

# Three ways to make difficult election conversations easier

Make the last week count!

**Fear, anger and confusion are the overriding emotions people feel about the upcoming election. According to a recent survey, only 5% of us are excited and just 1% feel pride. We often hear that we are divided as a country—but we are also worried.**

In the run up to December 12th, many of us will be having difficult conversations. Whether it is on the doorstep, over a cuppa or during a phone call with our grandma, we will be trying to understand what is driving people's decision in this election in the hope that we will be able to change people's minds.

The way we frame any issue reinforces some ways of thinking, and feeling, over others. Last year, we pulled together years of research to identify the key framing challenges we are up against, and how to overcome them. In the run up to this election, we have selected three of these recommendations to give you a framing informed way of approaching conversations ahead of the election.

## 1 Appeal to people's better selves

Start potentially tricky conversations by focusing on the bigger picture. If you find out what someone values, you are likely to find you have more in common than you think. Avoid making assumptions about what motivates or infuriates the person you are talking to.

It turns out we are a bundle of beliefs (that often contradict each other) so it is worth appealing to the 'better side' of the person you are talking to – it will open them up to new ideas and ways of thinking.

Try asking open questions and try to stay curious. If possible, avoid getting stuck in debating small policy decisions or only focusing on one big issue, such as whether you voted leave or remain, at the expense of the bigger picture.



### TRY THIS

#### Try asking:

- “What issue do you most care about?”
- “What sort of life do you want for your children/grandchildren?”
- “What is your biggest concern?”

## 2 Promote an expansive, diverse 'us'



Political divisions are reflected in our language: 'us' and 'them' narratives are rife. This way of thinking lends itself to putting other people firmly into political camps, reducing us down to our voting decisions.

Highlight common concerns and areas of shared collective identity to help build connection and trust. It can be tempting to spend a lot of time talking about who or what we are against but in doing so you give your political opponents a lot of air time and don't establish what it is you stand for.

This does not mean avoiding talking about difference or obscuring power disparities in society. Couching a conversation about inequality with an appeal to our shared humanity will make it more likely the person you are speaking to will hear what you are saying and encourage them to broaden their sphere of concern. Show why you think an unequal society is bad for everyone, not just one group in society.

### TRY THIS

**Try appealing to your shared identity throughout your conversations:**

*"As a Mancunian I am also worried about X. As a mother I am concerned about that too."*

**Focus on shared values, even across political divides:**

*"I voted [leave / remain / Labour / Conservative] but I really care about that as well."*

## 3 Show that change is possible and that people can make it happen



For many of us, it's the belief that nothing can change that holds us back from voting or taking part in political life. In your conversations, you need to inspire hope as well as overcome disagreement. Highlight what collective action has been achieved in the past.

Whatever you believe, this election is going to make a profound difference to the future – explain why you believe taking action in this election will make a difference. Stress that the political system is the way it is because of decisions made by people – and so we can change it. If possible, give local examples of how people coming together has made a difference and created change. Remember the strong emotions that underpin political preferences and beliefs. Try to stay positive and open.

### TRY THIS

**Try acknowledging why someone might feel disillusioned:**

*"I can totally understand why it might feel that voting makes no difference, but what is really motivating me about this election is..."*

**Give [appropriate!] examples of people making change:**

*"I don't know if you heard about the recent decision [to ban fracking]? It made me feel quite inspired because it showed that local communities could really have a say in their future."*

## Finally, remember to listen!

Here are three ways to frame difficult conversations in the run up to the election. You can read more about these framing recommendations, and others, [here](#). With any difficult conversation, it is also important to remember that listening is the key. Alongside listening, we can use framing lessons to help us have conversations that have a chance of reaching across the divide. **Good luck!**