Anti-Oppressive Communication – Practical Application
Session 2 – February 6, 2023
CAEA

Facilitated by Douglas Stewart, Competence Consultants & Associates

Objectives – participants will have an opportunity:

- to enhance their knowledge and skills re anti-oppressive communication;

- to be familiar with frameworks such as trauma informed and calling in/out while considering concepts such as tone policing, gaslighting, internal policing, code switching, white fragility, etc.;

- to reflect on and practice strategies for giving and receiving feedback in continuing to co-create anti-oppressive workspaces.

Giving & Receiving Feedback Breakout Group #1

1. Think about an oppressive situation/incident when you gave feedback about or someone gave you feedback, and it didn't go well.

   • What is difficult about receiving feedback?

   • How can we give feedback in a way that will land as supportive but clear?

2. Think about another oppressive situation/incident when you gave feedback, or someone gave you feedback, and it went well.

   • What were the elements that made the conversation go well?

Calling In

- Calling in is bringing attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior, including bias, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination with generosity, gentleness and calmness while remaining firm in communicating the impact of their actions in the interest of their learning and understanding about the impact of their behaviour.

- Calling in is usually associated with communities who have either established such expectations or are assumed to be working with related values that they will call each other back into alignment when they experience behaviour that is inconsistent.

Tone Policing

A tone argument (also called tone policing) is **a type of ad hominem aimed at the tone of an argument instead of its factual or logical content**. Ignoring the truth or falsity of a statement, a tone argument instead focuses on the emotion with which it is expressed.

A **conversational tactic that dismisses the ideas being communicated when they are perceived to be delivered in an angry, frustrated, sad, fearful, or otherwise emotionally charged manner**: It's condescending to shut down an argument through tone policing.

Examples of tone policing**:**

- "Calm down so we can discuss this like adults."
- "You get more flies with honey than with vinegar."
- "It's hard to take you seriously when you're so emotional."
- "When you're ready to talk about this in a rational way, let me know."
- "Your language is divisive."
- "This isn't the time or place for you to express your emotions."
- "You cannot speak to me in that tone."
- "You'd have a lot more people on your side if you weren't so rude."

Calling Out:

- When we need to let someone know that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- When we need to interrupt in order to prevent further harm
- When it is repeated behaviour that has been "called in" before…
- Will likely feel hard and uncomfortable, but necessary
- Allows us to hit the "pause" button and break the momentum

Gaslighting

"Gaslighting is an abusive technique whereby people are made to believe that they don't have a grip on reality," writes Suzannah Weiss of [Everyday Feminism](#).

"Most of the time, it's privileged people questioning marginalized people's accounts of oppression," Weiss writes. "This serves to tell disadvantaged people that privileged people know what they've experienced better than they do — and that their perspective is not important."

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation that hinges on creating self-doubt.

Shifting blame is a common gaslighting tactic. Accusing the victim of being the gas-lighter causes confusion, makes them question the situation, and draws attention away from the true gas-lighter's harmful behavior

What Should I Consider When Calling In or Out?

Calling In

- **Influence** - You have influence with this person through a personal (e.g. close relationship) or professional (e.g. work colleague) connection

- **Safety** - A one-on-one or small group conversation will not compromise your safety or wellbeing

- **Openness** - This person has demonstrated an openness and commitment to learning how to better foster spaces of inclusion and belonging

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Calling Out

- **Urgency** - There is an urgent need to hit "pause" to prevent further harm to others or yourself, and make it clear to others present that you are not in agreement with what is being said or done Influence and

- **Safety** - There is a specific power or relationship dynamic that would render calling in harmful, unsafe, or ineffective for you

- **Openness** - Previous attempts to call in have been unsuccessful

How Do I Call In or Call Out?

Calling In

- "I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?" "How might the impact of your words or actions differ from your intent?"

- "How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone else might misinterpret your words/actions?"

- "Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?" "What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable, or worried?"

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Calling Out

- "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."

- "It sounded like you said _____. Is that what you really meant?" "I need to push back against that. I disagree. I don't see it that way."

- "I need you to know how your comment just landed on me." "It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit."

Giving Feedback

- Feedback should be:
  - Timely, Specific & Descriptive, Relevant & Helpful & Future Oriented
  - It can also be disruptive and an awakening

" Use "I" statements

👀 When I (see, hear)...

🕴 I feel (mad, sad, glad, hurt, scared)...

Because I thought, believed, hoped..

👍 And I would like you to....

TIPS for Giving Feedback

Feedback should:

1. Be **TIMELY** (e.g. give feedback in private)

2. Be **OBJECTIVE** (e.g. describe the behaviour)

3. Focus on the **IMMEDIATE** issue (i.e., do not bring up very old issues)

4. Describe the **IMPACT** of the behaviour on you, others, the environment

5. Focus on the **FUTURE** (i.e., how to solve the problem and/or work together)

6. Involve the other person in coming up with **HELP/IDEAS** to resolve the issue.

-Marylin Kanee & Nathalie Peladeau

What Do I Do When Someone Calls Me In or Out?

