



CONVERSATION WELCOME?

Bridging Political Divides In An Election Year:

We all have deeply held views. It is emotionally challenging to have these views challenged, or be open to changing them. However, having productive, generous political conversations can help to shift the tone and experience of the election in our communities.

While it may not be easy, or come naturally, following these principles should enable us to have more productive and meaningful political conversations in the lead up to the election.

- **Assume the best intentions in others**
 - When exploring ideas or challenging issues, people may use phrases that you find difficult or problematic. If this happens, try to give them the benefit of the doubt. The best of intentions may be hidden behind clumsy words.
- **Be prepared to listen**
 - Too often we listen only to respond or to correct. Try to listen actively to understand, engaging fully with what is being shared. If you are contributing more than listening try to pause and give others the opportunity to share; if you are listening more than you share try to contribute to the conversation.
- **Try to understand rather than convince**
 - Our ability to convince ourselves is much greater than our ability to convince others. Rather than trying to change the opinion of others use this as an opportunity to fully understand their thoughts and feelings. If everybody does this, it is likely that a great deal more will be exchanged as a result.
- **Look for common ground**
 - Look for shared values, fears and interests. Think about sharing stories and the reasons behind your views on issues or policies, people connect more readily to personal stories. Don't be afraid, you will be able to find common ground.
- **Comment on ideas not people**
 - We are biologically programmed to respond to people attacking our views in the same way that we would respond to being attacked by a lion!
 - If something inspires you or if there is something that jars it may be appropriate to highlight it. It is important however to do so in terms of the ideas that were shared and not the people who shared them. It also may



sometimes be wise to re-direct and often is helpful to give people time to explain themselves more fully.

- **Stay curious**
 - Resist the urge to pigeonhole others by asking questions and respecting the complexity of the issues and the depth and experiences of the individuals that are sharing with you.
- **Prioritise relationships and consider having hard conversations over a meal**
 - When we hold polarised views, evidence shows that people are more likely to have productive conversations with people with whom they have pre-existing relationships.
 - In many cultures the act of sharing food is an important way of building relationships and people have been shown to be more open to talking about deeply held views over a meal.¹ Could you have politically divisive conversations over a meal?

“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.” — John Wesley

¹ Haidt, The Righteous Mind, 2012