

IAP2 AUSTRALASIA

GUIDELINES ON HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

- Be prepared. Before the meeting begins, do some thinking about what topics in your subject area may become controversial in the virtual space, keeping in mind that the issues you think are controversial may not be the same ones that create conflict among your participants.
- If the group dynamics become out of control, have the group establish and agree on group norms/ground rules to establish a safe space for participant discussion, such as:
 - Always use a respectful tone
 - No interrupting or yelling
 - Ask questions when you don't understand
 - Try to see the issue from the other participant's perspective before stating your opinion
- Recognise what's causing the disruption and listen carefully to the issue to determine the true cause of the conflict and the support needs of the participants involved.
- Remain calm. If needed, allow the group a comfort break so that you can take a few minutes to gather and re-compose yourself.
- Pay extra attention to body language, eye contact and other nonverbal cues that can be observed in an online environment which may offer an insight as to whether a participant is feeling upset or disengaged.
- Recognise and manage both the participant's and your own emotional state, being mindful of the tone which you may be using when interacting with the group.
- If a controversial issue arises involving just one or two participants, offer to take the discussion offline or into a breakout room, if appropriate. This approach is best for handling sensitive issues privately or to calm an explosive situation.
- If the participant is reluctant to go offline, it may be worth contacting the participant via chat to explain the reason a private conversation in a breakout room is the best approach, to ensure there is no misunderstanding.
- If appropriate, communicate to the larger group what's happening and reassure them that the issue is being resolved. For example, "We have some specific needs that need to be met, I'd like to discuss with these participants how we can best support them, we'll be back in a few minutes."
- If one-on-one conversations are required, engage the group in a self-paced task to ensure they're productively occupied and not focused on the issue that's occurring.
- Remember the basics of having difficult conversations, including viewing the issue from another perspective and at times, you may have to agree to disagree.
- Always remain respectful in your interactions with participants, despite any frustration you may be experiencing.