



# When Emotions Run High

## ADDRESSING WHAT'S HAPPENING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM OR OFFICE

### KEY PRINCIPLES

**ACKNOWLEDGE IT.** . . . Whether you only mention it briefly or dedicate an entire meeting (or more) to exploring it, it is important to acknowledge what you know or sense is happening. This is in itself an expression of care and respect.

. . . **BUT DON'T FORCE IT.** Don't make assumptions about how people are feeling or what they need. Don't force a conversation. Create direct opportunities to process (and allow folks to opt out), or simply acknowledge + then support indirectly by creating an atmosphere of care.

**CONSULT THE MOST AFFECTED.** . . . If you know that one or more participants is (very likely to be) personally affected by what is going on, let them know beforehand what you have in mind and ask for their feedback + preferences (as well as give them the chance to opt out).

. . . **BUT DO NOT BURDEN THEM.** It is not the responsibility of personally impacted participants to educate others, to share their testimony, or to help the facilitator plan the session (unless they express desire to do so).

### EFFECTIVE PRACTICES Additional guidance is linked where available!

#### GREET WITH CARE

Consider that your gathering space has the potential to be a refuge. Take special care to ensure a safe passage: **Greet** people warmly + by **name** as they come in. Have **music** playing. Bring **snacks**. Spritz **aromatherapy** spray. Soften the **lighting**. (etc) Signal the transition into a "temporary alternative world" (Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering*).

#### ACKNOWLEDGE DIRECTLY

**Name what you know** is going on, in simple, factual, specific terms: "There is a lot of unrest on campus related to X conflict in Y place." "Last night, X happened. Many are upset, grieving, or confused." "As we speak, X is unfolding." (etc)

**Name what you sense** is going on, framing it as observation without judgment: "I sense a lot of tension in the room today." "I am observing a lot of distraction." "You all seem tired. Is that fair to say?" (etc)

#### ALLEVIATE TENSION + STRESS

**Mindfulness.** Do a body scan, a breathing exercise, a loving-kindness meditation, etc. Find many exercises on [ggia.berkeley.edu/](http://ggia.berkeley.edu/)

**Play.** Set out modeling clay, coloring pages, puzzles, etc. Or invite everyone to tell a corny joke or share a meme. Let people feel a bit silly.

**Go outside.** Take a walk or sit outside together in silence. Invite sensory observations: what do we see, hear, smell?

#### PROCESSING PROMPTS

Name what you are **thinking, feeling, observing,** and/or **experiencing** right now.

What are some opportunities you see to **give care** right now?

What is a work of **art**, piece of **music**, or a **text** that really speaks to how you are feeling?

What **conversations** are **nourishing** you right now? What are conversations you're having that are **not helpful**?

#### PROCESSING STRUCTURES

**Journal/freewrite/make lists.**

**Draw/build/make a comic/ create a visual representation.**

**Turn and talk to a partner.**

**Story Circle**  
(see [nphm.org/story-circle-toolkit](http://nphm.org/story-circle-toolkit))

**My News** (see guide from SNF Paideia)

**Collective Freewriting** (see guide from SNF Paideia)

#### MOVE FORWARD

Whatever time and depth you have allowed to acknowledge + process, signal the transition to what is next. Set a **boundary** where necessary + note any relevant **external resources** or ongoing **internal support** you are willing to provide, e.g. "While we won't be exploring this (anymore) here, X, Y, and Z are available." Express **thanks** for people's presence + sincere good wishes for their well-being.