



## Holding Listening Conversations with your Teams:

*Tips for creating safe spaces for employees to process current events*

Ideas gathered from: 1. [Fostering Psychological Safety During Times of Crisis in Paradigm](#), by [Analia Stratton](#) and [Roni McGee](#).

2. [11 Ways to Cultivate](#) for [Coaching for Leaders](#)

We are in the midst of unprecedented times. As each of us experiences in unique ways the distress of the coronavirus pandemic and the protests and responses to George Floyd's death. Now, more than ever, our teams need to connect and feel part of a community. At the same time, with most of the workforce unable to connect in person, sharing concerns, questions, and ideas has become more difficult. It is critical to cultivate an environment where employees feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work.

This guide is intended to support leaders to cultivate an inclusive, safe space for discussions to allow employees feel seen, heard, and valued in this time of crisis. Doing so also allows leaders to model vulnerability through transparency and honesty about their own experiences, while also cultivating empathy and trust among teammates—both of which are critical to building psychological safety. Because individual experiences and reactions will vary, and grief emotions may be heightened during this time, we recommend the following tips from experts in the field. These are intended as suggestions, not instructions.

1. **Time:** Create a meeting time to support employees to share their thoughts, concerns, feelings, and needs at this time.
2. **Use Norms:** Prior to the discussion, have the group agree to norms. Here are suggested norms for this time:
  - Speak from the "I" perspective. be authentic
  - Be fully present
  - Listen to understand, not to judge
  - Lean into discomfort
  - Disagreement/ new perspectives are learning opportunities
  - Honor confidentiality
3. **Use Prompts:** Prompts and questions can help people to share their thoughts. Here are some to try:
  - What does the current state of events bring up for you?
  - What are you feeling right now based on these events?
  - What one emotion you are feeling right now? (list in chat or use menti.com to create an instant word cloud)
  - How you and your family coping at this time? How have you been explaining what is happening to your younger family members?
  - What are you finding challenging about working during these unprecedented times?
  - What strategies are you finding helpful to build resilience?
  - What's one thing you can do for yourself or your family members to support your emotional health?
  - What do you need from this team to feel supported at this time?



#### **4. Ask Open Ended-Questions:**

Encourage conversation and relationship-building through open-ended questions. For example, ask “How so?” or “Tell me more.” If possible, avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple yes/no or other one-word response.

#### **5. Invite (but don’t force) Participation:**

Communicate that answering these questions is optional. Let people know they can turn video off if they prefer. These options provide flexibility while honoring that not everyone will feel comfortable participating.

It’s common for a few people to speak more often than others in the group. Avoid statements like, “Let’s hear from someone else other than Rick” or “Lisa, you’ve been really quiet”. Instead, make invitations for volunteers and let people engage when they are ready, so they don’t feel put on the spot.

#### **8. Allow for silence and pauses in the conversation:**

It is normal that some people talk right away and others take time to think. Allow for silence so that people can take the time they need to get their thoughts together.

#### **9. Using break out rooms:**

Some people will feel reticent to share in a large group, but will share in small groups. For large meetings, try using the zoom break out room feature. This will allow small groups to discuss and share together. After the “break out” room discussion is over, ask people to volunteer to share anything that resonated or might be important for the group. Emphasize confidentiality norm at this point. They should share their own idea or keep it general.

#### **10. Normalize differences and disagreement.**

Differences in experiences and reactions are normal. So is disagreement. Conflict can arise if disagreements aren’t handled respectfully. If this happens, revisiting the group norms is often helpful. It’s also helpful to establish a group norm that disagreement is welcome for the purpose of understanding, but not for convincing.