

# Elementary Critical Conversation Guide



## Topic

Difficult  
Conversations



## SEL Competency

Relationship Skills,  
Self-Awareness



## Theme

CSE, Implicit Bias

## Having Conversations on Critical Issues- Elementary

Part of maintaining a safe and respectful environment is ensuring the skills needed to engage in difficult conversations are reviewed and practiced. Often due to personal discomfort and the strong emotions associated with various current events one may avoid conversations or engage in discussions that create greater divides. Below are points to prepare for those times when students initiate discussions, or when we ourselves need to start a conversation. The following strategies can be applied to various conversations on sensitive topics or issues.

### BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

*Plan Ahead:*

- You will need adequate time for onboarding of students, set the guardrails for the discussion
- Content Delivery, confirm you have the necessary tools and resources to prepare for the conversation.

*Ensure that discussions and lessons:*

- Are developmentally and age appropriate
- Provide a balanced perspective either in the materials used or the totality of the lesson
- Align with the organization's mission and goals

*We present; we do not promote one view over another; we teach our students how to think, not what to think.*

### DURING THE CONVERSATION

- Collectively establish, then remind students of group discussion norms
- Know the diversity of student perspectives in classroom
- Self-regulate before and during the discussion
- Monitor how students are responding
- Be aware of your biases (We teach, we do not promote)
- Ensure all voices that want to be heard are heard
- Address perspectives that are harmful
- Reflect individually and collectively on the discussion
- Get Feedback & improve your effectiveness

### FINAL POINT TO CONSIDER

Take time to regulate yourself first and pay attention to your body during these conversations. If you feel yourself getting anxious or dysregulated in any way, utilize calming techniques.

## Additional Resources:

- Alrubail, R. (2015). [Creating a Safe Space for Students to Discuss Sensitive Current Events](#). Edutopia.
- Ruland, T. (2020). [Engaging in Appropriate Conversations](#). National Education Association.
- Teaching Tolerance. (2019). [Let's Talk: A Guide to Facilitating Critical Conversations With Students](#). Montgomery: Southern Poverty Law Center.
- Washington University. [Facilitating Challenging Conversations in the Classroom](#). Washington University in St. Louis. Center for Teaching and Learning.