



# ANTI-RACISM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Nationwide uprisings against police brutality and movements like Black Lives Matter have brought systemic racism to the forefront—making it imperative for district and school leaders to cultivate anti-racist school systems. Historically, district leaders have focused on multicultural literacy and implicit bias training, but the national conversation has catalyzed a focus on anti-racism.

District leaders across the country are asking how they as individuals can (a) examine their own beliefs and actions and (b) foster an environment in which they can push conversations about race, racism, and other equity issues. Although conversations about race pull individuals out of their comfort zones and, at times, lead to conflict and tension between participants, it is important to lead productive discussions about equity issues in your districts and schools. We created this discussion guide to help leaders effectively navigate these topics by establishing goals for equity discussions, brainstorming questions for holding constructive conversations, and identifying actions to take as a result of the perspectives and information shared.

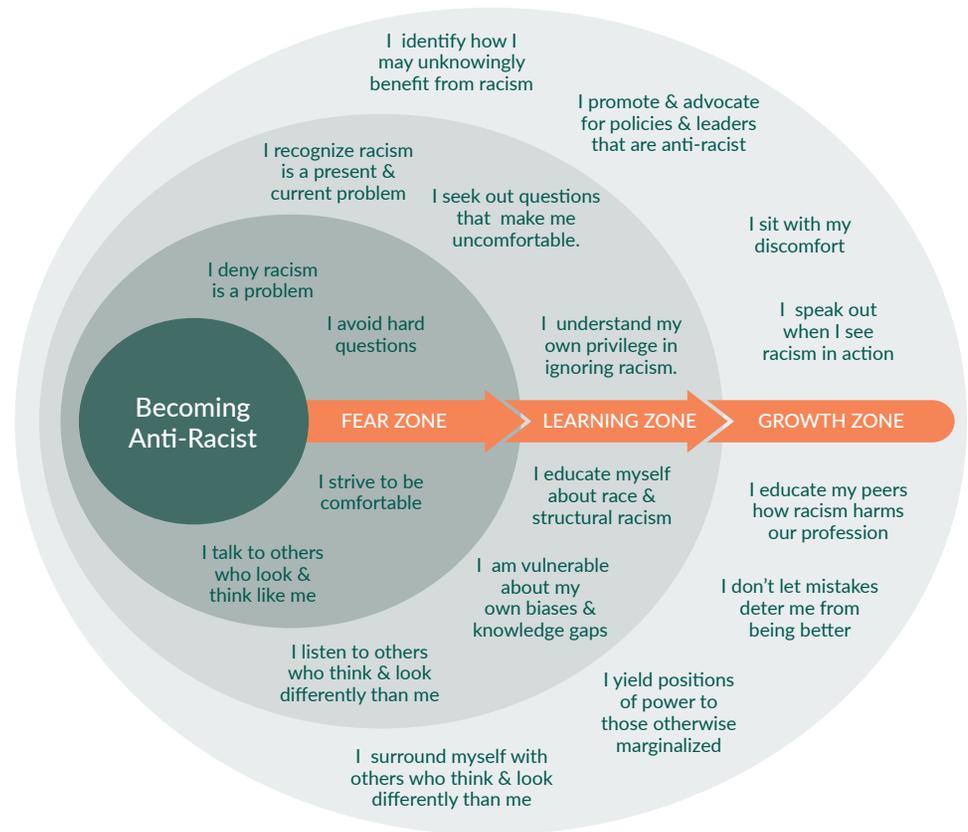


# DEFINE WHAT YOU HOPE TO EXAMINE

There are several frameworks available in surrounding anti-racism research; therefore, it is critical for districts to define what they hope to examine. Topics range from understanding how members of the community feel about a race-related issue to exploring how students from diverse racial and ethnic groups can benefit from sharing their experiences. Without a clear focus for the discussion, facilitators won't be able to provide the most impactful, educational, and open conversation, and may miss an opportunity to bring stakeholders together.

