



OBAMA FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION: VIOLENCE PREVENTION

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

COMMUNITY
CONVERSATION

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COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

When we engage in meaningful conversations with our neighbors we are doing real, important work to build strong communities. Research shows us that communities thrive when people are engaged in dialogue, build relationships with one another, and collaborate on projects that improve their communities. The documentaries we've suggested are wonderful opportunities to engage in community conversation. Thanks for taking some time out of your busy life to host this important conversation.

This discussion guide is intended to help you facilitate important conversations related to deepening your understanding of the root causes of violence. It includes everything you need to host a conversation after you screen the video of your choice with friends, family, or neighbors. You can use it to spark dialogue and reflect on narratives and personal beliefs.





WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION?

We think about community conversations as opportunities to engage in quality discussion around topics that we so rarely have the space to engage with—topics that grapple with values, identity, and community. These conversations are an opportunity to begin to build deeper and authentic relationships with those in your immediate community.

AS A LEADER OF THESE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS, YOU WILL...

- Bring a small group of people in your community together
- Follow the conversation guide to facilitate a meaningful conversation around violence, its root causes, and how we play a role in interrupting it
- Build community and relationships during the conversation and by following up with a few participants after the conversation
- Encourage personal connections among group members
- Make sure everyone feels supported and invited to share their perspectives with each other

EIGHT HABITS OF IMPACTFUL DIALOGUE

Kristen Coley (Founder, SafeWord Society) developed the Eight Habits of Impactful Dialogue framework through her work facilitating and engaging a number of diverse communities in dialogue sessions. From her experiences, Kristen has learned that these habits are also co-dependent, and most importantly, the habits can be intentionally practiced every time a person engages in dialogue.

You should reference and use these habits as you host your community conversation. Some of the habits might be new to you, and you may already be practicing others in your conversations.



EIGHT HABITS OF IMPACTFUL DIALOGUE

1 CURIOSITY

Curiosity drives us to care, to listen to others, to want to learn and seek perspectives, even if they differ from our own. Especially if they differ from our own. Curiosity is where you'll want to start.

2 ENTRY

Figure out your entry into an impactful dialogue. By creating and participating in the space for dialogue, ask yourself if it's easily accessible and/or comfortable to a variety of participation styles. We're already curious, right? Now, the goal is to communicate openly and therefore how you invite someone into a conversation matters.

Entry also means considering and suggesting additional options for engaging in impactful dialogue, like writing or recording, so that all viewpoints can be expressed in a multitude of mediums.

3 EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Not only will you need to consider your emotions and be able to express what your needs are in a dialogue, there must also be room for others to share what they want and need.

This can be challenging to understand at first but the idea here is to encourage an agreement on self-care. In impactful dialogue, you will likely experience a range of emotions, even if the conversation is going well. So, what are some ways we can take care of ourselves and each other in this space?

4 RESPECT

An opportunity for all involved to consider and express personal boundaries for the dialogue. How do you, and the person or people you're in dialogue with, need to be affirmed? What does respect mean to every person, specifically? Depending on your relationship with the person you're in dialogue with, you may only be able to define what respect is for yourself, and only hold yourself accountable.

5 DEEP LISTENING

This isn't just "hearing to respond" – deep listening asks that you be fully present in the conversation, so that, at any point, you can respond to others with genuine thoughtfulness. Being heavily focused on only your own thoughts or judgments—and expressing yourself that way—could inadvertently kill the conversation.

6 TRANSPARENCY

Transparency creates opportunities to build connections through lived experiences. The more connections that are created, the more robust a conversation you can have.

7 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

You and the other participants in the conversation need to be willing and active participants. This can change throughout the conversation, but it must start with all parties actively participating. If you're committed to practicing all of the habits, you are well on your way to being an active participant.

8 EXIT

Along with ways to enter conversations, there must be ways to exit them—for any reason. While time is a good way to determine when a conversation is set to be over, you need to find ways to make room for participants to take space or leave early, if necessary, without fear or shame of being disruptive. This is important, especially in group dialogue.

Points of exit share the message to come as you are and leave as you must. Clear points of exits can be made or broken for challenging conversations—and often makes people more inclined to stay in dialogue.

GETTING STARTED

It'd be easy enough to simply chat with your friends but these virtual community conversations are an opportunity to engage a wider community in dialogue. That likely means inviting people you don't know or are only acquainted with. While that can be scary, it's also really exciting and important! Don't worry we've got your back. This section will walk you through every step in setting up a successful virtual community conversation. The Obama Foundation is not asking you to hold in-person conversations in your community at this time. Please follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding physical distancing.