- **Pause** - take a breath. Ground yourself to receive what they have to say.
  Listen - with the intent of learning and seeing things from their point of view Acknowledge - take responsibility for the impact of your words or actions

- **Reflect** - process your thoughts and emotions. It may help to do so with a trusted partner who will not only have grace for your mistake, neither defending your actions nor condemning you.

- **Repair the harm done** - change your behavior going forward, inviting trusted partners to hold you accountable to learning and doing better

- Don't beat yourself up or go on a shame spiral; try to be kind to yourself

- Don't make the person calling you in or out be your emotional caretaker, especially if they are the recipient of the harm (that is centering yourself and may add to their emotional labor)

- Remember: You're not a bad person. You are an ever changing and evolving person and this is just one step in your growth.

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When you receive feedback …

- Thank you for sharing that.
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Can you help me understand….
- So you feel…. Now I see why you feel that way….
- I'm sorry I came across that way. Here's what I was trying to say…
- Next time I will be more aware, careful, an ally, anti-racist…
- I think I have a lot to learn and will take this very seriously.

Remember

Patience

- Try to be patient and understanding, keeping in mind that you will also sometimes cause harm with your words or actions

Self-care

- If you are the target of the harm, make sure you are taking care of yourself (you may not have the capacity or ability to call in or call out right now and that's okay)

Find Allies

- Identify allies for support and to step in, so that the burden is not on you
If you are an ally, act as an upstander to call in or call out when you see the harm being done, without being asked to do so
Reflect on your own identities and privilege, noting how they may make you more or less effective, safe, and able to call in or call out (e.g. if you have racial privilege, it may make it easier or safer for you to call out racial harm)

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Trauma Informed Care

Taking a trauma informed approach
- Experiencing discrimination, harassment, violence, bullying, and/or reprisal can be extremely traumatic
- Being accused of discrimination, harassment, violence, bullying, and/or reprisal can also be traumatic
- There are four basic principles of this approach:
  - ❑ Awareness of prevalence of trauma for all people including yourself
  - ❑ Recognition of the signs of the impact of trauma that will show up in different ways (fight, flight, freeze)
  - ❑ Responding rather than reacting
  - ❑ Resisting re-traumatization

HAVEN Helpline: 1-855-201-7823

Scenario...Breakout Group #2

You are on a in rehearsals when the announcement is made that Queen Elizabeth the II has died. On the bio-break cast members check their phones and come back to the rehearsal room commenting on the news. One woman says weepily how sad she is that the world has lost such an incredible role model. She begins to wax on, uninterrupted about how glamorous the Royal's are. You catch yourself intrigued with what she is saying and thinking about how you too watched Harry and Meghan's wedding. You look around the room and notice the faces of two of the racialized cast. Their expressions range from disdain to anger.

- **How do you feel?**

- **What do you do next?**

- **Practice/Role-play the feedback conversation...**

Internal Policing/Code Switching

In a recent article, Harvard Business Review identified three reasons Black professionals become experts at "code switching," or changing how they talk and act around people of other ethnicities to fit in or downplay aspects of their true identity at work.

These are:

1. Downplaying membership in a stigmatized racial group helps increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired.

2. Avoiding negative stereotypes associated with Black racial identity helps Black employees to be seen as leaders;

3. Expressing shared interests with members of dominant groups raises the chance of promotions because individuals tend to affiliate with people they perceive as similar.

https://www.cumanagement.com/articles/2022/01/diversity-insight-complexities-code-switching

White Fragility

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.

Robyn D'Angelo International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 3 (3) (2011) pp 54-70

FOUR PARTS TO

ACCOUNTABILITY

SELF REFLECTION

APOLOGY

REPAIR

CHANGED BEHAVIOR

"True accountability is not only apologizing, understanding the impact your actions have caused on yourself and others, making amends or reparations to the harmed parties; but most importantly, true accountability is changing your behavior so that the harm, violence, abuse does not happen again."

MIA MINGUS

For more, visit http://bit.ly/BAC2020

This is Us... Breakout Group #3

1. What is Randall saying to Kate?

2. What is the impact of Randall not having said anything in the past?

3. How do we lessen the need for internalized policing and code switching and shift white fragility in our industry? What needs to be in place?

Are you an ALLY?

ALLY	BYSTANDER
Speaks out against inappropriate comments or conduct	Lets inappropriate behaviour pass without intervention
Tries to remove systemic barriers faced by certain groups	Accepts the way things are as "normal"
Acknowledges and affirms people's experiences	Denies or minimizes people's experiences
Thinks about impact of words and tone of voice	Unaware of impact of actions (or inactions)
Makes mistakes and learns from them -- no excuses	Unwilling to learn (and unlearn)
Takes time to listen	Does not listen