

“Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.”

- Margaret Wheatley

The world we live in is one increasingly focused on the things that divide us. Many of us find ourselves either arguing unproductively or completely avoiding issues that deeply impact our society and the future. We are more informed and technologically connected now than ever before, yet our ability to have open, honest and respectful dialogue across differing perspectives and opinions seems even more at risk.

Daring Discussions is a road map to help you find ways to have authentic exchanges that bridge divides and bring us all closer to our shared humanity. Disagreement does not have to be scary and unpleasant if we strive to have respectful conversations grounded in our personal experiences and values.

Using the best strategies for navigating confrontation, defusing defensiveness and finding common ground in shared values, Daring Discussions is about embracing discomfort and having a truly important conversation. The intention of this Guide is to help you create a safe environment for a vulnerable and meaningful conversation that allows both sides to learn and grow.

Being or becoming aware of privilege is important for respectful dialogue. “Privilege” doesn’t necessarily mean wealth and it certainly doesn’t mean a person has never struggled—it means the relative power you hold in a society that is structurally unequal due to racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, religious discrimination and so on. An individual may hold some kinds of privilege while also experiencing some form of oppression. Holding privilege is what allows us to avoid and ignore issues that do not directly affect us, and understanding your own privilege is an important part of giving others space to share difficult and vulnerable truths about their experience.

Daring Discussions launches on Mother’s Day 2017 in memoriam of the original intent of the holiday: a day for women and mothers to work together toward peace. In the shadows of the Civil War, women came together to heal a nation. Daring Discussions is a call for mothers and all those who nurture to restore the fabric of our human relationships. Carrying the torch of those from the past who worked toward peace, we hope this Guide helps you navigate Daring Discussions that will bring us closer to a more just country and world.

Goal:

The goal of Daring Discussions is for participants on different sides of a given issue to learn about one another’s personal experiences and perspectives as a starting place to gain compassion, respect and stronger relationships. Participants are asked to commit to avoiding judgment, defensiveness and anger and to try to express any negative feelings and different views constructively from a place of giving as opposed to being oppositional or needing to be right.

Guiding Principle:

ground yourself in love

The problems of society stem from our willingness to turn people into the “other” and deny their basic humanity. Holding onto hate hurts us deeply—it is “like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” Love is a recognition that all people are interconnected. Love drives us to invest our time and energy in each other in a more productive way, raising the level of relationship between each other.

strength is compassion & vulnerability

When we think of strength we often think of toughness and inflexibility. However, it takes bravery to be vulnerable and great strength to be compassionate rather than judgemental. Strive to be honest, vulnerable, authentic and compassionate in your discussion. Express appreciation for your partner when they show the same qualities, even if you don't agree with what they are saying.

suspend your first judgement

When we judge each other, we shut down our power to listen to what our partner is saying. Be aware of the impulse towards judgement, then take a moment to breathe deeply. How does your body feel? What specifically caused this feeling—was it a word or an assumption?

seek clarification before jumping to conclusions

Assume your conversation partner has good intentions and wants to find the common ground. Rather than launching into a response based on judgement or what you “think” your partner meant, ask open-ended questions—ones that start with ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’. The goal of gathering more information is to come to a fuller understanding of your partner’s experiences and how those shape their perspectives.

be honest about your experiences

Focus on sharing your direct personal experiences, as opposed to stories you’ve heard in the news or through other people. When we speak from our personal experience, we are helping the other person gain perspective on who we are, the way we see the world and our role in it. Sharing as deeply and truthfully as you are able will help your partner feel empowered to do the same.

be unconditionally accepting

It is possible to both accept someone and disagree with them at the same time. Unconditional acceptance will help you reach the underlying values and beliefs of your partner, rather than reacting to larger narratives your partner’s stories may play into. The goal of a Daring Discussion is not to try to “win” a debate, but to find the common ground that connects us. At our core, we are all motivated by similar things—to be safe, to be free, to be connected to others in a meaningful way.

reflective & Intuitive Listening

Use listening techniques to support each other in expressing feelings, fears and experiences. Listen patiently and quietly, avoid fidgeting, impatient exhales or interrupting. When your partner is done sharing, reflect back to them what you heard before you begin sharing what’s on your mind by using “I” statements. “I hear you saying that...” or “I appreciate you sharing with me that...” are good ways to show you are actively listening.

be aware of the privilege you hold in a conversation

This is tricky because the privileges we hold are exactly those things of which we are least aware. Privilege refers to relative power you hold in a society that is structurally unequal due to racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, religious discrimination and so on. We can simultaneously hold some kinds of privilege while also experiencing some form of oppression. During a Daring Discussion, being aware of the privilege you hold is an important part of creating space for your partner to share difficult and vulnerable truths about their experience.

