

How to Confront Others with Care

Generally speaking, we are a society that prefers harmony to harshness. Keeping our true feelings tucked inside is sometimes the perceived cost of keeping the peace.

Despite its not-so-positive image, confrontation is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes it's necessary in order to move forward. Sometimes it brings things to the forefront so that everyone involved can continue on with their lives. And sometimes it's just plain crucial in order to keep students from hurting themselves or others.

So, how do we confront with care?

Confronting an Inappropriate Comment

When might you need to confront an inappropriate comment?

- If someone tells a joke that degrades a certain person or group
- If someone uses inappropriate language
- If a student slanders another student
- If someone disrupts a meeting or program with inappropriate language
- If one student comes to you complaining of another student's inappropriate comments toward him/her

How can you confront an inappropriate comment?

- State what you heard and your reaction to it.
- Explain why you're talking with them — i.e. that type of language doesn't fit in a caring community, you have a personal reason to take offense to what was said, etc.
- Don't censor the person.
- Offer suggestions regarding other ways to express their feelings and thoughts.
- If necessary, share campus policies pertaining to hate speech and harassment.
- Talk with a trusted staff member about what happened in order to process through the interaction.

Confronting a Fellow Student in Trouble

When might you need to confront a student in trouble?

- If someone brings a concern to you
- If the student's health is in jeopardy
- If you suspect they may do themselves or others harm
- If you observe some behaviors that indicate the student is struggling with an issue
- If they reach out to you

How can you confront a fellow student in trouble?

- Speak with a trusted faculty/staff member first to get guidance.
- Let care and compassion be your guide.
- Attend to any immediate health or crisis concerns to ensure that the student and others will be safe.
- Have referral information available to pass on since the larger issue will probably be something you can't handle on your own.
- Don't promise blanket confidentiality because you may need to get others involved in order to best help that person.
- Don't talk about the issue in public where someone's privacy may be compromised.
- Follow up to see how they're doing once the initial conversation has taken place.

Confronting a Fellow Student

When might you confront a fellow student?

- If he does something against policy
- If she puts you in an awkward, uncomfortable or dangerous position
- If he confronts you publicly instead of privately
- If she does something you perceive as harmful
- If he gives a student special treatment because he is in a romantic relationship or friendship with him/her

How to Confront Others with Care

How should you confront a fellow student?

- Use “I” statements to show how an action made you feel. Saying, “I felt let down when you didn’t back me up” will put that person less on the defensive than if you were to say, “You let me down when you didn’t back me up.”
- Confront them in a calm, even voice once you’ve had a chance to get beyond the “heat of the moment.”
- Explain what happened and your reaction to it.
- Confront in private, not in public.
- Go directly to the source instead of talking about the problem with other peers.
- Follow up once the initial conversation is over so that you can continue working on your relationship rather than giving up on it due to one confrontation.

Confronting an Advisor or Supervisor

When might you need to confront an advisor or supervisor?

- If you don’t agree with a decision she made
- If you feel he treated you unfairly
- If she didn’t follow through on a commitment
- If he made an inappropriate comment or action toward you
- If she put you in a compromising, difficult situation

How should you confront a supervisor?

- Use “I” statements to explain how you reacted to the issue at hand.
- Be clear about what’s bothering you.
- Try to stay calm — getting angry or upset can detract from your message.
- Be open.