use this style value being concise and clear. Low-context is a “say what you mean and mean what you say” communication style.

Low-context is predominantly used in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.

The following table summarizes the characteristics of high- and low-context communication styles (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006, p. 35).

General communication orientations	
High-context communication	Low-context communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonverbal communication emphasized.</li> <li>• Contextual, implied meaning.</li> <li>• Indirect, covert.</li> <li>• Implicit message.</li> <li>• Facial reactions reserved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal communication emphasized.</li> <li>• Specific, literal meaning.</li> <li>• Direct, overt.</li> <li>• Explicit message.</li> <li>• Reactions on the surface.</li> </ul>

“It is less important to classify communication as high or low context than it is to understand the balance of importance of nonverbal or verbal cues in any communication. Without this understanding, those who utilize high-context starting points may be looking for shades of meaning that are not present, and those who prefer low-context communication may miss important nuances of meaning” (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006, p. 35-6).



#### To adapt your message for low-context communicators:

- Keep the message clear and short.
- Be as specific as possible.
- Consider that non-verbal cues might be missed.
- Avoid ambiguous language.
- Confirm that the message is clear by repeating key information and reiterating next steps.

#### To adapt your message for high-context communicators:

- Provide context that might be useful to better convey the message.
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language.
- Prioritize relationships.
- Focus on language that communicates more subtle requests or phrases as a question. For example, instead of saying, “I need this by the end of the day” consider saying, “When do you think this could be ready?”
- Ask open-ended questions to clarify information. Yes/No questions might make them feel uncomfortable or cornered.

## 4. Emotional intelligence

Recognizing that courageous and respectful conversations might be uncomfortable and could uncover emotional reactions that might be difficult to navigate, it is essential to acknowledge that emotional intelligence plays a vital role in these conversations.

**Emotional intelligence** encompasses four components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and empathy, and relationship management or social skill (Goleman, 2017). This section outlines a brief description of each component and its relevance in courageous and respectful conversations.

### 4.1. Self-awareness

**Self-awareness** involves continuously paying attention to one's internal states, where the mind observes and explores its own experiences, including emotions (Goleman, 2020).

“It means having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives. People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful” (Goleman, 2017, p .17).

### 4.2. Social awareness

**Social awareness** or empathy entails being attuned to the emotions, requirements, and viewpoints of others. It requires accurately perceiving, acknowledging, and reacting to others' emotions, thereby nurturing positive relationships, and facilitating effective communication (Goleman, 2017).

In her book [Atlas of the Heart \(2022\)](#), Brené Brown lists 87 human emotions and experiences. This information might help identify your feelings and those of the person you are communicating with.

### 4.3. Self-management and self-regulation

**Self-management** is the combination of self-regulation and motivation.

- **Self-regulation** is the capacity to exercise control over one's emotions and behaviours, and even channel emotions in a useful way. Some signs of self-regulation are inclination for reflection, being comfortable with change and uncertainty, and integrity (Goleman, 2017).
- **Motivation** is having the drive to achieve beyond your own and other people's expectations. It is a deep desire to achieve a goal for the sake of achieving it (Goleman, 2017).

Self-management is important in courageous conversations because people who are able to control their emotions and impulses help create an environment of trust (Goleman, 2017).

### 4.4. Relationship management

**Relationship management** or social skill is the ability to maintain healthy relationships, collaborate and manage conflict effectively.

Relationship management “is the culmination of the other dimensions of emotional intelligence. People tend to be very effective at managing relationships when they can understand and control their own emotions and can empathize with the feelings of others” (Goleman, 2017, p. 49).

Even though these dimensions are all important, self-awareness and self-management are essential skills to navigate a courageous conversation.

When we struggle with self-awareness and self-regulation, we might experience **emotional hijacking**. This occurs when our emotions take over and cloud our ability to manage ourselves, often creating a response that is out of our control (Goleman, 2005). For example, ignoring someone while they are trying to convey a message or becoming defensive and can escalate tensions between parties.

In courageous and respectful conversations, we want to do our best to avoid emotional hijacking for any of the parties involved. This is why it is so important to practice self-awareness and self-regulation to minimize harmful comments and maximize an environment of respect and honesty.

## 5. Reflective listening

**Reflective listening** is an essential skill for better understanding the message being communicated and letting the other party know that you are attentively listening to what they have to say. It provides empathetic attention and helps minimize defensiveness and resistance in a courageous and respectful conversation.

