

Civil Discourse Guidelines

USE THE TIPS
BELOW TO BEGIN
ENGAGING IN
CIVIL DISCOURSE
AROUND
DIFFICULT TOPICS.

Listen to understand.

Use “I” statements.

Speak from lived experience; tell stories.

Avoid the word, “but”.

Avoid “fighting words”.

Speak to grow the conversation; connect what you say to what the other person just said—build upon each other’s perspectives.

Rather than focusing on points of disagreements, talk about the values behind each person’s perspective. For example, folks who disagree about gun control may share values about keeping people safe. Begin your conversation at a point of mutual understanding or share values.

Consider the gray areas for you or the mixed feelings/uncertainty you might have about an aspect of your position. Talk about each other’s gray areas—they are conversation openings.

Remember, “Each person has something to teach me” (even if it is hard to recognize).

You have a right to be understood—so does the other person. Remain curious about the other’s person’s perspectives—why does this person hold this position? Why do you hold yours? What are the life experiences that have shaped people’s positions? If possible, share a bit about these life experiences. Accept that you are trying to be understood, not trying to change the other person’s mind. Let this sentiment guide what and how you share.

Know when to “hit pause.” Whether it’s taking a deep breath, a break, or ending the conversation for the moment, sometimes the most constructive choice is to pause the conversation until emotions simmer down.