

## **Facilitating Discussions of Hot Topics**

### **Ensure a respectful process**

- Enforce the group agreements, e.g. respectful listening, no personal attacks, no interrupting).

### **Make sure people feel heard and understood**

- Slow down the interaction: make sure one person is finished before someone else speaks. If needed, use a “talking stick”. Only the person with the object talks.
- Paraphrase: Instructor or next speaker summarizes what person said before continuing.

### **Go deeper**

- Ask questions to draw out and clarify people’s thinking and feelings
- Look for and explore feelings beneath words.
- Note areas of agreement.

### **Broaden the conversation**

- If between two people, invite others to share their perspectives or go around the room and get all perspectives on the table.
- Move focus off of individuals to larger issues raised. What are the meta questions/topics?

### **Pay attention to power dynamics and cultural differences**

- Make sure people’s feelings and experiences are not being dismissed or invalidated.
- Discuss differences in styles of communication and conflict. Clarify how people are feeling. Don’t assume

### **Provide space for reflection and feelings**

- Take a time-out (a break, journaling, free writing, reactions in pairs, time for quiet reflection.)
- Allow individuals to sit with their feelings (e.g. crying). Do not overprotect.

### **Manage yourself.**

- Stop, breathe, think.
- Know your hot buttons and how to manage them.

### **Provide some closure**

- Thank people for their participation and willingness to engage these issues.
- Highlight some learnings or take-aways and ask student to reflect on what they learned.
- Remind people that it is okay to agree to disagree and that these are sensitive, powerful issues.
- Provide opportunities for further discussion, if needed.