

THE RES LIFE

Facilitator's Toolkit

— Training & Staff Engagement Tools —

**PAPERCLIP
COMMUNICATIONS**

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Community Conflict

It's impossible for things to go right all the time, yet you *can* prepare for conflict by keeping the following things in mind...

Don't Blame or Accuse. Gather the facts first instead of automatically pointing the finger of blame. You'll save a lot of time, hassle and misunderstanding this way.

Use "I" Statements. Let people know how their actions impact you. Saying, "I can't sleep when your music is turned up" will make someone a lot less defensive than saying, "You keep me awake *constantly* with your loud music."

Steer Clear of Assumptions. It's easy to assume something about someone or go based on the word of others. Yet, assumptions are rarely ever accurate and just contribute to further misunderstandings. Don't give in to them.

Don't Overreact. Difficult situations just get worse if you make a mountain out of a molehill. So, focus on what's *truly* wrong rather than letting things get out of control.

THE RUMOR MILL

Keep the rumor mill at bay by...

- ▶ Making your own impressions about people rather than automatically believing what someone tells you
- ▶ Not making people's lives and situations the topic of your "small talk" with other community members
- ▶ Not talking behind other people's backs
- ▶ Going directly to the source if an issue comes up

THINKING BACK...

What is an instance of community conflict that you either observed or were part of in the past?

What was handled well?

What could have been handled more effectively?

Encouraging Participation

When people participate, they feel a part of things. Yet, it can sometimes take a nudge to get them to that step. Some students hang back at first, taking things in, while others dive right in, ready to volunteer and get to work. And others dip their toe in initially, testing the waters to see if further involvement suits them.

As you're building a community, of course you want residents to get involved! It helps them take ownership for the community and feel like they're part of something worthwhile. So, consider a few different ways that you can enhance residents' involvement...

- **Recognize Talent.** If you hear that Sarah is creative, ask her to help with bulletin boards. She'll likely be happy that you know about her talents and that you think she can contribute.
- **Use Activities.** Icebreakers can be a great way to get people more comfortable and willing to engage.
- **Ask for Opinions.** This is a good way to hear from those passive participators. See what insights they may have gleaned from their observations.
- **Look Beyond the Obvious.** The enthusiastic "sure-I'll-help-you-with-a-bulletin-board!" residents are easy to spot — and easy to love. Yet, if you look beyond these obvious helpers, you'll also find a wealth of talent. For instance, take Damien's interest in the environment and ask for his help in developing a more sustainable, environmentally conscious community. Or tap into Bella's enthusiasm for her major, zoology, and ask for her help inviting a professor to join your community for a trip to the local zoo.

LEARN TO DELEGATE

Sometimes we're very invested in a project and want everything to be done just right. But, as a leader, part of your responsibility is empowering others to lead. Here are some tips for successful delegation...

- ▶ **Ask for Volunteers.** Give people an opportunity to step forward and accept the challenge of the task.
- ▶ **Appoint Them.** If you think someone would be perfect, speak with them privately and see if they would be willing to take on a certain task.
- ▶ **Let Them Make Mistakes.** These valuable lessons often must be learned the hard way.
- ▶ **Provide Support.** If others get in trouble, ask what solutions they've come up with and offer a few suggestions but, ultimately, let them be the ones to decide what to do next.

How to Foster a Sense of Belonging

Searching for a sense of belonging can be a potent force among students. They want to belong to something bigger than themselves, whether it's a group of friends or a campus community in which they take pride. This belonging helps them feel cared for, connected and part of something positive larger than themselves.

That sense of belonging also results in important outcomes such as persistence to graduation, a feeling of equity and enhanced well-being, according to a growing body of research. At four-year institutions, an improved sense of belonging among students leads to higher rates of personal and academic successes later in their college experiences, reported *Inside Higher Ed*. Those students reporting a higher sense of belonging at the end of their first year seemed to do better than their peers. Researchers also found that those students seemed to be persisting more in their second and third years, as well as reporting fewer mental health issues. Belonging matters!

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF BELONGING AND CONNECTION

It's one thing to tell students, "You belong here." Yet, you truly need to *show them* through your actions for your outreach efforts to be effective.

So, what are some things you can do? Shannon Brady, an assistant professor of psychology at Wake Forest University (NC), suggested...

- Help students face challenges and setbacks
- Help them better understand things like course grading
- Have trustworthy mentors and faculty available
- Connect students with other students

You can plant the seeds of belonging and connection through other simple actions such as...

