

# THE GORILLA IN THE ROOM

FOSTERING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME

## Facilitator's Guide

This activity is designed to foster open communications and create safe spaces while doing so. Open communication is key, especially when tackling challenging topics. By addressing issues directly, we ensure accurate information flows and prevent the spread of rumors and misinformation. This fosters trust within the education ecosystem, as individuals feel valued and respected when included in important conversations.

Confronting issues head-on allows for collective problem-solving, enabling proactive steps to address concerns before they escalate. Additionally, it helps us maintain control over the narrative, preventing unnecessary panic, anxiety, or division. These conversations also prepare us to handle future challenges more effectively, building resilience and fostering a healthy climate and culture. This proactive approach promotes transparency, strengthens trust, and empowers us to address issues collaboratively and constructively. Use the steps below to guide your process, knowing this activity is a ready tool in your toolbox as you rise to your next level of excellence.

1. Select the space. Find a quiet and comfortable area where team members can gather without distractions.
2. Establish rules of engagement. Identify guidelines with team member input for respectful communication, such as listening without interrupting, speaking from personal experience, and refraining from judgment.
3. Hand out copies of the 800 lb. Gorilla in the Room activity sheet page 2. Provide each participant with a worksheet that prompts them to identify and reflect on the "Gorillas" that need to come to light.
4. Introduce the concept. Explain the metaphor of the "800 lb. Gorilla in the Room" as an overwhelming, large, looming, and/or dominant issue that needs to be addressed. (e.g., requiring more from already overworked staff, increased class sizes to cover staffing shortages, reinstatement of higher education testing requirements, etc.)
5. Encourage reflection. Ask team members to think about issues in their school community that feel like "gorillas" - things that are difficult to talk about but important to address. Highlight your time together is designed to foster open communication and reveal next steps if any, rather than find immediate solutions.
6. Facilitate discussion. Encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences related to the "gorillas" they've identified.
7. Summarize and conclude. Wrap up the activity by summarizing key points, next steps, and/or insights gained from the discussion. Remind participants that creating a safe space for dialogue is essential for addressing challenging issues.
8. Follow-up. Acknowledge the team members' courage and willingness to share openly. Discuss next steps, if applicable, and outline any resources available for further support.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# THE 800 LB GORILLA(S)

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Name them here: \_\_\_\_\_

