

## FAST FACTS



4+  
People



45  
Minutes



\$0



Medium  
– High  
Risk Level

## Moral Conversations

Adapted from the work of Robert Nash, University of Vermont

**Purpose of Activity:** This experience is about learning to have respectful conversations where participants make a commitment to listen to each other with the sole purpose of understanding.

**Objectives/Learning Outcomes:** After taking part in this activity, participants will be able to discuss the importance of finding common ground and ensuring that all beliefs are treated with respect. By listening respectfully and negotiating an agreement among individuals that may initially disagree, participants will demonstrate that even disparate beliefs may be a starting point for finding commonalities. Participants are encouraged to reflect on actively listening and intentionally creating a safe space.

### Materials Needed:

- Facilitation Guide (see below)
- Large presentation paper pads (like newsprint)
- Markers
- Cards with the discussion prompts listed in order OR individual cards on which one prompt is printed:
  - Violence is an inevitable fact of life that must be accepted with a certain degree of indifference.
  - Everyone should have the same rights, regardless of sex, race/ethnicity, sexual identity or orientation.
  - Active involvement in the political process can make a difference in society.
  - The use of lab animals in experimental studies is an acceptable scientific approach for the development of human interventions.
  - Sex education should be part of a mandatory curriculum in both private and public schools beginning with the middle school level.
- A poster with the LEARN Model outlined:
  - *Listen* with empathy and understanding
  - *Elicit* relevant information and reflect your understanding
  - *Acknowledge* similarities and differences in perceptions
  - *Respect* the other person
  - *Negotiate* from a position of equality

### Ground Rules:

- Be fully present and participate at your own comfort level – challenge by choice.
  - Follow up - What does it mean to be “fully present”?
  - Follow up - What does “challenge by choice” mean?
- Push yourself outside of your comfort zone – the most learning happens when we are a little bit uncomfortable.
- Listen respectfully, share air time, and encourage others to participate.

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- It's ok for us all to be at different places with the things we discuss today.
- Show respect for one another's beliefs, values, and experiences.
- Respect and maintain privacy.

### Disclaimer:

- If someone DOES attend the program who is of a subordinated identity group, be sure not to single them out for the "identity perspective," stare at them to judge their reaction, or basically put them on the spot. They should be treated like every other student, and invite everyone to share/participate as much as she/he/ze is comfortable.

### Facilitation Guide:

- The facilitator should direct participants' attention to the LEARN Model poster and invite participants to read each line aloud to the group. The facilitator should note that the LEARN Model is essential to fostering understanding and encourage participants to briefly discuss their thoughts on the statements.
- The facilitator reads the following statement:
 

*Your beliefs and experiences are important to you, right? Let's assume this is true for everyone.*
- The facilitator then asks:
 

*What does this statement suggest?*
- The facilitator should encourage participants to share their thoughts about the first statement. The facilitator should guide the conversation to ensure that points are made that create a sense of respect, inclusivity, and understanding. For example, participants will ideally recognize:
  - the importance of listening to understand
  - the value of respect
  - knowing that understanding does not mean agreeing
  - a different view is not a criticism of your view
  - a differing belief does not discount or diminish your belief
  - differences are natural
  - it's okay to disagree (if respectful)
  - the value of acknowledging what others say
- The facilitator should invite the participants to count off or arrange themselves in groups of four to five people. In the event that the group is only four or five to begin with, the group may complete the exercise together.
- The groups should be instructed to review the statements on the discussion cards and rewrite the statements so they are agreeable to each member of the group. Participants should write the final version of their statements on the large paper pads so they can present them after all the groups are finished.

### Processing Questions:

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- After all groups have shared their statements, the facilitator should ask about the participants' experiences and observations. For example, the facilitator could ask:
  - What was challenging about the activity?
  - How did you come to an agreement? How and why did you compromise?
  - Which of the LEARN statements seemed most applicable? Which was the most challenging? Why?
  - How might this activity help with conversations one might have in daily life?
  - How might this activity help us continue having challenging conversations?
  - What did you learn from the experience?
  - How did you ensure that others felt comfortable and respected? What was challenging about that? What came more naturally?
  - How did you ensure that your perspective was included?
  - What steps did your group take to reach the final statement? Could you walk us through the steps your group took? How might other groups benefit from what you tried as a group and as individuals?
  - What did you learn about listening from this exercise?