

Novant Health

How to talk about race and racism and take steps to unify the community

Typically when a group of people comes together, it is to solve a problem, plan a solution or get something done. *True dialogue*, however, is the opportunity to practice team building, collective thinking, learning and interaction while exploring a particular topic – without being driven by a need to have an outcome.

This type of true dialogue, as contrasted with conversation or discussion, requires intentionality, skill and discipline. Areas of competency outlined below include *listening*, *speaking* and *discovering*.

Purpose of the dialogue

- Provide a safe space to share dialogue about feelings, thoughts and ideas related to the specific event.

Time: 40 to 60 minute, *depending on the number of people involved*

1. Guidelines:

- Authentic personal sharing; listening and giving space to others are paramount to the process.
 - The dialogue is not a debate or a problem-solving discussion.
 - If you are in a group, identify a facilitator – someone to assist in facilitating/guiding the conversation. The facilitator should not try to come to a singular conclusion but rather to express and better understand the multiple realities that may be in the room. The role can be as simple as starting and ending the conversation while also ensuring that everyone is encouraged to speak and that everyone is listening to others.
 - **Listening** to others and accepting views and experiences that may be different from one's own is very important. The hope is that there is a newly shared understanding in listening to each other.
 - On the following page, there are discussion questions that will assist you with the dialogue. If you do not use all of the discussion questions, it is OK. **The first question is the most important to ask.**
2. Share the purpose of the dialogue in a sentence or two. Ask participants to reflect on the questions in silence for a few minutes (2 to 5 minutes). They may write some responses, but that is not essential. A few moments of silent reflection are crucial
 3. Consider asking the questions one at a time and let each person respond before you move to the next question. These questions are offered as a way to promote dialogue and move from the personal into the organization and/or the community – time permitting.
 4. Ask your facilitator/guide to summarize and paraphrase – and to ask follow-up questions as appropriate.

5. In closing, ask how understanding has increased through listening to others' responses to the questions

Questions for reflection

Feelings

1. What was your immediate feeling upon learning about what happened in (specify city)?
 - Have these feelings shifted or become more complex over time? If so, how?

Stories

2. What is the dominant story you are telling yourself and others about what happened? (State specific event.)
 - What other stories are you hearing? Who is telling these stories?
 - Whose story don't you know or understand?
 - Which story is the most troubling?

Now . . .

3. What steps can you take individually to unite our communities?

Source: Adapted from CBI (Community Building Initiative) and OZS Consulting