Reflective listening, also known as active listening (Gordon, 1977) or looping for understanding (Duhigg, 2024), begins with the listener focusing on the message the speaker is trying to convey, the paraverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice and pitch), and the feelings being expressed either implicitly or explicitly. Then, once the speaker has finished the idea(s) they wanted to communicate, the listener may reflect on the message by paraphrasing or mirroring what the speaker said and discussing their feelings and main points.

Reflective listening focuses on the speaker and their message while suspending judgment, leaving out the listener's opinions. It also involves confirming that the listener's understanding is accurate.

This technique will help:

1. Confirm understanding and interpretation.
2. Minimize defensiveness. The first step in the conversation is to actively listen to the individual. Avoid listening with the intent of responding right away defensively without having a confirmed understanding of the message.
3. Create empathy and focus on the relationship so the speaker can see that an effort is being made to understand what they communicated.

Some phrases that can be used to practice reflective listening are:

- “What I hear is.... Is this correct?”
- “What you’re saying is.... Is this correct?”
- “You feel...” or “You’re feeling... Is this correct?”
- “It seems to you... Is this correct?”
- “What I guess I’m hearing is... Is this correct?”



## 6. Curiosity

Genuine curiosity is important to help parties understand each other and build trust in courageous conversations, especially after practicing reflective listening.

“Curiosity allows us to think more deeply and explore options that we may not have seen had we accepted what was in front of us, without question.”  
(Matuson, 2022, p. 113).

Asking open-ended questions with a tone that demonstrates interest in creating an environment of honest dialogue and respect for diverse opinions can help move a courageous conversation forward. Some sample questions that might be helpful are (Matuson, 2022, p. 107):

- What’s your understanding of the situation?
- In your opinion, why do you think this happened?
- How do you feel about this situation?
- What do you see being at stake here if nothing changes?
- What would you see as a possible solution?
- Where do we go from here?

On the other hand, closed-ended or yes/no questions can make people feel like they are being interrogated or cornered, which can build up feelings of defensiveness and make it difficult to continue the courageous conversation.

Focusing on open-ended questions with a nonjudgmental tone shows commitment to understanding the situation and people’s points of view better.



## 7. Communication/Compassion roadblocks

To ensure that the courageous conversations move forward, consider the following communication or compassion roadblocks (Rosenberg, 2003):

### Moralistic judgements

**Moralistic judgments** suggest that individuals who do not align with our values are viewed as wrong or bad. Blame, insults, belittlement, labels, criticism, and comparisons constitute various forms of judgment.

When we articulate our values and needs in this manner, it amplifies defensiveness and resistance among the individuals whose behaviours worry us. Alternatively, if they consent to align with our values because they acknowledge their wrongdoing based on our assessment, they are likely to do so driven by fear, guilt, or shame (Rosenberg, 2003).

### Denial of responsibilities

We are individually accountable for our own thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. **Denial of responsibilities** occurs when individuals refuse to take ownership or accountability for their thoughts, feelings, or actions.

This behaviour often involves shifting blame onto external factors or other people, rather than acknowledging one's own role or contribution to a situation. We deny responsibility for our own actions when we excuse them using (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 20):

- Vague and impersonal forces.
- Our condition, diagnosis, personal or psychological history.
- The actions of others.
- The dictates of authority.
- Group pressure.
- Institutional policies, rules, and procedures.
- Social or identity roles.
- Uncontrollable impulses.

Denial of responsibility in communication can hinder effective problem-solving, collaboration, and conflict resolution. It erodes trust and accountability within relationships, leading to misunderstandings, resentment, and further communication breakdowns.

Overcoming this roadblock requires individuals to develop self-awareness, take ownership of their actions, and demonstrate accountability by acknowledging mistakes, apologizing when necessary, and addressing the consequences of their behaviour.



## 8. Conflict management

**Conflict management and resolution** in intercultural contexts is a complex topic that requires extensive discussion. Including only a few pages on this topic in this guide would not do it justice. Moreover, the focus of this guide is on fostering courageous and respectful conversations, which do not always stem from or lead to conflict. However, we believe it is important to provide resources that can assist in the process of conflict management and resolution.

Below is a list of recommended sources:

- Blackstock, M. D. (2001). Where is the trust? Using trust-based mediation for First Nations dispute resolution. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 19(1), 9–30. [doi.org/10.1002/crq.3890190103](https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.3890190103)
- Haslett, B. B. (2017). Transforming conflict through communication and common ground. In *Conflict Management and Intercultural Communication* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 98–122). Routledge. [doi.org/10.4324/9781315266916-7](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266916-7)
- Kozan, K. M. (1997). Culture and conflict management: A theoretical framework. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 8(4), 338–360. [doi.org/10.1108/eb022801](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022801)
- LeBaron, M., & Pillay, V. (2006). *Conflict across cultures: A unique experience of bridging differences*. Intercultural Press.
- Walker, P. O. (2005). Decolonizing Conflict Resolution: Addressing the Ontological Violence of Westernization. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3–4), 527-549.

