

FOSTERING DISCUSSION

HOW TO SPEAK WITH THOSE WHOSE POLITICS DIFFER

In 2016, having discussions with people whose opinions about politics differed from yours was difficult. It was even harder in 2020. Now? It seems almost impossible. Yet if we don't make a concerted effort to speak to people who did not vote for Kamala Harris (most Americans), there may be no chance in the future.

Now is the time for these discussions. Below are a few guidelines, tips, rules, questions, and sample texts to get you started.

PART I: DISCUSSION GUIDE

YOUR AUDIENCE

- Choose someone you already have a relationship with—someone who respects you and is open to having a conversation.
- Pick a purple or a red voter, someone who didn't vote at all, or someone who voted, reluctantly, for Trump. (Deep-red and single-issue voters are unlikely to be good choices.)
- Ask the person if they'd like to meet to talk about politics. Here are two ways to break the ice. You can do it on the phone, by email, or by text:
 1. Hey! I know we don't agree 100% politically. But I think we can both agree there's too much division and not enough respectful conversation. Would it be crazy to suggest that we have a conversation about bridging this gap? (Note: People are *much* more likely to answer *no* to any request. By saying *no*, they are saying they are open to this!)
 2. I am so concerned about the divisiveness in our country. I would like to get your advice on what tangible ways we could get some respectful conversations going. Do you think this is nuts if we tried this?
- Meet in person, talk on the phone, or use Facetime or Zoom. This should be a discussion, not an email or text thread.

GUIDELINES

- **Find common ground (ABC: Agree Before Challenging)**
If you're nervous, consider saying so. It might soften your conversation partner toward your perspective. If they're nervous, too, that's already common ground!
- **Encourage introspection**
Ask them to share their feelings on a scale of 1 to 10 and ask why they chose that rating.
- **Articulate each other's perspective.**
Try role-playing the conversation from each other's shoes. Each of you should name one positive thing the other side has achieved.



GUIDELINES (cont'd)

- **Use *stories* rather than information or facts.**
If they state a particular view, share a story that backs up that view, and follow it with a story that made you reconsider.
- **Incorporate humor.**
- **Avoid defensive behavior on both parts.**
- **Watch this [four-minute](#) video by Robert Reich for more information on finding common ground.**

PART II: CONVERSATION FLOW

INTRO AND GROUND RULES

- Tell your friend you're reaching out because you thought they'd be open to having a conversation to help bridge the political divide.
- Establish ground rules:
 - Remind your friend that this is only a conversation; it is not about changing each other's views.
 - Be polite and respectful at all times.
 - Do not argue over facts during the conversation. (If you have facts to refute, save it for after the conversation. Agree in advance on what you will accept as valid news sources. Then you can send a thank-you email with a link.)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. There is a lot more political divisiveness today. What can we (you and I) do to help bridge that gap?
2. What are your biggest concerns about how the current economic and political situation is affecting you? Your family? Future generations?
3. What do you think needs to be done to better address these concerns?
4. This congress has accomplished less in the first 100 days than any other. Why do you think it is so gridlocked?
5. How do you think unlimited money for political donations has contributed to this gridlock?
6. How do you think the average person can be heard when so much money is going to politicians?
7. How strongly do you feel about [issue] on a scale of 1 to 10. Why did you choose that number?
8. Is there a particular experience that informed your views on that subject?
9. May I share a different perspective?
10. (If you think that they're staying tied to something they no longer really can stand behind, ask:) If you knew in 2016 what you know now, would you have voted the same way?

AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1. Discuss what you liked about the conversation and what might have made it more productive.
2. Pat yourselves on the back for doing this. Almost no one else is having these kinds of respectful conversations.
3. Schedule another discussion for the following month.