

Addressing equity issues in the classroom can sometimes lead to discussions that may be difficult, delicate and sometimes painful for some participants. The following are some suggestions you may find helpful in the process of creating a *safe, strong and free* environment:

...be sure to include everyone in the discussion (without forcing them to take part). Some students are bound to be more open than others to equity- and inclusion-related topics. It is important to interact and encourage discussion with everyone to model ways of finding connections with everyone, even those who have a different opinion or who are different from us.

...respect the choice of students who do not want to take part. Try to make sure these students feel comfortable about their choice. Not everyone is ready to share his or her feelings or experiences; this may be a way of protecting themselves.

...respect students' privacy and personal limits. Approach the topic using questions, comments and activities that do not target specific students or compel students to confide or talk about their own experiences.

...take into account that some students in the class may be experiencing harassment or bullying and may be hurting others. Bear in mind, too, that someone who is bullying in the classroom may be, and probably is, someone who is being bullied in another context.

...approach the activity as an exploration for both you and the students. Work together, using questions, activities and discussion, to come up with responses to complex issues and strategies for dealing with difficult situations.

...make use of opportunities to address offensive or disparaging comments. Ask questions designed to increase awareness about the impact of the comment, while remaining sensitive and attentive to the student who made it.

...ensure continuous and constructive intervention. Notice and address any disparaging comment by encouraging reflection on the impact of the message it conveys. Every comment of this kind is a learning opportunity! It is also an opportunity to clarify the values we are striving to realize in schools.

...approach the issues in a positive manner. For example, focus on the impact of discrimination and positive ideas and strategies for change instead of emphasizing examples of ways of hurting others. In this way no one going through such an experience will feel that they are being blamed or shamed.

...actively promote diversity. Encourage discussions about our human differences (language, religion, age, physical appearance, tastes, style, sexual orientation, ethnicity and so on) as well as that which unites us and makes us similar.

...celebrate each others' uniqueness. Encourage the students to learn about others' differences instead of valuing only what is generally perceived as trendy. Encourage students to talk about what they truly like in contrast to what is currently popular.

...honour words and actions that foster equity and inclusion. Recognize that which is respectful and acknowledge it. This will reinforce our capacity for positive change.

...encourage students to come up with strategies and solutions. Encourage students to reflect and think for themselves about constructive strategies. Ideally, they will feel proud of themselves for coming up with solutions on their own.

...be available for private discussion. Discussing problems like racism, homophobia and sexual violence can draw out difficult emotions in some students. If approached, we need to try to remain accessible to those who want to talk to us about their experiences. Our attentiveness and compassion alone may mean a great deal to a student.

...convey your optimism that change is possible. Those whose actions and words are discriminatory have learned this way of thinking and acting. Someone who lives in an environment in which such behaviour is acceptable will have more difficulty changing. It is important, however, to believe in change and in people's capacity to learn new ways of being. As teachers, we are role models for our students.