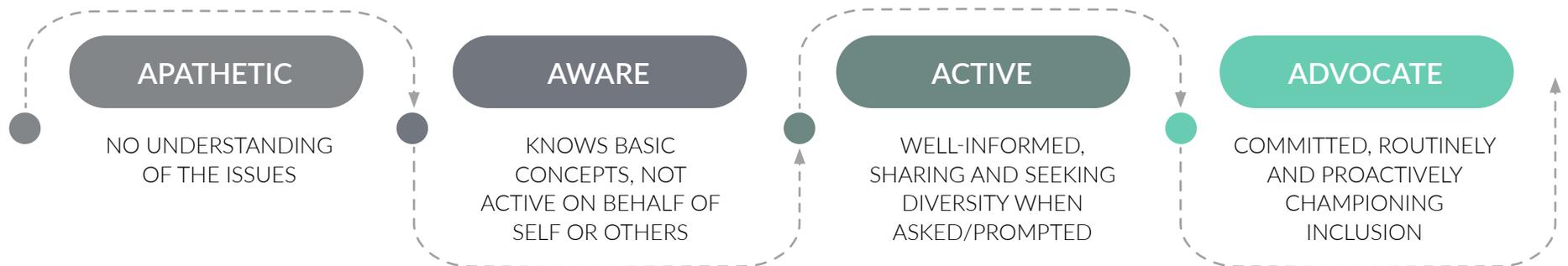
Source: [U.S. Department of Justice](#)

Source (right): Adapted from a [figure by Dr. Andrew M. Ibrahim](#), which is inspired by the writing of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi.



## THE ALLY CONTINUUM

Districts are using the Ally Continuum to facilitate allyship among key stakeholders.



Source: Adapted from a [figure by Jennifer Brown](#)

# ESTABLISH GOALS FOR THE CONVERSATION

Once you have defined what you are working toward, you should prepare goals for your discussion about the inequities in your district.



## GLOSSARY

**Race:** A human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent. Determining which characteristics constitute the race is a choice made by human beings; neither markers nor categories are predetermined by any biological factors.

**Ethnicity:** A sense of common ancestry based on cultural attachments, past linguistic heritage, religious affiliations, claimed kinship, or some physical traits.

Source: [Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann](#)

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZING A FORMAL DIALOGUE ON RACE

### COMMUNITY DYNAMICS AND INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS

Facilitators should consider historical and current community contexts and issues related to race that might be addressed in formal conversations. Possibilities include:

- ▶ Sharing of cultural knowledge between different racial and ethnic groups;
- ▶ Addressing a historical or current event or problem in the community or the nation at-large; and
- ▶ Exploring implicit biases and systemic injustices or inequalities.

### PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR NEEDS

Facilitators should consider which stakeholder groups will participate in the dialogue, as this will influence the topics addressed during the conversation. Possible participants include:

- ▶ District and school staff (e.g., administrators, teachers, instructional support staff, operations staff);
- ▶ Community members (e.g., elected officials, business partners, representatives of local nonprofits); and
- ▶ Students and their families.

### IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Facilitators should consider their objectives in hosting a formal conversation around race or specific racially-focused events and issues. Possible goals include:

- ▶ Building relationships between participants of different races and ethnicities;
- ▶ Learning empathy for the challenges faced by a historically or currently disadvantaged racial group; and
- ▶ Planning actions to address problematic community dynamics.

### DISCUSSION FORMAT AND CADENCE

Facilitators should consider how they wish to organize and structure the discussion to best achieve outlined goals. Possible formats include:

- ▶ Small group meetings with a limited number of specified participants (e.g., a high school class, a committee meeting);
- ▶ Open forums that can be attended by any interested individuals or groups; and
- ▶ Ongoing working sessions that occur on a set schedule.

## ESTABLISH GOALS FOR THE CONVERSATION

**Facilitators should first consider local climate, national events, historical contexts, and the experiences of individuals from different races to generate potential foci for the discussion.** They should research how “race remains a key predictor of access, opportunity, safety[,] and well-being” and how this dynamic plays out within their local school community. Such reflections can encompass how specific groups or individuals within the district, including the facilitators themselves, face disadvantages, prejudice, or bias due to their race and, conversely, how others may experience unearned

privileges and advantages due to their race. Knowledge of racial issues and disparities and how they manifest in schools and the community will allow facilitators to begin brainstorming ways in which racially-focused conversations may challenge those issues and disparities and the narratives surrounding them.

These explorations should also emphasize the specific concerns of those groups or individuals that will participate in the conversation. In particular, facilitators should anticipate participants having different perceptions and experiences with

the external construction of racial identities (i.e., how others perceive an individual of a certain race) and its internal manifestation (i.e., how individuals identify and define themselves). Relatedly, facilitators need to consider their own racial identity and the disadvantages or privileges that accompany it—as well as participants’ interpretation of those disadvantages or privileges—to appropriately frame their individual experiences and maintain conscious consideration of how their race impacts their ability to lead a racially-focused conversation.

