



Revive Civility

How to Listen Across Differences Small Group Discussion Guide

Welcome to the conversation on reviving civility!

We know there's an uneasy feeling that things are broken, disrespect is on the rise and we're tearing each other apart. Many Americans have a feeling of dislike, distrust, and even contempt for many of their fellow Americans largely because they hold different political views and we are seeing citizens demonizing others based on who they voted for.

We also know that many want to do something about this and are seeking to come together around things that unite us rather than things that divide us. The good news is this can be achieved by connecting around some of our 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.

The goal of this conversation is to start to build active listening skills that enhance civil discourse.

Objectives:

- Learn to listen and build relationships--especially with people of different views
- Start to 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.

Conversation Set-up Instructions

1. One person will serve as the facilitator for the whole group to help keep things on track. The facilitator will read the questions, keep track of time and complete the form in the back of this guide.
2. Form small groups of 4-5 people, preferably seated in small circles in the room. If you have a large gathering, simply break into small groups.
3. To help support the conversation, please have a flip chart and markers ready to make notes. Have draft ground rules written up in advance and edit as needed.
4. Have a sign in sheet (or online access) that asks people for their name and email address.



5. If possible, have a laptop, computer, tablet or cell phone with an Internet connection ready.

Starting the Conversation

Facilitator - when you're ready to begin the conversation, please walk through the following questions/provide the following instructions. You'll notice before each step, there are instructions to the facilitator to either **READ, WRITE DOWN, SET UP, HAND OUT**, etc. These capitalized instructions are to help serve as a guide to the facilitator for each step. Anything italicized are notes to help the facilitator.

1. **READ:** Thank you for coming today. We are going to talk about the important elements of civility and respect, and how we can use these values to hold civil conversations with people who think differently than we do.
2. **SET UP:** *Facilitator introduces self first, modeling a "20-second introduction" including your name, why you wanted to participate today and one thing that you love about your community. Have each participant introduce himself/herself, while gently but firmly keeping to the time limit. (3 minutes)*
3. *Facilitator - do this with the small group together. (10 minutes)*

READ: Next, let's talk ground rules. Here are some examples of ground rules that are designed to help groups have civil, respectful conversations. What would you add or change today?

- Let everyone have a chance to participate
- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Assume best intentions from all participating
- Use personal experiences to help share your viewpoint.
- Ask questions for clarification or further learning
- There are no right or wrong answers, everyone's voice matters.
- Honor time limits
- No side conversations

WRITE DOWN: *Any changes or additions from the group on chart paper.*

4. **READ:** Before we talk about civility, let's define it! Here is one definition.

Civility is showing mutual respect. When practicing civility, you don't have to agree; but when you do disagree you are doing so without behavior or words that are intentionally hurtful or disrespectful.



What does civility mean to you? What does it look like (within your organization, family or community)? (5 minutes)

5. **READ:** Now let's talk about different view points. In discussing something you care deeply about, why can it be difficult to talk to someone with a different point of view? (5 minutes)
6. **READ:** One of the most important things we can do to start understanding others is to listen fully and deeply to them. Here are some tips for using those listening skills and engaging in a civil conversation with someone who thinks differently than you:
 - Listen for understanding – this means you are listening to understand what the person is saying and feeling, not for response or debate. Keep focused on what the other person is saying versus what you will say in response.
 - Repeat back or summarize what they said before sharing your perspective
 - Ask questions
 - Say things like, "I respectfully disagree because..."
 - Remember you can agree to disagree. The goal is not changing someone's opinion or winning an argument.
7. *Facilitator - allot 20 minutes for this entire activity.*

READ: Now we're going to divide into pairs and practice active listening. I'll give you time reminders as we go along. And I'm going to ask you to find someone that you do not know well to do this exercise with. Let's take a minute and get a partner.

- A. **READ:** Take 2 minutes to select a topic that you and your partner feel differently about and will discuss. I'll share some of the examples to help you think of topics, but it does not have to be one of these topics.

