

CosmoLab Value Statement

(dated: 2022)

CosmoLab is a safe learning space for everyone to ask questions and to collaboratively think about the big problems in physics. Competition and judgment should be left for other venues; curiosity, critical thinking, and collegiality are welcome.

Guide for Respectful Discussion*

1. Listen

Be attentive while others are speaking. If you paraphrase what someone else said, verify with them afterwards that you have correctly interpreted their words: “Did I get that right?”

2. Share the Air

Be mindful of how much you and those around you are speaking. If you find yourself dominating the conversation, please step back; if you have not spoken much, feel encouraged to step up.

3. Lean into discomfort

Learning only happens when you leave your comfort zone. Try to translate discomfort into constructive questions.

4. Be aware of privilege and power

How does your identity and status affect how you speak and listen to others? If you belong to an overrepresented group, please be even more careful not to dominate the discussion.

5. Use “I” statements

Speak from your own experiences and avoid generalizing; respect that others’ experiences and expertise will differ from your own.

6. The “Both/And” Rule

Think “both/and” rather than “either/or.” Acknowledge that binaries are incomplete; leave room for complexity and avoid oversimplification.

7. Tolerate and teach; do not shame and blame

Be patient with, rather than critical of, individuals’ unfamiliarity with issues.

8. Critique ideas, not individuals

Focus criticism on ideas, refrain from personal attacks or comments on individuals.

9. Intent ≠ Impact

Recognize that unintended harm is still harm.

10. Ouch” & “oops”

If you feel uncomfortable or hurt by something that is said, you can say “ouch.” In response, the speaker should simply say “oops” and step back to allow the other person to explain what bothered them, if they feel so inclined.

11. Access the space as you need

Support everyone to feel welcome to sit in chairs, sit or lie on the floor, stand, rock, flap, spin, move around, and step in and out of the room.

*This guide is based on Princeton Astrophysics and STScI Ground Rules for Respectful Discussions.

