

Top 5 Tips for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues about Racism & Anti-Semitism

Given the increased awareness of racial tensions both nationwide and in the UT community, it is important that we consider ways to support students who may have difficulty processing race-related issues. Below are some tips to help both you as the instructor and your students navigate conversations about racism and discrimination:

1. Assess your own feelings.

Before engaging your students, be sure to address your own emotions. It is a challenge to address the needs of students if you have not first assessed your own ability to process the incident(s).

Reflect. Take time to unpack the event first as a human being. How did this event make you feel? Why did it make you feel that way? What learning opportunities can you take from this situation?

Plan your response. Take a moment to consider the perspectives of your students and your role as the instructor. Who might be affected by these events? How might they feel about all this? How do you see your role/responsibility in addressing this situation? What support mechanisms are you able/available to offer to students?

2. Acknowledge the incident(s).

Once the class begins, acknowledge that the incident(s) happened and – if appropriate – allow students space to share their own feelings. You can designate a short time to do this at the beginning of class or invite students to come to your office hours.

3. Set “agreements” in class for difficult dialogues.

If you do decide to have a conversation about the situation in class, it is important to collaborate with students on a set of ground rules for that discussion. For example, it might be important to specify that nothing said during the discussion will be shared with anyone outside the classroom. Setting agreements before the conversation helps to create a safer “brave” space for people to share their ideas.

4. Direct students to appropriate support mechanisms on campus.

In addition to acknowledging the situation, connect students with resources outside of class to help them process what has happened. A list of resources for students can be found on the [Office of the Dean of Students' website](#).

5. Help students see learning opportunities in the midst of the situation.

If appropriate, challenge students to think about ways in which they can address racism in their own contexts. Ask questions like, “What can we learn from this situation? How can we apply what we have learned in our contexts?” These questions can help make the conversation more productive by focusing on practical ways that we as individuals can address racism in our spheres of influence.

For more resources on facilitating difficult dialogues, check out our [“Inclusive Teaching Toolbox”](#) and [our resource on addressing implicit bias and microaggressions](#). If you are in need of more one-on-one support, please schedule a [consultation](#) with a member of our staff via our website (teaching.utk.edu).