

CP Cal Community Learning Statement & Guide

What builds trust, enhances the safety needed for learning and strengthens our community’s relationships over time? Our willingness to stay engaged, enhance our relational skills, and adjust ineffective responses. This framework is meant as a simple support for that purpose.

We are not DEIBA experts – nor do we expect you to be. Consequently, we’re offering the **framework below** as support to help us stay connected, responsive, and productively engaged (also available in the CP Cal Toolbox). These steps are rooted in solid clinical research. We understand that the 6-Step Guide provided requires practice and is easier said than done, especially in stressful moments. As life-long learners, we assume that *we all do the best we can, and we all can and must do better.*

OUR CP CAL LEARNING COMMUNITY:

We aim to cultivate a learning community that offers every participant and presenter a welcoming space to be seen and valued in the identities they carry. Each participant and presenter plays an important role in co-creating this safe learning space.

When we feel we belong, we become: Belonging in community - being seen, valued and supported as we are – allows us to take the risks needed to stretch, lean into our growing edges, and thrive.

We ask that every participant and presenter co-create this kind of safety and respect to provide an optimal learning environment for CP Cal’s community. Relational values are at the core of who we are. Thank you!

Real-time, 6-Step Response-Repair Guide (Thank, Listen, Understand, Own, Learn, Check)

- 1. **Thank**
- 2. **Listen to Understand**
- 3. **Communicate Understanding**
(Reflect & Validate Subjective Experience)
- 4. **Own** (Impact, Apologize, Plan for Change)
- 5. **Learn** (Take Responsibility for Learning)
- 6. **Check Understanding**

1. Thank
“Thank you for bringing this to me.”

Gratitude is welcoming, and acknowledges any risk involved in raising an issue. Given potential power dynamics and personal risk, the person may raise their concern more or less skillfully (e.g. may blame or criticize rather than making a respectful request for the specific behavior they wish to see). Receive the concern as it’s presented. Breathe.

2. Listen to Understand
“I want to understand what felt harmful.”

Stating your intention to understand what felt harmful invites the person to speak freely. Continue listening without explanation, correction, or judgment. Whatever the person’s tone may be, consider that they are likely feeling both vulnerable and defensive.

3. Communicate Understanding (Reflect & Validate Subjective Experience)

“I hear that ____ came across as/means ____, and it felt _____. It makes so much sense that you’d feel this way.”

Understanding is communicated by accurately reflecting the person’s *subjective experience* and validating it. Understanding involves explicit communication – not just your internal recognition. This area of hurt is likely repeatedly reopened in similar ways.

Understanding does *not* involve: fact-finding, determining who is right, agreeing, resolving disputes, evaluating, minimizing (more common) or exaggerating the experience, or reacting to delivery, interpretations or perceived intent.

Validation affirms that the person’s experience is “understandable” and “makes sense,” especially in the context of dominant culture norms that are often imposed in ways that shape how their experience is misread and responded to. Validation is *not* an “I-statement,” opinion or positive judgment about their experience. Note: Validation can feel patronizing or minimizing if not sincere or if it’s explanatory in a reductive way (e.g. “If you grew up in the south, no wonder you’re reacting like this!”)

4. Own Impact, Apologize & Plan for Change

“I’m really sorry for the impact I’ve had on you by doing/saying _____. I will get more input on this to change how I handle this going forward.”

When the interaction feels charged, keep your focus on *your behavior, impact, and their experience* of it. This can help ground you by emotionally regulating both you and the other person. The “charge” may reflect recurring experiences of being misunderstood, misread, or exposed to harmful language, stereotypes, or inaccurate assumptions.

Effective apologies include clear ownership for the *specific* adverse impact (versus a vague “I’m sorry,” or a responsibility-shifting “I’m sorry you feel that way”), and *intentional steps* that reduce the likelihood of similar future impacts.

In many professional contexts, “*impact*” or “*harm*” language is used, unless the person names specific feelings. In a more intimate setting, you might say “I’m really sorry I *hurt* you by doing/saying _____,” which can feel more personally exposing in a professional setting. If you say “I’m really sorry I *offended* you,” this is more buffered and professionally distant, but risks understating the harm experienced.