## 9. Compromise

**Compromise** means coming to a mutual agreement or resolution where the people involved in the courageous conversation commit to take specific actions and make the necessary changes to move forward to benefit both parties.

In compromising, some concessions will be required. It is essential to revisit the purpose of the conversation and focus on the common grounds both parties have and the shared goals.

Dai (2010) noted that “people in all cultures desire beauty, want to be respected and pursue happiness. In essence, they have similar life worlds and similar needs.... More importantly, they all possess communicative reasoning – the ability to criticize and argue with others, and can learn from each other, perfect each other and reach agreement across cultures” (p. 16).

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the plurality of beliefs and values, be aware of privilege among all participants, and treat others with respect, dignity, and reciprocity. Ask yourself, what ideas could the parties involved agree on? What are some common concerns?





# PLANNING AND PRELIMINARY WORK before the conversation

1. Space booking
2. Timing
3. Maintain confidentiality
4. Preview general communication agreement and purposes
5. Expect non-closure
6. Record-keeping

## 1. Space booking

When booking the space for courageous and respectful conversations, consider spaces that are private, accessible, and neutral for both parties.

All people should feel comfortable in this space to facilitate the conversation.

## 2. Timing

Timing is crucial when it comes to a courageous conversation.

Consider booking a time when both parties can have an open conversation and give their full attention to the other party.

It is also common to underestimate how much time it will take to have this conversation. Consider having a buffer time between meetings and, if necessary, reconvening on a different day.

Finally, take into account holidays, faith/religious days, and praying time.

### 3. Maintain confidentiality

It is critical that all parties agree to maintain confidentiality.

If information shared during the conversation might be disclosed to individuals who are not present, it is important to inform everyone involved beforehand.

### 4. Preview general communication agreements and purpose

If general communication agreements were created or provided before the courageous conversation, review them and ask yourselves if there are any other communication agreements you would like to add. Also, take the time to review the primary outcomes of the conversation and remember how important it is for both parties to understand each other and conduct the conversation respectfully.

### 5. Expect non-closure

A courageous conversation might require multiple sessions to deepen comprehension. Embrace the possibility that the discussion may conclude without reaching a resolution.

