
Embracing Discomfort + Transforming Conflict

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What is conflict?

Yes / Agree

Sometimes / Unsure

No / Disagree

How do you feel during conflict?

Always / A lot

Sometimes /
Somewhat

Never/ Not at all

Overview

Topic	Time
Embracing Discomfort + Somatic Healing Practice	15 min.
Redefining Power & Power Dynamics + Partner Discussion	15 min.
Transforming Conflict + Case Study Activity	20 min.
Commitment to Action	5 min.

White Supremacy Culture Characteristics

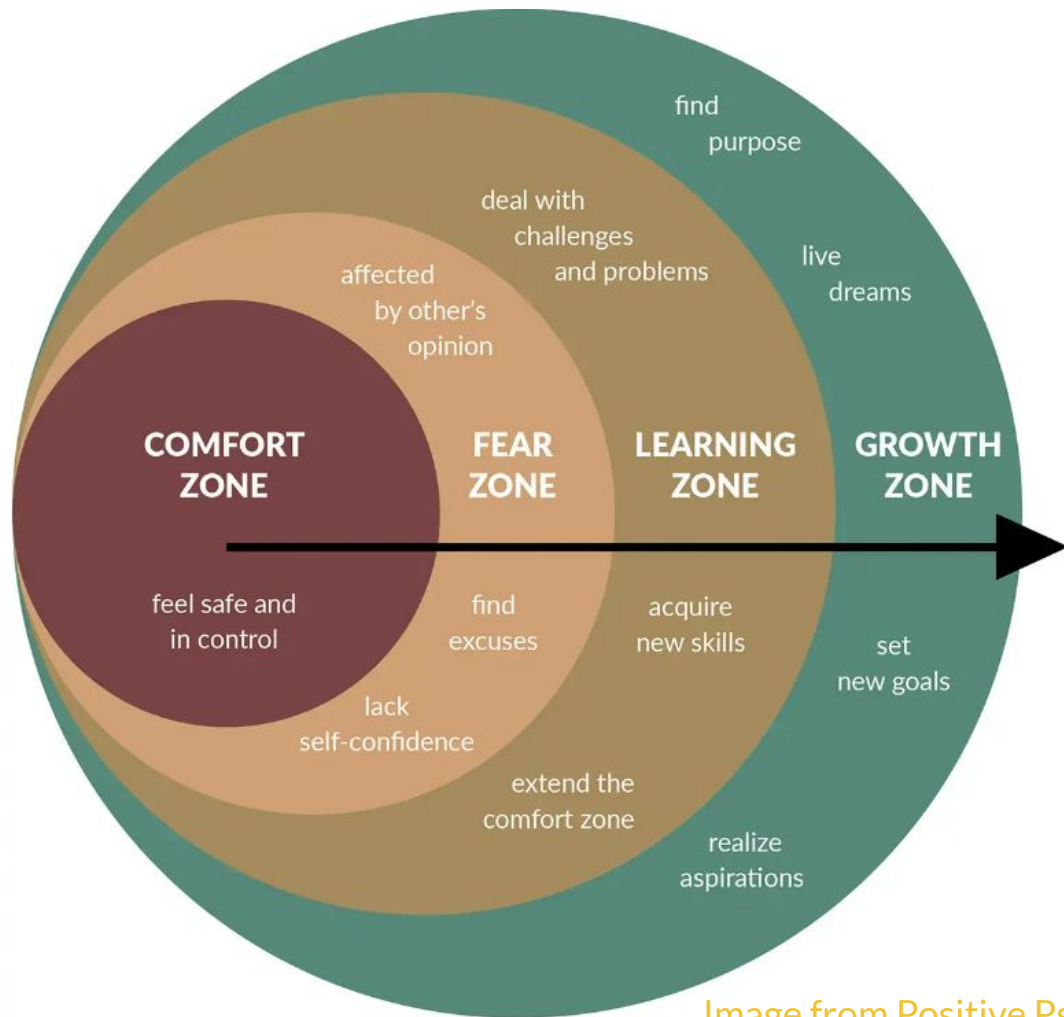
Right to comfort, fear of open
conflict, power hoarding

- Belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort
- Scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- Demanding, requiring, expecting apologies or other forms of “I didn’t mean it”
- Equating individual acts of unfairness with systemic oppression

Embracing Discomfort

An antidote to Right to Comfort,
a characteristic of White
Supremacy Culture

- Discomfort translates as fear in our bodies, even though it is no longer typically linked to our survival
 - Discomfort is actually at the root of all growth and learning
 - How does Midwestern Nice get in the way?
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[Image from Positive Psychology Toolkit](#)

Somatic Healing Practice

What is your relationship to power?

