
Tips for Difficult Conversations

What might listeners and speakers do to effectively respond to one another when something has been said that creates concerns of cultural insensitivity, disrespect, and/or unfairness? *This list of possible responses is meant to open up possibilities for more effective communication.*

Listener – Speaker:

What you might say when you hear something insensitive

- I find the term you are using makes me uncomfortable.
- I support your desire to speak your mind but the language you are using strikes me as disrespectful.
- I am interested in your perspective, but the way you are approaching this topic promotes hostility not understanding.
- Did you need to make your point by using that language?
- Your understanding of this subject is important to me, but when you present your information this way you turn me off to learning more about your ideas.
- I think language is important, but I appreciate how difficult it can be to communicate.
- Statements or language usage can make a speaker's intentions misunderstood. Did I understand you to mean ...?
- I don't want to take your comments/terms out of context. Did I misunderstand your intention?
- I hope I am not being too sensitive, but...

Speaker – Listener:

What you might say when you've been accused of saying something insensitive

- My meaning and usage is technical but I am open to further discussion.
- Give me a second. I have never had someone ask me that question.
- I'm not sure I understand your position, but I want to explore your concerns.
- You raise a good point, but we won't have time to examine this idea until next week.
- Sounds like we should discuss these terms in greater detail.
- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain myself further.
- Language is important. Thank you for not jumping to conclusions about my intentions.
- I try to keep up on language usage and what might be considered terms that are culturally insensitive. I apologize if my words were offensive. It was not my intention.
- Thank you for not taking my remarks out of context. I was trying to be provocative not offensive.