

AWARE-LA

Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere - Los Angeles

~ www.awarela.org ~

Communication Guidelines for a Brave Space

AWARE-LA has modified its communication guidelines multiple times over its 13+ year history. Originally, communication guidelines were co-constructed with participants at Saturday Dialogues. We later adopted “*Communication Guidelines for a Safe Space*” based on participant recommendation. In 2013, Kathy Obear (a leading white anti-racist diversity trainer) suggested that we use language highlighting the need for a “brave space.”

Our understanding is that the movement toward “safe space” began out of trauma work. Over time, perhaps recognizing the link between the history of racism and trauma, people working in diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts adopted the “safe space” language.

Unfortunately, many noticed that in dialogues investigating issues of race, there was a tendency for white people to claim that a space was not “safe” if they were challenged, became uncomfortable, and felt that their opinions were not validated. This also tended to occur as a reaction against the testimony of people of color.

As white people working to cultivate a culture of anti-racism, we are called to create a “brave space” where we accept the likelihood that we will be uncomfortable when investigating issues of race, privilege, and oppression and our roles within them. We recognize that this works because we meet as a racially-caucused group, as asking people of color to be “brave” in multi-racial dialogues can be problematic.

Annotated Version with Facilitator’s Notes

1. Welcome multiple viewpoints

Speak from your own experience by using “I statements.” Ask questions to understand the sources of disagreements.

- *Although atypical for people to use “you” in reference to a single individual in a confrontational way, we have found it important to check in with people who tend toward general statements such as “You know how you just get so mad when...? Or “We just all need to remember...” It is common for people to use language as though they are speaking for the group, albeit unintentionally.*

2. Own your intentions and your impacts

Respect each other’s experiences and feelings by taking responsibility for the effects of your words. On the other side, if you have a strong reaction to something, let the group know. Be open to dialogue.

3. Work to recognize your privileges

Use this space to recognize and investigate your privileges (for example: class, gender, sexual orientation, ability). Honor the different experiences we all bring to this space.

- *We do not list race here because by virtue of the dialogue, we intend to investigate white privilege. This statement asks us to consider our other areas of privilege in order to create an intersectional lens, recognize the diversity among white people, and to be as inclusive as possible.*

4. Take risks: Lean into discomfort

We are all in process. Challenge yourself to contribute even if it is not perfectly formulated.

5. Step back

Share speaking time and try to speak after others who have not spoken.

- *There are some groups who reject the language of stepping forward or backward and offer the critique that it is ableist. Thus far, we have attempted to convey the metaphorical message and have not been asked to alter our approach to this concept. As with all guidelines, modify as needed to suit your group's needs.*

6. Notice and name group dynamics in the moment

We are all responsible for this space. Be aware of how others are responding or not responding. Ask for a "time out" or dialogue if needed.

- *As an organization that relies upon volunteer, non-expert facilitators, it is essential that everyone in the dialogue feels responsible for helping to create the experience for themselves and the group. This includes being brave enough to speak up with something feels like it is going awry.*

7. Actively listen

Use your energy to listen to what is said before thinking about how to respond. Notice when defensiveness and denial arise.

8. Challenging with care

Find ways to respectfully challenge others and be open to challenges of your own views. Think about how to question ideas without personal attacks.

9. Confidentiality

Share the message, not the messenger.

- *This phrasing is intended to allow participants to share the insights they gain from the dialogue with others in their community, but asks them to do so in a way that avoids using details that would allow a listener to infer someone's identity.*

10. Break it down

Use simple language and background information when necessary. Ask for clarification if needed.

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