

# Navigating Conversations When You Disagree



EFR EMPLOYEE & FAMILY RESOURCES



The holidays often bring opportunities for disagreements around the dinner table. What started as a casual and innocent conversation can quickly unravel. While it can be healthy and interesting to converse with people of different belief systems, one should be mindful of unproductive discussions, especially when they escalate and create problems between friends or family members. Here's how you can shift conversations in a positive direction, even when there is a disagreement.



*When you focus on what you have in common, you can see eye to eye.*

## Agree to agree

While you might have drastically different opinions or ideas on a topic, you likely share some common ground. Be open to hearing the other person's perspective about what is important to them. You might be surprised by what they say and even find an area of consensus. For example, you might have very different ideas on gun control, but you may agree on keeping our schools and children safe from gun violence. Discussing shared viewpoints can help lessen the stress surrounding areas of disagreement.

## Be kind

Steer clear of polarizing language and personal attacks. Be mindful of your words and tone to avoid turning the conversation hostile or combative. You don't want to damage your long-term relationship with someone over a short-term disagreement.

## Agree to disagree

Agree to Disagree! Accept that you will not always concur or share viewpoints. Everyone has personal opinions and beliefs that make them unique, and you will never agree with everyone. It might be hard to accept that a friend or loved one may have opposing ideologies, and that's okay. Listening and sharing perspectives will contribute to a healthy relationship.



## Say when

It is essential to know when to draw the line. If you have not resolved your conversation, you may need to find an appropriate time and way to end the discussion without causing further tension. It may be time to change the topic or suggest moving to a different room, taking the dog for a walk, or finding an activity like a game or sport to play. Shifting focus, if only for a short while, can give people the clarity they need to move forward in a healthy way.





## Plan ahead

Plan Ahead! If you know in advance that there is potential to have difficult conversations at family gatherings, especially during the holidays, keep in mind that these occasions are meant to bring people together and not tear them apart. Focus on good memories and the common bond you share. Plan activities that foster fun and laughter and make the most of your time together. This does not mean avoiding difficult conversations but prioritizing the things you have in common versus your differences.

*Prioritize what you share in common rather than your differences.*