

## WHAT IT IS

College students are faced with a wide range of challenges when it comes to talking through hard conversation topics on campus. In recent years, these have included the Israeli/Palestine conflict, reproductive rights, gun ownership, political divides, race relations, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, COVID-19 policies, vaccinations, and cancel culture. Staff can be helpful in these scenarios by sharing some basic “dos and don’ts” when it comes to engaging with others. Lessons from the Crucial Conversation program also provide some helpful context and skills related to managing these challenging conversations.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

Students who are likely to become involved in conflict with others related to a strongly held belief related to a controversial issue. Students who are considering a protest and/or working with the school to host an event for students. Student clubs/organizations that may find themselves the focus of controversy or targeted by other groups.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What are some of the key points that you want to get across when having a conversation with someone on an issue that you hold passionate opinions about?
2. What barriers and obstacles have you experienced when trying to engage in a dialogue with someone who has very different ideas?

## TEACHING INSIGHTS

The following questions are useful for reflection on these various topics and to help prepare staff to better understand some of the key areas of tension on each issue.

- **Cancel Culture:** Is cancel culture the natural consequence of unacceptable speech or actions? Is cancel culture as a tool for social justice? What are the benefits and limitations of this approach? How does cancel culture intersect with free speech?
- **Black Lives Matter:** How does the media shape the dialog with protest versus riot language? How does emotional and cultural intelligence provide a framework for change in this discussion?
- **Gun Control:** What are the core elements of the gun debate? What terminology should be used and how do we prepare for a trauma-informed, civil discussion? How do time and place come into this debate? What is the relationship between gun ownership and school violence?
- **LGBTQ+ Rights:** Discuss the language and terminology used by the LGBTQ+ community. What are the differences between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression? What are some examples of recent laws that further impact the safety of the LGBTQ+ community?
- **Reproductive Rights:** Bodily autonomy has come to be a central theme in American social and political discourse. Explore the intersectional nature of reproductive freedom and reproductive justice.
- **Immigration:** Identify some ways we each define ourselves by our history. Expand this to ideas of family, parents, and grandparents. What are the concerns related to having a more open immigration policy? What are some common, middle-of-the-road areas of agreement on both sides of this debate?