

## Tips and Responses for Six Challenging Behaviors

### HOSTILITY

---

#### What it looks like:

Angry, cynical, or sarcastic interjections

#### How it impacts the conversation:

It may undermine the conversation, shut participants down, and be hurtful to individuals.

#### How to address it:

**Name it:** “That comment sounded sarcastic to me.”

**Use empathy:** “It sounds like you are very angry about this issue.”

**Refer to the ground rules:** “At the beginning of the conversation we agreed to respect one another’s views.”

Take a break and speak to them privately.

### EXPERTS

---

#### What it looks like:

A participant who is an expert on the topic sharing facts, figures, etc. OR, someone acting as if they are an expert on the topic.

#### How it impacts the conversation:

Shuts down some participants who don’t feel they know enough to contribute, or derails the conversation to focus on the expert sharing information and answering questions.

#### How to address it:

**Invite other contributions:** “It seems you have a clear idea of what you think should be done. I’d like to invite others to share their ideas of what we might do.”

**Refocus:** “You clearly know a lot about this subject. In this conversation though, we’re hoping to focus on people’s feelings about the topic.”

**Invite alternative contributions:** “I can tell you know a lot about this issue. I wonder if you might be willing to write something up to share with the group before our next session?”

### DOMINATION

---

#### What it looks like:

Constant talking or interjecting when others are speaking; Not allowing for other voices to be heard.

#### How it impacts the conversation:

Limited participation from others in the group—participants may tune out or leave if they don’t feel they can contribute.

#### How to address it:

**Thank them and invite others:** “Thank you. Are there others who would like to respond to the question I posed?”

**Interrupt politely:** “I appreciate your contributions, but I’m concerned that we haven’t had a chance to hear from others yet. Could we hear from a few other people?”

**Refer to the ground rules:** “We agreed at the start of today’s conversation that we would allow everyone an equal chance to speak.”

## FIXERS

---

### What it looks like:

Someone who has the solution to a problem and just wants to discuss it—whether it’s the topic at hand or participant’s personal problems shared in a conversation.

### How it impacts the conversation:

Disrupts collaborative decision-making, can frustrate participants.

### How to address it:

**Acknowledge and redirect:** “You seem enthusiastic about this potential solution. I wonder if others have ideas for potential solutions?”

**Restate the purpose of the conversation:** “We’re here to share our personal experiences with this topic and feel heard today. Let’s focus on listening to one another’s sharing.”

## RESERVED

---

### What it looks like:

Someone who is not participating in the conversation, whether they are uncomfortable or just content to listen.

### How it impacts the conversation:

It may not always be an issue, but in when the group is working towards a decision or collaborative action, it can cause frustration to not have all participants involved.

Additionally, the reserved participant may feel they need to be invited to speak and left out if they are not asked.

### How to address it:

**Create space:** “Would those who have not had the chance to speak like to?”

Check-in with them during breaks to ask how you might support their participation.

## MICROAGGRESSIONS, SEXISM, RACISM, AND MORE

---

### What it looks like:

White participants may “center” their own lived experience to demonstrate that they have lived through a situation in which they were a “minority” and, in some cases at least, to ensure their identity’s experiences are still centered in every space.

*Or:* Deflecting—instead of directly addressing race, someone will shift the conversation to class.

*Or:* A participant might focus on critiquing the tool you’re using in a workshop or facilitated conversation rather than engaging with it.

### How it impacts the conversation:

It can shut down others completely, or create hostility. Conversation will not continue unimpeded until this is addressed.

### How to address it:

**Name the actions and comments:** Ask the person to recognize what they have said and the impact on others.

**Address myths and anecdotal evidence:** “White people can be impacted by class and race, but it is also true that people of color are disproportionately impacted negatively. Let’s talk about why this might be the case.”

**Encourage respectful dialogue.** “While we may not agree, we must disagree respectfully. Disagreement should be expressed in a way that is consistent with the ground rules.”