Example Topics: climate change, immigration (e.g. building the wall, DACA, refugees) health care, LGBTQ related issues (e.g. gender-neutral bathrooms, same sex marriage), abortion, prison reform, community violence, or campaign finance reform, euthanasia, or another topic.

Facilitator - call time when 2 minutes are up and review instructions for the listening activity.

READ: Now that you have your topic. For 3 minutes, one person shares their views on that topic and why they feel that way. The other person listens for understanding. At the end of 3 minutes, the person who was listening will take 2 minutes and repeat back what their partner just shared. There is no discussion happening at this time. One person speaks



and the other person listens. At the end of 5 minutes you will change roles.

Facilitator - give a 30 second warning before 3 minutes is up for speaker and 30 seconds before 2 minutes is up for the listener and 30 second warning before the pair switches roles.

- B. **READ:** Now that you've listened to each other for understanding, take turns explaining any points that you respectfully disagree with. Make sure you do not take a long time to explain any one point. You may want to share the underlying value or a previous experience that contributed to shaping your perspective. Take turns saying one thing you disagreed with and why. You have 10 minutes to do this.

Facilitator - give a 2 minute and then 30 second warning about time.

8. **Facilitator - everyone in the whole group come back together (8 minutes).**

READ: How that experience for you?

- When listening to your partner, did you learn something new about their perspective? *(take a few responses)*
- Were you able to respectfully disagree? How? *(take a few responses)*

9. **READ:** We don't have to change our values and beliefs to act civilly and respectfully toward others. But by listening to others, we can enhance our understanding of that person's values, allowing us to feel more tolerance and empathy toward others.

10. **READ:** Let's take a moment to identify potential opportunities in your life to use these skills. It can be with people in your life that you know think differently or it can be with someone you don't know personally, but has differing viewpoints. Capture your thoughts on paper.

Facilitator - invite them to share after about 3 minutes.

11. **READ:** Does anyone want to share what you wrote down?

Facilitator - invite them to share for about 5 minutes ((No one should feel obligated to respond).

12. **READ:** Civility challenge! In the next two weeks:

- 1) Sign the Revive Civility Pledge at www.revivecivility.org and share with others you know. The pledge asks you to take personal actions that model and promote civility and respect.
- 2) Reach out to the individual(s) you identified. Invite them for coffee or tea. Sit down with them with the goal to get to know them better, and to listen to



better understand their perspective on the issue you feel differently about. We have a short guide that can assist you in having these conversations (download from revivecivility.org).

13. **READ:** Are you each willing to commit to doing the civility challenge in the next two weeks?

Facilitator- Ask people to raise their hands if they agree to the challenge and capture the number. If there is online access, at the end you can encourage them to sign the pledge online before they leave or if not, have paper copies available.

14. **READ:** What are some ways we can help revive civility in our community? Revive Civility will use your input to develop next steps in reviving civility locally! In addition, we will share your answers with local elected officials and the media. Let's take the next 10 minutes to discuss as a group.

Facilitator- takes 10 minutes for people's ideas

WRITE DOWN: the participants' answers on the sheet marked Appendix A. or on a flip chart.

15. **READ:** Almost done! If you are willing, I'd invite you to sign the pledge and we can follow up with an email that shares other tools that might be of interest to you, such as tips to have a one-on-one conversation, or how to work within your community if you wish.

Facilitator - either makes an online option or paper version of the pledge available.

16. **READ:** Thank you for participating in this Civility Conversation!



Appendix A. Collective Actions To be completed through this online form
<https://goo.gl/jyEkFZ> or by facilitator, with input of the group

Group/Organization/School/Business _____

Location (town/city/county): _____

Number of people who participated: _____

Reason workshop was held: _____

What are some ways we can help revive civility in our community? Attach additional pieces of paper if needed.



For the Civility Challenge, how many people in your group are willing to commit to the challenge? _____

Is there anything else your group would like to share regarding the revive civility effort?

For more information:

National Institute for Civil Discourse
Maine Revives Civility is a project of the National Institute of Civil
Discourse (NICD).

You can learn more at:

<https://www.revivecivility.org/>
<https://www.revivecivility.org/contact>

