



Engaging a Difficult Issue

1. Realize that as you meet with the other, you are never alone.

Christ promised that he is with us always, and that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be (Mt. 18:20). Before beginning a difficult conversation, or during the discussion if feelings become tense, take a deep breath, be still and contemplate His presence; pray for guidance, on your own, or with the one with whom you are engaging in conversation.

2. Note that the goal of dialogue is understanding.

There is no need for an answer or result in dialogue. As James 1:19 points out, we, as followers of Christ, must be "quick to listen, slow to speak," and we are admonished elsewhere to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). You do not have to agree with the other; the point is to be open to God's leading as you talk together.

3. Listen and speak without judgment.

Jesus admonishes us to refrain from judging another (Luke 6:37). Rather, listen with an open heart, suspending judgment. This allows the space for good listening to take place. Judging another, or even criticizing another's point of view, will work against you. The other person will be less likely to hear what you are saying.

4. Listen without interrupting.

When Jesus was approached by one who sought healing, such as the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), he listened as the person told their story and responded only when they were finished. By allowing the other to finish a thought, you are not only listening well for understanding, you are showing respect for the speaker.

5. Speak only for yourself.

Jesus was assertive. He presented viewpoints that challenged the conventional wisdom of the day and the practices of those in power (Luke 11:37-53). When you meet one-to-one with another, it may be tempting to bring up the fact that many, perhaps a majority, of people believe as you do. In this moment of connecting, however, it is most important that you represent your own viewpoint. Use I-statements.

6. As the conversation closes, take a moment to share appreciation for your dialogue partner.

Jesus was quick to show appreciation for the Centurion's faith (Mt. 8:10). He gave praise where praise was due. We can follow his example by expressing our appreciation for the other's contribution to the conversation. We can thank the other for their time, honesty and integrity, and fellowship in Christ.