

THE DIS/AGREEMENT PROJECT

A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR CONVERSATION:

Conversations between people who disagree can open new possibilities for constructive change when the focus is on increasing understanding.

Below is a simple framework for having a conversation with someone with whom you disagree. The framework proposes a manageable, contained space and time where you can begin an exchange oriented toward humanization and curiosity.

INVITE:

- Find someone with whom you disagree on a topic that matters to you and to them.
- Ask them if they would be willing to have a conversation with you on the topic. The conversation would be structured and last about 25 minutes.
- Explain that the purpose of the conversation that you propose is not debate, argument, or persuasion. Instead, the goal is to each get a better sense of what the other is thinking and how your life experiences affect your thoughts on the issue.

SETUP:

- Once they have agreed to a conversation, find a comfortable place to sit together or a space where you can walk/ move side by side as you talk. If it seems useful, give the other person the conversation questions in advance.
- Explain how the process will work: There are three questions, you will take turns responding to each question, while the other person has the chance to just listen, without responding*. Decide whether or not to set up a timer to keep track of time. Ask if they would prefer to speak or listen first. Ask if they have any questions.

CONVERSATION FORMAT:

- Have a conversation using the following three questions in the following way: 1) Read the first question out loud, 2) Together, take 1 minute to silently consider your own responses, maybe making notes, 3) Take turns responding to the first question, while the other person has the chance to just listen, 4) When finished, repeat the process with the 2nd and 3rd questions.
- As you listen to the other person, practice increasing your curiosity. Consciously widen the focus of your attention past the other person's opinions to the person themselves. Notice how they move, listen for their experiences, be curious about what is important to them on a deeper level.
- When you finish, thank them for taking the time to talk with you.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

1. (around 3 minutes each)

How have your personal experiences and/or the stories of others impacted the way you think about this topic?

[Before exchanging, take 1 min to think and maybe make some notes]

2. (around 3 minutes each)

Are there underlying values / ethical beliefs that are connected to this topic for you?

[Before exchanging, take 1 min to think and maybe make some notes]

3. (around 3 minutes each)

Are there gray areas / points of complexity that you notice when thinking about this topic?

[Before exchanging, take 1 min to think and maybe make some notes]

*Note: Introducing the idea of just listening without responding offers a different conversation than people often experience in conflict. People may still sometimes respond while listening, which is fine when it's part of a productive conversation flow. Having the structure there to return to as needed can help to ensure that both people have the chance to listen and to speak and to keep the conversation moving through all three questions.

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For more information on The Dis/Agreement Project and other public events, as well as books, talks, trainings, and coaching on changing the conversation in conflict, please visit: danacaspersen.com