# Tips for Leading Productive Team Conversations

*Adapted from* https://studentlife.mit.edu/support/faculty-staff

When there are major events at MIT or in the world, it can be helpful to provide an opportunity for team conversations. Broadly speaking, we encourage managers to acknowledge what has happened, recognize that it could have an impact on people's ability to focus, and make sure staff are aware of support resources.

The tips below are provided to help you plan for a conversation. The conversation should be goal oriented, structured, time-limited, and optional.

**Goal Oriented**

- Establish clear goals for the conversation and make these explicit at the start
- Set ground rules for the conversation. Example ground rules could include stressing the importance of respectful language, setting time limits for speakers, or agreeing that people will not interrupt one another.
- Take some time to think about your own feelings on this topic and decide what you do and don't want to share with the group. You may want to brainstorm with a colleague about this ahead of time.

**Structured**

- Create a timed agenda and determine who will facilitate the conversation
- The facilitator should have a short introductory statement and prepared questions aligned with your goals
- Offer a disclaimer that the conversation has the potential to be difficult
- Provide resources and remind people that this is a time when they can and should prioritize self-care

**Time Limited**

- Have clear start and end times and stick to them
- Provide a guideline of 1-2 minutes per speaker
- The amount of time you dedicate to the conversation should be guided by your goals. For a team meeting, you might consider setting aside 45 minutes or one hour and using this sample agenda.
- Remind everyone about ways they can continue the conversation in other settings.

**Optional**

- People can choose whether they participate without judgment or consequence
- Remind everyone that participation does not have to mean speaking; it can also mean listening

**Additional Tips for Virtual Conversations**

- If holding the conversation on Zoom, gently encourage participants to turn on their cameras by emphasizing how helpful it can be for people to see one another during a difficult time. However, this should be optional, and you should be sensitive to individual differences and preferences.
- Allow people to participate in ways that you are comfortable managing. For example, you might decide that you are or are not comfortable with people using the chat window.
- After the meeting, let your staff and colleagues know that you will stay logged on for a few extra minutes at the end of the scheduled time. This creates the informal opportunity for others to connect with you.