

Conversation in Disagreement

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. *James 1:19-20*

Teaching teens to engage respectfully with people who have different opinions is a valuable life skill, especially in today's divided world. Encourage them to see these interactions not as debates to win but opportunities to understand diverse perspectives and grow in empathy. Remind them that every person is created in God's image and deserves respect, even when their views differ from our own. As Christians, we are called to show love to all, and this includes how we communicate with others. Help teens see that it's possible to stand firm in one's beliefs while still being open to listening and learning from others.

➤ conversation starter

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who had a very different opinion than yours? How did you handle it? What did you do well? What could you have done differently?

What are some important things to remember when discussing sensitive topics with people who might not agree with us?

➤ navigating the conversation:

- **Encourage Active Listening:** Teach the value of truly listening to what others say, instead of just waiting for their turn to speak. Explain that understanding another person's perspective is crucial for meaningful dialogue.
- **Practice Respect and Kindness:** Emphasize the importance of maintaining a respectful tone and choosing kind words, even when they strongly disagree with the other person.
- **Avoid Assumptions:** Encourage teens not to make assumptions about another person's beliefs or intentions. Assumptions can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. Teach them to ask questions to clarify, which shows that they are interested in truly understanding their perspective.
- **Stay Calm and Patient:** Discuss the importance of staying calm, especially when conversations become challenging. Patience is key in handling differing opinions.
- **Agree to Disagree:** Help teens understand that it's perfectly acceptable to end a conversation with a mutual understanding that both parties have different viewpoints. There comes a point when the healthiest thing to do is to stop having a conversation if/when emotions get too heated. At the same time, having differing views doesn't mean you have to hate each other or can't be friends.
- **Model the Behavior:** Demonstrate through your own actions how to engage in healthy, respectful discussions. Let teens see you having calm and constructive conversations with others, especially when you have differing opinions. This modeling can be a powerful teaching tool.
- **Use Empathy:** Encourage teens to try to understand the other person's feelings and perspectives. Explain that empathy does not mean they have to agree, but it helps in appreciating where the other person is coming from.

