



CONVERSATION GUIDE

Talking about Racism, Racial Equity and Racial Healing with Friends, Family, Colleagues and Neighbors

The National Day of Racial Healing (NDORH) offers people, organizations and communities across the United States, opportunities to recognize the need for racial healing, and brings people together to take collective action for a more just and equitable world.

Racial healing is supported through:

- Respectful dialogue
- Recognition and affirmation of people and their experiences
- Connectedness to individual cultures, histories, and practices
- The sense of agency, nurtured through racial justice activism

One way to participate in the National Day of Racial Healing is to invite friends, family, colleagues and neighbors to your home or over lunch with co-workers to start a conversation. Many people would like to talk about the impact of racism and [the need for racial healing] in our country, but don't know where to start. Some worry that others won't understand their points of view or what they say might be offensive to others.

This guide can help you begin to have a conversation, despite these very real challenges. Recognizing that talking about racism can be challenging; your goals should be to commit to creating a safe space for people to be authentic and vulnerable, and to pave the way for future conversations.

CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

Of course, creating a safe space involves a number of steps. You may want to reach out to friends and colleagues who have facilitated meaningful conversations for their advice and guidance. It may also be useful to explore online resources. But here are some basic suggestions.

Before you begin, you may want to make refreshments available: offer a glass of water, a cup of tea or mug of coffee. Encourage people to introduce themselves to one another. From there, follow these four steps:

CONVERSATION GUIDE

1. **Reinforce the Purpose** of this first conversation which should be to explore, to listen and to learn from each other. As facilitator, you should steer participants away from blaming or belittling statements. Participants do not need to all agree, or find an antidote to racism.
2. **Set Agreements** to encourage dialogue, mutual respect, and deep listening to what others share. Write these agreements – such as “Practice Active Listening,” “Don’t Interrupt,” and “Assume Good Intentions” – in a visible place in your meeting room.
 - Hopefully, you can encourage participants to be relaxed and comfortable with one another, especially as differences in beliefs and experiences emerge. A key for successful discussion is to be interested and deeply listen to what others have experienced, and what they think.
 - Consider saying *“I’ve never thought of that before – could you explain why you think that?”* rather than *“I don’t believe it; that’s never happened to me.”*
 - Recognize that people with good intentions misspeak or make statements that can hurt or offend. Letting others know how their words affect you, or might be misunderstood by others is useful, but ascribing intent can be counterproductive.
 - Consider saying *“I feel frustrated (or I feel disrespected) when people say... because...”*, rather than, *“That pisses me off; that’s such a stupid (or racist) thing to say.”*
 - Establish strategies for everyone to participate, and to be heard. For instance, you might invite quieter participants to share their thoughts and/or questions and actively encourage more talkative guests to give space for other voices. (Perhaps include use of something like a talking stick)
 - Announce a strategy for brief “breather breaks” or “hitting the restart button”, if the conversation veers into spaces that are too conflicted or unproductive. Select discussion moderator(s) responsible for helping everyone abide by the ground rules: Folks that everyone will acknowledge and respect.

Adapted from: <http://www.uww.edu/documents/diversity/start%20a%20conversation%20%20student%20orgs.pdf>

3. **Open the Conversation.** Begin with a conversation starter to help everyone get to know one another.

Possible Conversation Starters: Begin with one or two of the prompts below:

- Tell about a place that makes you feel good.
- Tell a story about something that you have lost or have found.
- Tell a story about a surprise.
- Tell a story about a time when you were generous.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

- Tell a story about a time you got angry.
- Tell about someone you miss.
- Tell something about how you played as a child.

4. **Deepen the Conversation.** Once you're all more comfortable, get serious and deepen the conversation using one or more of the following:

- How often do you think about your racial or ethnic identity?
- What aspect of your racial or ethnic identity makes you the proudest?
- In what ways does being White/Latino/Hispanic/African American/Black/Asian/Native American/American Indian/Pacific Islander impact your personal life? Your professional life?
- Have you ever experienced a situation where your racial or ethnic identity seemed to contribute to a problem or uncomfortable situation?
- Does racial or ethnic identity enter in your process of making important or daily decisions? If so, how?
- Have you ever felt "different" in a group setting because of your race/ethnicity? How did this affect you? How often/deeply do you interact with people of a different racial/ethnic identity other than your own? What is the nature of these relationships and interactions?
- Have you ever witnessed someone being treated unfairly because of their racial or ethnic identity? If so, how did you respond? How did it make you feel?

After a few people have shared, ask others to reflect on what they've heard and share what they related to or what stood out to them without blaming, shaming, or rescuing.

5. **Bring the Conversation to a Close.** As you reach a point where you feel it is time to close the conversation, consider doing any of the following:

- Extend gratitude to everyone for their courage and willingness to participate.
- As the host, share how this experience impacted you and offer space for others to share how the conversation impacted them. It can be as simple as sharing one word to summarize their feelings about the experience.
- Encourage guests to share an appreciation for the group process or with someone in the group.
- Encourage group members to follow up with someone from the conversation for deeper dialogue to continue learning and personal discovery.
- Ask people to share what they learned about themselves or what is their one takeaway from the conversation.
- Inquire if there are any actions people are inspired to take as a result of the conversation.
- Schedule another conversation?

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Remember ...

Racial healing is an ongoing process, supportive of wholeness in individuals, communities and societies. It benefits all people because, regardless of background, we live in and are impacted by the narratives and conditions present throughout this increasingly interconnected world. This process provides opportunities to acknowledge the tremendous damage inflicted by individual and systemic racism. When grounded in empathy and oriented toward equity, it has restorative potential to affirm the inherent value of all people.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

dayofracialhealing.org

Let's Talk by Teaching Tolerance and the Southern Poverty Law Center

More Than One Story Playing Cards from Welcoming America

(Note: the conversation starters above were drawn from these playing cards.)

Content for the development of this Conversation guide was adapted from [UWW Student Orgs Conversation Guide](#)