



HARD CONVERSATION **FAQs** **FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

We created this additional packet to address some of the most pressing issues that have arisen in 2020—and to make sure that you have the information and confidence you need to step into even more transformative hard conversations.



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OUTCOMES & OVERVIEW

This additional packet of FAQs was created to address the turbulent times we find ourselves in—and to answer our community's specific questions about the hard conversations we are currently having.

OUTCOMES

It's time to step up and speak from our hearts about racism, systemic injustice, and the topics that threaten to keep us divided by our silence. Now more than ever, it's important, for young adults, who are the future of the world, to bravely enter discussions that encourage greater understanding and awareness, especially around issues of injustice and social transformation.

Use this time as an opportunity to bravely speak your truth. By the time you are finished with this packet, you will have tools to step into charged conversations specific to this moment we all find ourselves in.

FAQs

DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC

I have a lot of friends who seem to be acting irresponsibly with respect to safety in the pandemic. I feel like I should address it, but I don't know how.

If there is one thing we've learned about the pandemic, it's that social shaming of those who may not be acting in accordance with how we would act is not only ineffective but can end up backfiring and creating even more resistance, defensiveness, and unsafe behavior.

So why don't we all try to lead by example? Practice social distancing, wear your mask in public, and offer gentle reminders to loved ones. At the same time, avoid issuing harsh directives and judgments. No matter what people believe, nobody enjoys being told what to do, even if it's for their own safety. You also might want to encourage mindful behavior around public health through light comments and jokes. In conversation, you may also want to bring up recommendations and best practices from trustworthy medical sources. If you feel tempted to talk to someone who is not wearing a mask, instead of attacking them, you could talk about why you feel better when you wear one. They might think you're acting out of line, but it's better than being confrontational and making them feel attacked.

Also, be sure to gauge your comfort level when it comes to talking to others. If you are uncomfortable justifying your decisions (which is understandable, given the divided nature of the conversation around public health and safety), it's okay to step away and mind your own business. Sometimes, it's not worth it to make a scene or get into arguments with friends, neighbors, and strangers. You can't control their behavior, but you can focus on controlling your own and practicing safety measures to the best of your ability.

FAQs

THE TRAP OF "AGREE TO DISAGREE"

I have a really hard time with the idea of “agreeing to disagree,” especially if someone else’s viewpoint might have harmful consequences, like racism, misogyny, or supporting leaders who have violated human rights. How can I accept someone else’s perspective without falling into the trap of “agreeing to disagree” if I hate what that person stands for?

In many ways, a big part of having the hard conversations is accepting that it’s futile to enter them with the objective of changing anyone’s mind. In fact, arguing your point is much likelier to alienate other people rather than winning them over to your side. At the same time, it’s commendable that you wish to speak up against offensive (e.g., racist or misogynistic) comments, especially when they go unchallenged. You need not get into a debate with the person who makes such statements, but it may be enough to say something along the lines of, “I hear you, and while that may be how you feel, here’s why I disagree.”

You may also want to ask them why they feel that way or believe those things, then respond from your heart without moving into attack mode. If they absolutely refuse to hear you, it’s time to walk away. When it comes down to it, if there is zero common ground for a civil discussion, it’s much more important to save your precious energy instead of depleting it and wasting it on those who will never see eye-to-eye with you.

FAQs

WHEN SILENCE BECOMES COMPLICITY

The people in my family have strong opinions. I'm afraid to step on anyone's toes by saying that I disagree with them (because it always turns into an argument), but I also don't want my silence to be mistaken as condoning or agreeing with offensive comments. What do I do?

It is all too easy to be drawn into arguments that we would be better to stay away from. Such arguments seldom lead to productive discourse or deeper understanding, but only keep us locked in a power struggle. Instead of voicing your disagreement or focusing on what you disagree with, express what you believe in, instead. This might mean sharing about a cause that is close to your heart, and doing so from a place of transparency and connection rather than friction and defensiveness. If you find that your family members attack or abuse your viewpoint, instead of telling them that they're wrong, try to set boundaries around what is or is not up for debate. You can say something like, "I see that we don't share the same perspective. I respect that these are your beliefs, but I also want you to respect that I have different beliefs. I am not willing to engage in a debate or argument about this."

When you are not in a charged environment or situation, you can consider opening space for each of you to share your perspectives. That would entail letting your family member share what they have to say without interrupting them, perhaps for a designated period of time (let's say, five minutes). Then, you would be able to share your thoughts and ideas, uninterrupted, for the same amount of time. Instead of getting into a debate, see if you can encourage space for respectful listening and curiosity. This is one of the most powerful methods we can use to learn from each other and allow room for differences in opinion, rather than spiraling into a shouting match.

