



Skills for Bridging the Divide

Follow-up Skills Practice

Overview

This Skills for Bridging the Divide (SBD) Practice session assumes that you have taken the [Online SBD Training](#) on the Braver Angels website.

Our Zoom call today will have three main parts: Get To Know You, Listening Skills Practice and Speaking Skills Practice.

In this session you'll have a chance to get to know your partner and practice the skills you saw demonstrated online in the workshop. You'll also learn how to set a constructive tone before these types of conversations.

Goals for these Conversations

- You learn about the perspectives, feelings, and experiences of people from a different political viewpoint.
- You have a sense of satisfaction about how you conveyed your own perspective, feelings, and experiences.
- You discover some common ground, if it's there.

Expectations to Abandon

- That you can persuade the other person to change core attitudes and beliefs.
- That facts will be agreed on and logic followed consistently.
- That your conversation partner will match your openness.

Core Principles

- Respect, curiosity, and openness tend to elicit the same from the other person.
- Everyone needs to save face—no one is portrayed as stupid, blind, narrowly self-serving, or bigoted.
- Most people in a relationship have some common values and concerns that can be unearthed.

A Few Cautions

- Timing is key. Start at a calm moment and not after someone has fired off a verbal shot or is in mid-rant.
- Only try this with someone you think might want to hear your point of view.
- Practice one-to-one first; group conversations are harder.
- Not intended for use online! Online conversations are a different “animal,” potentially much harder than even group conversations in person.

Preface: Tone-Setting Skills

The conversation you'll have today with your partner is practice. They are there to help you learn listening skills and speaking skills, and you'll be helping them do the same. But in real life you don't always have time to prepare yourself as you have for this practice. That's why the Tone-Setting Skills that follow are important to learn. You can practice them today in your conversation also.

1. Let the other person know that you want to understand other perspectives better.

"I'm finding myself curious these days about the views of people who are different from the people I tend to hang out with."

2. Ask permission to pose questions.

"Can I ask you something about politics and your views on something?"

"Can I ask what people in your part of the country are saying about what's going on in Washington these days?"

3. Acknowledge your political stance.

"As you probably know, I'm a liberal Democrat, so that's the perspective I come from."

4. Offer something critical of your side and credit something positive about the other side.

Blue: "I think Democrats have been out of touch with a lot of people in rural communities and Rust Belt towns. Trump picked up on that."

Red: "I think conservatives sometimes come across like they don't care about minorities. Liberals have done a better job of connecting with minority groups."

Part 1: Getting To Know You

You'll have 10 minutes in breakout room with your partner after which the moderator will bring you back to the main call.

Question 1: Something about yourself (*Up to 1 minute each*)

Share something about yourself such as where you live and for how long, family, and if you like, a fun question: What was your favorite meal as a child? What would people be surprised to learn about you?

Question 2: Where you are politically and how you got here (*Up to 4 minutes each*)

How would you describe yourself politically, and what life experiences have influenced your values and beliefs about politics and public policy?

The other person listens, with no cross talk (that is, no questions, "me too" comments, or anything that takes the conversational ball away from the one speaking). Then the other person goes.

Part 2: Listening Skills Practice

The first skill you'll practice with your partner is Listening. The following Listening Skills Tip Sheet will give you some specific approaches to this, some hints to help you, and some do's and don'ts. There is also a list of Role Player Talking Points for playing both blue and red roles during the practice.

Please print the Listening Skills Tip Sheet and Listening Skills Talking Points to have them available during your practice session.

Directions:

The Moderator will give you the instructions for the practice session. You will practice with your partner in a breakout room. Partner 1 will practice their listening skills while Partner 2 role plays someone who holds the opposite political view. Then you'll do a second practice where Partner 2 practices listening skills while Partner 1 role plays someone holding the opposite political view.

The Listener: Your job in this role-play is to use your Listening skills while your partner role plays opposing political views. Listen, paraphrase, acknowledge, ask questions as necessary to clarify what you think you hear. You can refer to the chart to help remember the skills.

The Role Player: Your job is to help the Listener use their Listening skills. In order to do that you'll have to talk about some opposing opinions so they can listen. For many people it's challenging to speak about opinions you don't really hold during a role-play. Below we've provided some talking points for you to use.

