



**U-THRIVE**  
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

## Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Facilitated Discussion

### Abstract:

This facilitated discussion covers a range of related topics: diversity, equity, and inclusion. At its heart, this discussion focuses on the concept of identity and explores the ways that identity guides thoughts, feeling, actions, and relationships. Everyone has multiple identities and some of these might be more pronounced at certain times. By the same token, certain identities are associated with historical biases and current obstacles to fairness and opportunity. Throughout the video portion, mindfulness is discussed as a tool for dealing with bias and discrimination. We will also explore how cultivating empathy can be profoundly beneficial to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### Important Terms:

*Understanding that terminology can be a bottleneck to learning can help you work with students to clarify difficult vocabulary. Here, we provide succinct definitions of key terms. We also include some terms to which many students have a strong reaction.*

- **Bridging:** A style of responding to societal changes in which they are viewed as opportunities.
- **Breaking:** A style of responding to societal changes in which they are viewed as threats.
- **Colorblind Race Ideology:** The idea that disregarding race, ethnicity, or similar demographic factors is important to ending discrimination. This ideology often backfires because it fails to acknowledge historical and current prejudices and systematic inequality.
- **Diversity:** A focus on and appreciation of differences. These can include faith, sex, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity, age, ability, political affiliation, or other personal characteristics.
- **Empathy:** Understanding our own and other people's emotions (and communicating that understanding to others without trying to change or fix them).
- **Equity:** An emphasis on fairness and equality.
- **Identity Politics:** A shift away from traditional political affiliation in which people of similar backgrounds form alliances intended to promote group advocacy.

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- **Inclusion:** Making certain people of all backgrounds have equal opportunity for participation.
- **Implicit Bias:** Thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes we hold about other people without our conscious awareness.

### Lecture Framework:

This can be a particularly difficult discussion to facilitate because people harbor differing opinions, have strong emotions related to these topics, and have unique life experiences. Taken together, these interpersonal differences mean that conversations about diversity require trust, acceptance, open-mindedness and a willingness to listen. It is advisable to establish norms for respect by establishing a few basic ground rules for discussion such as:

- 1) Acknowledge that the other students have not had your same life experiences. As a result, they will not see things entirely the same way as you do. The purpose of this session is to explore our own identities and biases and not to convert others to the “rightness” of our points of view.
- 2) As we discuss, make a conscious attempt not to give offense. This is a perfect opportunity to recognize that others may have been victims of discrimination and to be sensitive to this possibility in our language.
- 3) As we discuss, make a conscious attempt not to take offense. This is the flip-side of the above guideline. Here, we recognize that all people have biases and that not every opinion will be stated articulately or sensitively. Know that the other students are making an effort and try to forgive mistakes or insensitive language.

- **Warm up:** This portion of the learning session can be used to emphasize respect, norms, ground rules, confidentiality or other policies (see sample ground rules above) that will make difficult conversations easier and feel safer. Feel free to take questions or reactions from the students (approx. 5 minutes).
- **Video:** [Building Your Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Vocabulary](#) (approx 17 minutes).  
Show the video above, or ask students to come to the discussion having already watched it.

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- **Reflection and Discussion:**

- **IMPLICIT BIASES:** (approx. 10 minutes). Implicit biases are the thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes we hold about other people without our conscious awareness. All people have these automatic biases, whether we like it or not! In order to understand our implicit biases, it can be beneficial to take a psychological assessment of reaction time called the “Implicit Attitudes Test” (IAT) in which people’s reactions to various stimuli are measured to the thousandth of a second. Here, you and your students can take a wide range of IATs including those related to race, weapons, sexuality, weight, and other common biases. If you assign this task to students, encourage them to record their results and to be prepared to share personal reactions (not necessarily personal results!) with the group.

