

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHO TO VOTE FOR?



A GUIDED CONVERSATION

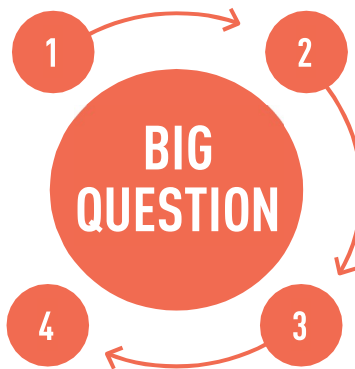
WHAT KIND OF CONVERSATION IS THIS?

A Big Question conversation is one that helps us connect by discussing questions that matter to everyone, and everyone can answer. The questions we will talk about don't require expertise to answer. For our time together, we will share stories and explore questions instead of making arguments and debating issues. We'll focus on listening and reflecting together to understand and learn, instead of to convince or persuade others.

CONVERSATION FLOW:

ASK

We'll look at the question we are considering together and make mutual agreements for our group conversation.



SHARE

We'll begin sharing our experiences related to the Big Question of this conversation.

DO

We'll reflect on what we have learned and what we can take forward from this conversation.

LEARN

We'll explore a story that helps us think further about our Big Question and connect it to our own experiences.

Our conversation today will follow these stages, and should last between 60 and 90 minutes. We'll use this written guide as a centering point, to help us have a shared discussion that stays focused and allows everyone to participate. Some parts of the conversation will include reading aloud by members of the group and at times we might break into pairs or small groups.

*Conversation Leaders can find suggestions and support in our "Resources for Conversation Leaders" guide, available online.

ASK

Before we ask each other to share our stories, we need to agree to some parameters to guide us. To create a more trustworthy space where we feel able to contribute openly, we will begin by asking each of us to agree that we have mutual responsibilities to each other and the group. We'll spend around 10 minutes in this section.

We will read our Agreement of Mutual Responsibility together, with volunteers taking turns reading items out loud. As we read, you can use the space provided before the items to mark them using the symbols shown below. You can put more than one symbol by an item if more than one applies.



Put a question mark by any items for which you need clarification



Put a check mark by items which feel easy or natural to you



Put an arrow pointing to items which will be challenging for you, where you will need to pay special attention



Put a star by items which are most important for you to receive from others in order to participate fully

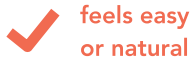
After we read the Agreement items together, we'll review any that need clarification. Then, as we go through the conversation:

- be aware of those items you marked as challenging for yourself, and try to adjust when you find yourself not following an agreement;
- if you feel others are not observing agreements, especially those that you starred as most important to you, you can ask the conversation leader or the group as a whole to review an item and discuss what can help the group make adjustments;
- notice whether your assumptions about what would come easily or naturally to you were accurate, and whether in the future you might need to be more mindful about your tendencies in those areas than you anticipated.

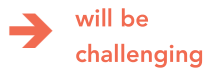
OUR AGREEMENT OF MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY



need
clarification



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WE AGREE TO:

- _____ **1. Share the Air:** We will strive to share this time, space, and learning process equitably, so that all can participate and share in the benefit. We will not expect other individuals or groups to bear the responsibility of educating us.
- _____ **2. Uphold Confidentiality:** We will not share others' stories or identities outside this conversation, although we may share what we have learned from this experience.
- _____ **3. Maintain Respect:** We will treat others with respect. We will not shame, blame, demean, or attack others.
- _____ **4. Allow for Silence:** We won't rush to fill silences, recognizing that we may need time to gather our thoughts or find our courage to speak.
- _____ **5. Listen to Understand:** We will acknowledge the limits of our own knowledge and open ourselves to what we can learn from the experiences and circumstances of others. We will listen to understand and to learn, not to debate.
- _____ **6. Speak Only for Ourselves:** We will each speak from our own experience, not for others, not for entire groups. We will not expect others to speak for entire groups.
- _____ **7. Consider the Bigger Picture:** We will strive to recognize how our own and others' experiences and perspectives are influenced by heritage, cultural environments, social groups, our diverse identities, and social systems.
- _____ **8. Explore Disagreement:** We will strive to be open and curious about our disagreements, and to engage with disagreement even when it feels uncomfortable.
- _____ **9. Lean in to Discomfort:** We will be willing to grapple with challenging ideas and feelings, and examine our own reactions.
- _____ **10. Practice Generosity:** We will recognize that we are all people in process and are more than we express in any one moment. We will give ourselves and each other permission to not know. We will respect each other's right to be fully human, including experiencing strong emotions, not knowing, and making mistakes.

Please sign here as a symbol of your commitment to upholding our Agreement.

SHARE

We want to enter into conversation by introducing ourselves and inviting everyone to reflect on our own experience, connecting our Big Question to our individual lives. We'll have up to 20 minutes for this activity.

Think about this question:

WHAT COMES TO MIND?

- Generally, how do you feel about voting in political elections?

Take a moment to organize your thoughts; you can use this space to make some notes to yourself. Then we'll each introduce ourselves and share a brief answer.

LEARN

This is the heart of our conversation; we'll spend up to 30 minutes in this portion. We are going to do an activity together, to help us think about our Big Question from a shared reference point.

SETTING THE CONTEXT:

Sometimes we may be excited to vote. A candidate may really inspire us. We may really agree with him or her and find it easy to make a choice. But what about when it's not so clear or we feel alienated by the choices we have? How do we determine the best person to support? Or whether to vote at all?

