

**Syracuse University Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)**

***Preparing for and Responding to Challenges & Challenging Moments in the Classroom***

Strategies you can use before the course or before a class meeting

- Ask yourself what topics or readings might lead to challenges/challenging moments.
- Draft course/course meeting ground rules. Then have students contribute/add to them.
- Reflect on what you would deem to be a satisfactory outcome or desirable resolution to a challenge/challenging moment.
- Evaluate your level of comfort with uncertainty and risk taking in your course.
- *[Other ideas specific to your course...]*

Strategies you can use in the moment when a challenge arises

- Give a student the opportunity to rephrase or clarify their meaning. “Can you say a little more about what you are thinking?”
- Clarify or rephrase a statement you made. “What I mean is....”
- Acknowledge that feelings may be heated. “I recognize that X is a subject that evokes strong feelings/disagreement.”
- Seek additional information if a student says they are offended or hurt by something you said. Offer an apology if you feel it is warranted and are comfortable doing so. “I am sorry you feel X. Can you tell me a little more about why you feel that way?”
- Ask students to take three minutes to process their reactions by writing silently.
- Be transparent about your decision making given the circumstances. “We are coming to the end of class. I want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to contribute to this discussion, and I need a little time to think through how best to approach this. I will email...let you know how we will revisit this in our next class meeting this week.”
- *[Other ideas specific to your course...]*

Strategies you can use to revisit a challenge or challenging moment after it occurs

- Remind students of the course ground rules. Lead discussion on whether rules need to be amended or broadened to promote respectful, productive class discussion moving forward.
- Lead a structured re-visiting of the challenging moment during a subsequent class meeting. Establish parameters for this discussion, e.g. Express concern about a person’s ideas rather than about who they are as a person. “I strongly disagree with your view on X” rather than “If you believe X, you are uncharitable.”
- Invite students to write you about their views of what transpired. Explain you will summarize and share reactions in a way that maintains individual anonymity.
- *[Other ideas specific to your course...]*