FAQs

I'M MAD AS HELL AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT!

I know that having a hard conversation is supposed to be a win-win, but I am having a hard time “toning down” my anger to get my point across. I’m angry, and I don’t feel I should have to water down the way I communicate. What do I do?

First of all, know that your feelings are valid and you have a right to have them. While it can be frustrating to dilute any of those feelings when we communicate with others, it’s also important to understand that anger can make it challenging to create a bridge for communication and understanding in most situations. Often, conversations hit an impasse when anger is present, as it can make other people feel defensive or shut down their willingness to listen.

Ultimately, it’s okay to admit that anger is present when you talk to another person, but it’s also important to own your feelings and make it clear that you are not blaming the person with whom you’re communicating. If emotions are running high, it may be useful to agree to come back to the conversation at a time when you aren’t as charged, and to practice what you want to say in advance to the best of your ability. Also, think about what you wish to get out of the conversation and communicate that to the other person. If you simply want to vent, it may not be useful to engage another person unless they have made it clear that they’re willing to hear you and hold compassionate space for your anger. Rather than off-loading your anger onto another person, it’s important for you to be able to sit with and process your anger, perhaps through journaling, physical activity, or connecting with a trusted friend or therapist. Get in contact with the feelings that are present. Usually, sadness and grief, which can be harder to give voice to, hide beneath anger and require our tenderness and attention.

FAQs

CAN'T SEE EYE-TO-EYE

No matter how much my family member and I have talked about this one issue we have totally opposing viewpoints about, we can't seem to come to a resolution. It's beginning to put a strain on our relationship. How do we move forward?

Unfortunately, we all come into situations where we cannot reach a resolution other than “agreeing to disagree,” which may often feel forced and unsatisfying. Sometimes, however, it can be enough to acknowledge the elephant in the room. Rather than continuing to stew in your differences, have a candid conversation with your family member. You may wish to say something like, “I am realizing our differences in opinion are taking a toll on our relationship, which I don’t want to happen. How are you feeling? Can we come up with some ideas about how to stay connected, even though we may not see eye-to-eye?”

Simply letting them know that your relationship is important and that you want to focus on ways to build connection rather than opposition is likely to create an opening, as well as opportunities for vulnerability and love to shine through. Try to remember what you appreciate about your family member, and attempt to voice that gratitude to them. While you may never come to a resolution, the reality is that whatever we choose to focus on can inform our relationships. If your focus is gratitude, love, and appreciation, you are likely to see a tangible shift. On the other hand, depending on the issues you’re facing, you have to determine for yourself whether the differences are big enough to inhibit connection or pave a way forward, or if they will force you to hold back your truth. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Listen to your heart.

FAQs

WHEN YOU GET SHUT UP AND SHUT DOWN

What if someone shuts me down when I want to speak my truth, because they don't want to hear what I have to say?

This is a possibility that we each face on a daily basis. Speaking our truth can be scary because we have no idea what the cost will be—whether we will be ridiculed, shut down, dismissed, or even ostracized. Women in particular tend to be more sensitive to the needs and actions of others, which is great, but this can also make us more anxious about how others perceive and react to us. But speaking our truth is always a risk worth taking, especially when it comes to reclaiming our power and agency.

If you feel afraid, ask yourself, “What if I didn't worry what others thought? What would I say? How freely would I express myself?” You can work through your fear of fully expressing yourself by taking baby steps that allow you to gain confidence. If there's a big truth that feels too difficult to share, start with small ones, which will help you gain confidence. Build resilience by thinking of the people who will be positively impacted by your truth. Practice speaking your truth to yourself in the mirror, and acting “as if” you are powerful and confident—and you will quickly find that it stops being an act and starts being true. Find your cheerleaders and supporters, who can also serve to inspire and motivate you. When it comes down to it, none of us has the power to control what others think, say, or believe in reaction to our truth—so why let that be a factor that holds you back from being more of yourself in the world?

FAQs

WHEN FRIENDS AND POLITICS DON'T MIX

I am having difficulty expressing my political views to my close friends because I'm afraid of being shamed. What do I do?

If these people are truly your friends, they will hear what you have to say without responding to you in a negative, judgmental, or shaming way. Be brave and share from your heart, using the tools in the toolkit...and hopefully, your friends will listen to you with open ears. If they disagree, this can still invite an opportunity for constructive conversation about why your views may be different from one another's. Remember, it's not simply our commonalities that have the power to create deeper bonds and stronger intimacy; it's respectful awareness of our differences, and how to navigate them that also matters.

