

# Conversation Guide

## Starting Out

### GUIDING A CONVERSATION

In your community or surrounding area, you will find trained professionals who can help you address issues of violence. Reach out and speak with them about strategies for the kind of conversation you desire to have. Their experiential wisdom about your community and your aims may be a gift to your efforts. It is also important to take the time to identify your own motivation, immediate aspirations, and long-term aims or goals.

## Planning

### CREATE A CIRCLE OF ALLIES

If you are going to discuss the nature of violence then it will require that you have allies to do so. Where there is conflict in community or in the world, allies across lines of difference are essential to cultivate. By doing so, you witness by example how differences of opinion can be healthy, especially if you have allies who are committed alongside you to the deeper conversations that are essential to a more robust and strengthened family, community, and world. Cultivate allies and plan a conversation. When you do meet, make sure you build in an opportunity to assess what was learned and where you hope the conversation may lead. Identifying these hopes is an essential part of the process of discovery.

## Gathering

### SAFETY MATTERS

Choose a moderator or two who are skilled in mediating group dynamics around difficult conversations. This is not direct conflict resolution, but conversation about violence

brings up lots of feelings people aren't always aware they have. Moderation is essential. When people feel safe they will share more of themselves with you. Whether you gather as a family or a community it is important to recognize everyone in the room, to greet them, and depending upon the feasibility of time, to create opportunity for introductions. Consider going around a circle with abbreviated one-breath introductions, or ask attendees to turn to those around them and to respond to not more than two question prompts about themselves.

## Purpose

### YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING

Consider how you communicate the purpose for the gathering, with attention to an opportunity to share with one another and to discover new possibilities through gathering. You are not required to know all of the answers to violence. In fact, admitting you don't know is your source of strength too. It is important to be aware that some people will need to hear clear anticipated outcomes on purpose, whereas others are happy to discover these along the way. If there is a crisis in your community, the purpose for gathering may be very clear and filled with anxiety. Take time to recognize the crisis. When you do so, you give others permission to feeling uncertain in the face of crisis. That can be a very good start. Often a sense of purpose will arrive in insightful conversation. Often enough, the truth of a community's need will arrive in its dialogue with one another even in the face of crisis.

## Be Open

### EXERCISE YOUR MIND AND HEART

Violence is slippery, even in how we define it, refer to it, or justify it. Review the *Questions and Resources* section. Pick one or two examples therein that you want the group to consider together. It is important to talk together about what violence is, how it is disruptive, what it does to trust, and what impact it has on the health of the community. These are not easy conversations so it is essential to listen deeply.

## Go Far

### LIVE INTO THE QUESTIONS

Questions matter, begin by looking at the main questions for each portal, and then consider additional questions, such as:

### ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

How does violence originate? Why do we need stories about violence and what do these tell us about ourselves? Such stories also often reveal courage, resiliency, and cooperation; what do these and additional values tell us about our communities? What makes violence complicated in society? What kinds of violence are we willing to live with, and which ones are we aiming to reject? In what ways are we empowered to respond to violence before it erupts? What must we do in our own communities in order to respond in a pre-emptive way to violence even before it arrives?

### CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

What is culture? What happens when a specific culture cannot see its own violence? Is violence ever a 'good' within culture? If one society has many cultures, what is necessary to get along? What are the stories in our own community that reveal cultural differences? Within a culture, what is the difference between civil disagreement and uncivil hate speech or incitement? You've read or listened to comments about hate speech – what is hate speech? What is incitement? Do local and national governments, religious leaders and all of us, have a responsibility to addressing violence? If so, what are our options for response that you see clearly within the Parliament *Global Ethic* and the United Nations *Plan of Action* document?

### IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGY

The resources of this section make a case for when technology is healthy and when it is corruptive to society – what are examples of healthy and unhealthy uses of technology that cause or deepen violence? What additional resources in this section illustrate how you understand the relationship between violence and

technology? Explore this section and cite examples for further inquiry – for instance, consider the positive impacts of technology and the ways in which we can teach tolerance across cultures in society

## INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE

Given the UN document titled *Plan of Action* as well as the Parliament *Global Ethic* (as well as other resources you have consulted), consider the following: What is the difference between a general opinion and hate speech? Are there different forms of hate speech depending upon whether they incite violence? Does violence breed more violence? Do religions have a role in inciting and resolving violence that you can think of? Has or is your community or context living through a period of unchecked hate speech and further incitement to violence? How have you responded (built relationships, sought external resources, and more) in ways that check hate speech? Where do you see room for improvement and what must you do in order to secure the improvement you see as possible? Responding to hate speech and incitement is about resourcing yourselves – can you identify or list the top ten significant resources that are or would assist you in addressing violence in the present and the future?

## RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

Preventing violence in the present and the future is the work of an entire community, region, country and world. Fortunately, there are excellent resources out there that can help you. We've found that the UN "Plan of Action" and Parliament Global Ethic documents are helpful. Review the UN related resources on the Responding to Violence page. These are distinguished by region and provide region-specific resources and possibilities for your consideration. Even so, the UN and the Parliament are only two organizations amid a whole range of possible organized entities who aim at responding to violence in local communities and regions. If you don't find what you need, write to us and we'll look alongside you as well. When you find helpful resources, send this information to us through the Contact Us dropdown on the main Menu page. We welcome your suggestions and refinements. Your comments can also assist others who may need these same resources in the future.

## Seek Connection

### COMMIT TO TALKING MORE

Conversations on violence have to germinate. People often need time to answer large questions about how they think about violence in the world. You cannot control changing hearts and minds, but you can request that the conversation continue. This resource is meant to help you to explore themes for the sake of your life, your community, and for the world. Take that time and talk more.

## Evaluate & Plan Ahead

After the meeting, gather separately with your allies and discuss what you have heard, including what new insights and truths arrived in the room, and where you see the conversation evolving next. What can be improved, refined or left out entirely? Look to the portals of this web Resource and explore the kinds of themes you believe the community could discuss next. Be prepared to plan and meet again. Stay consistent with timeline and obligations between yourself and your allies.

THIS CONVERSATION GUIDE IS A RESOURCE FROM THE  
RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE WEBSITE:

[religiousresponsetoviolence.org](http://religiousresponsetoviolence.org)

