

## KIM CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS MODEL

### Individualized Assessment & Training Plan (IATP)

The IATP is a personalized approach to having constructive conversations about difficult topics. It aligns with the 8 steps of the Kim Constructive Conversations Model (KCCM) and highlights one's unique strengths and challenges. It should ideally be completed just prior to or during training of the KCCM, or as an accompaniment to the book *It's Time to Talk (and Listen): How to Have Constructive Conversations About Race, Class, Sexuality, Ability, and Gender in a Polarized World* (Kim & del Prado, 2019).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Why are you motivated to learn how to have constructive conversations?

Barriers: Fear

Many factors can get in the way of having constructive conversations about difficult topics. One of the most common barriers is fear. The more you are aware about what makes you uncomfortable, anxious, or afraid, the better prepared you will be to engage constructively with difficult conversations.

◇ **What fear(s) gets in your way of having difficult conversations?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> saying the wrong thing   | <input type="checkbox"/> being exposed              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> not knowing what to say  | <input type="checkbox"/> uncertainty                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conflict                 | <input type="checkbox"/> being judged               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hurting others' feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> being invalidated/rejected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> looking foolish          | <input type="checkbox"/> being vulnerable           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> retaliation              | <input type="checkbox"/> being abandoned            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing control           | <input type="checkbox"/> violence/death             |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing a job/promotion | <input type="checkbox"/> losing status/respect     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing hope            | <input type="checkbox"/> triggering old/raw wounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> losing a friendship    | <input type="checkbox"/> others _____              |

## Difficult Topics

Not all difficult topics have the same impact on everyone. This could be due to various factors including personal identities and experiences. Knowing which topic(s) you find particularly challenging or feel passionate about can make a difference in preparing how you converse about them.

◇ **What topic(s) are most difficult for you to talk about, especially with those who hold different opinions, experiences, or identities?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> race/ethnicity                 | <input type="checkbox"/> police/military violence         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gender                         | <input type="checkbox"/> climate change                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> social class (poverty, wealth) | <input type="checkbox"/> human rights/humanitarian crisis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sexuality                      | <input type="checkbox"/> health care                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ability/disability             | <input type="checkbox"/> immigration                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> religion/spirituality          | <input type="checkbox"/> education                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> age/generation                 | <input type="checkbox"/> others _____                     |

◇ **In what type(s) of relationship do you have the most challenging time having difficult conversations?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> boss/supervisors/managers      | <input type="checkbox"/> grandparents   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> co-workers/colleagues          | <input type="checkbox"/> other relatives  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> supervisees/employees/students | <input type="checkbox"/> friends  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> parents                        | <input type="checkbox"/> neighbors  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> romantic partners/spouses      | <input type="checkbox"/> strangers  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> children                       | <input type="checkbox"/> community groups (e.g., places of worship, social clubs, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> others _____                   |   |

## Emotions

Emotions (our own and others) play a big role in difficult conversations. What role do they play in how you communicate?

◇ **When I find myself in emotionally uncomfortable or challenging situations with others, I typically...** (Check all that apply)

- freeze
- fight
- flee
- relax (I got this!)
- other \_\_\_\_\_

◇ **When I am emotionally dysregulated (e.g., angry, anxious, etc.)**

- I am aware of what I am feeling.
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
- I am aware of why I am emotionally dysregulated.
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
- I can accept my emotions without judgment.
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often

- Always
- o I am able to respond mindfully instead of react impulsively.
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
- ◇ **How do you generally cope with strong emotions?** (Check all that apply)
  - Act on them
  - Distract myself (e.g., eat/drink/smoke, change subject, etc.)
  - Walk/get away
  - Breathe through them
  - Talk calmly and gently to myself
  - Ride them out; wait for it to pass
  - Don't know
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Having constructive conversations about difficult topics require that you accurately identify, understand, and effectively manage your emotions, so that they work for and not against you.

## Core Values

Values can significantly help you stay aligned with your goals, especially when barriers get in the way.

