

Systemic Racism Conversation Kit



December 2020

Creating the Right Space and Setting the Tone

Context and Considerations

Excerpt from **Conversations Without Borders** – Professor David Divine

When seeking to connect with others on sensitive areas relating to ourselves - our bodies, our thoughts, how we were brought up, what areas of our past influenced how we think, act, how we change, and do we want to change - there is risk.

Risk in the sense of sharing ourselves with others opens us to outside inspection and interpretation that may not be to our liking.

Therefore, to maximize the prospects of connection with each other there needs to be ground rules in terms of creating safe spaces to talk within. Such spaces allow us to have a chance to expose our thinking and actions, vulnerabilities, areas where our knowledge and experience is limited, areas where we wish to seek further knowledge and experience. In such spaces there is a commitment from each of the participants to acknowledge each other's contribution without critical judgement because that leads to a shut down in connection. The object of the safe spaces is to hear each other and learn from each other and potentially change one another through respectful exchanges.

Living in our bodies can be challenging in society, especially if our bodies look or feel different to what bodies 'should' look and feel like. We receive such judgements through other people, social media, upbringing, newspapers, books, television, films, etc.

When bodies have a different colour and a negative value and worth is placed on that colour, and there are other alleged differences attributed to such bodies, and there are shared external views from multiple sources, powerful sources, dominant sources, about such bodies, it has a profound impact on the individuals who inhabit such bodies.

Talking together about such impacts, differences, how it feels to navigate through life in such bodies, is a necessary activity as is discussion about those shared powerful views held by others who feel they do not have such bodies. How did those views emerge?

How are they sustained? What foundations do they rest on? What supports do they have? How do we who do not have such bodies benefit from sharing such views, whether we are aware of such benefits or even aware that we share such views?

The Importance of Conversations

Just Start

A key part of activating meaningful change to counter system racism and anti-Black racism is to start the conversation.

As Professor Divine notes in his article – **Conversations Without Borders** – there are certain considerations one needs to have in mind when creating these conversation opportunities.

- Allowing yourself to be open and vulnerable to share your perspective and/or holding space for others to share theirs.
- Holding personal and collective accountability for the process and progress, even as it gets messy and the path forward is not clear.
- Finally, being aware of our own biases as we step forward into these conversations is key to ensuring they are authentic and genuine and rooted in a common commitment for meaningful change.

Conversation Fundamentals

Strategies and Tactics

Setting the Stage

If you are thinking about hosting a conversation about racism, you shouldn't just spring it on the club. It takes some pre-thought, planning and maybe some pre-conversation notice to make sure you have created the best conditions to have a safe and informative conversation.

- Create and pre-circulate a “thought starter” document where you could provide an overview context as well as a few key questions for the members to think about.
- Give members a few weeks of notice so they can get it into their calendars as well as identify a key contact if they have questions before the session.
- Communicate clearly that everyone is welcomed to participate in the conversation and that all efforts will be taken to create space for all views and perspectives.

Results, Outcome and Impact

These conversations are important and are happening all over the globe across various forums. Rotary recognizes the importance of these conversations and has activated a number of groups to assist with advancing the awareness and action within Rotary to counter anti-racism and anti-Black racism.

Rotary has appointed special leadership positions and Task Force committees with the express mandate to explore and create tools for clubs to use to examine their own organizations and also identify key actions they can take to contribute to meaningful change.

As we've noted, being willing to host the conversation is the first step to activate that meaningful change.

The result will be a deeper awareness of the issues and identification of key actions that we can undertake to be part of that change. The ultimate outcome of course is that meaningful change actually happens and that we **are not** in this place a decade from now - having this same conversation.

But it is important to note – this is not change that will be achieved overnight from one conversation.

It will take time and a collective commitment to move this forward. As Rotarians and as people of action, we are all responsible for this change.

Be part of the conversation.

