



One on One Discussion Guide

The Need to Revive Civility and Respect in our Communities

There's an uneasy feeling in the country that things are broken, disrespect is on the rise and we're tearing each other apart in our country. A large number of Americans have a feeling of dislike, distrust, and even contempt for many of their fellow Americans largely because they hold different political views. It seems that, more than ever, we are seeing citizens demonizing others based on who they voted for.

The divides we are experiencing make it extremely difficult to come together and find ways to deal with issues of common concern. It adds to the feeling of distance and disconnection people have from each other, within their community and with their government. If it is not addressed, this divide threatens to become a chasm that will become almost impossible to bridge.

In order to address this problem and enhance our sense of community, we can and must rebuild some of the connections that have been damaged through the years by partisan political fights and the use of extreme rhetoric that demonizes and degrades those on "the other side" of an issue. Finding a path forward will require Americans to begin listening and engaging with one another again.

Connections made in each community can only be made by individuals who take responsibility to change the climate and who are willing to listen deeply to each other and relate as human beings first.

The [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#) (NICD), a non-partisan institute based at the University of Arizona, is dedicated to addressing incivility and political dysfunction in American democracy by advancing transformational change. NICD has created this short discussion guide to support a conversation between two people who have different political perspectives and who are interested in bridging differences, deepening relationships and/or creating new ones. The emphasis is on listening deeply to another person and listening across differences to understand where the other person is coming from. This guide offers tips to:

- Learn to listen and build relationships--especially with people of different views;
- See each other as a people first and foremost (with a story and experiences as complex as our own) before any of the political thinking enters the conversation;
- Talk about what we can do to revive civility and respect in our community.

As Americans seeking to create a more perfect union, we have often come together around common values of freedom, liberty, fairness, equality, safety, family, faith and opportunity. We thank you for participating in this initiative to revive civility and respect - person by person, community by community - through listening with respect to another who may hold different views.



How to Get Started

1. Invite a co-worker, neighbor, family member or anyone you know who you don't exactly see eye to eye with on politics to grab some coffee (or other beverage) and talk. Tell him or her that you want to discuss the divisions in our country and explore what can be done to revive civility and respect between people of different views.
2. Set a time that works for both of you and sit down and allow at least half an hour to talk. Some people may find they need closer to an hour to have a good conversation.
3. Follow the outline for the conversation described below under Suggested Conversation Flow.
4. As you talk, make a special effort to share time equally and really listen to each other. Don't try to convince the other person about anything--- just focus on learning about them and from them.
5. At the end of the conversation, take a few minutes to reflect on what was discussed and where you may have found areas of agreement. If you discussed possible actions, take note of those.
6. Share the experience with others, be creative (take a photo, make a short video, or write to us). Make sure you used the #ReviveCivility hashtag, so we can follow your journey. Let us know how it went by sending an update to <http://www.revivecivility.org/contact>.

Discussion Guide

Tips to Enhance the Conversation

Here are some tips that are designed to help enhance the experience and conversation together. A key element, in addition to really listening to the other person, is not to go into the conversation with the goal of changing someone's opinion. The goal of the conversation is to gain a better understanding of the different viewpoints and life experiences the other person is sharing with you. This is a way that we can begin to revive civility and respect one person at a time.



- Have the conversation in a safe and comfortable space.
- Make the conversation time-limited and agree to meet again if you want the conversation to continue.
- Use personal experiences to help share your viewpoint.
- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Look for the feelings that are behind the words.
- Ask questions for clarification or further learning.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Acknowledge what you have heard by summarizing or repeating back some of what the other person said.
- Avoid nonverbal cues or comments that shows disinterest or discounts another's beliefs and experiences.

Suggested Conversation Flow

We suggest you start a conversation with someone of different views by restating why you wanted to have the conversation and then getting to know each other a little. After that, the conversation should focus mainly on a discussion of the three suggested questions with a little time at the end to reflect on the conversation. It is important to have genuine conversations, so while you can use this guide to get you started, please listen and adapt as best suits you to have authentic, personal and heartfelt discussion.

Getting to know each other (5-10 minutes)

Start by spending time getting to know the person in front of you. Discuss a couple of the questions below or other similar ones that can help you understand each other as individuals who have rich lives and varied experiences. Please remember to share time equally.

- Tell me a little about your family--do you have children, siblings?
- Tell me a little about your work--what do you like most about it?
- How long have you lived in the community and what are some of the ways you are involved?
- What sense of purpose/mission/or duty guides you in your life?
- What would your best friend say about you and what "makes you tick"?

Discussing the three key questions (20-30 minutes)

After you have spent some time getting to know each other, turn to the three questions and take turns sharing your views on each one. After you each comment briefly on each question you may want to ask each other some follow up questions to learn more. Some suggested follow up questions are listed, and you can ask any other similar ones that seem appropriate.



1. What are you most thankful for about living in America?

Begin by sharing some of your views about our country and what you like best about it. This starts the conversation on a positive note and opens up the possibility of discovering common ground. Some follow up questions you may want to ask are:

- What are you most proud of in our nation's history?
- What are some things you take for granted as an American that you wouldn't have in most other countries on earth?
- Have your views of what you like about America changed through the years or remained the same?

2. How do you feel about the deep divisions and incivility we see in our country?

Move the conversation to explore more about your community - choose a few of these questions to discuss our divisions and differences and again please remember to share time equally.

- Why do you think our country is so bitterly divided at this time?
- How do you feel about our community--do we seem more or less divided than other parts of the country?
- What are the main ways that you think people in our community are uncivil and disrespectful to each other when it comes to political discussions?
- In what ways do liberals and conservatives stereotype each other? Do you ever feel stereotyped by those you disagree with on issues?

3. What can we do to revive civility and find more effective ways to work together?

We can often find that there is more that unites us than what divides us. Take some time to explore areas of agreement and some hopes and dreams you both have. Here are a few questions that may assist you.

- What are your hopes and concerns for our community/and or country?
- In spite of political differences, what do you think are some of the main things that a majority of people in our community agree on?
- What things come to mind that could be done to improve civility in our community and/or before the next election?
- What can our political candidates do differently? How can their supporters show more respect for each other?
- Who in our community needs to be involved in efforts to revive civility and respect?



Reflection on the Experience (5-10 minutes)

Close the conversation by taking a couple of minutes to reflect briefly together. Explore some of the following:

- In one sentence share what was most meaningful or valuable to you in this conversation?
- Is there a next step you'd like to take based on the conversation you just had? Should we have another conversation together? Would you invite another person to have a one-to-one conversation and/or encourage this to be done within a group you know (e.g. civic, faith based, school, at work)?

Please help us learn what was interesting about your conversation by letting us know how it went by sending an update to <http://www.revivecivility.org/contact>. Sharing the experience on social media can help spread civility too, for example take a picture or short video and share it on social media using **#revivecivility**.

Thank you for being part of a growing number of Americans who together are helping civility, one conversation at a time.