

Office of the Ombudsperson

Questions to Stay Curious and Conversational While Disagreeing

We may find ourselves disagreeing with others in classrooms, at events, among friends and colleagues, or among strangers. Conflict can be uncomfortable. Kenneth Cloke, Director of the Center for Dispute Resolution, shared fifty questions to help keep conversations, conversational. Asking questions with genuine curiosity opens us to exploring differences and aids in regulating our emotions. The questions, modified but largely as Cloke offered them in his [Mediate.com article](#) are available for you to use as a tool for de-escalating disagreement.

1. What of your experiences brings meaning to this issue?
2. From where do your beliefs originate?
3. In what ways do you think your beliefs might differ if you had been born into a different family of origin?
4. What is at the heart of this issue, for you?
5. Why do you care so intensely about this issue? What do you believe is at stake here?
6. Do you see any gray areas or ideas you find difficult to define?
7. Do you have any mixed/ambivalent feelings, doubts, uncertainties, or discomfort regarding this issue?
8. Is there any part of the issue that you are not entirely certain of and would be willing to discuss?
9. What questions or points of curiosity do you have for those with different views?
10. What key words or phrases divide us?
11. What key words or phrases may unite us?
12. What are “hot button” political words or phrases for you?
13. How would you define each of those words or phrases (what do they mean, suggest, or imply)?
14. What emotions do you experience with each set of words? Do your responses come from experiences you would be willing to share?
15. If other definitions, meaning, experience, or emotion could be enacted, what would that look like?
16. How might our conversation go if we did not use divisive, activating words? Can we try that, now?
17. Despite our differing views, can we identify common concerns or ideas?
18. What values or ethical beliefs have led you to your current political beliefs?
19. Do the differences between our positions reveal any contradictions or challenges regarding this issue?
20. What facts or assertions, if proven true, might cause you to think differently?
21. Is it possible to view our differences as two sides of the same coin? If so, what unites them?
22. What principles do you believe [group, party, person, etc.] stands for and why are those principles important to you?

23. What are your goals for [this election, conflict, etc.] and why are they important to you?
24. How might we apply those principles and goals to the conversation we are having right now?
25. What do these principles and goals require of us, in the way we treat and talk to one another?
26. What forms of argument or support do you feel are counter-productive or discourage listening and learning?
27. What forms of argument or support do you feel effectively encourage listening, thinking, and learning between those who might disagree?
28. What ideals or principles do you think [group, party, person, etc.] share?
29. What do you think will happen if our arguments or support become too adversarial or confrontational?
30. How can we work together to prevent that from happening?
31. Are you able to separate political issues from the people who hold them?
32. Is there anything positive or affirming to say about the people on the other side of this issue?
33. Instead of focusing on the past, what would you like to happen in the future? For what reasons?
34. Do you think we are disagreeing about fundamental values, or over how to enact/achieve them?
35. Is there any way that both of us could be right about different aspects of the issue? How or in what ways?
36. What criteria could be used to determine which ideas or approaches work best?
37. What processes or ground rules could help us disagree more constructively?
38. Would it be possible to test our ideas in practice and see which work best? How might we do that?
39. What could be done to improve each of our ideas?
40. Could any of my ideas be incorporated into yours? How?
41. Has any aspect of this issue been left out? Are there alternatives to what we are sharing?
42. Would other information be useful in addressing some of the questions remaining for us?
43. What could we do to encourage future dialogue together, even if we still disagree?
44. Do you think this has been a useful and constructive conversation? If so, how? If not, what could we do better?
45. Is there one thing in particular I could do to make this conversation work better for you?
46. Would you like to know one thing you could do that would make it work better for me? Are you willing to do that next time we talk?
47. Why were you willing to participate in this conversation, even though we disagree?
48. What did you learn from our conversation?
49. What would you like to do differently in the future if we disagree? How could we make our dialogue ongoing or more effective?
50. Do you think it would be useful to continue this conversation, to learn more from each other and what we each believe to be true?