### ◇ What is your personal core value(s)?

- |                                    |                                     |                                       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> courage   | <input type="checkbox"/> compassion | <input type="checkbox"/> faith        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fortitude | <input type="checkbox"/> honesty    | <input type="checkbox"/> humility     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> integrity | <input type="checkbox"/> dignity    | <input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> prudence  | <input type="checkbox"/> generosity | <input type="checkbox"/> self-control |

- |                                      |                                       |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> grace       | <input type="checkbox"/> gratitude    | <input type="checkbox"/> respect  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> openness    | <input type="checkbox"/> trust        | <input type="checkbox"/> wisdom   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> honor       | <input type="checkbox"/> empathy      | <input type="checkbox"/> mercy    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> loyalty     | <input type="checkbox"/> love         | <input type="checkbox"/> justice  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tenacity    | <input type="checkbox"/> commitment   | <input type="checkbox"/> patience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cooperation | <input type="checkbox"/> others _____ |                                   |

- ◇ **Proverbs, quotes, or mantras that personally resonate can also provide the same function as core values. List any that you find grounding to help you work through any barriers and stay aligned with your goals.**

## Setting the Stage – Openers

Effective openers are important to setting the stage for constructive conversations.

- ◇ **Which opener(s) most resonates with you?**

- "I'd like to take a risk and share something..."
- "This is hard, but I'm hopeful that we can talk about it..."
- "I feel confident that we can talk openly about what just happened..."
- "I have faith that we can talk through this..."
- "Although we feel differently about this issue, I hope we can hear each other out..."
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

## Communications Styles

Communicating is much more than verbal exchanges. How we communicate can make just as much of a difference, if not more, than words alone.

◇ In general, what communication style(s) are you most familiar/comfortable with?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Quiet				Loud

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
No eye contact				Direct eye contact

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Non-expressive face				Very expressive face

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Flat tone				Animated tone

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Far (personal space)				Close (personal space)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Low energy				High energy

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

◇ **What communication style(s) makes you uncomfortable during difficult conversations?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Quiet				Loud

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
No eye contact				Direct eye contact

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Non-expressive face				Very expressive face

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Flat tone				Animated tone

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Far (personal space)				Close (personal space)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Low energy				High energy

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

◇ **Have you ever asked someone to change their communication style (e.g., volume, eye contact, energy) because it made you uncomfortable?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, all the time                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, occasionally      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, but I considered it               | <input type="checkbox"/> Never felt the need to |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, the thought never crossed my mind |   |

Limited understanding of and intolerance for diverse communication styles can put you at a great disadvantage. By contrast, expanding your understanding, tolerance, and flexibility can significantly enhance your communication efficacy.

## Communicating Difficult Content

Speaking up is not easy, especially when what you have to say might be difficult to hear.

◇ **How do you generally deliver difficult content?** (Check all that apply)

- Get right to it – direct
- Beat around the bush – indirect
- Wing it – no preparation
- Sugar coat it – dilute/down play it
- Emotionally neutral, matter of fact
- Emotionally empathetic and available
- Prepare to answer questions, to talk about it
- Prepare to listen afterward
- Prepare for negative response or disagreement
- Prepare to be corrected, to be wrong, or to change your position

If delivered in the context of relationship connection and mutual engagement, difficult content can be less daunting and more likely to be better received.

## Listening

Listening is an invaluable communication skill, yet one of the most underdeveloped and underutilized.

◇ **Rate your overall listening skills:**

- Nonexistent: *Huh? Did you say something?*
- Poor: <50% accuracy of content, tone, affect, intention
- Okay: 50-75% accuracy of content, tone, affect, intention



- Good: 75–90% accuracy of content, tone, affect, intention
- Excellent: 90-100% accuracy of content, tone, affect, intention

◇ **Which of the following have you ever done while “listening” to someone give you difficult feedback?** (Check all that apply)

- Interrupt
- Prepare your perspective/rebuttal
- React defensively with non-verbal language
- Argue back silently
- Argue back out loud
- Tune out/ignore/distract yourself
- Leave/walk away
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

Leading with these “listening” behaviors can significantly compromise your communication efficacy.

◇ **Which of the following describes how you generally listen during difficult conversations?** (Check all that apply)

- Listen with full attention
- Listen to understand (this doesn’t necessarily mean agreement)
- Listen for intention
- Listen for accuracy of content and (cultural) meaning
- Lean into hearing difficult content
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

Leading with these constructive listening skills can significantly amplify your communication efficacy.

◇ **Want more information about your listening skills?**

- Ask a trusted friend/family member for honest feedback.
- Listen to a news anchor, commentator, or personality you are unfavorable toward. Then go back and answer the above questions. Were you able to listen deeply, fully, accurately, for intention, and to understand? If not, what got in the way?