- Using community-oriented language like "we" and "us" to include everyone
- Explaining campus lingo so newcomers aren't left in the dark
- Asking students about their interests and then making connections to related organizations, academic fields and other opportunities
- Using eye contact, smiling and giving people your *full* attention

Source: *Inside Higher Ed*, 1/2/20

"We find experimentally trying to help people foster a sense of belonging can improve a number of positive outcomes. We have found benefits on academic outcomes, benefits on health outcomes, benefits on engagement types of outcomes."

– Shannon Brady, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Wake Forest University (NC)

Microaggressions

It's a term being used a great deal on campus these days: microaggressions. They are more than just "insensitive comments," as they often indicate an undercurrent of racism, sexism and other social tensions that can leave students feeling marginalized, unsafe or invisible.

"Microaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group," according to author Derald Wing Sue in the book *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. "Microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences of marginalized groups in our society; they assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care."

"Impact always trumps intent."

– Dr. Maura Cullen, Diversity Educator, during a PaperClip webinar on "Microaggressions"

THE IMPACT

No matter the intent of our words, the impact of microaggressions on marginalized groups can cause...

- Constant vigilance and uncertainty
- Self-doubt
- Fear that bringing it up could hurt a relationship or career path
- A feeling of not belonging
- A change in natural behavior
- Pressure to act "right," like the majority
- A lack of trust in majority/privileged group members

FOR DISCUSSION

- ▶ How can we be more aware of the microaggressions we commit, even if it's not our intent?
- ▶ How can we better think through what we say so as not to commit a microaggression in the first place?
- ▶ How have I reacted when a microaggression has been targeted at me?
- ▶ Do I tend to "write off" people who commit microaggressions? Why or why not?

Using Inclusive Language

A sure way to alienate people is to use language that might exclude them in some way. So, keep a few things in mind as you embrace the diversity of people you're interacting with, such as...

- ✓ Use examples from a variety of religions and don't assume that everyone believes in a higher being.
- ✓ Ask about how to pronounce people's names if you're unsure.
- ✓ Don't assume that everyone comes from two-parent households. And not everyone has both a mother and a father.
- ✓ Ask about identifying pronouns rather than assuming.
- ✓ Don't comment on people's bodies directly or indirectly. Someone may be struggling with body image issues.
- ✓ Don't assume that all romantic relationships are heterosexual. Figure out comfortable language that includes all relationships.
- ✓ Don't rely on "people-harming humor" to get an easy laugh.
- ✓ Don't just use student culture references that apply to 18-22-year-olds, as that can exclude adult student learners.
- ✓ Make sure that when you talk about siblings you also include only children.
- ✓ Don't assume that an averted gaze is a sign of disinterest or disrespect. Direct eye contact is considered disrespectful by some cultures.
- ✓ Use names from different cultural backgrounds when providing examples.

What else can you do to make your language more inclusive?

Why Mental Health Stigma Can Create Barriers to Support

Stigma can discourage people from getting the help they need to lead fully functioning, fulfilled lives. It's a form of discrimination, just like what's used against people of different races, religions, appearances, cultures and more. So, what can you do?

- Help campus community members look beyond the labels associated with mental health issues.
- Avoid labeling people by their diagnoses.
- Treat them as individuals deserving dignity and respect.

Stigma doesn't always come from external sources. It can be very internal for students: "How do *you* view your emotional/mental health condition?" Sometimes they judge themselves in negative ways, confusing feeling bad with *being* bad, says the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI). And that's where stigma can set in.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services offers the following tips when it comes to mental health stigmas...

Do...

- Use respectful language such as "person who has depression" or "person with a psychiatric disability"
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations
- Address someone if they're expressing a stigmatized attitude

Don't...

- Use terms like "crazy," "lunatic," "manic depressive," "slow functioning" or "normal"
- Use generic labels such as "retarded" or "the mentally ill"
- Portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman

Following guidelines such as these while trying to provide caring mental health care can greatly enhance students' sense of campus belonging.

PEOPLE FIRST

When talking with students, you can share this reminder...

Try not to equate yourself with your illness. "You are not an illness," the Mayo Clinic reminds us. So, don't say, "I'm bipolar" or "I'm depressed." Instead, put yourself first, as in "I have bipolar disorder" or "I have depression."

For a one-page National Alliance on Mental Illness infographic entitled "Finding Mental Health Care That Fits Your Cultural Background," go to: <https://bit.ly/2j6oolA>. And learn about Minority Mental Health Awareness Month at: www.nami.org/minoritymentalhealth.