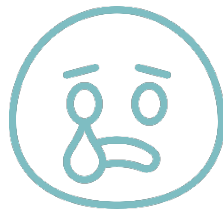




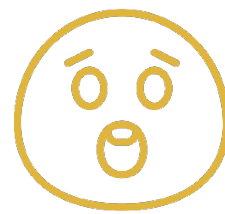
## **TOOL** OOPS, OUCH, WHOA PROTOCOL



**OOPS**



**OUCH**



**WOAH**

### OVERVIEW

The Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol is a tool that can be used to acknowledge and address racism, classism, heterosexism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of systemic oppression when they appear in our community spaces. The tool is a way to pause the conversation, recognize and process harm as a group, take accountability, and move forward together toward a more just and equitable world.

### WHEN TO USE

The tool can be used in group settings and in one-on-one conversations to identify and dismantle oppressive speech patterns. There are lots of times when someone may use a turn of phrase or idiom that they don't realize has a harmful impact. It can feel risky to interrupt these moments when you don't know someone as well or someone has power over you. Without the right tools, it's all too common for someone to get defensive because they didn't hold a negative intent but ended up creating a negative impact. Rather than waiting for harm to occur, you can set up the use of this tool early on when working with a group to say how you want to talk through these situations when they happen.

### HOW TO USE

We have all been raised in a society built on structural oppression and that oppression is engrained in each of us, both consciously and unconsciously. Like Black Lives Matter co-founder, Alicia Garza, states "Racism is everywhere. It's in the air we breathe." Many groups, organizations, and even classrooms have addressed the Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol to name oppression when it appears in group spaces and create opportunities for learning, growth, and healing in collective spaces.



The best way to use the Oops, Ouch, Woah protocol is to adopt it as a part of your group's norms or guidelines so that everyone in the group is clear in advance on when, how, and why it will be used. The tool should be documented in your group materials and embedded in onboarding processes with new group members.

Facilitators may choose to name the Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol as a norm that they will use to address and handle oppression in groups that they facilitate. For example, they may say "It is my duty as a facilitator to establish a protective space for all people to participate. As such, I would like to use the Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol to name and address structural oppression when it arises intentionally or unintentionally through our words, behaviors, and actions in this space. I do this, not to call anyone out, but to call us all into the collective creation of a world that values equity and shared humanity."

The protocol is simple to use and can be explained with an analogy of stepping on a person's toes. When a person's toes are stepped on, they may say "Ouch!" to express the pain they are experiencing. Recognizing that they have caused harm, the person who stepped on their toes may say "Oops!" to apologize for causing harm. A bystander on the street witnessing the incident may say "Whoa!" to recognize the harm done and create an opportunity for repair.

### *The Oops, Ouch, Whoa Protocol*

Here are the three basic moves in Oops, Ouch, and Woah:

- Say "ouch" to publicly acknowledge that you have experienced harm.
- Say "oops" when you realize that you have caused harm, even when you didn't mean to.
- Say "whoa" when you've witnessed something that has caused harm or that reinforces some sort of structural oppression that you hope to interrupt.

When someone says "ouch" or "woah," the first step is to pause and take a few breaths. Allow time and space for the person who experienced harm to share their experience with the group. Be cognizant that explaining oppression and harm can be triggering and re-traumatizing and ensure that the person who experienced the "ouch" feels supported both during and after an incident. Allow space for the person/people who caused the "ouch" to recognize the impact of their actions and apologize for the impact.

One way to acknowledge and apologize for harm caused is the Communication Recovery process, which enables the person who caused harm to:

1. Accept the feedback. "Thank you so much for telling me."



2. Acknowledge the harm that was caused. "My intention was not to hurt you, but I clearly did."
3. Apologize. "I am so sorry that I said that and caused you pain."
4. Adjust. "I commit to working on this so that it doesn't happen again in the future."

### *Oops, Ouch, and Woah in Practice*

For example, during a school leadership team meeting at a school where the Oops, Ouch, Woah protocol has been agreed upon, a school principal comments, "Parents in this neighborhood just don't care about their kids' education." A member of the team says "Ouch! That comment hurts because I know so many families who are working two to three jobs and still get up at 6:30 a.m. to check homework, pack lunches, and bring their kids to school."

Another colleague chimes in and adds, "My parents didn't speak English so they never understood what the school sent home and couldn't help me with my homework. That didn't mean that they didn't care about my education. They moved to this country to give me and my sister better opportunities than they had."

The principal responds, "Oops, I'm sorry I offended you. I didn't mean to. I'm just frustrated because there are some parents that I call and call, but they never pick up. Their kids are late every single day, some of them are acting out, some of them are failing, but they won't work with me."

"It sounds like you really care about the kids at this school, and you want them to succeed. I am positive that families feel the same way about their children and want them to succeed, yet it sounds like it has been challenging for you to find a way to reach them. How do you think that race, educational experience, and income levels might be at work here?" A team member asks. "How might your assessment that 'families don't care about their children's education' limit your actions and compound the situation," another chimes in.

Without the Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol, the principal's team may have simply ignored the principal's comments and written him off as another privileged white authority figure with no understanding of the reality, strengths, and beauty of the community that the school is located in. Having the protocol in place helps the team voice their concerns and have a conversation about how the principal's understanding of the situation is rooted in his experience as a middle-class white man. By the end of the conversation, the principal is able to acknowledge that his assumptions about the neighborhood's parents limited his efforts to build positive relationships with his student's families, and in turn, harmed student chances



for success.

By recognizing and uplifting harm when it occurs, as well as modeling a repair process, we strengthen our collective muscle to uproot structural oppression when it occurs and create a protected, inclusive space for all members of our community to participate, grow, heal, and thrive.

If you would like more training on the Oops, Ouch, Whoa protocol, please watch this [training](#) called "Ouch Oops to Navigate Conflict" from [Coming to the Table's](#) 2021 National Conference.

*Adapted from: Aguilar, Leslie. Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts: Communicating Respectfully in a Diverse World. Bedford, TX: The Walk The Talk Company, 2006.*

## COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

### Dialogue

Create a high-quality conversation that clarifies values, surfaces tensions, and taps into creativity; leading to concrete plans that achieve results. Establish conditions of genuine respect for the views and needs of the other.

Oops, Ouch, Whoa is a tool for the Dialogue phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit [civiccanopy.org/clm](http://civiccanopy.org/clm).

