



## Engaging with Civility: A Conversation Model

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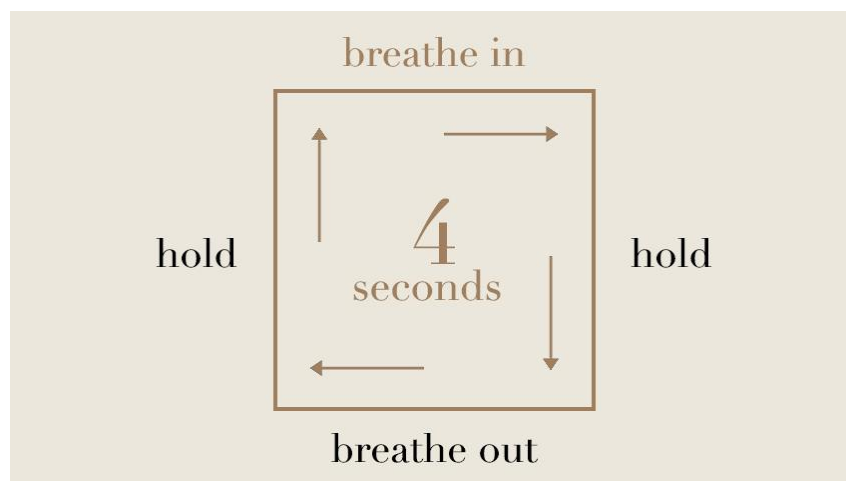


In regular conversation we tend to focus on broadcasting rather than listening.

Here we'll lean into listening and trust that just listening and learning isn't a threat to our values.

### Tool #1: Regulate • Get Out of Fight/Flight/Freeze

#### Technique: Box Breathing



*Once settled, remember: "It's just about needs."*

## Tool #2: Listen, Focus, Paraphrase and Acknowledge to Re-Engage the Thinking Brain

### Paraphrasing Technique: Looping

***Our habit is to assume we know the other person's view fully after just one or two statements. We're often wrong. Keep checking to ensure you clearly understand.***

Them: "High taxes!!! Wasting our \$\$\$! Can't afford it!"

Me: "It sounds like you see a real hit to your budget from current tax rates."

Them: "Of course I do! They're too high and just keep going up and now I have to pay for sidewalk repairs!"

Me: "It sounds like maybe you were frustrated when you received notice about the sidewalk repairs and realized that isn't covered in the regular tax bill. Is that right?"

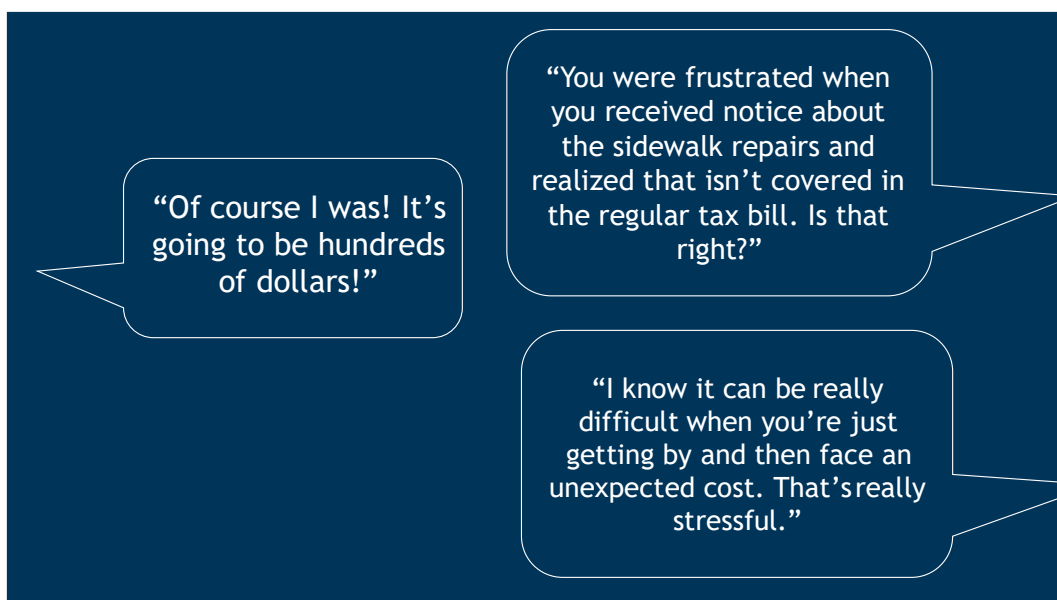
Them: "Yes, I was frustrated! Who wouldn't be? It's going to be hundreds of dollars!"

**After you've clarified through paraphrasing, acknowledge what the world looks and feels like to them.**

***PRO TIP #1: Don't make it about you.***

***PRO TIP #2: Acknowledging is not minimizing.***

***PRO TIP #3: Acknowledging is not agreeing.***



## Acknowledgment Practice

*Just acknowledge their perspective. Don't correct them or explain your view.*

"I'm so stressed about getting my history project done, plus I have that chemistry test on Tuesday!"

"I can't believe you voted against the funding increase for the food bank. This is a basic need for so many people in our community."