## Responding

How you receive and respond to difficult feedback matters greatly in having constructive conversations.

- ◇ **In general, how do you respond to difficult feedback?** (Check all that apply)
  - Thank the person who just shared the difficult feedback; you genuinely feel grateful for their honesty.
  - Refute/challenge the feedback.
  - Say nothing and end the conversation as soon as possible.
  - Immediately walk away.
  - Acknowledge the difficult feedback you just received (e.g., "So it sounds like you are upset with me about...")
  - Express appreciation because you know giving difficult feedback is not easy.
  - Make a mental note to not engage with the person in the future.
  - Tell the person off.
  - Ask the person to elaborate because you want to learn more.
  - Others \_\_\_\_\_

Responding in ways to enhance communication efficacy, even when discussing difficult topics, is possible. This involves highlighting appreciation, acknowledgment, impact, and hope.

- ◇ **Which of the following statement(s) about appreciating the speaker most resonates with you?**
  - "Thank you for your willingness to talk with me about this."
  - "I know this isn't easy to talk about. Thank you."
  - "Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me."
  - "I know it must've been difficult bringing this to my attention. Thank you for taking the risk."
  - Others \_\_\_\_\_
- ◇ **Which of the following statement(s) about acknowledging what was said most resonates with you?**

- "What I heard you say was..."
- "If I understood you correctly, you feel that..."
- "It sounds like you..."
- "It seems that from your perspective,
  - I misunderstood you..."
  - I made an insensitive comment..."
  - Your co-worker/supervisor perpetrated a microaggression..."
  - You experienced my comment as racist/sexist/heterosexist/etc."
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

◇ **How might you share the impact that the difficult feedback had on you?**

- "I" statements
- Share your vulnerable feelings (e.g., hurt, afraid, disappointed, concerned, surprised, etc.)
- Examples: "I was upset by what you said about..."; "That wasn't what I intended, but I'm sorry it was so sensitive..."
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

◇ **Which of the following statement(s) about hope for the future most resonates with you?**

- "Maybe we can grab coffee next week to continue where we left off?"
- "I think this conversation is too important for us to stop here. I hope we can do this again soon."
- "I hope we can continue to have more honest conversations moving forward."
- "What you shared is important and I'd like to think more about it."
- "This was really hard. It was also important. I'd like to get back to you after I reflect some more on what we discussed."
- Others \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflect, Rework, Repeat

Developing any new skill requires time and practice – to reflect, rework, and repeat again and again until it becomes a habit.

- ◇ **In general, after having a difficult conversation, do you take time to reflect on what just happened?**
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
  
- ◇ **In general, after having a difficult conversation, do you take time to rework any missteps?**
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always
  
- ◇ **In general, after having a difficult conversation, do you take time to repeat/practice the same/similar conversations later?**
  - Never
  - Rarely
  - Sometimes
  - Often
  - Always

## Kim Constructive Conversations Model: 8 Steps

The above domains align with the 8 steps of the Kim Constructive Conversations Model (KCCM). Informed by evidence-based theories and tools, the KCCM emphasizes the following: understanding barriers to constructive conversations, self-awareness and regulation, values as anchors, personal skills development, and healing in relationship connection.

Step 1: Identify your **goal**

Step 2: Locate and acknowledge any **barriers**

Step 3: Anchor in personal core **values**

Step 4: Set the stage – **openers**

Step 5: Take **action** – highlight the relationship connection, your experience, and invitation to engage

Step 6: **Listen** – deeply, with full attention, to understand, and for underlying intentions

Step 7: **Respond** – emphasize appreciation, acknowledgement, impact, and hope

Step 8: **Repeat** – reflect, rework, and repeat

◇ Which of these skills do you find easy or are already in your repertoire?

◇ Which ones do you find challenging and require more work?

## Individualized Plan

Using the aggregate of your responses above, develop a personalized plan for how you will learn, practice, and enhance your efficacy in having constructive conversations about difficult topics using the KCCM.

- ◇ **What can you try out immediately? With whom? On what topic(s)?**

- ◇ **What might get in your way?**

- ◇ **How will you stay accountable?**

- ◇ **Bonus Challenge:** Immediately reach out to someone with whom you have been intending to have a difficult conversation and schedule a time to talk (and listen).