Interruptions are a set of skills that we can use to create space for dialogue and re-thinking oppression in our communities. This primary goal of interrupting has several objectives. The objectives of an interruption are: to encourage respectful communication, to deconstruct “-isms” (recognize and name stereotypes and their contribution to structural violence), create a respectful space for everyone to participate, to educate, and to learn something together. These skills can be effective in our work and personal lives. The following lists skills to get started. Keep in mind, you probably already do these! Being aware of a variety of ways of doing an interruption can add tools to your cognitive and interpersonal toolbox. On a separate sheet of paper, please, add to this list. (When you think of more, please, share them with me! I would love to add them to this workshop! learnheartwork@gmail.com)

**Skills**

Here are some skills to remember, every time you do an interruption:

- Think well of one another.
- Demonstrate patience.
- Know your objective.
- Share new information.
- Demonstrate your leadership skills.
- Be aware of your use of non-verbal communication (demonstrate warmth and understanding, when you can, with your body language).
- Dialogue.
- Follow your instinct. (Does it seem oppressive, but you’re not sure? If you have the hunch, it is often worth pursuing.)
- While interrupting may be the right thing to do, it is not, necessarily about being “right.”
- Always, ALWAYS, be interruptible…this includes interrupting one’s self before anyone needs to interrupt as well as being accepting of interruptions from others.

Here are some other skills that may or may not be appropriate, you may think of them as tools with specific uses (ie. A hammer is more effective with a nail than with a bolt):

- Teamwork-use friends if it would help or policy as back-up.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Speak from personal experience.
- Use humor when applicable.
- Make or draw parallels.
- Include positive and validating comments.
- Know what you know…access additional resources when you don’t.
- Breather, take a break.
- “I statements” can be helpful.
- Give the invitation to dialogue.
- Be non-judgmental; we are in this together!
Guide to Difficult Conversations

Pre-Conversation:
- What is your purpose for having the conversation?
- What “buttons” of yours are being pushed?
- What is the impact of your attitude toward the conversation?
- What assumptions are you making about this person’s intentions?
- Who is your counterpart in this conversation?
- What are your needs and fears?
- What was your contribution to the problem?
- How can you center yourself so you are prepared for the conversation?

Beginning the Conversation:
- “I have something I’d like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.”
- “I’d like to talk about _______ with you, but first I’d like to get your point of view.”
- “I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?”
- “I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If they say, "Sure, let me get back to you," follow up with them.
- “I think we have different perceptions about _______. I’d like to hear your thinking on this.”
- “I’d like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _______. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.”

The Conversation:
Step #1: Inquiry
- Cultivate an attitude of discovery and curiosity.
- Let them talk until they’re finished.
- Try not to interrupt.
- Whatever you hear, don’t take it personally.

Step #2: Acknowledgment
- Validate their feelings.
- Empathize with their experiences.
- Clarify and ask questions.
- Summarize their thoughts.

Step #3: Truth versus Understanding
- Ensure that they have finished sharing their story.
- What can you see from your perspective that they’ve missed? Help clarify your interests without minimizing theirs.
- Step #3 is complete when all parties feel they have had a chance to share their story and feel that their story has been accurately heard.

Step #4: Problem-Solving
- Brainstorm solutions.
- Ask your partner what they think would work.
- If the conversation becomes adversarial, go back to inquiry.
- If you’ve been successful in centering, adjusting your attitude, and in engaging with inquiry and useful purpose, building sustainable solutions will be easy.

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