Try your own example of a statement someone makes with a lot of emotion where your immediate impulse is to explain or justify:

*How can you acknowledge the way things look and feel from their perspective?*

**Tool #3: If/when you continue the conversation, approach it as a learning conversation.**

*Reach out to learn, not to convince. Stay curious.*



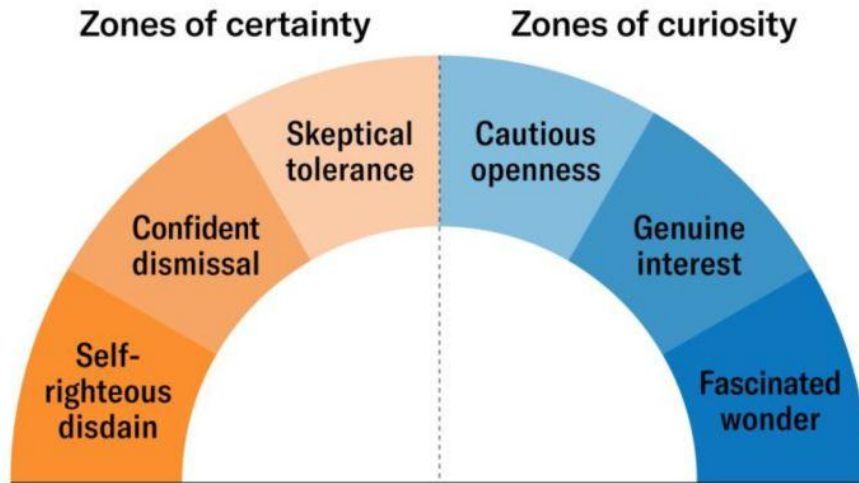
### Leaning into a Learning Conversation

- 1. Focus and breathe.**
  - Reassure yourself that you can learn about someone's views and values without it threatening your own.
- 2. Be curious about who they are.**
  - Ask questions about their time in the community, their family, neighborhood, etc. *Stay focused on them.*
- 3. Listen for values.**
  - What values do you share?
- 4. If appropriate—after a lot of listening—share a story about shared values.**



# The Curiosity Curve

Before high-stakes conversations, gauge whether you're actually open to vital new information from your counterpart.



|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Self-righteous disdain</b></p> <p><i>"I can't stand them!"</i><br/><i>"They're mad, bad, or scary!"</i></p> | <p><b>Confident dismissal</b></p> <p><i>"They're mistaken, incompetent, or out of line."</i><br/><i>"I'm right!"</i></p> | <p><b>Skeptical tolerance</b></p> <p><i>"I think they're wrong but I'll hear them out."</i></p>                  |
| <p><b>Cautious openness</b></p> <p><i>"Hmm...they could know something worth finding out."</i></p>                | <p><b>Genuine interest</b></p> <p><i>"I truly want to understand their views and experience."</i></p>                    | <p><b>Fascinated wonder</b></p> <p><i>"Wow! There's so much I want to learn—from, with, and about them!"</i></p> |

[www.askapproach.com](http://www.askapproach.com)

Source: Jeff Wetzler, inspired by Braver Angels' "The Emotional and Intellectual Transformation of De-Polarization"



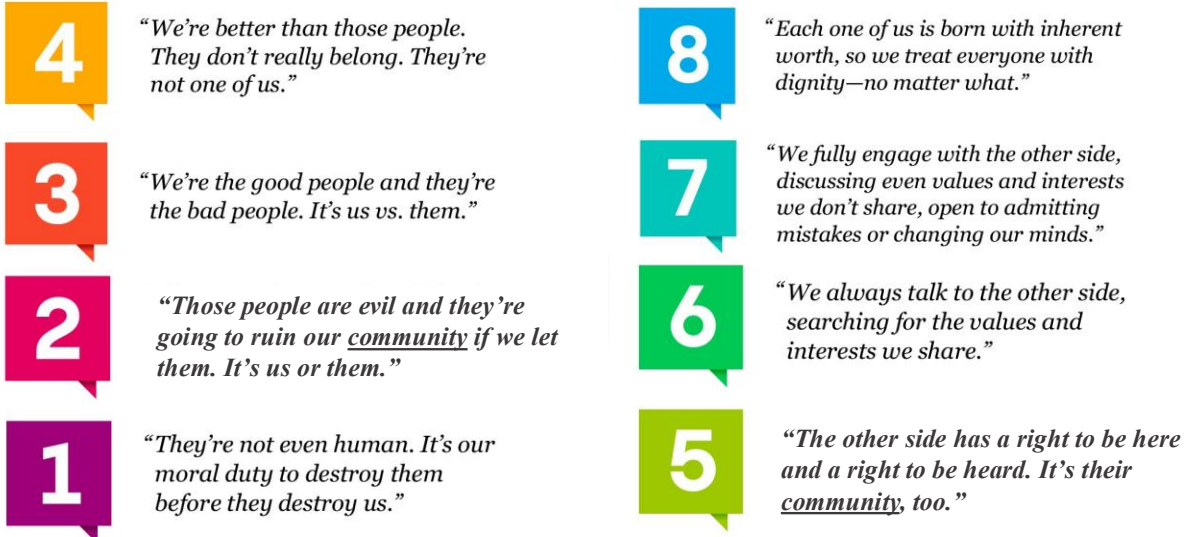
All human beings have a need for dignity:  
to feel seen and respected by those around us.

*Engaging in a learning conversation indicates that I see you and value you as a member of this community.*

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### Skills for Dignified Disagreement



#### Be curious, not furious

When there is a disagreement, approach it with curiosity, using language that invites dialogue.



#### Regulate then debate

When you start to get upset, pause and take a breath before speaking.



#### Listen to hear, not to respond

Really listen to the other person and consider summarizing briefly what you heard.



#### Challenge ideas, don't attack people

Speak your truth but do it with dignity.



#### Acknowledge knowledge

When someone else makes a logical or interesting point, acknowledge their point.



#### Build up rather than tear down

Advocate, explain, and build up your idea rather than just attacking others' ideas and/or dehumanizing people.



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