I have little power to act or change the world around me.

Power isn't something I think much about or experience.

I am confident in my power to enact change or influence others.

Redefining Power

Merriam Webster

- Ability to act or produce an effect
- Possession of control, authority, or influence over others
- Physical might

Formal vs. Informal

- Formal: power designated by official titles, ranks, or positions.
- Informal: social power that isn't immediately visible.

Examples:

- Experiential
 - Relational
 - Cultural or Systemic
 - Collective
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Power Dynamics

Power from within or empowerment

- The creative force you feel when speaking up for something you believe in

Power with or social power

- Influence, status, rank, or reputation that determines how much you are listened to in a group

Power over or coercion

- Power used by one person to control another
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Partner Discussion:

What types of power do you have?

How might this impact your approach to conflict?

Mitigating Power Dynamics

If you're in a position of power...

- Actively ask for opinions and advice from others, and implement their suggestions
- Encourage several ways of voicing concerns (e.g., anonymously, in writing, as a vote system, etc.)
- Use eye contact to open the floor for others - speak less
- Shift power through systems when possible
- Check your assumptions, make the implicit explicit

If you have less power...

- Assess where that feeling might be coming from, don't diminish what power you have
 - Find small ways to test trust and vulnerability
 - Build collective power with peers or colleagues
 - "I'm happy to hear from you when I'm done sharing"; "I'd like to finish my thought before we move on"
 - Own only what you actually can control, share what is necessary
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Transforming Conflict

An antidote to Fearing Conflict, a
characteristic of White
Supremacy Culture

- Conflict is usually something we want to get over, get through quickly, or to avoid
 - Conflict can be **generative**, transformative, and innovative
 - Explore conflict with curiosity - what can we learn? What are we unearthing in this process?
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Approaching and addressing conflict

1. Curiosity

- a. Why does this person feel this way? What might be prompting my reaction? What is our common ground solution? What's at the root of this?

2. Empathy

- a. Repeat back what you hear and check for understanding
- b. Express empathy for the impact on them (and yourself!)

3. Accountability

- a. What am I responsible for? What do I "own"? How do we check back to determine whether this solution is working for all parties?
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Case Study 1: How might you respond?

Your boss says, “At a meeting this morning with other managers, we decided to make significant changes to the project you are working on. We are expecting you to complete this additional work within the same timeline.”

Case Study 1 Responses

1. Curiosity

- a. With boss: “Can you tell me more about the changes, and why you thought these were important?”
- b. With self: “What am I feeling right now? Why?”

2. Empathy

- a. With boss: “I agree that it’s really important that this project reflects the needs of multiple departments & aligns with broader organizational goals.”
- b. With self: “I am feeling really overwhelmed and frustrated. I worked hard on this project and wasn’t consulted about these changes. I want to feel like my voice and my efforts are valued.”

3. Accountability

- a. Accountability to self and boss: “I would like to sit down and take a closer look at the changes you are requesting. Could we meet again tomorrow and talk together about the project and set some action steps and a timeline?”
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Case Study 2: How might you respond?

Because of staff shortages, your organization has decided to reduce its drop-in hours for a specific program, but allows people to schedule appointments as needed. You are relieved about this change, but a client says to you:

“This program isn’t accessible anymore. You and your organization are always just thinking about yourselves. Nobody cares about what I need or what will actually help my family.”

Case Study 2 Responses

1. Curiosity
 2. Empathy
 3. Accountability
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Commitment to Action

What actions do you want to take to embrace discomfort, mitigate power dynamics, and transform conflict?

- Embrace discomfort, growth, and learning
 - Build space for my own healing
 - Embrace and build my own power
 - Mitigate and share the power I already have
 - Practice curiosity, empathy, and accountability when I experience conflict
 - Other ideas?
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Resources for Ongoing Learning

- [Wisconsin Partners Asset-Based Cooperation](#)
 - [Turning Towards Each Other: A Conflict Workbook](#)
 - [The Seven Habits of Highly Depolarizing People](#)
 - My Grandmother's Hands, Resmaa Menakem
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Thank you for joining us!

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