

...

Charitable Conversation: 8 Tips for Redirecting a Hostile Discussion

...

We've all at least seen a video of this. Maybe you have experienced it firsthand. You're tabling on a campus, looking to have productive dialogue about abortion. A pro-choice person marches up and starts loudly accusing you of trying to control women, telling you that women need choices or that a fetus is just a clump of cells. You make one remark in response, and it's met immediately with another stream of objections.

As intimidating as this can be, what we don't want to do is shut off the conversation. We want every person to see the value of human life, even the person who seems very uninterested in hearing about it.

So what can we do to help the encounter move from a battle of smart remarks to a productive dialogue about the issue of abortion?



1.

Be willing to listen!

Often, the angriest people are those who have had very personal experiences with abortion. Let them talk. They're probably used to pro-life people listening simply to respond; let this be the first conversation they've had with a pro-lifer where they are met with patience and really listened to, rather than argued with.



2.

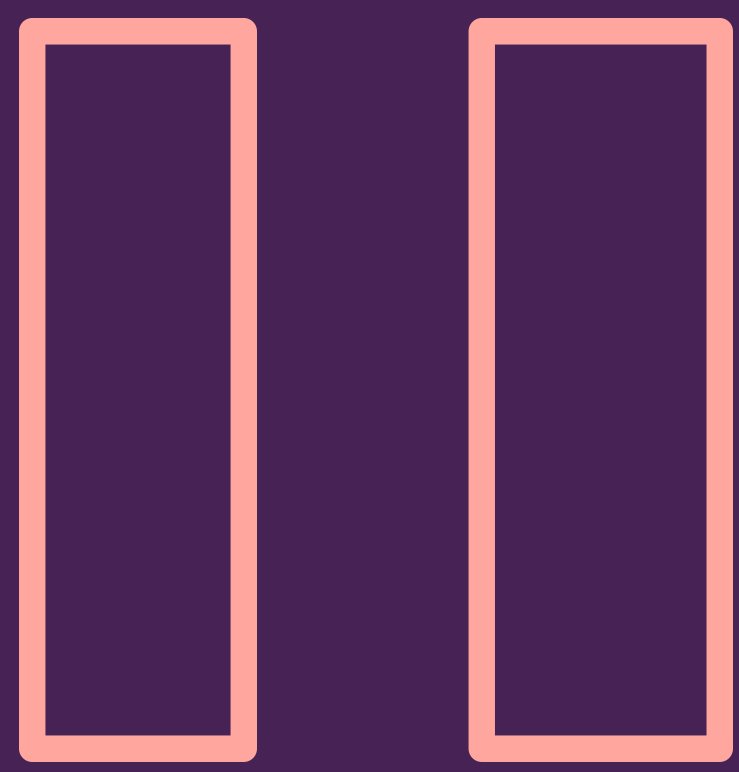
Ask clarifying questions.

Ask for further explanation of the concerns they bring up. This demonstrates that you are hearing them. As they realize they are actually being given space and time to talk, the person will slow down, calm the tone of their voice, and make cohesive statements you can better interact with.

”

Show the pro-choice person you respect them by turning off your inner monologue and truly listening to them.

-Josh Brahm



3.

Pause before you respond.

Often when people are heated, they trip on their words or say something they don't exactly mean. You might be tempted to lash back with a quick comeback. Don't do it. Pause and graciously engage with what they meant.



4.

Look for common ground.

When people approach you with hostility, they see you as an “other” that basically has nothing in common with them. By showing where you share values, beliefs, passions, etc., you bridge the gap between yourself and the person you're speaking with, making dialogue more relational and productive.



5. ***Address THEIR concerns.***

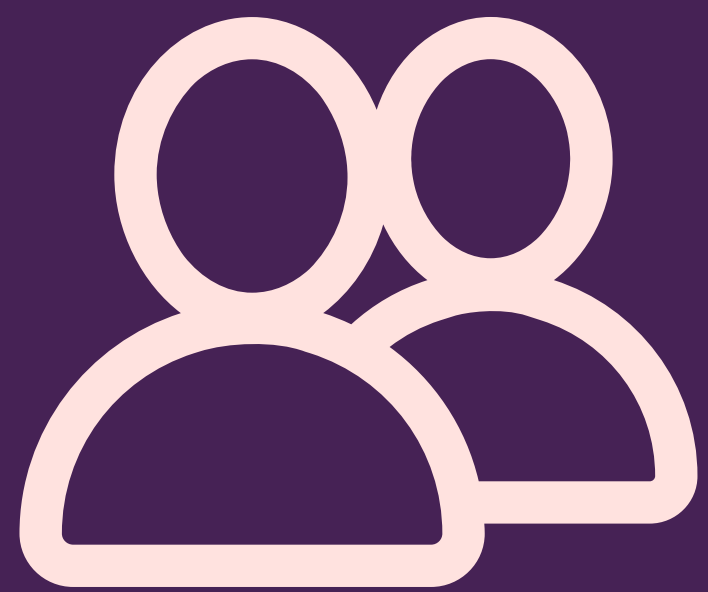
Avoid fetus tunnel-vision. If they bring up rape, don't say, “It doesn't matter the circumstances; you can't kill an innocent human being.” While true, this is not a helpful response. Instead, address the situation through the pro-choice person's eyes—with a view toward the mother's mental health. Affirm that rape is an atrocity and a traumatizing event. Then move on to explain that you want all possible support for that woman to heal from her trauma, with the exception of ending another person's innocent life.

6. *Don't take the bait.*



Remember that as hostile and antagonistic as they may be, responding in kind and becoming argumentative will only escalate the situation. Remain courteous and respectful, even when they aren't affording you the same.

7. *Make it private.*



With people watching, a conversation can turn into a debate, where both sides are trying to appear the "winner." By taking the conversation away from a crowd, the performative aspect is out of the picture so that you can have a real conversation where both of you are more willing to truly consider the points being made.

8. *Politely end the conversation.*



Sometimes, there's nothing more to be done. If you've tried everything with no change in the tone of the conversation, you can let the person know that you aren't able to have a conversation with them if they aren't willing to do so civilly.

For more dialogue training and resources, visit Y4Life.org.