1

PICK A VIDEO



 **THE INTERRUPTERS**



 **FIRSTHAND:
GUN VIOLENCE**

2

PICK A DAY AND TIME

Things to consider when picking a date:

- Holidays
- Local school days off
- Your personal calendar (you have a life too!)
- Other local events that might conflict with the date you select

Typically evenings on weekdays or anytime on weekends except Sunday morning are best for people. But you know your community. If you choose an evening time make sure it's not too early or too late. Typically 5pm is too early, especially if most people work or go to school, and after 8pm is too late to start.

3

PICK A PLATFORM

The Obama Foundation is not asking you to hold in-person conversations in your community at this time. Please follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws and guidance regarding physical distancing. You should pick any platform that you feel comfortable navigating to host your conversation. Some platforms you might consider are Zoom or Google Hangouts.

4

INVITE PEOPLE

Ideally 2–8 people that live in your community will join your community conversation—which means you should aim for 8–14 people to RSVP yes. The reality is that things come up, so plan to invite more people than you want to attend. When inviting people make sure to include directions on how they should RSVP. People are far more likely to show up if they sign up!

You can create a Google Form or a Facebook event, or text a few friends to invite them to the conversation. **No matter how you invite people to the conversation, remember to include a link to the video you'd like them to watch before the conversation so that they're prepared to engage on the call!**



THE CONVERSATION

As a conversation host, you'll facilitate a dialogue around questions the film raises, encourage people to see perspectives outside their own, and help build connections in your group. We're sharing a few helpful facilitation tips we put together specifically for your community conversation.

- ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS
- HOLD SPACE NOT OPINIONS
- MODEL CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
- THINK BROADLY ABOUT RACE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
- STICK TO THE QUESTIONS INSTEAD OF DIVING INTO DEBATES
- LISTEN IN DURING SMALL GROUPS

THE CONVERSATION SKILLS

ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS

Asking questions is an essential facilitation skill. Clarifying questions are open-ended, probing, and thought-provoking questions that will encourage participants to examine their beliefs and consider issues from different perspectives. Clarifying questions also help keep the discussion going. Avoid questions that evoke yes/no or one-word responses. Avoid “why,” as it often invites a defensive response.

You can also push on agreements reached quickly to prompt further discussion and draw out anyone who might disagree by asking clarifying questions.

EXAMPLES OF CLARIFYING QUESTIONS:

“Let’s dig into this. Can someone tell me more about their thoughts on...?”

“Can you say a bit more about what you mean when you say...?”

“What in your experience has led you to that point of view?”

HOLD SPACE NOT OPINIONS

Another way to keep the discussion going is to give participants space to discuss and form their own opinions instead of “teaching” them yours. As a facilitator, your job is to provide information, ask questions, and open up a safe space for dialogue. Asking clarifying questions is a great way to hold space instead of giving your opinion. Remember, the purpose of the dialogue is exploration, not “convincing,” “converting,” or agreeing.

MODEL CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Cultural understanding is more than knowing about different ethnicities and cultures and creating space for people to understand one another across those differences. It’s also about knowing yourself and knowing what blind spots and biases you might hold. Then it’s about setting an example for the group by checking those biases at the door and being open to acknowledging your blind spots.

THE CONVERSATION SKILLS

THINK BROADLY ABOUT RACE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

- When discussing violence, any of the above issues (race, gender, sexuality, inclusion/exclusion, marginalization and justice) may come up. And while knowing about personal biases and blind spots is important, it's also important to understand the systemic and structural aspects as well. It's about personal responsibility and about how our systems and institutions shape our opportunities, experiences, and well-being.
- Understand the intersections of issues and identity and that how they play out in our lives is important. For example, a straight, low-income white woman will probably have different experiences than a queer, middle-class Asian American woman at work, school, or in other institutions. Similarly people of the same race will have different experiences based on their gender, sexual orientation, class, and other identities.
- Thinking about intersecting identities in the context of American narratives will help you and your group consider whose stories are told and not told, and whose stories are misrepresented or commonly misunderstood. And how we talk about all of these stories.