5. Responsibility for Learning (Without Burdening Them)

“I’ll take responsibility for learning more about this—I don’t expect you to have to educate me.”

Your willingness to understand more about the raised concerns signals an openness to learn and change. It also matters that you understand that it’s not incumbent on members of underrepresented groups to constantly explain themselves and educate the dominant group. It’s generous when and if they do.

6. Check Your Understanding

“Am I understanding your experience in a way that feels meaningful and accurate to you? Is there anything I’m missing or that you’d like to add?”

Avoid assuming you’ve understood, without checking. The goal is for the person to walk away feeling seen, valued, accurately understood, and trusting that you will continue learning and adjusting.

Responding Under Pressure & Self-Regulation

1. When You Lose Your Compass, Return Here:

Communicate Understanding of Your Impact & the Other Person’s Experience

When tensions or escalations arise, ground yourself by redirecting your focus back to communicating the impact of your behavior, and the person’s experience of harm (See Step 4 in 6-Step Response-Repair Guide above). This will also help emotionally regulate both you and the other person.

Under stress, this guidance works only if you can prioritize understanding their experience over protecting your position in the moment and have some practice. It's about your behavior and impact, not agreement or resolution.

2. Pause Defensive Impulses

We all have defensive impulses, such as the urge to assert good intentions, dispute facts, explain ourselves, or justify our behavior.

To keep your focus on communicating your understanding of the other person's subjective experience, notice defensive impulses and *pause them before responding*.

3. When Disagreement or Tension Arises

Concerns may not always be expressed in polished or measured ways. To avoid escalations when there is reactivity, or disagreement about intent, wording, or factual interpretation, the way forward is to return your focus to communicating understanding of the other person's subjective experience of your impact on them.

Ultimately, go back to communicating accurately that you: can acknowledge your adverse impact, understand the person's experience of harm, validate their experience, and take on learning how you'll adjust behavior going forward – this builds trust *over time*.

4. Character Judgments

In the rare event that you feel pressure to shift your focus from your impact to a global judgment about your character (e.g. being framed as “a harmful person,” or similar identity-level judgments), avoid self-condemnation or global character judgments about yourself. These will increase defensiveness and reactivity. Instead, redirect by staying *focused on your behavior and the impact*. If pressed further (identity coercion), you can state what you're *not willing* to do, alongside what *you will* do.

- “Let me reflect the impact you're describing to make sure I'm accurately understanding your experience ...”
- “I take responsibility for what I said/did and its impact.”
- “I can't frame this as a global judgment about who I am, *and* I do take my impact here seriously. I'm focused on understanding your experience of the impact, and changing the behavior.”

Relational Practices in Action

- Most harm in our community will arise from unintended and unintentional behavior. This reflects the reality that cultural biases are woven into the fabric of who we are, and they can be expressed in ways that cause harm even when that is not our intent.
- Unintentional harm is still harm. Intent cannot erase impact. Asserting “good intentions” is alienating because it is a defensive attempt to minimize harm when it occurs.
- Missteps and discomfort are part of cross-cultural learning. This relational work involves learning to stay engaged with our discomfort, without avoiding it or withdrawing.
- What's key is becoming skilled at responding with a communicated understanding, and changing behavior going forward.
- Trust and safety are strengthened, when we take our impact seriously and are willing to adjust.
- Validation is a key affirmation of the person's experience as “understandable” and “making sense” given dominant culture norms—without our needing to agree, explain it away, or evaluate it.
- Humility is needed for effective responding—being at ease recognizing that our perspectives and experiences are limited, especially in cross-cultural contexts where dominant norms can make it harder for us to see our adverse impact.

- Effective responding takes more than practice and following steps—it depends on a genuine willingness to let the other person’s experience matter more than defending our position.
- Learning is a shared responsibility that does not involve burdening those harmed with educating us about DEIBA-related issues. That responsibility is ours.
- Effective responses communicate that our adverse impact and the person’s experience of it, *genuinely matter to us*.
- Our efforts aim for: growth, accountability, and relational skills that strengthen relationships and the experience of safety within our community (not debate, forced resolution, or agreement).

(DEIBA: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Access.)