

TOOL

# Behaviors That Foster and Undermine Effective Conversations

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# Behaviors That Foster and Undermine Effective Conversations

## **Purpose**

This tool helps team leaders and teams identify the behaviors that support productive, inclusive, and focused conversations—and those that get in the way. It can be used to build shared expectations for how a team communicates and collaborates.

## **When to Use**

Use this tool when establishing or revisiting team norms, when conversations feel unproductive or tense, or when you want to strengthen participation, trust, and clarity in team discussions.

## **How to Use It**

Review the lists of behaviors with your team and identify which ones you want to prioritize and commit to. You might invite team members to reflect individually, then discuss patterns you notice together. Use the “foster” behaviors to define or refine team agreements, and the “undermine” behaviors to name what the team wants to avoid. Revisit these lists over time to reflect on how your team is doing and to reset as needed.

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## What Do We Want to Hear and See in Group Conversations?

- Active listening through paraphrasing and by asking follow-up clarifying and probing questions
- Active listening through nonverbal communication (making eye contact with each other, nodding)
- Questions and wonderings grounded in genuine inquiry
- Summarizing of each other's ideas
- Invitations to quieter members
- Making sure that everyone's voice is heard
- Probing questions that go below surface comments
- Clarifying questions that elicit more information
- Appreciation for what others say and do and for taking risks
- Productive conflict around ideas
- Respect for the opinions of others and valuing their input
- Problem-solving
- Offering of ideas, suggestions, solutions, and next steps
- Empathy for each other and others outside of our team (including students, parents, and administrators)
- Flexibility and vulnerability
- Thoughtfulness around the language that is used and awareness of the impact that certain words have
- Awareness of emotions when appropriate

## What Don't We Want to Hear and See in Group Conversations?

- Going off topic and into long digressions
- Dominating the conversation by taking up too much airtime or trying to dictate the conversation
- Being sarcastic
- Disengaging and not participating
- Avoiding contentious topics
- Criticizing people and their ideas with negative comments
- Dismissing the ideas of others with "Yeah, but"
- Taking pride in being a devil's advocate
- Being contrary and blocking team progress
- Boasting about personal skills or experience
- Pulling rank on each other
- Insulting team members or others outside of our team (including students, parents, and administrators)
- Gossiping about others
- Blaming others
- Complaining about things that are outside of our sphere of influence
- Using emotions to hijack a conversation
- Using language that is explosive and can trigger others as a way to bully the conversation
- Being distracted by other things (technology) or people

Exhibit 7.5. © Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools*. Jossey-Bass, 2016.

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