

# We Need To Talk.

## **How we talk about things matters.**

The bruising, divisive rhetoric of the US presidential election and its aftermath have shown us that we must figure out how to talk—and listen—with civility and respect. These skills are vital to the health of civil society and the future of democracy.

Reports of increases in hate speech, intimidation, bullying, fear, and anxiety from schools across the country in the past two weeks demonstrate that children need our help learning how to have difficult conversations. But how do we model civil discourse for young people when many of us are not feeling very civil ourselves?

Having difficult conversations is a skill that can be learned. We have an opportunity to practice together in our homes this holiday season. The next generation of civic actors, thinkers, and problem-solvers will be with us around our tables, and they will be listening. Here are three discussion strategies you can borrow directly from Facing History and Ourselves' classrooms:

## **Start with yourself.**

Be aware of your own strongly held beliefs, political positions, emotional responses, and biases, and be thoughtful about how they influence your point of view. Take ownership of the lens you bring. Realize others might feel just as strongly about their beliefs as you do.

## **Acknowledge the elephant in the room.**

If you know that guests have divergent opinions and beliefs, start by acknowledging these differences and the possible discomfort that exists in the room. Reassure your guests that you value them as individuals and members of your family or community.

## **Agree to some ground rules.**

You can do this before you come together or when you arrive. Or simply make a conscious decision about how you will act and the behavior that you want to model. Rules can include:

- › Listen with respect. Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgment.
- › If someone says something that hurts or offends you, don't attack the person. Acknowledge that the comment—not the person—offended you and explain why.
- › If you don't understand something, ask a sincere question for clarification. Leave sarcasm at the front door.
- › Share talking time—provide room for others to speak, and do not interrupt them.
- › Stereotyping, using racial epithets, or using any religious, ethnic, homophobic, or gender-based slurs is unacceptable.

We won't always agree, but how we disagree has the potential to bring us together, rather than drive us apart. This is precisely the strength—and hope—of our democracy. Food for thought this holiday season and beyond.



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