If the fear of being shamed or rejected persists and keeps you from speaking up, it might be a good idea to do some gentle self-inquiry. Go back to the first part of the toolkit and get clear about your desires and intentions. Are you projecting your fear onto your friends, or is it the result of earlier experiences of being shamed and ostracized by others? Are you someone who has difficulty speaking up in general, or is this an issue that is specific to your political views? Do some journaling and self-reflection before rushing into a conversation. It could very well be that the first hard conversation you need to have is with yourself, not your friends.

FAQs

WHEN "ENOUGH" DOESN'T FEEL LIKE ENOUGH

I understand that we're in a time of major change right now, nationally and globally, so I'm trying to learn as much as possible—but I also feel like I'm being bullied by the people around me for not "doing enough." I'm starting to feel resentful. What do I do?

When it comes down to it, there are no “guidelines” for what is or isn’t enough in terms of educating yourself and making a commitment to do better. At the moment, instead of focusing on your resentment, which can overpower genuine efforts to build knowledge, take small but meaningful steps to educate yourself. Follow people on social media who share valuable resources. Start reading books and learning about the topics that are circulating throughout our world. The more you educate yourself, the easier it will be to carve out a clearer understanding of how you can respond to social issues. Putting yourself in the position of a student is one of the most important actions you can take; everyone has to start somewhere, and “beginner’s mind” is a powerful way to step outside of one’s own blind spots and start examining what we didn’t know we didn’t know.

Also, while the feelings you have might be uncomfortable, they could be a powerful motivation for having a hard conversation with yourself. Take a gentle look at your resentment, which might be masking defensiveness, which in turn could be a cover for guilt or shame. Guilt and shame are understandable, but they can also be toxic, as they often keep us stuck in a loop of inactivity and overwhelm rather than inspiring us to grow. Also, if you ever feel pressured, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. This isn’t a competition where the person who “does the most” wins. In fact, that kind of attitude usually serves to make us feel more stuck. Sometimes, simply acknowledging your own privilege and questioning your own biases can be a powerful way to instigate meaningful, long-lasting change.

FAQs

IGNORE, DEBATE, OR BLOCK?

I'm trying to figure out what the right way to respond to people who disagree with me on social media is. Should I block them? Debate them? Ignore them?

Obviously, every platform, relationship, and conversation that you are likely to engage with over social media has its own unique qualities and possibilities, so there is no right or wrong answer. Also, connect with your own intentions around social media. Are you looking to share your viewpoint and engage in discussion about it? Do you expect that everyone who reads your posts should agree with you (which can lead to a lopsided expectation that keeps you “safe” from conflict)? Do you have a sense of who you want to engage with, and on what terms? Are you posting on other people’s pages just to argue with them, or to engage in meaningful and educational conversation?

Unfortunately, while social media can be an important place to seek out and find valuable resources, it can also be extremely heated and intense—meaning that you’re likely to come across people who want to have a virtual shouting match with you. Decide how you want to deal with that. Also remember things can get exaggerated and escalated online in ways that they are unlikely to in real life (for example, people are more likely to troll you on social media than in your day-to-day). While social media can be a great place to express your truth in a post, it’s not the best place to carry out a hard conversation—especially in the absence of things like body language and invitations to be vulnerable. Save the hard conversations for IRL, and for the people with whom you have real relationships and genuine interactions.

More than anything, check in with your energy. If you’re spending way too much time debating people online and it’s depleting you, choose to funnel your efforts into powerful, positive, life-affirming activities. Some of us may be naturally more comfortable talking things through with folks who disagree with us, but if you don’t want to waste your energy and emotional labor “educating” other people or nitpicking their rebuttals, that’s also perfectly fine. It’s important to go with your gut on this. At the same time, while you don’t have to agree or engage in conversation with people who hold wildly different views, it could be a good idea to sincerely attempt to understand where they are coming from. This is not about condoning harmful viewpoints; it is about using your curiosity to consider how those views came to be, which can make it easier to engage from a place of connection and information rather than defensiveness.

FAQs

UNSOLICITED INFORMATION

What if someone from your extended family has opposing views from you, and they are sending you masses of information to try to get you to “switch views”? I don’t want to ruin the relationship, but also don’t value a relationship with someone who agrees with Trump, racism, extreme conspiracy theories, etc.

This is a good opportunity to turn things around on them—not to be a contrarian, but to exercise curiosity. Ask them questions about the information they send you. If you have the time or energy, check out their sources of information and then bring them up in conversation. For example, if they are sharing what seems to be a conspiracy theory, does your relative know if their source is credible? Are other news sources sharing the same or similar information, or is coverage limited? Do whatever you can to gently encourage critical thinking. At the same time, just as you don’t appreciate them trying to make you switch views, you can’t force them to change their mind.