STICK TO THE QUESTIONS INSTEAD OF DIVING INTO DEBATES

- To help keep the conversation on track, or at least from veering too far into the weeds, feel free to redirect your group toward answering the questions posed and talking about them from their personal experiences.
- For example, if someone starts advocating for or against a specific public policy, elected official or candidate for public office, or starts debating in a way that doesn't directly relate to the conversation or question you asked, you should feel empowered to say, "Let's relate this back to the original question." OR "I want to push us to think about how that perspective relates to the question."
- Listen for generalizations and redirect participants to make "I" statements (e.g., "I think this is a problem" vs. "Everyone knows this is a problem" or "I have observed that some people experience xyz" vs. "Other people experience xyz.")

LISTEN IN DURING SMALL GROUPS

As the facilitator you're well positioned to listen into multiple small group conversations and find common themes. You can use these insights during the whole-group discussions. Just be sure to avoid naming people specifically in case they don't want to share with the larger group.

EXAMPLES

"As I listened in, I heard someone talking about xyz. I wonder if anyone would like to expand on that."

"I heard a few folks refer to the Tegan video. What was so challenging about what she said?"

QUICK TIPS: 4 THINGS TO KNOW

1. KNOW YOUR TRIGGERS AND BE READY IF OTHERS ARE TRIGGERED.

FOR YOURSELF:

- As a facilitator think about what may trigger you in these conversations, and then think of how you'll manage yourself in the moment if it happens.
- Talk through your reactions and thoughts about the film in advance with someone you trust. That will help you to process and recognize some possible challenges you'll face.
- Imagine the hardest things people might say and think through how you'll calm your body and how you'll respond, both with body language and spoken language.
- In the moment, be sure to take a deep breath. Our brains need oxygen to let our "thinking brain" take charge once our "emotional brain" starts to take over.

FOR THE GROUP:

- Acknowledge that strong emotions seem to be present (without labeling them). (e.g., It seems like you/some of you are having an intense response to the film or question vs. It seems like you/some of you are angry, sad, etc.).
- Acknowledge that emotions are data, and that body language and even tears have a physiological purpose of releasing stress hormones. Remind everyone that it's possible to feel uncomfortable and still be safe.
- Invite participants to take a deep breath, pause, and consider how they want to continue/what they might want to learn during the rest of the conversation.
- Reinforce group norms and group agreements.
- If two participants are locked in a back-and-forth exchange, try asking each to (1) make "I" statements ("When you said that, I felt ..."); and (2) paraphrase the other's point of view to see if they are understanding the other person's view.

2. KNOW YOUR THREE "MUST-DOS."

- Pre-identify three outcomes you definitely want to achieve regardless of what happens. For example, you may want to be sure everyone discusses their views on how to address violence even if you don't get to share deep stories. Or maybe you want everyone in the room to speak at the beginning of the event even if it starts late. Go through the conversation guide and identify what you really want to happen during your event.
- Be sure that your choices balance your need to "get through" the material with the needs of group members for safety, clear ways to participate, and opportunities to make authentic connections with one another.

3. KNOW WHAT YOU CAN LET GO.

- Pre-identify areas you would cut if short on time. Even with the best laid plans, conversations can go long, tech issues can slow things down, etc. Figure out what you want to cut if you find the clock running out.
- As much as possible, try not to share your cuts with the group. When participants hear facilitators say things like "if we had more time, we would xyz" too often, they can lose confidence in your capacity to hold the space. Rather, you could say "Given the amount of time we have left, here's what I'd suggest we do." Or, if you haven't specifically promised something to the group, you may not have to say anything about the changes. Remember, they don't know your plan as well as you do.

4. KNOW THAT YOU'RE DOING GREAT WORK AND THAT YOU'RE LEARNING.

When all's said and done, you're stepping up as a leader in your community. Acknowledge this. Enjoy the conversation you've prepped for and have fun with the people you've brought together. Pat yourself on the back—learning and community building happen when we try new things and step outside our comfort zone. Keep up the good work!

**CONVERSATION FACILITATION SKILLS AND TIPS
DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CYNTHIA SILVA PARKER
OF THE INTERACTION INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE.**



HOST PREPARATION THE DAY OF

It's time to host your virtual community conversation! Make sure you're prepared to facilitate by reviewing the checklist below.

- Send out an email, text, or message to all your guests reminding them the community conversation is happening and include important information like the start time.
- Have your facilitator's guide handy and review it one last time.
- Make sure your computer is fully charged and the wifi is working.
- Read through the Eight Habits of Effective Dialogue at least one more time.
- Set the space! Sign on to Zoom or Google Hangouts early so that you can troubleshoot any technical issues.
- Play background music and greet people as they sign on.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

SECTION 1 - 25 MINUTES

FACILITATOR

WELCOME

Welcome and thank everyone for coming!