Considerations:

Picking a discussion topic.

When you identify someone to invite to a Daring Discussion, consider people in your life—family members, friends, neighbors, church members—who hold different views than you on issues that affect politics and our society. The topic of the conversation may come naturally based on your familiarity with that person or past exchanges you've had. You may also visit the Daring Discussions website and select a topic from the resources available there.

If you choose to invite someone of a different racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability or religious affiliation than yourself, be mindful that people who are directly impacted by societal discrimination are forced to deal with difficult or uncomfortable conversations more frequently (and without preparation) than those who aren't directly impacted. The emotional labor that goes into these exchanges has a real impact on the person's life. Please be respectful of the person's boundaries if they decline your invitation.

When it's okay to pull the plug.

As kids many of us were told, "sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." This is deeply untrue. Psychological trauma from verbal and emotional violence can hurt more and last longer than physical wounds. There is nothing daring about a discussion where you or your partner use offensive or derogatory language, resort to name calling and ad hominem attacks, or make threats, real or implied. If this transpires during your conversation, the safest thing to do is leave the conversation immediately.

“When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

- Audre Lorde

Instructions:

1. Invite a person with a different perspective to engage in a Daring Discussion. Conversations are intended to be one-on-one.
2. Find a private, quiet location to have the conversation & leave your cell phone behind!
3. Allow at least 90 minutes in total, to read the Guiding Principles, to have the conversation and debrief.
4. Both participants should verbally agree to follow the Guiding Principles during the discussion. Without agreement to its terms, we do not recommend that you have the discussion.
5. Review the Sample Questions below to set content expectations for the discussion. The structure of the conversation can be uniquely curated to your needs and interests.
6. Balance talking and listening during the conversation. Allow pauses in the discussion and give both yourself and your partner space to explore thoughts and feelings silently before speaking.
7. Participants are asked to commit to avoid judgments, defensiveness and anger and to try to express any negative feelings and different views constructively and from a place of giving as opposed to being positional or needing to be right.
8. Complete the experience by thanking your partner for their participation. Acknowledge and specifically acknowledging them for whatever you are called to acknowledge them for (e.g. their openness, courage, truth, generosity, trust, etc.).

Sample Questions:

This isn't meant to be a script and you don't have to discuss every question. Read through the entire list and agree with your partner on 1-2 questions from each section to guide your discussion. Remember to close with gratitude and thank each other for bringing your whole and authentic selves to this Daring Discussion.

Setting the Intention

- Why are you here? What motivated you to participate in this discussion?
- When did you first become aware that this discussion topic was an issue?
- What do you hope comes out of this discussion?

Defining Who We Are

- Who are you?
- What are the top things that motivate / drive you? What makes you "tick"?
- How do you define yourself in relation to the discussion topic? How does your family relate to it?

Hopes and Concerns for the Future

- What are the biggest challenges you and your community have had in relation to the discussion topic?
- What are you most concerned about for yourself, your community and/or the country right now?
- What are you most hopeful about when you think of the future?
- When you think about the kind of world you hope to leave to the next generation, where do you envision our society is, regarding the discussion topic?

Delving Deeper in the Theme

- What are some of the personal experiences you have had that have influenced your views or relationship to this discussion topic?
- Have you ever felt that you've been disadvantaged or advantaged by the discussion topic?
- Was there ever a time when you felt like the "other"?
- What do you want to know but have been afraid to ask about the other side of this topic?
- What do you think is the biggest opportunity for people coming together in terms of this discussion topic?

What Have We Learned?

- Do you have a new understanding or appreciation for the topic based on this discussion?
- Has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there any next step you would like to take based upon the discussion you just had?
- What was the biggest misconception about the other person and their experience?
- Is there something you hope people will understand about you and others who share your perspective?

Close with Gratitude

- What did you appreciate about this discussion?
- What is one important thing you think was accomplished here?
- Is there anything you will do differently next time you have a Daring Discussion?

Issues

- Race in America: Black, White, Latino, Asian, Indigenous & Multiracial perspectives
- Feminism
- Immigration
- Islam / Islamophobia
- LGBTQIA+
- Transgender perspectives
- Income inequity
- Gender bias in workplace
- Gender Roles
- Disability Perspectives

TAKE THE SURVEY, TELL US HOW YOU DID