**Implicit Attitudes Test:** <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html> *Have your students complete one or more of these assessments of your choosing prior to the discussion, or you can have them complete it in class.*

- Consider the following questions for discussion:
  - What did you learn about yourself?
  - The IAT is a difficult format to fake. What did you think of this assessment?
  - What uses can you think of for this assessment?
  - How can understanding your own biases change the way you think, relate, or behave? What do you plan to do with the information you learned about yourself?
- **EMPATHY:** (approx. 15 minutes). Empathy is useful in creating more diversity, equity, and inclusion in individuals. Here, you can guide students through an activity designed to allow them to practice empathy skills. Empathy is understanding the emotional state of another person, but the real power of empathy is when we communicate this understanding. The exercise, itself, is to read a short, first-person account of either a teenager whose mother had been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, hospitalized, and had just returned home, or a teenager who experiences prejudice while attempting to see a play. There are four components of empathy: 1) taking others’ perspectives, 2) recognizing emotion in others, 3) staying out of judgment; acceptance, 4) communicating understanding of others. As you read the script, encourage students to use all 4 aspects of empathy: A) try to see the story through the teenager’s point of view (called

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“perspective taking”), B) write down any emotions you feel and try to understand the emotions the teenager must be feeling, C) avoid making any good/bad judgments, and D) communicate your understanding of this experience (by sharing with the group; you cannot, of course, communicate empathy to the teenager directly in this instance).

**Script 1:** My mother was gone two weeks. At first, it was a relief to have her out of the house. She had been so depressed and it hung over our family like a storm cloud. The longer she was gone, the more I missed her. Especially the “fun mom” who was so energetic and playful. When she came home, I almost didn’t recognize her. She had gained weight and she seemed distant and distracted. My father told me that these were side effects of the medication she was taking. When I talked to her, or put a hand on her shoulder, she gave a sort of half-smile but seemed a million miles away. When we watched TV together, she rarely laughed. The mom I used to know would crack jokes and throw popcorn at the TV screen. Over time, I realized that this was the new normal. Even worse, I realized that I had a new role. I would always have to be there for my mom and I would never stop taking care of her.

**Debrief:** Ask the students to discuss the emotional aspect of this account.

- Consider the following questions for discussion:
  - What did they, themselves, feel?
  - What do they believe the teenager was feeling?
  - How might they react if this was a good friend telling them a personal story?
  - Which of the 4 empathy skills did they find easiest or hardest?
  
- Next, widen the discussion to their social world.
  - How might they use these 4 skills when hearing about the experiences of other people in class, in the news, or in their own social circles?
  - If the group has enough trust and safety, you might offer a slightly more challenging discussion item: it is easy to generate empathy for loved ones or for those who are similar but how can you do so even for those who might not share your values?
  - What are the potential costs and benefits of doing so?

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**Script 2:** I was at Shakespeare in the Park. My parents took my siblings and I every summer and—although I didn’t always understand the plays—I loved watching the acting on the enclosed, temporary stage during the beautiful summer evenings. When I turned 19, I went alone for the first time. They were putting on *Much Ado About Nothing*, which is one of my favorite plays. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a ticket. I really wanted to see the play so I made a sign that read, “Need 1 ticket.” A white woman walked up to me and read the sign aloud. She read it aloud, saying “Need I ticket.” She thought the 1 was the letter I! Then she looked at me and said, loudly and slowly, “Have you ever seen a play before?” I guarantee you that if I was white, she would not have made that mistake! I felt like telling her I was an Elizabethan Studies major at university just to put her in her place. The truth is, I was so offended I couldn’t even respond.

**Debrief:** Ask the students to discuss the emotional aspect of this account.

- Consider the following questions for discussion:
  - What did they, themselves, feel?
  - What do they believe the protagonist was feeling?
  - How might they react if this was a good friend telling them a personal story?
  - Which of the 4 empathy skills did they find easiest or hardest?
- Next, widen the discussion to their social world.
  - How might they use these 4 skills when hearing about the experiences of other people in class, in the news, or in their own social circles?
  - If the group has enough trust and safety, you might offer a slightly more challenging discussion item: it is easy to generate empathy for loved ones or for those who are similar but how can you do so even for those who might not share your values?
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