

Small Group Guide

- Review the agreements and process
- Everyone works to ensure people follow the agreements

Conversation Agreements

Read the agreements aloud. Will everyone in the group adhere to the agreements?
Will everyone help the group follow the agreements?

Agreements

Open-mindedness: Listen to & respect all points of view.

Acceptance: Suspend judgement as best you can.

Curiosity: Seek to understand rather than persuade.

Discovery: Question assumptions, look for new insights.

Sincerity: Speak from your heart and personal experience.

Brevity: Go for honesty and depth – don't go on and on.

Self-compassion: Take time out for self-care if you get overwhelmed. It's okay to turn off the camera or leave the conversation.

Process

During the first 2 rounds each person has an opportunity to respond directly to a question. Although in virtual conversations, there is no talking object, the idea is that only one person speaks at a time. Everyone else listens. You may choose not to speak. At the end of a round, the leader can check back with people who did not speak to see if they would like to speak before moving to the next step. In Open Dialogue anyone can speak at any time and respond to others. Continue to follow the agreements. When you speak, be as brief as possible, and when others speak, focus on listening.

Round 1 (about 10-15 min) Everyone speaks briefly!

Share your name, where you live, and a hobby. What brings you to this conversation about understanding whiteness?

Round 2 (about 10-15 min) Everyone speaks briefly!

Whatever your race, how often during a typical day do you think about the color of your skin? What does this have to do with understanding whiteness?

Open Dialogue (40-50 min) Interact. Respond to each other.

Understanding whiteness requires white people to see the world from the perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)? Why is this difficult for white people, even if they are well-intentioned? Share from your own experience or observations.

Questions to go deeper: What happened that led you to this point of view? ; How does this affect you personally? ; I'm curious, can you say more about that... ; Here's what I heard...is that what you mean?

If you reach a lull consider some of these questions:

- Why is important for white people to understand whiteness?
- What were some of your earliest memories about race?
- Is the story of America the same for everyone?
- Are white people “guilty” of something? If so, what?
- How does shame keep white people from talking about racism?
- What are some examples of mainstream culture equating white with normal?
- If white=normal in America, what does non-white=?
- How do you feel about the color of your skin?
- What does “white supremacy” mean?
- What's the best way for white people to process their feelings about racism?

Round 3 (5 minutes) Everyone speaks briefly!

Briefly! What challenged, touched or inspired you about the conversation you've just participated in?

Understanding Whiteness Quotes

From the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Smithsonian. ["Talking about Race"](#)

Whiteness and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of people are compared. Whiteness is also at the core of understanding race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal.

This white-dominant culture also operates as a social mechanism that grants advantages to white people, since they can navigate society both by feeling *normal* and being viewed as *normal*. Persons who identify as white rarely have to think about their racial identity because they live within a culture where whiteness has been *normalized*.

From [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#) by Robin DiAngelo

“How can I say that if you are white, your opinions on racism are most likely ignorant, when I don't even know you? I can say so because nothing in mainstream US culture gives us the information we need to have the nuanced understanding of arguably the most complex and enduring social dynamic of the last several hundred years.”

From [4 lessons on Antiracism from Brene Brown and Dr Ibram Kendi](#)

Shame does not lead to social justice Dr Ibram Kendi says...Holding ourselves and others accountable for racist actions is critical, but feeling shame for having acted in racist ways is not helpful—We all need to cultivate the ability to have honest conversations, accept that we will make mistakes along our anti-racist path, and to commit with love to walking this path anyway. To do this, we need to practice listening and understanding deeply. When we allow ourselves able to step into a role of genuine vulnerability, in this moment, we can see more clearly where racism and injustice stem from. Holding this awareness, we can begin to walk the long path of change with presence, compassion, and courage.