### 6. Record-keeping

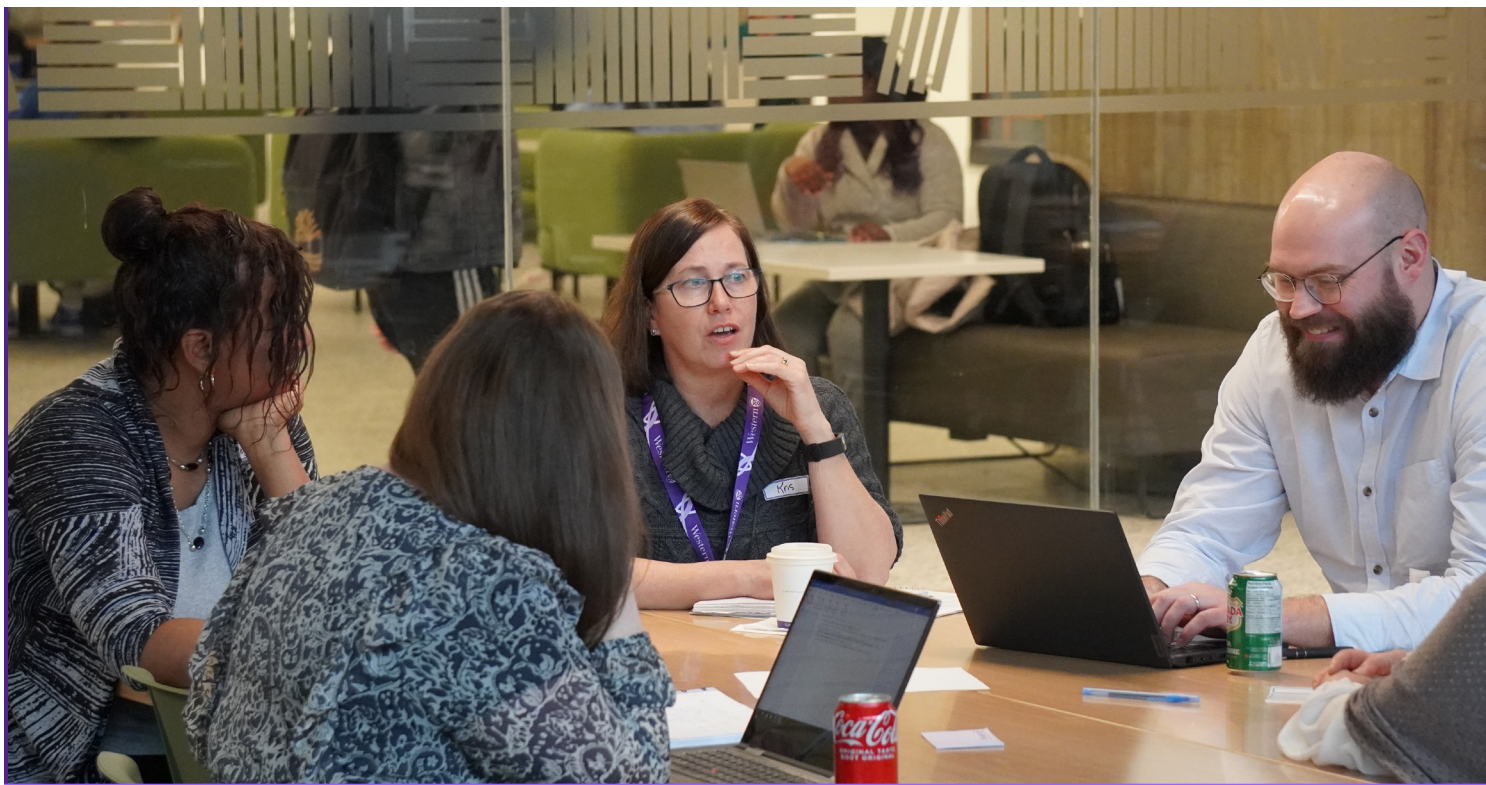
It is advisable to designate a record-keeper or notetaker if all parties involved agree. This person will be responsible for maintaining a detailed and accurate record of the discussions, including points of agreement, disagreement, and any consensus reached.

The presence of such a record ensures that all decisions and agreements are documented and can be referenced later, minimizing misunderstandings and providing a clear account of the proceedings for future review.

## DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. Review communication agreements and discuss if it is necessary to add more.
2. Review purpose.
3. Centre the conversation around dialogue (not debate).
4. Practice compassionate communication and emotional intelligence.
5. Practice reflective listening.
6. Make space for takeaway points, agreements, and points to be discussed later if any.

If communication appears to falter or emotions run high, it might be worth considering the option of taking a break.



# AFTER THE CONVERSATION

## 1. Practice self-care

After a courageous and respectful conversation, parties will probably need some time to navigate what was discussed and practice self-care to maintain their emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

We encourage taking the time to engage in practices that promote wellbeing after these conversations, such as going for a walk, journaling, practicing yoga or mindfulness, among other options.

## 2. Reflect on next steps

It is advisable to document any agreed-upon action items and future check-in timelines in writing as well via email, for example.

## 3. Recognizing the value of the conversation

Expressing sincere gratitude for the opportunity to engage in dialogue and actively listen to each other's perspectives, even if a consensus was not achieved.

Acknowledge that the process of discussing and understanding differing viewpoints is itself a significant and worthwhile endeavour.

Thank everyone involved for their openness and willingness to contribute to the discussion, emphasizing that the exchange of ideas and viewpoints enhances mutual understanding and respect, regardless of the final outcome.

# FROM COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS TO ACTIONABLE STEPS

To effectively implement changes after a courageous conversation, start by breaking down the discussion into specific, actionable steps to make implementation and progress tracking easier.

It is important to set clear, achievable goals using the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to ensure they are well-defined and attainable. Assign responsibility for each action item to ensure accountability and follow-through.

Consider scheduling regular check-ins to review progress, making adjustments as necessary, and continuously monitoring the action plan's effectiveness.

Finally, be flexible and ready to adapt the plan based on feedback and new insights to maintain its relevance and effectiveness.

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This guide was compiled by Dr. Ana Boller, Digital Learning Specialist in the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and reviewed by the EDID Central Working Group at Western University, The Wellness and Equity Education unit at Student Experience at Western University, Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige, and the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization at King's University College.

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# Western

Equity, Diversity  
& Inclusion

Western Student Services Building (WSSB)

Room 2120

[edi@uwo.ca](mailto:edi@uwo.ca)