

Seven Suggestions for Genuine Dialogue

*Adapted by Veterans for Peace Santa Fe Chapter from www.tikkun.org

In order to make any kind of change, it is necessary to be able to communicate effectively what you believe. Some may think like you. Some may think differently. But in order to have any kind of exchange—whether one-on-one, to an audience, or in a structured forum, such as a meeting—it is crucial that you engage in dialogue. When talking with people who disagree with you, this can be a challenge. It is difficult to refrain from interrupting or growing angry when you feel certain that the other person is misinformed or misguided. But in your certainty, you clearly may miss an opportunity to persuade someone of what you believe. Regardless of the situation, here are a few basic communication tips:

1. LISTEN ACTIVELY.

Focus on what the person is saying, not your next argument. You can always take some time to think before responding.

2. RESPECT THE OTHER.

This is crucial. Whomever you are talking with must feel respected, or they will not speak honestly and will not be open to your ideas. Respect is signaled by refraining from interrupting or speaking over someone; respect also requires avoiding language that is abusive or accusatory. Speak as you would want to be spoken with.

3. REMAIN CALM.

No-one ever changes their opinions because they are intimidated, or when they get furious.

4. ASK QUESTIONS WHICH WILL HELP OPEN A PERSONS MIND.

Research shows that people change their minds NOT when they are listening but when they are speaking, working out what they really think.

5. SPEAK FROM WHAT YOU FEEL.

Express this literally. As opposed to "You're wrong, and you're being idiotic," it'll be much more effective to say: "I feel you're only taking in only part the story. Have you thought about..." etc, etc.

6. PICK YOUR BATTLES.

There are some people who will never think differently. Don't waste emotional energy on these situations. Remember that dialogue is like baseball: if you bat .300 you are doing really well.

7. REMAIN CALM.

You'll learn something.