



Strategies for Having Compassionate Conversations

Communicating effectively and compassionately with friends and family is a key component of maintaining healthy relationships. During challenging times, it can be especially difficult to find the words to provide support when viewpoints differ and emotions are high. Avoiding judgment of others and being an active listener are big steps in creating caring conversations.



1. Prepare

- Center yourself: Don't go into a compassionate conversation already upset. Try to center yourself to remain calm and focused.
- Be aware of the dynamics between you and the other party.
- If you are addressing dis/misinformation be aware of the arguments and the counterarguments.
- Be clear about the points you want to share but leave space for you to elicit and understand the other person's perspectives.
- Mindset: The goal of the conversation is not to prove that you're "right", but rather to understand the other party's view points and your shared values.



2. Identify Shared Values and Common Ground

- Develop a strong foundation for the conversation by identifying shared concerns or priorities around core items such as safety, health, uplifting our communities, protecting our families, etc.
- Compassionate Response: *I am doing this out of love for our friendship and wanting to better understand you rather than wanting to be "right" and impose my political perspectives onto you.*



3. Approach/Lead With Curiosity

- Ask questions to understand why they believe what they do.
 - Example questions:
 - *I've been thinking about [insert topic] and wondering what your thoughts are about the topic?*
 - *Have you considered [viewpoint]?*
 - *What led you to this view? What are your sources of information?*
- Admit that you also have had times when it was difficult to know what was true and false. If possible, share a time when you have been misled by misinformation and explain why.



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4. Listen Non-Judgmentally

- The first step is to listen to the perspective of the person with whom you are talking.
- Pay attention to context and dynamics.



5. Be Aware of Emotional Reactivity & Trauma Response

- Remember that when someone is upset or traumatized their ability to think clearly is substantially impaired – yours included.
- Take breaks if necessary to recenter everyone.
- Work on de-escalation, try not to fuel the fire.
- Recognize your boundaries and prepare to communicate them at the beginning of the conversation.
 - Ex. *If we begin to raise our voices or at any point feel that we are not seeing each other's viewpoints, I would like to suggest that we agree to pause the conversation and talk about it another time.*



6. Consider Your Delivery

- Try the “truth sandwich” method of addressing misinformation you may hear from someone you are having a conversation with by sandwiching it between the truth:
 - Start with presenting the truth about a subject.
 - Then address the misinformation about that topic, clearly labeling it as a lie/misinformation.
 - Repeat/end with reinforcing the truth.
- Example: (from CommunicateHealth.com)
 - *Never drink bleach.*
 - *You may have heard that bleach can kill the coronavirus, but this only works on surfaces — not inside your body.*
 - *Drinking bleach can cause serious illness and death, and it doesn't cure COVID-19.*



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7. Explore Issues & Resources Together

- Approach conversations as learning opportunities for everyone involved.



8. Continue to Have Dialogue

- Remember that the dialogue is not necessarily a linear process - you may have to return to topics to continue the conversation.
- Follow-up is important to maintain the relationship and further build on the dialogue.

These are just some suggested ways and considerations for having compassionate conversations. If you find something else that works particularly well for you we encourage you to integrate it into your approach. Give yourself and others grace in the process. Recognize that this too is mental health!





Compassionate Conversation Case Study

Imagine you want to start a conversation with a family member. You believe it's important to have elected officials who champion mental health, especially for the AANHPI community. You are not sure if your family member is on the same page or maybe you know they don't think that mental health in AANHPI communities is that big of an issue and there are other areas that are more important for elected officials to focus on. How might you approach a conversation around this topic compassionately?

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