Listening skill	Hints	Example	What Not To Say
<p>Paraphrase: Repeat back to the person the essence of what you hear them say.</p>	<p>Don't suggest any implications beyond what they actually said. Listen for a "Yes, that's what I'm saying"</p>	<p><i>"So, what you're saying is that you focus on what the President does for the country, not his personal life".</i> <i>"So for you, Trump is a big threat to the country."</i></p>	<p><i>"So, in other words, you're saying that the character of the President doesn't matter."</i></p>
<p>Ask real and honest questions in order to better understand the other person's view</p>	<p>Don't ask "gotcha" questions (This is harder than you might think!) It can be helpful to ask how the other person came to their view. Stories are important; they humanize us.</p>	<p><i>"How do you see Trump's border wall idea addressing the complex problems in our immigration system?"</i> <i>"Do you see Black Lives Matter helping or hurting things in our cities?"</i></p> <p>Ask how the other person came to their view.</p> <p><i>"How did you come to see the federal government as more the problem than the solution.?"</i> <i>"I'm interested in how you came to. Believe in single-payer health care."</i></p> <p>Then acknowledge what they told you.</p>	<p><i>"Can't you see that the Wall is racist and xenophobic?"</i></p> <p><i>"Do you see attacking the police as the solution?"</i></p>
<p>Listen for underlying personal values and aspirations and acknowledge them</p>	<p>"I'm hearing that for you, fairness is a big issue when it comes to immigration."</p>	<p><i>Reds: This might be fairness related to those who waited years to come to this country legally.</i> <i>Blues: This might be fairness to the Dreamers who were brought here by their parents and have grown up as Americans.</i></p>	

Part 3: Speaking Skills

The second skill you'll practice with your partner is Speaking. The following chart will give you some specific approaches to this, some hints to help you, and some do's and don'ts. You can also use the talking points for playing both blue and red roles during the practice.

Please print the Speaking Skills Tip Sheet and Role Player Talking Points to have them available during your practice session.

Directions:

The Moderator will give you the instructions for your practice session with your partner. You will role play this just as you did for the listening skills.

The Speaker: Your job in this role-play is to use your Speaking skills. Use "I" statements, mention areas of agreement, say something about your life experience that led you to believe this, soften areas of disagreement and use "Yes, and..." to acknowledge other beliefs but still express your own.

You can refer to the Speaking Skills Tip Sheet to help remember the skills.

The Role Player: Your job is to help the Speaker use their Speaking skills. In order to do that you'll have to talk about some opposing political opinions so they can respond by speaking. Don't hesitate to use the Role Player Talking Points when you're role playing views that are different from your own, but don't make it so forceful they can't practice owning and speaking their own opinions.

Speaking Skill	Hints	Example	What Not To Say
<p>Use “I” statements</p>	<p>(“This is how I see it”) more often than truth statements (“This is how it is”).</p> <hr/> <p>When talking about the future, use “I’m concerned/worried/troubled” expressions rather than definitive “This is what will happen”.</p>	<p><i>“It sure looks to me like Trump refuses to accept Russian interference in our elections.”</i></p> <p><i>“I see Trump’s lack of political experience as a good thing because I think professional politicians have screwed things up.”</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>“I’m afraid we’re going off a cliff on climate change and there will no coming back.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m concerned the first steps on gun control will lead to banning all guns.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The Russians helped Trump get elected. He knows it and refuses to admit it.”</i></p> <p><i>“The last thing we need is a professional politician running things. Trump is exactly right for the job.”</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>“We’re going to have to evacuate coastal cities before this century is over.”</i></p> <p><i>“The anti-gun people won’t stop until they take guns away from everyone.”</i></p>
<p>Mention an area of similarity or agreement</p>	<p>It’s always good to look for this but be aware it may not exist.</p>	<p><i>“It sounds like we both agree that the health care system needs fixing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sounds like we both see the media as dividing us more than informing us right now.”</i></p>	
<p>Say something about what life experiences have led to you to be passionate about it.</p>	<p>Personal stories humanize issues and make passionate political people come across as human beings who care.</p>	<p><i>“I’ve worked in health care my whole career, and I’ve seen things that have disturbed me a lot....”</i></p>	
<p>Softening flat-out disagreements by signaling first that your perspective is very different.</p>	<p>If you get really emotional on a topic, signal that as well.</p>	<p><i>“It probably won’t surprise you that I see this completely differently.”</i></p> <p><i>“This one is very close to home for me, and I have very strong feelings about it.”</i></p>	
<p>Before expressing disagreement, saying some version of “I hear you.” (acknowledgement)</p>	<p>Going back and forth between acknowledging the other’s viewpoint and then stating your own is more effective than just restating your position. It’s like dancing or tossing a ball back and forth. Aim for “yes, and...” rather than “yes, but...” (I hear you, and here’s what I think about this.)</p>	<p><i>“I get that you don’t trust the federal government to do the right thing on health care. [INTENTIONAL PAUSE*] My view is that only the federal government has the resources to guarantee good health care for all. The market isn’t going to do it, and some states are just too poor to support health care.”</i></p> <p><i>“I understand you think that federally-backed health care is the way to go. [INTENTIONAL PAUSE*] From my point of view, the federal government has a really bad track record of running domestic programs, and I can’t see it doing a good job on something as complicated as health care. I prefer a market approach with states helping people who can’t afford insurance.”</i></p> <p>* Note: An <i>intentional pause</i> allows for a transition from acknowledging the other’s viewpoint to your own. It also gives the other person a chance to acknowledge verbally or non-verbally that you got it right.</p>	