Conversation Design and Hosting

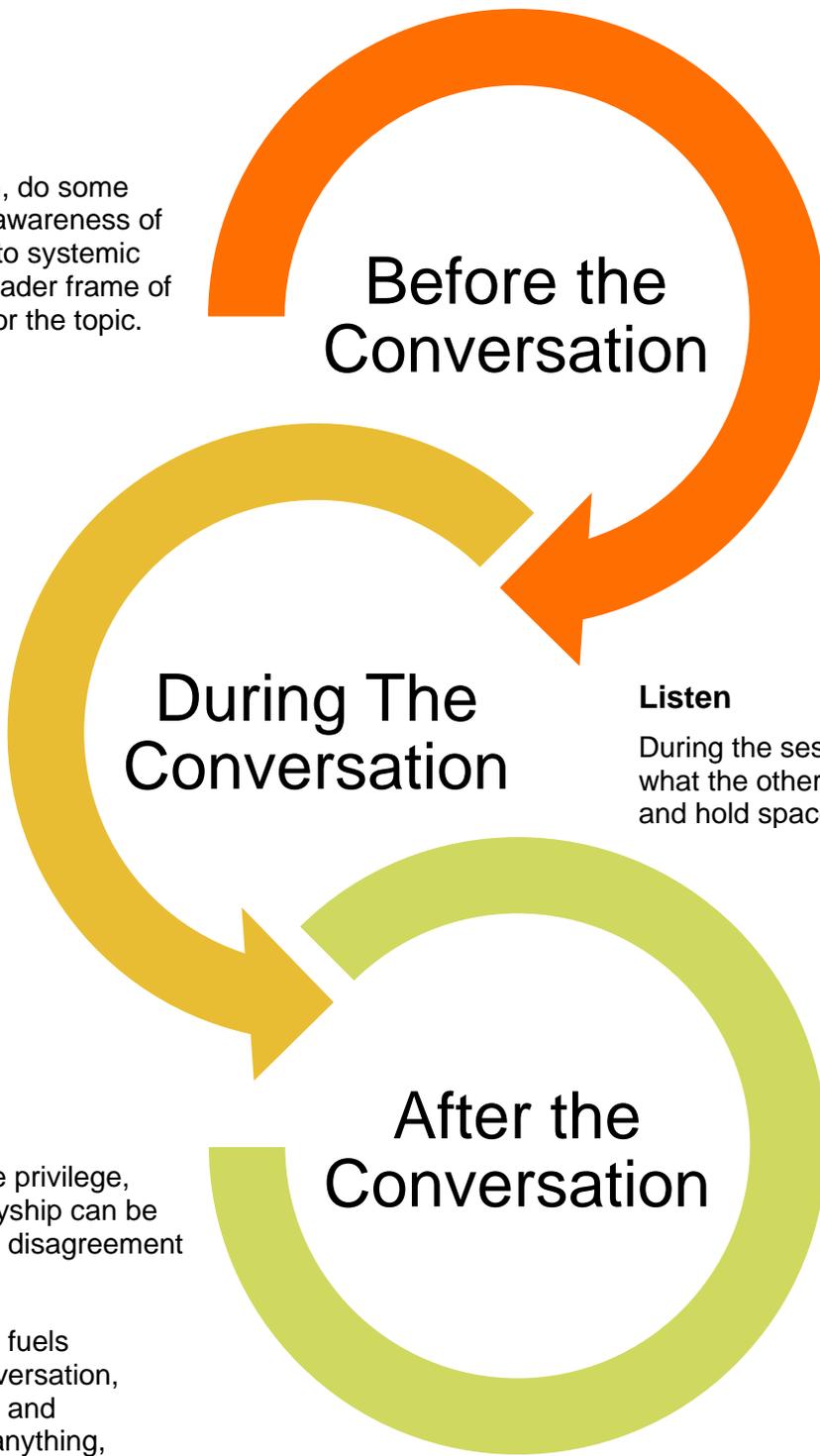
A key part of designing and hosting a successful conversation about racism is choosing a facilitator who is comfortable guiding the conversation and, if necessary, reminding participants of the boundaries and guiding principles.

- Create a loosely structured agenda or topic profile for the conversation, so people know what to expect.
- Respect the rhythm of the conversation, allowing for pauses and quiet reflection.
- Vigilantly ensure that no one person dominates or overpowers the conversation at the expense of the other participants.
- End the conversation with “What resonated with you and what should we do next?” to reinforce common perspectives and collective commitment to change.

THOUGHTFUL SYSTEMIC RACISM CONVERSATIONS

Learn

Before the conversation, do some reading and build your awareness of the core issues related to systemic racism. Gives you a broader frame of reference and context for the topic.



Before the
Conversation

During The
Conversation

Listen

During the session, actively listen to what the other participants are saying and hold space for them to respond.

Reflect

Discussions about white privilege, systemic racism and allyship can be difficult and may lead to disagreement and tension.

This friction is a gift that fuels reflection. After the conversation, reflect what was shared and discussed and what, if anything, triggered a response in you – both positive and negative. Both are key indicators of growth opportunities.

After the
Conversation