



**OUR MISSION:** Women and Youth Supporting Each Other empowers young women by providing the resources and support necessary to make positive life choices and create community change.

# BRAVE SPACE GUIDELINES FOR CONSCIOUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SENSITIVE TOPICS

## Mentor Training Component: 5. Diversity and Cultural Awareness

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WYSE supports the following recommendations for **participants of a group discussion** to follow when talking about **divisive topics**. These guidelines can help make participants feel more comfortable expressing personal thoughts or opinions that they **perceive to be outside the norm** and create a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

1. **Be welcoming.** Set the tone for the conversation. Create a physical space where all feel welcome and safe. Use inclusive body language and actively invite perspectives from all participants. Challenge jokes and statements that are perceived to be hurtful or offensive, or be supportive of people who do.
2. **Be aware.** Acknowledge that all participants are at different points on a journey of learning and growing. Validate and support the ideas, feelings, or experiences of others. Be aware that your emotions may impact others based on their experiences. Be mindful of sexually charged topics, language, and perceived behavior as we all come from different cultural and life experiences and have different boundaries.
3. **Strive to learn.** Listen to those who have different experiences than your own. Seek permission to ask questions about other people's experiences, e.g. "*Would you be willing to tell me more about...*" Avoid attacking or debating the validity of someone else's experiences.
4. **Always ask questions.** Seek to engage in critical dialogue through conscious questioning and active listening. Before reacting or responding to jokes or statements you feel are hurtful or offensive to yourself or others, ask for clarification, e.g. "*What I heard you say is... Is that correct?*"
5. **Avoid generalizing.** Recognize that your experiences, values, etc. are unique and avoid generalizing. Similarly, avoid language that assumes all people are in the majority (e.g. heterosexual, white, abled, cisgendered, Judeo-Christian, Republican/Democrat) and avoid stereotyping based on assumptions.
6. **Practice forgiveness.** Remember that this is a space where we are all learning and growing. While all are expected to make their best effort to be respectful, there is an understanding that someone may say something that results in unintentional offense and hurt feelings for those around. A primary assumption of Brave Space is that everyone speaks with the positive intent of seeking greater knowledge and understanding.