

# GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING OPEN CONVERSATIONS: A SUMMARY

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- 1. IDENTIFY YOUR TOPIC(S):** Review Tanenbaum's [Combating Extremism page](#) and the various topics to determine which will be the subject(s) of the conversation.
- 2. IDENTIFY YOUR PARTICIPANTS:** Determine who you want to be part of the conversation. In doing so, consider how different constituents may affect the openness and/or diversity of thought.
- 3. BUILD YOUR TEAM BEFORE THE EVENT:** Determine who, if anyone, other than yourself will help prepare the discussion and what each facilitator's role will be during the talk.
- 4. CREATE AN AGENDA:** Plan ahead with an agenda and be sure to take time constraints into consideration. If it suits your community, we find that it's best to begin with a welcome, opening prayer and/or icebreaker. (An icebreaker should be geared toward helping participants get to know each other better and prepare participants for the conversation ahead.)
- 5. ESTABLISH GROUNDRULES:** Establish rules that allow you to stay on track, make everyone feel safe sharing their experiences, and ensure respectful conversation, especially when the conversation becomes difficult. Good rules include letting one person speak at a time, using respectful language, and assuming best intentions.
- 6. USE "I" LANGUAGE:** Don't speak for others, including your religious or community group. Speak for yourself and your own experiences. Encourage others before the conversation to do the same.
- 7. ENSURE CONFIDENTIALITY OF PARTICIPANTS:** Before the event begins, make sure that all participants do not repeat what is said during the conversation outside the event. This is an important step to help participants feel safe discussing difficult subjects.
- 8. GIVE SPACE TO SILENCE:** Difficult conversations entail moments where no one knows exactly what to say. It's vital to give participants the space to process what they've heard before which requires silence. Don't immediately try to rekindle a conversation when it isn't necessary.
- 9. DEBRIEF THE CONVERSATION:** After the conversation ends, reflect on the conversation. What worked? What didn't? Glean information from participants by using the debrief evaluation template on the last page of the full version of Tanenbaum's "Guidelines for Conducting Open Conversations," available for free.
- 10. TELL US HOW IT WENT:** Don't forget to send an email to [combatingextremism@tanenbaum.org](mailto:combatingextremism@tanenbaum.org) telling us how the conversation went and sharing any interesting stories about the event. Any notable exchanges? Any expressed changes in opinion? Anyone express something they plan on doing differently? We also welcome any and all feedback about our *Combating Extremism* resources. How can they be improved? Which topics would you like to see in the future?