Bonus Skills: Handling Difficult Moments

During these practice sessions you've had the advantage of someone who is just role-playing with you to have these conversations with. In real life, things don't always go as smoothly. Your Moderator will cover these points and explain more about how to handle them.

- Staying focused on a topic when the other person jumps around from issue to issue.

"Can we stay with immigration for now?"

- Not answering baiting questions; instead, just restating your viewpoint on the topic.

Blue: When asked "Do you think we should let foreigners just pour into this country illegally and then become citizens?"	You might respond: <i>"It think we need a responsible immigration policy that protects our walls and is also welcoming the way it was for my grandparents and lots of others."</i>
Red: When asked "Do you think we should just round up undocumented immigrants and throw them in concentration camps?"	You might respond: <i>"I think we have to make sure that our immigration laws mean something-by enforcing them."</i>

- Not returning provocative statements in kind.

Blue: When you're talking about health care and the other person exclaims <i>"Obama was a fraud on health care like he was on everything else!"</i>	Instead of defending Obamas's integrity or attacking Trump in kind, you can ignore the outburst and say something like <i>"Obamacare needs fixing for sure, but I don't think the Republican alternative will be an improvement for most Americans."</i>
Red: When someone bursts out <i>"Trump will go down in history as the worst President we've ever had"</i>	You might respond <i>"For now, he's the President and I want to give him a chance to succeed"</i> rather than saying <i>"Do you think Hillary would have been a modern-day Lincoln?"</i>

- Instead of beating entrenched differences into the ground, agreeing to disagree.

Talking Points for Role Players

Immigration ([Red perspective](#)):

You want the country to get control of the border

You worry about jobs Americans lose to people coming illegally, but you're ambivalent about deporting all

You're open to permanent residency for some, but adamantly oppose rewarding them with citizenship

If building a wall would help, you're for it, although you want to know the costs

Immigration ([Blue perspective](#)):

You want a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have not committed crimes

You see them as contributors to society who deserve a chance to stay here legally and out of the shadows

You're especially concerned about the "Dreamers" whose parents brought them here

But you do support border controls

Gun rights/Gun control talking points ([Red perspective](#)):

You see gun violence as a problem in this country that needs to be addressed

But the Second Amendment gives people the right to own guns

Most gun regulations won't help because bad guys will always find a way to get a gun, and good guys will lack self-protection

Regulations may be first steps towards taking away legitimate gun rights

Still, there are some commonsense reforms like requiring universal background checks and screening for dangerous people who should not own guns

You're cautiously open to some regulations on automatic rifles

Gun rights/Gun control talking points ([Blue perspective](#)):

You see gun violence as a huge problem in this country, and one of the big causes is too many guns

European countries don't have the gun violence we do

There is no place for assault weapons in the hands of ordinary people

Guns don't protect people; in reality, they put people at risk from suicide, mental illness, accidents, and domestic shootings

Still, you realize that the Second Amendment gives people the right to have guns

We need sensible regulation that respects gun rights