



# FLY FiVE<sup>®</sup>

The Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

## DISCUSSING DIFFICULT TOPICS





## Discussing Difficult Topics

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Over the course of the past year, educators have likely had to facilitate difficult discussions surrounding the pandemic, institutional racism in America, and the polarized climate of our nation's politics, just to name a few. Although conversations such as these can be uncomfortable, overwhelming, and contentious, they are necessary. Students need to know how to address someone with a different opinion or idea and proceed with empathy and respect. Assertive communication is fundamental for achieving these goals.

# Facilitating Difficult Conversations as a Classroom Community



Whether we have been long-planning a difficult discussion as a part of the curriculum or responding quickly to a contentious current event, there are steps to take that can set you and your students up to have a respectful, productive conversation.

- **Preparation** is an invaluable tool in setting yourself and your students up for difficult conversations. Before having the conversation, tell students that you'll be discussing an issue that might bring up big emotions. Set learning goals to keep the conversation productive and affirm that students are capable of having a difficult discussion.
- **Reflection** on past difficult conversations can help students become familiar with how they react in hard moments. The more familiar students are with their own emotions and reactions, the better they will be at recognizing their feelings and adjusting accordingly during discussions.

— **Assurance** that whatever feelings may arise are valid and acceptable. It is okay to feel sad, confused, apathetic, or angry, and it's important to notice and get curious about those emotions. Why might they be feeling this way? Remind them that what feels important for one student may not be the same for another; one student may have a personal attachment to whatever is being discussed, which will naturally make their experience with the conversation different. It's important to respect that.

As students grow up and engage with increasingly complex issues in school, in their relationships, and in society, they must have the skills to both command and give respect. With time and practice, students will be able to engage meaningfully with the issues they care about. Assertiveness will ensure they can have difficult conversations that result in deep understanding about the issues that matter to them.



# References

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