

Sentence Stems for Healthy Communication and Conflict

Clarifying information:

- “Could you say more about what you mean by that?”
- “How have you come to think that?”
- Let me see if I understand what you’re saying. I hear that you think...Did I get that right?
- Can you elaborate on your thinking because I’m not sure I understand?
- That’s an innovative idea. I’m having a hard time imagining how that could work. Could you explain?
- I have some questions about that suggestion. Could you explain it more?
- It would help me get behind that idea if I could hear more about...
- I’m curious about...I have some reservations about doing that.
- I’m curious. What was your intention when you said that?
- Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?
- What criteria are you using to measure/assess etc?
- It sounded like you just said _____. Is that really what you meant?

Different Perspectives:

- I hear what you’re saying, but have you considered...?
- Can you help me understand why you believe that? My experience has led me to a different conclusion, but I want to understand your perspective.
- I hear that our beliefs are very different. To make a decision about what to do, it seems like we need to get additional perspectives.
- I have a request/suggestion to make. Are you open to hearing it?
- Why is this the best way to proceed? What other approaches have you considered?
- What would other members of our community say/think/feel?
- How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone might misinterpret your words/actions?
- What sort of impact do you think your decision/comment/action might have?

Disagreement:

- Let me see if I understand what you’re saying. I hear that you think...Did I get that right? Ok, I still disagree with that idea, assessment, suggestions because...

- I hear that we have a difference in beliefs, and I understand that it comes from our different experiences. I disagree with you about that, but I want to hear your thoughts.
- I disagree with you about that. Can I share my reasoning?
- I disagree with you about that, but I'm willing to change my mind.
- I need to push back against that. I disagree. I don't see it that way.

Naming Emotions and Boundaries:

- I need you to know how your comment just landed on me.
- Okay, I am having a strong reaction to that, and I need to let you know why.
- "It sounds like you're really frustrated/nervous/angry....."
- What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable or worried?
- This is what is making me feel fearful, nervous, uncomfortable or worried.
- Why did the result or response cause a problem for you?
- I need to leave the room if the conversation is going to continue down this road.

Interrupting Microaggressions/Bias:

- It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit.
- I feel obligated as your peer/colleague/co-worker/friend/supervisor to tell you that your comment wasn't okay.
- That word/comment is really triggering and offensive. Be mindful and pick a different word.
- Ouch/Whoa. I need to stop you right there.
- That's not our culture here. Those aren't our values.
- I don't find that funny. Tell me why that's funny to you.
- Hmm.. maybe you want to think this one through a bit more and speak about it later.
- I wonder if you've considered the impact of your words.
- Is sex/gender/gender identity/gender expression/race/class/ethnicity/religion/ability/immigration status/body type marital status/age/pregnancy relevant to your point? How?

Adapted from:

- Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools*. Jossey-Bass, 2016.
- Oregon Center for Educational Equity: *What Did You Just Say? Responses to Racist Comments Collected from the Field*