



How to Discuss Politics with Friends & Family

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In these stressful times, talking about politics can be tricky even with the people closest to us. It's easy for a comment to be misinterpreted and for feelings to get hurt. For this reason, some people prefer not to discuss politics with family or friends. Others would like to talk about these issues, but are unsure of the best ways to do so. Dr. Tania Israel, author of [Beyond Your Bubble: How to Connect Across the Political Divide](#), provides suggestions on how to have meaningful in-person conversations on political topics with people you know. Here are a few tips based on Dr. Israel's work that you can use:

Before the Conversation:

- If you know in advance that you'll be talking with someone about politics, take a moment to think about what you'd like the conversation to accomplish. Some useful goals might be to listen with an open mind, explain your views calmly, and understand the other person better by the end. Goals that involve changing the other person's mind tend to result in arguments rather than useful discussions.
- Spend some time thinking about your views on the relevant topics, and how they may have changed over time as a result of your life experiences. This will help you explain them more clearly to the other person.
- Think about what words and viewpoints tend to evoke an emotional reaction in you, and how you might deal with them if they come up.

During the Conversation:

- Listen with the intention to understand the other person's perspective, not to find ways to argue with them. This is not a debate; it's an effort to understand each other better.
- Ask questions in a curious tone of voice, not a combative or dismissive tone. Every so often, summarize what you've heard the other person saying to ensure that you are understanding them accurately.
- Maintain eye contact with the other person in a friendly way, not a hostile way. Explain your views in a neutral tone of voice, remembering that your perspective is only one of many.

- Use open-ended questions (“what are your thoughts on gun control?”) rather than closed- ended questions (“do you agree with gun control?”).
- Don’t play devil’s advocate. Avoid arguing simply for the sake of arguing.
- If you find yourself getting angry at the other person, remind yourself that although you may disagree about this subject, they have good qualities and you have chosen to have them in your life for a reason.
- Recognize that there may be a point where you have to walk away and end the conversation, such as if the person is being disrespectful or simply refuses to listen. If this happens, you might say, “I do not feel that you are listening to my opinion. I am trying to express my opinion, not trying to change yours. It looks like we may have to agree to disagree.”

After the Conversation:

- Take a few minutes to consider how you felt during the conversation, how well the two of you communicated with each other, and how you handled any difficulties.
- Consider what the conversation may mean for the relationship. How do you feel about this relationship after the conversation? Do you have any outstanding worries?
- If you felt unheard or misunderstood, try to remind yourself that the other person probably did not intentionally try to make you feel that way. Each person’s opinions have been shaped by their beliefs, values, family members, culture, etc. from the time they were young. Also, some people don’t have strong communication skills and that can lead to others feeling misunderstood.
- Remember: the real “win” is not about changing the other person’s mind, but about communicating and listening in an effective, respectful manner. If you really tried to understand the other person, communicated your views clearly and respectfully, and managed your emotions well, consider this a win!
- Take some time for self-care if you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Relax in your favorite chair, listen to some calming music, or watch something funny on TV. A few minutes of downtime after a stressful conversation can go a long way toward putting you back on track.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA’s Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then “Resources” and then “Public Resources”. PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.