

Sensitive conversations with international employees can be challenging when dealing with different cultural backgrounds and assumptions. Americans can usually assume similar cultural understanding when we talk with fellow Americans, so recognizing that people from other countries will have different perspectives is crucial when trying to resolve problems. International Affairs developed these suggestions to help with those difficult conversations.

TIPS FOR HAVING A SENSITIVE CONVERSATION WITH AN INTERNATIONAL GTA

Assume the best from everyone involved.

Approach the conversation with curiosity and care.

Be comfortable being uncomfortable.

ISSUES THAT MIGHT BE INVOLVED:

Personal hygiene

Personal space

Inappropriate touching

Gender norms

Emotional expressivity

Eye contact

Body language

Unfamiliarity with American culture

Communication styles

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE HAVING THE CONVERSATION

What happened to bring you to this point?

Where did your perception come from?

What do you hope to accomplish by having this conversation?

Do you need to gather more information before having the conversation?

TIPS FOR HAVING THE CONVERSATION

Frame the conversation as being important to the student's success at KU, a goal you both share.

Describe the issue as a cultural difference related to the student's employment that you both need to sort out.

Describe the situation as you understand it, without interpretation or evaluation.

Explain KU expectations regarding the issue; refer to department policy, if applicable.

If you would like more information about these types of conversations or think your department or unit would benefit from intercultural training, contact Alison Watkins, intercultural training coordinator in International Affairs, awatkins@ku.edu. Building Intercultural Skills workshops are offered through the HR Talent Development system.