

# Helpful Response Phrases for Managing Difficult Conversations

## Responding with Empathy

- “I hear you. (And I’m sitting with that.)”
- “Let’s all sit with what (group member) just shared for a moment.”
- “Thank you for choosing to share with us.”
- “It’s meaningful to hear your perspective/experience.”

## When You Are Impacted

- “I’m not responding well to what you just said. Can I take a moment to process?”
- “I don’t know if anyone is feeling similarly, but what you said is bringing up some emotions for me.”
- “That language is not welcome in this space.”

## Addressing Bias/Microaggression/Non-Inclusive Language

- “Let’s consider the impact of our language.”
- “Could I (or a group member) offer some context on why that language/perspective might be harmful?”
- “I’ve read/heard that that word might not be the most inclusive, can I (or a group member) offer an alternative?”

## Naming Group Process/Dynamics

- “I sense the energy just shifted/activated in the room. Let’s take a moment to pause/breathe before we continue.”
- “I notice there is some disengagement happening. I’d like to open space for voices we haven’t heard in a while.”
- “I see there are many people who want to respond. Let’s do our best to hear from as many as possible in the time we have.”

## Asking for Clarification

- “Can you say more about that?” or “So I’m hearing \_\_\_\_\_. Did I understand correctly?”
- “It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Can you help me understand why?”
- “What did you mean/who are you referring to when you said \_\_\_\_\_?”



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## Make The “Implicit” Explicit

- “I want to point out that when we talk about \_\_\_\_ in this way, we’re actually saying \_\_\_\_.”
- “Why do you think \_\_\_\_\_ is true for your community/group?”
- “When we say this, whose perspectives are we centering and whose might we be leaving out?”

## Redirecting or Moving on from a Conflict

- “This is a big, important, complex issue - one that deserves more time and space than we are able to give it here.”
- “I need to direct us back to our group purpose/topic for today. Shifting away from this issue doesn’t mean it’s not important, but we aren’t going to be able to hold enough space for it now.”
- “It sounds like many of us are dealing with \_\_\_\_ but we are experiencing it in different ways. How does this connect to the purpose of what we are trying to do in our group (or the topic for today’s session)?”

## Revisiting a Topic

- “I want to go back to something that came up in our last session...”
- “Can we take some time to process what was shared last time?”
- “Do we feel the need to share feelings or reflections about what happened in our last session - or does it feel better to start fresh?”

## Acknowledging an Unsatisfying Ending

- “I recognize that we didn’t come to a clear end point, and there is still much we could talk about, but I appreciate what we were able to share and process together today.”
- “I realize we may be ending this session with more questions than answers, or feeling worse rather than better. While this can feel unsatisfying, continuing to think, reflect, and process is an important part of what we are here to do together.”
- Consider adding a brief closing ritual/go-around that allows for both reflection on the impact of the conflict, and positive or forward-looking elements.