## DISCUSSION GOALS TO ADVANCE RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

### AWARENESS

Build participants’ awareness of equity issues and their ability to understand and examine those issues critically. As such, the conversation will help normalize reflective dialogue about race and related issues.

### CAPACITY-BUILDING

Develop a specific skill or knowledge set for participants to leverage in their daily work around racial equity. Moreover, the conversation may introduce specific strategies or resources for participants to use immediately.

### ACTION

Initiate a particular action plan, policy shift, or program to combat institutional racism and advance racial justice. These conversations focus on coordination of participants’ efforts and the resources at their disposal.

# TIPS FOR FACILITATING THE CONVERSATION

Facilitators must also consider how to structure critical conversations about race. Logistical items such as distributing pre-reading or reference data, scheduling a meeting time, selecting questions and prompts for discussion, and outlining rules and procedures for administering the discussion (e.g., managing talk time, dealing with increased tensions) are an important part of these considerations. Facilitators must also determine how to structure these critical conversations so that they are constructive and focused on goals. This includes intentional framing of conversations around intended goals and results.

In addition, at the start of any formal conversation around race, racial equity, and social justice, facilitators should work with participants to formalize and codify norms and expectations. Ideally, facilitators will collaborate with the participants to establish these norms and expectations, though facilitators may simply need to present participants with a set of guidelines that they must adhere to—if time constraints prevent group collaboration around

norms. Facilitators will generally want to emphasize empathy, respect, confidentiality, acceptance with discomfort, and conflict management when setting rules.

Here are a few examples facilitators can use to start the conversation:

**“Share the airspace.”**

**“What is said here stays here; what is learned here leaves here.”**

**“Challenge ideas, not people.”**

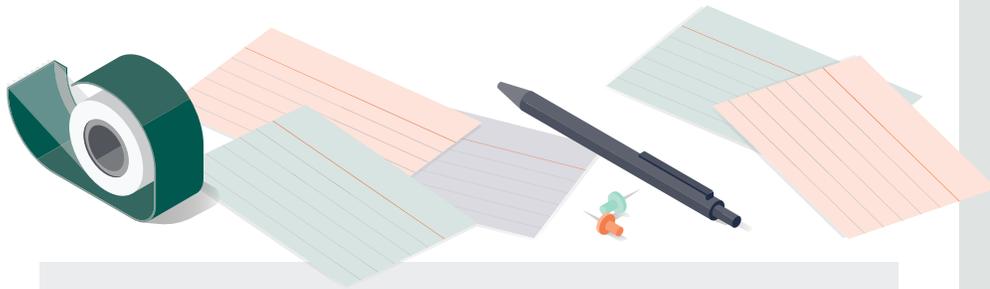
Finally, facilitators should include a land acknowledgment at the start of

the session. Conversations about racial injustice can often center on the Black community; while this is a critical focus point, these conversations may fail to make space for the first Americans to experience racism: Indigenous people. Facilitators should name the Indigenous territories where the discussion is taking place, explain why this is important to acknowledge, and address the relevance of Indigenous rights to the subject matter of the discussion.

Source: [Amnesty International](#)



## QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE CONVERSATION



### ACTIVITY

A helpful way for facilitators to ask this question is to write down participants' answers on a flipchart or index cards. The facilitator can then place the answers around the room randomly and allow participants to do a "gallery walk". This can ease participants into being more willing to share their perspectives openly.

### BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

The bystander effect is “the concept that when there are a group of people that witness an incident, that we as individuals are less likely to respond.” Facilitators can discuss how participants can advocate for victims in these situations by intervening—helping to remove them from the situation, distracting the instigator (e.g., taking them aside to ask an unrelated question), and, if in a workplace or similar setting, reporting the abuse to a leader.

## POTENTIAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO INDIVIDUALLY LIVED EXPERIENCES

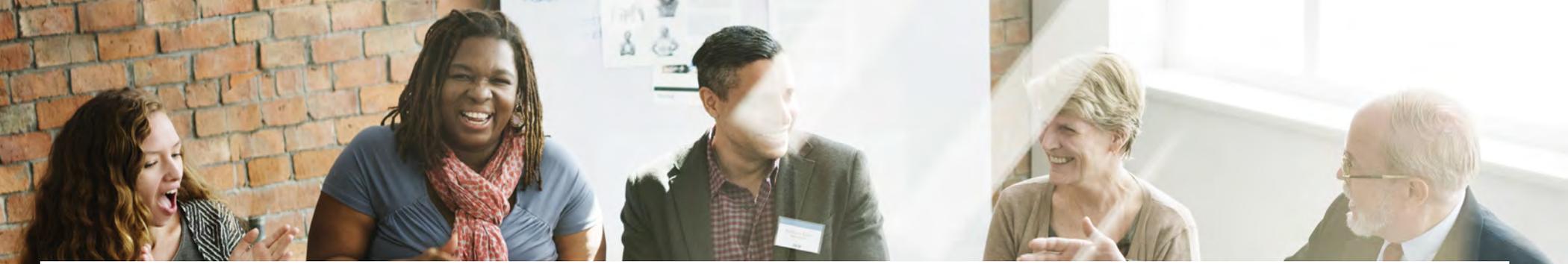
1. What is your racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background? What aspect of your racial or ethnic identity makes you the proudest?
2. When were you first aware of your race? What circumstances drove this recognition?
3. How often do you think about your racial or ethnic identity?
4. In what ways does your race impact your personal life? Your professional life?
5. Does racial or ethnic identity enter in your process of making important or daily decisions? If so, how?
6. How much and what type of contact do you have with people of other races or groups? What is the nature of these relationships?
7. Have you ever felt “different” in a group setting because of your race/ethnicity? How did this affect you?
8. Have you ever experienced a situation where your race or ethnicity seemed to contribute to a problem or uncomfortable situation?
9. Have you ever witnessed someone being treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity? How did you respond?
10. How would you answer the question of where we want to go in race relations as a community?
11. What things have you seen that give you hope for improved race relations?
12. What are some steps you could take to improve race relations in our schools and community?

Source: [Kelly Charles-Collins](#)

## POTENTIAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

1. How would you describe the overall state of race relations in our community?
2. What problems do you see in the school community that are related to race and ethnicity?
3. What racial groups tend to be socially isolated from one another in our community?
4. Are there any specific factors (e.g., language, socioeconomic status, neighborhood segregation) that compound issues related to race?
5. What are some of the underlying conditions and hindering forces negatively affecting race relations in our community?
6. In what ways do we agree and/or disagree about the nature of our racial problems, what caused them, and how serious they are?
7. How do racial divisions adversely impact individuals from specific races and the community-at-large?
8. If we had excellent race relations, what kinds of things would we see, hear, and feel in the community?
9. What are the main changes that need to happen to increase understanding and cooperative action across racial lines?
10. What are some steps we could take to improve race relations in our schools and community?
11. Should we continue and expand this dialogue to get more people involved? How could we do that?
12. What will we do to ensure follow-up to this conversation?





## CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

Facilitators should recognize and explain to participants that a single or even a series of racially-focused conversations may still result in more work needing to be done to accomplish target goals. Relatedly, every individual participant may not be entirely satisfied with the end result of a conversation, so it will fall on facilitators to highlight progress made toward goals at the conclusion of a given discussion. For instance, the facilitator may take the following actions to provide some sense of closure to the conversation in the absence of or in addition to a measurable representation of goal achievement:

- ▶ Extend gratitude to everyone for their courage and willingness to participate in a difficult—but necessary—conversation;
- ▶ Share how the conversation impacted themselves personally,

and offer space for others to share how the conversation impacted them;

- ▶ Encourage participants to share an appreciation for the group process or of someone in the group;
- ▶ Ask participants to share what they learned about themselves or what they took from the conversation;
- ▶ Prompt participants to follow up with another participant for deeper dialogue to continue learning and personal discovery;
- ▶ Inquire if there are any actions people are inspired to take as a result of the conversation; and
- ▶ Schedule a future conversation or an ongoing meeting time with the same participants.

Indeed, facilitators should reiterate that participants have learned something from the conversation while also encouraging individuals and the whole group to complete any planned or proposed action derived during the conversation, whether those actions are undertaken at the personal or the institutional level. This might mean encouraging participants to learn more to build on knowledge and skills acquired during a given conversation or educating others in the school community. Conversely, facilitators may ask participants to implement a series of actions which they outlined to alter organizational policies or modify individual behaviors as they relate to racial equity.

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## DEFINE WHAT YOU HOPE TO EXAMINE

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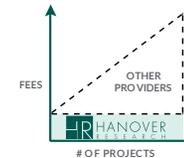
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