Many factors affect our voting decisions: party affiliation, values, specific issues, a candidate's experience, our feelings about the political system, and many other factors. While one single factor may be important enough to determine our choice, in other cases we weigh a variety of considerations.

Even beyond what we are consciously thinking about, research on the psychology of voting habits has revealed that there are also unconscious factors at work. While we presume our important decisions are always made consciously, in reality, unconscious thought processes, emotions and prejudices can be influencing our choices. For example, our sense of safety versus threat, our tendency to trust others we perceive as more "like us," or the tendency of our brains to remember negative information more easily than positive.

With even unconscious factors influencing us, we might question whether or not our efforts to choose who to vote for matters. But while these unconscious factors do influence the way we vote, they don't necessarily override logic. In fact, they may actually reinforce the importance of intentionally thinking about what is guiding our vote.

HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHO TO VOTE FOR?

Below are a variety of factors that have been identified as having a role in how we vote. Take a look at the list, and then we'll talk about the roles these may play for us in our own voting decisions. Remember, our goal here is not to decide on a "right" or "wrong" way to go about voting, but to explore and understand more about what is important to ourselves and others.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political party identification | Candidate's positions on issues | Candidate's traits (such as honesty, strength, leadership, etc) | Candidate's experience & record |
| Family views/voting patterns | My vote is an expression of my values & beliefs | How other people in my community/ social group view candidate | Perception that candidate will uphold status quo or be a reformer |
| Perception that candidate is an insider or outsider | Sense of worry or satisfaction with state of things | Candidate's identity (such as gender, race, religion, etc) | Sense that my vote will or won't matter |
| My beliefs about the role of government | My beliefs about individual freedom | My beliefs about the common good | Feeling uninformed about issues or candidates |

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

We won't necessarily discuss every question here, but we will discuss at least 1 or 2 from each section. As we discuss, you can use the space below to make some notes to yourself.

Clarifying: What's happening in the text?

- Is there anything in the chart that isn't clear to you?

WHAT COMES TO MIND?

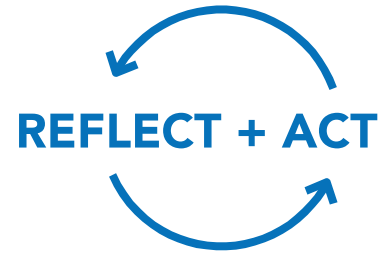
Reflecting: How does this resonate with us?

- Which of these items particularly speak to you? What do they make you think about?
- Is there one factor that stands out for you, or do you think you are influenced by multiple factors? Which ones?
- Would you rank some of these factors as more important to you than others?
- What motivates you to vote or not vote?
- Do you have a process for deciding who to vote for? What does it involve?
- Do you feel good about your process? Do you wish you did anything differently in deciding who to vote for?
- Have you ever been particularly proud of a decision to vote for someone? Have you ever regretted a decision?
- What insights have you gained about yourself or others from hearing what people are thinking about when they choose how to vote?

DO

To conclude our time together, we'll think and talk about some of the things that really struck us during the course of our conversation and what we can take forward from this experience.**

**Conversation Leaders can find suggested variations of the "Do" section in our "Resources for Conversation Leaders" guide, available online



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

First take a moment to reflect and respond briefly, in a phrase or sentence, to at least one of these questions:

- What insights did you have about our Big Question?
- What insights did you have about yourself, your own values, or how you view the world?
- What insights did you have about others -- whether other participants, someone whose story we discussed in the Learn section, or people in general?

You can use the space to make some notes to yourself. After you've had a moment, we'll share some of our thoughts.

WHAT COMES TO MIND?

WHAT WILL WE DO?

Now take a moment to reflect and respond to the questions below and choose one response you would like to share with the group. We'll finish with a final round of sharing.

1. Think again about our Agreement of Mutual Responsibility. What are some things you noticed in this conversation that you and others did – or didn't do – that created the space for a meaningful, respectful conversation? What is one thing you want to work on maintaining in other conversations you have?
2. We all know maintaining commitments can be hard. In anticipation of the times when maintaining your goal is a struggle, what is a strategy that you can use to help yourself in those moments?

WHAT COMES TO MIND?

CLOSING

Thank you for participating in this conversation. Educator John Westerhoff has said that "We are at our best when we make our lives and our search for meaning available as a resource for another's learning."

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK:

We'd like to hear about your conversation experience! Take our brief survey at bit.ly/AskBigQs.

SHARE YOUR STORY:

Join the Ask Big Questions community online – connect with us and share your conversation story. Tag @AskBigQs (Twitter) and @AskBigQuestions (Facebook and Instagram)



ABOUT ASK BIG QUESTIONS

Ask Big Questions is a project that seeks to deepen understanding and strengthen community through reflective conversations about questions that matter to everyone. No matter our background or perspective, we need opportunities to see and hear each other more deeply – not as labels but as human beings. Conversations that help us connect are essential building blocks for strong and inclusive communities. Big Question conversations support and strengthen civic habits of listening, civility, and engaging diverse perspectives, which are important steps toward better problem solving. Ask Big Questions is an initiative of Hillel International.

JOIN THE BIG QUESTIONS COMMUNITY!

Join our movement to build connection, trust, and community through better conversation! A good conversation changes us, and as those effects ripple outward, it can change the world. Visit askbigquestions.org to find more Big Question conversation guides and resources to help you use our guides for better civic dialogue.

USING ASK BIG QUESTIONS MATERIALS

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