

The UNM HSC Learning Environment Office
Presents

INTENT VS IMPACT:

A Toolkit for Improving Communication & Understanding

WHAT ARE INTENT AND IMPACT?

Intent: What you have in mind as a goal when you decide to perform an action. It reflects what type of impact you want to create with your actions.

Impact: The result of those actions, which aren't always the same as what you intended. Impact reflects the reality of your actions.

Put simply: **Intent** is what you meant, and **impact** is what you did.

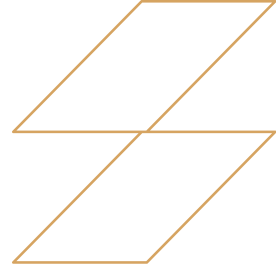
FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Imagine you say something that you think is a compliment, or a neutral statement, but then later you're told that you hurt someone. But you didn't mean to, and you don't know what they mean.

Or, imagine someone says something you find very offensive. You give them feedback, but all they say is, "that's not what I meant."

When intent and impact don't align, we often find ourselves in conflicts. This toolkit will help find ways to move forward effectively.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS



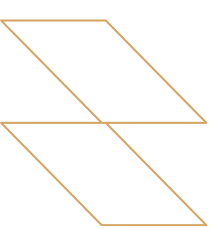
**“How do you balance working so much and being a mom?
Does your kid miss you?”**

Possible Positive Intents

- Genuine care about person's (and their family's) wellbeing
- Acknowledgement of how much work the person is doing/multiple roles
- Learn about your coworker and their family
- Gain insight for a possible future for me (could I balance parenting and working?)

Possible Negative Impacts

- You're not a good parent if you work this much
- Dads can be doctors but moms can't or shouldn't
- Women's priority should be their family
- Kids with working moms are neglected or worse off
- I don't expect people like you to be in this cohort / field



**“You're so smart—why did you become a
nurse instead of a doctor?”**

Possible Positive Intents

- Compliment you on how smart you are
- I think you would make a good doctor
- You remind me of my doctor friends
- Being a doctor is an honorable and important job

Possible Negative Impacts

- I think doctors are better and smarter than nurses
- I don't think there is value to being a nurse
- I don't appreciate or recognize the work of nurses
- I don't expect people like you to be nurses



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- 1 Positive intention does not undo negative impact. Over-explaining intention can seem like impact doesn't matter because it's not what was meant.
- 2 Focusing only on positive intent might make the other person feel invisible, unheard, or unvalued.
- 3 Positive intention matters, because there is a difference between intentionally causing harm and unintentionally doing so. Ignoring positive intent can escalate a conflict and break down a relationship and trust.
- 4 Whether or not a comment or behavior is hurtful is not up to the person who said or did it.
- 5 Negative impacts—regardless of intention—need to be tended to. If left unaddressed, these impacts can have lasting implications for trust, relationships, and groups.
- 6 Give people a chance to do better; then it's up to them to take it. Remember that we all make mistakes, so treat everyone with grace.



HOW TO HAVE AN INTENT vs IMPACT CONVERSATION

Observation: Share the situation you're discussing

Example:

- According to this memo from LEO, two weeks ago you told a student that they weren't smart enough to be a doctor.

Inquiry: Ask them what they intended by making that comment

Examples:

- Tell me more about the situation, the context, and what you were thinking as you made that comment.
- What was your intent when you made the comment?

Cognition: Ask them to brainstorm what impacts they think that comment could have had on the student

Examples:

- How do you think that comment might have sounded?
- Think back to when you were a student, how might you have reacted?
- Can you imagine why a student might have a negative reaction to that comment?

Sharing: Tell them what the negative impacts are

Examples:

- According to this memo, this comment negatively impacted the student's trust in you, and made them too afraid to ask you questions.

Incorporation: Ask for the impacts of this new understanding on them

Examples:

- What do you think that decreased trust might mean for the student moving forward, when they work with you and with others?
- What does it mean for you that your comment had a serious impact on the student?
- How are you going to incorporate this knowledge moving forward?
- What can you think or do differently in the future?