

Guidelines for Dialogue to Support Psychological Safety In Portfolio

The creation of a psychologically safe space is paramount to the learning that takes place in Portfolio. When psychological safety is established, members of a group feel accepted and able to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences.

1. **Establish and reinforce confidentiality:** overtly state that all experiences, perspectives, and ideas shared in the Portfolio group don't leave the group setting.
2. **Validate and support a learner's experience:** we encourage exploring alternative and new perspectives; however, this must be balanced with recognizing the validity of each student's lived experience and perspective. Overtly stating this can help a learner feel heard and safe.
3. **Allow student to define the limits of their sharing:** while we expect all learners to come prepared for each session with an experience upon which to reflect, they are not obliged to share a personal story. Scholars should recognize that for a multitude of reasons, any given topic may be too difficult or possibly traumatic for a learner to discuss. Scholars should encourage students, in advance of a session, to connect with them if an upcoming topic may be challenging for them. Students should be encouraged to participate in a meaningful way, always invited collectively, but not pressured to share. We would like to hear from you if a student has expressed difficulty around participating in Portfolio on more than one occasion or if you have any related questions at all.
4. **Discomfort is ok; feeling unsafe is not:** feeling uncomfortable often indicates a moment of potential transformative learning. Encouraging dialogue around difficult topics includes tutors acknowledging their own biases, privilege, and power differences. This role modeling helps create a psychologically safe environment for learners to reflect critically on their own experiences. While discomfort can allow for critical reflection, this must *always* be balanced by ensuring the learners feel safe to explore topics that affect them deeply. If a student appears reluctant or withdrawn, avoid probing further or asking them to "lean in" to discomfort in ways that cross the line for them personally, and consider connecting with them after the session to check-in.

Please remember that despite the fact that Portfolio groups are a safe space to share, we recognize that as Portfolio Scholars, you are not trained as therapists and the group discussions are not meant to be psychotherapy sessions. The MD Program has multiple [support programs](#) for students including [OHPSA](#) and we encourage you to direct students to OHPSA if you feel that they are in need of these types of supports. In addition, do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns. The Portfolio Faculty Lead, Nirit Bernhard, can be reached at portfolio.director@utoronto.ca and the Associate Faculty Lead, Lindsay Herzog, can be reached at lindsay.herzog@utoronto.ca