BACKGROUND

Take a few minutes to share some background on the Foundation and why you've invited everyone to watch the film:

- The Obama Foundation's mission is to inspire and empower people to change their world.
- To that end the Foundation has released resources related to targeting violence in communities and have challenged individuals in communities to engage in dialogue that helps us understand the root causes of violence, build greater empathy, and figure out ways to address it from wherever we are in the country.
- To be clear, the Foundation didn't commission the film that you watched in preparation for this conversation.
- The film wrestles with some important questions facing our country today: What are the root causes of community violence? How can ordinary people support the work that is already happening to target the root causes of violence? How do systems play a role in how perpetrators of gun violence are viewed, punished, and/or portrayed in our society?

GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

Use the one-minute introduction protocol! Share your name, gender pronouns, and why you wanted to participate in this dialogue. Introduce yourself first as a way of modeling and then ask each participant to share.

PARTICIPANTS

Engage in a quick round robin of introductions where everyone shares their name, gender pronoun, and why they wanted to attend.

FACILITATOR

REVIEW THE EIGHT HABITS OF IMPACTFUL DIALOGUE (PAGE 3) WITH THE GROUP. EXPLAIN THAT YOU'LL USE THESE HABITS THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION.

SHARE THESE NORMS FOR INTERACTIONS

(you may want to read this section):

- **Safe space:** In this conversation we commit to respecting one another and not making personal attacks or disparaging comments.
- **Active listening:** Our goal today is to understand one another, so really listen and ask questions of each other.
- **Stick to the topics/questions asked during discussion:** Resist the urge to explain a political or ideological viewpoint.
- **Ask the group for any additional norms.**
- **Ask the group for a verbal commitment.** You might try saying, "Are we all agreeing to spend the next two hours together and engage with each other by these norms?"

FACILITATOR GUIDE

SECTION 2 - 30 MINUTES

FACILITATOR

DISCUSSION STARTER

Thank the group for watching the video ahead of the conversation. Jog memories by asking 1-2 people to recall what the film is about then lead the whole group in a discussion using the questions below. They do not have to be in any particular order.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are your own experiences with violence? Has it touched your life personally, or someone you know? What impressions have these experiences left you with?
- How does race intersect with how gun violence is portrayed in the media in urban environments versus rural environments?
- How do we view victims and perpetrators of gun violence in our city?
- Why do we need to hear the voices and experiences of individuals who perpetrate or are affected by gun violence? What impacted you as you heard various story?
- Restorative justice is a system of justice based not on punishment or legal principles, but on rehabilitating both victims and offenders in hopes of rebuilding trust in the community. What do you think of this concept? Are reconciliation and forgiveness necessary elements of a justice system?
- What different types of individuals do we sympathize with concerning gun violence?
- Which factors are helpful in preventing further conflict in neighborhoods and communities? What are some ways you have learned to deal with conflict in your own life?
- Many practitioners in the violence prevention field share the phrase “hurt people hurt people,” referring to how many perpetrators of violence were once victims of violence. What are our individual beliefs about these young people who are victims of violence before they become perpetrators?
- What systemic barriers exist to prevent their reentry into the community?
- Why might individuals commit violent crimes again after being released? Do you recognize any impediments that may cause any of the individuals to reoffend?
- In Bryan Stevenson’s seminal book *Just Mercy*, he states, “Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” Do you believe perpetrators of gun violence deserve redemption?

FACILITATOR GUIDE

SECTION 3 - 20 MINUTES

FACILITATOR

- Thank participants for engaging in the conversation and let them know it's time to wrap up.
- Remind attendees that they can read stories related to violence interruption work happening around the country and access additional resources by visiting **Obama.org**.
- Encourage attendees to join the Foundation's mailing list to stay in touch. Attendees can also share the link on their social media accounts to keep the conversation going!

FACILITATOR

WE HAVE ONE FINAL ASK.

Can you go out and share what we did here with at least one fellow citizen. Can we each aim to have one conversation like this in the next two weeks?

PARTICIPANTS

- Think of someone who you can talk to about violence and how it impacts communities. It's better to pick a simple conversation that you're sure to have, rather than a hard conversation that may or may not happen.

ROUND ROBIN

- Go around the room and share the person's first name that you're going to speak to about the film and what we did here tonight (feel free to pass).
- Circle back to the Eight Habits of Impactful Dialogue at the end of the conversation by asking the whole group to reflect on how they showed up in the conversation. Remind them to keep the habits in mind as they engage in their own conversations.
- Thank the group for attending!



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