When you are talking to your relative, try not to talk them out of their beliefs or to approach them with anger, which will disable connection. Instead, you can appreciate that, like you, they are just attempting to make sense of the world around them (even if you think their beliefs are offensive or irrational). You can listen to the best of your ability and thank them for sharing, but then ask if they, too, are willing to learn about things from a different angle. If you think they should know more about specific topics, make sure to learn about them yourself, then teach them to your family from your perspective. Try to have the focus to be on education and continuing to ask questions rather than coming up debating points.

It’s also important to keep in mind that while you are most certainly not responsible for their opinions, if your disagreement is about a topic that really matters to you, you don’t need to continue to take in information they send your way—especially if it violates your sense of what is right. This would be a good time to set some strong boundaries. Let them know that while you respect them, you do not condone their viewpoints and would prefer not to engage with them on certain subjects. It’s not about stifling discourse—it’s about knowing when enough is enough.

FAQs

AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT RACISM

I'm a person of color (or white person) who has never talked to my close POC (or white) friend about racism. I want to be able to talk about it but am scared of what it might bring up. Help!

This is a great question, and there are multiple ways to approach this. First of all, if you are seeking to learn more about racism, educating yourself is always the first step. You might want to talk to other people of color (if you're a POC) or white people (if you're white) to share ideas. You can also look up the vast repository of resources on racism and anti-racism education. It's okay to admit that you feel a little scared when you approach the topic, but that you'd like to open up dialogue from a place of care and curiosity.

It's also important to understand that racism is a powerful and often-painful topic, especially for people of color, so approach it with sensitivity. Don't make assumptions about your friend's experiences. Speak from the "I" point of view, and allow your intentions to lead. Rather than going into a conversation with the desire to convince your friend of your point of view, go in with the desire to listen, learn, share from your heart, and respectfully take in what your friend has to say. You may be surprised to know that your experiences may substantially differ from your friend's, so approaching the topic with gentleness, love, and the desire to understand each other better is key.

FAQs

WHEN THE OTHER PERSON JUST DOESN'T GET IT

How can I have a meaningful conversation with someone—like a professor, manager, or even a friend—who doesn't understand that what they are saying and doing contributes to systemic racism?

This is a challenging question, but it's something that lots of people of color have had to encounter with well-meaning friends. It happens a lot when people engage in racial gaslighting, which makes people doubt their own experiences of racism with comments like, "Racism doesn't exist anymore"; "It was just a joke—calm down"; "All lives matter"; "Why does it always have to be about race?" Often, when people of color share their encounters with racism, they get these kinds of dismissive reactions, which can further serve to silence people's lived experiences. But hurtful comments can also come in the form of racial microaggressions, which are the common daily communications, intentional or not, that send derogatory or negative messages to people in marginalized groups ("I don't see color"; "You're pretty for a black girl"; "Can I touch your hair?"; "You're so articulate—were you born in this country?").

In many ways, countering these types of comments with reasons for why they serve to perpetuate prejudice is downright exhausting. If you're a person of color, know that you can trust your lived experiences—and you're not alone. Connect with white allies and other people of color for support. It is not necessary for you to exhaust yourself trying to educate someone who is more offended about being called out for racism than they are by the fact that racism exists. If it's a good friend of yours whom you need to speak with, decide whether it's worth it to talk to them directly. Is it the best use of your time? Are they truly open to hearing you, or would the conversation lead to your feeling more depleted? Would you prefer to send them resources or have a white ally talk to them? Remember that whatever you decide is perfectly fine.

If you're a white person, there are lots of things you can do to support people of color so that they don't have to be the ones corralled into conversations about racism with well-meaning but oblivious people. For one thing, if you hear a questionable comment from someone you know, be willing to counter them and offer compassionate but firm examples that help them understand how their words or behavior might be harmful. This can be tricky terrain, because people's shame can often cause them to lash out or to feel powerless to effect change. If you can, offer your friend empowering calls to action, and recognize any efforts they might be taking—even if they're as simple as learning and listening. Thankfully, there are plenty of great online resources that come in handy if you're a white person who wants to strengthen your allyship. Educator/activist Paul Kivel's [Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies](#) offers simple steps for skillfully handling conversations about racism. Remember that your voice matters, so please use it when you can!



BE BRAVE! ALIGN YOUR VOICE WITH YOUR VALUES!

Let the hard conversations be opportunities for truth,
transparency, and connection!

We want to hear from you!

Email your experience
and feedback to info@womenforone.com.



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