

KIM CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS MODEL (KCCM) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kim Constructive Conversations Model (KCCM), as discussed in *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), is a guide to having difficult conversations about important topics with family, friends, and co-workers. The aim is to deepen engagement and mutual understanding in hopes of working and healing together.

Informed by evidenced-based theories and tools, the KCCM emphasizes the following:

- Understanding barriers to constructive conversations
- Self-awareness and regulation
- Values as anchors
- Personal skills development
- Healing in relationship connection

A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

We live in a world that increasingly mandates collaboration and cooperation. Whether at the dinner table, in the board room, across the political aisle, or on the world stage, it's clear our future and survival are interconnected and interdependent. As such, more than ever, we must find better ways to talk and listen to one another in order to solve the most intractable problems within our families, communities, organizations, nations, and as a global society.

Many frameworks for having difficult conversations focus almost exclusively on simple rules of engagement. By contrast, the KCCM moves beyond the generic do's and don'ts and offers a comprehensive, step-by-step approach to having constructive conversations from start to finish. At its core is an emphasis on intra-personal (internal) variables that give rise to greater inter-personal success. Namely, how to better understand what we want, how we can get in our own way, adopting individualized tools and approach, and cultivating oneself as the most important instrument for connecting effectively with others.

THE 8 STEPS:

1. **GOAL:** Be clear about your goals from the start. This will greatly reduce common missteps and conversational derailment. *Why* do you want to have this conversation? What outcomes are you seeking or hoping for? Maybe to repair a relationship rupture? To check-in about a possible blunder/microaggression? To learn something new about someone's experience? To improve the health and efficacy of your family, team, or organization?
2. **BARRIERS:** Identify and address any barriers that could get in the way of a constructive conversation. For example, fear of: conflict, saying the wrong thing, losing control, retaliation, being judged/rejected, or losing job/relationship/status. Acknowledge and accept the prospect of barriers up front. Weigh the costs and benefits,

including why it's so important for you to broach this conversation. Decide that your goals are worth the risk. Recommit to your goals.

3. **VALUES:** Having conversations about difficult topics is not easy. Strong emotions will abound. *Anchors* to weather the inevitable emotional storms can help everyone stay the course. Core personal values make excellent emotional anchors. Maybe *courage* to face fear, *patience* to simmer agitation, *integrity* to uphold professional ethics, *gratitude* for the opportunity to learn and grow, *acceptance* of the unknown, or *faith* that healing is possible.
4. **OPENERS:** It's important to start a difficult conversation off on the right foot. Effective openers lead with "*I*" *statements*, are guided by *core values*, and openly *invite* others into the conversational space. Example: "I'd like to take a risk and share something important with you." or "I feel hopeful that we can talk openly about what just happened."
5. **ACTION:** Following internal preparation (steps 1-3) and initiating the conversation (step 4), it's now time to take action and speak up about that which is difficult. Speaking up isn't easy, and what you have to say might be hard to hear. Combining a few essential components can make delivering and receiving challenging content less daunting for all:
 - Highlight and stay connected to the *relationship*
 - Share the *sensitive cargo*
 - Invite the other person *to engage with you*
 - Whenever possible, give others the *benefit of the doubt*

Example: "Something you said yesterday left me confused and frustrated. Instead of stewing over it, I wanted to check-in because I value our relationship. I'd love to talk to see if there was something I may have misunderstood and to share my thoughts and feeling with you."

6. **LISTEN:** Listen *fully, deeply, and accurately* to learn and understand. Listen *for intentions* as well as *impact*. This is not the time to prepare rebuttals. Check that your non-verbal language is communicating your aim of listening. Be mindful of cultural norms regarding communication styles.
 - *If you have a privileged identity:* Critically examine your automatic judgements of others' communication styles. Resist the pull to ask those on the downside of power to edit their communication style so that it's more palatable to you. Respectful and professional communication styles come in various forms and not just the one you are used to or prefer.
 - *If you have a marginalized identity:* Challenge yourself to show up as genuinely as you can, and not with the veneer of socialized expectations. Resist internalized oppression to make those in power comfortable. Respectful and professional communication styles come in various forms that should be recognized and accepted, including your own.

7. **RESPOND:** How one responds to sensitive material or strong emotions can either take the conversation to the next level or kill it dead in its tracks. Four factors to responding are essential:
- *Appreciate* the speaker – “Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me.”
 - *Acknowledge* what was said – “I heard you say you found my comments to be offensive.”
 - *Share* the impact on you – “That was definitely not my intention, but I take full responsibility for the impact of my insensitivity.”
 - Communicate *hope* – “I hope we can continue to have more honest conversations moving forward.”
8. **REPEAT:** These are long-standing issues that require ongoing practice, persistence, and dedication. So...
- *Reflect* on the conversation that just happened
 - *Rework* any missteps
 - *Repeat* with the same or different people and on the same/different topics