

# talking about...

## why is it so **hard**?

Each of us wants to be **heard and understood**. Talking about difficult issues can feel challenging because it's a complicated topic and we don't want to:

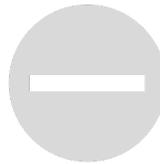
- Feel like our opinions have been **discounted or dismissed**
- Incur the costs of a conversation **if nothing will change**
- Engage in additional **emotional labor** when already exhausted
- Relive **trauma**
- **Say the 'wrong thing,'** hurt feelings, or be seen as clueless, a bad person, or prejudiced
- Be **misunderstood**
- See ways in which **we might be contributing to** or **benefitting from** the problem

Talking about difficult issues often leads into other conversations that may lead to further understanding.

## why is it so **important**?

In order to address our challenges and find a way forward

- We have to *see* our problems accurately and fully
- AND**
- We can't change things unless we work together, in new ways, to engage and address those problems



## **step in or step back?**

It can also be okay NOT to have a conversation when it's too emotionally fraught, risky or undermines your sense of self.

## where do our views **come from**?

Our picture of "reality" and the story we tell about how things are or should be, is deeply rooted –

- In our own lived experiences
- In the stories we heard as children
- In a particular generational moment in time, with its own "correct" terminology, which may or may not have been updated
- In the educational experiences we've had – or continue to have
- In the social circles and economic strata in which we live – and the culture of those we surround ourselves with
- In the media and books we consume

These are necessarily limited. But taking in additional information that conflicts with our sense of reality is confusing and troubling. How do we make sense of a picture that is more complex?

*it can often feel easier to text, or post on social media, or put a sign in your yard, than to have a conversation....*

# what helps?

before the  
conversation

## choose your purpose

- **perilous purposes:** trying to change someone's belief system in one conversation
- **promising purposes:** listening to understand, and sharing what you see and what's important to you

## anticipate conflicting feelings and complex people

- You can feel sad, angry, despairing, exhausted, defensive, accused, heartbroken **AND** hopeful, joyous, appreciative, and empathetic
- As human beings, we each have astonishing capacity for harm and bias **AND** an incredibly capacity for love, generosity and bravery

during the  
conversation

## don't talk past each other...adopt the **AND** stance

- You can be most concerned with X, I can be most concerned with Y, **AND** they both may be part of the picture we need to address

## listen to understand

- In understanding how they understand the world, listen generously to **what concerns them most, and why it matters**
- When we hear things that don't align with our own experience, or what we **want** to be true, it's easy to defend or dismiss. Instead, listen generously to what concerns them most, and what new information you need to integrate into your world view

## listen for intentions & share impact

- Good intentions are important, but also don't sanitize bad impacts. Well-intentioned people can be contributing to the problem.
- Work to understand how your words and actions, or the policies and practices we use to operate, impact others.

## questions to ask

What worries you most about this?

What impact did that experience have on you?

What do you think I'm missing?

This is complicated. How are you feeling about this conversation?

Say more?

after the  
conversation

## reflect on your conversation

- Take time to reflect. Ask **"What did I learn?"** and **"What surprised me most?"**

## take action

- To **make a difference:** do some research to learn more, talk with friends or colleagues about what you've learned, experiment with a new way of doing things.

## step into your power to encourage change



To what extent might you be (unintentionally?) contributing to the problem? And what is your responsibility and opportunity to help understand the problem, and do your part to change things for the better?