

Deepening conversations

Many of us crave relationships that go beyond casual chit chat. We want to feel heard and understood and help others feel the same. Fortunately, there are skills we can learn and steps we can take to deepen connection through meaningful conversation.

Do you ever find yourself talking with an old, trusted friend, wanting to bring up an important and perhaps challenging topic, yet unable to move past small talk? You are not alone. Deepening conversations and creating meaningful connection takes courage and vulnerability - things that don't always come naturally. Here are some tips that can help.

- **Be an active listener.** Many spend a lot of time in conversations waiting for their turn to talk. Practice allowing others to finish their thoughts and give your undivided attention before adding your own. Ask yourself, how does it change what you hear and how you hear it?
- **Start with a beginner's mind.** When presented with a new idea or a perspective that differs from your own, focus on being curious and keeping an open mind. When you approach something as though it's brand new knowledge, you have a chance to see the situation in a fresh light. Think of conversations as an exploration of different ideas rather than devolve into disagreements.
- **Agree to disagree.** Different opinions don't have to be a problem, and in fact, can add richness and depth to conversations. Many connections and relationships deepen and expand when people discover differences and learn to navigate them with mutual respect.
- **Get real.** Don't be afraid to discuss beliefs and priorities. One of the best ways to get closer and to know someone better is to learn about their values.
- **Take gentle risks.** Some topics are tough to discuss, especially if they are linked to deep emotional trauma. Create safe spaces for conversation by balancing curiosity, open-mindedness and respecting boundaries. People tend to respond better to mutual sharing if you use a non-judgmental and shame-free approach. And remember, you are not in conversation to fix or be fixed. Perhaps the most important aspect of meaningful discussions with closely connected friends is being present to one another. Sometimes all it takes for someone who is hurting to feel better is knowing they are not alone.