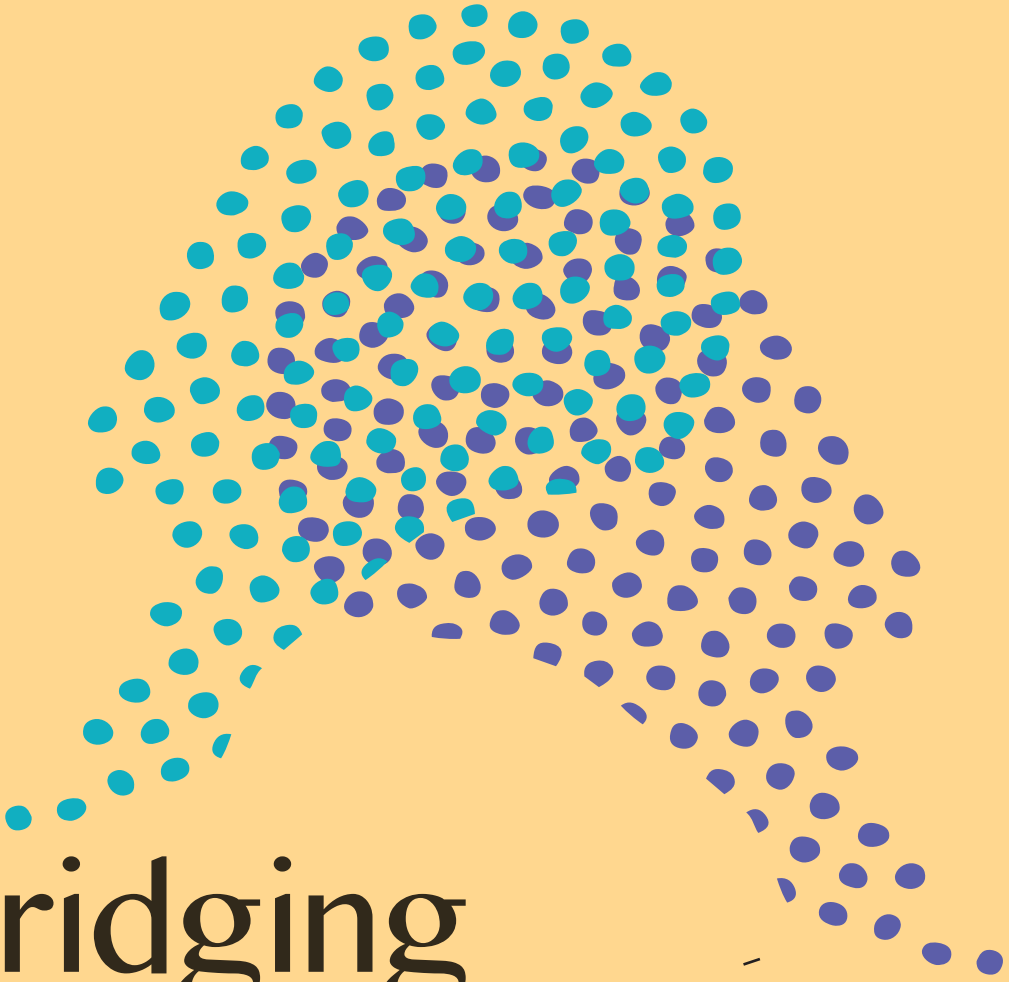

Bridging Differences Playbook

Learn research-based strategies to promote positive dialogue and understanding

Greater Good Science Center

BRIDGING DIFFERENCES

An Invitation to Bridge Differences

Recent surveys suggest that partisan divides in the United States are on the rise. The resulting polarization has widespread effects: It can harm our personal relationships, spark violence motivated by racial or religious prejudice, and even undermine our democracy.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There is a growing movement of individuals and organizations—Bridge Builders—who are working to foster more constructive dialogue and understanding across group lines, bringing us together at a time when so many forces are pulling us apart. Bridge Builders close the psychological gaps between Us and Them, encouraging others—and themselves—to recognize that their differences don't need to define or divide them; instead, they work to foster empathy and understanding, find common ground when possible, and identify shared goals and values. Some work as mediators or lead groups devoted to cross-group understanding, but they're also K-12 educators, local politicians, workplace managers, and leaders of faith-based groups and other community-based organizations. They span ages, neighborhoods, and backgrounds. They broker difficult conversations at the holiday dinner table and suggest solutions with broad appeal at a community town hall.

At UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center (GGSC), we are mixing science and storytelling to both illuminate and support the important work of Bridge Builders across the country. Drawing on cutting-edge research and lessons from trailblazing programs, our Bridging Differences initiative is highlighting the key skills and strategies for overcoming divides—and we are featuring them in this Playbook.

NOT EVERYONE SHOULD BRIDGE.

We acknowledge that not everyone can or should be a Bridge Builder, or feel compelled to build bridges in every situation—the work of bridging should be done by invitation and not demand. Before they're ready to bridge, some must heal from personal trauma. It's ethically dubious—and, research suggests, often counterproductive—to ask people to bridge differences when they're being discriminated against or otherwise denied social power. And bridge building shouldn't be used as a tool of persuasion or coercion, especially not to consolidate power in order to attack or oppress others—it's about expanding one's sense of commonality with others, not about constricting them to adopt your worldview. So while we hope this Playbook is a useful tool for many, we recognize that it's not for everyone.

What is the Bridging Differences Playbook?

OUR INTENTION.

Through our Bridging Differences initiative, we have been studying the research and interviewing program leaders to identify key strategies for fostering positive dialogue, relationships, and understanding across groups or individuals. In this "Playbook," we have tried to synthesize some of our main lessons learned so far. We do not intend for this to be a formal curriculum or rigid list of requirements. Instead, we offer it as a set of flexible principles that people can adapt and apply in different settings. We hope it's a helpful guide to overcoming divisions and divides, whether within families or between groups.

THIS IS A PROTOTYPE.

This Playbook is a draft, and will be refined based on the feedback we receive in the next few months. We invite you to review it and try applying its contents to your life and work; we'd love to hear from you about what's useful, what's unclear or impractical, and what we should add. We believe the final version of the Playbook should be the outcome of a co-creation process, where your experiences and expertise contribute to its evolution.

Send us your feedback to **greater@berkeley.edu** with "Bridging Differences Playbook" in the subject

IT'S AN ONGOING JOURNEY.

The more we practice these principles and skills, the better we'll get at bridging differences. We'll make some mistakes along the way, which we should learn from. In addition to understanding the practices, it's also important to reflect on our use of them. We suggest taking notes on what you're learning as you use these practices.

THIS IS A CURATED LIST OF PRACTICES.

At this point, we don't see this as a comprehensive recipe for bridging differences but rather as an emerging list of practices that people can try to apply to their own thinking and behavior, and in their interactions or work with others.

MODESTY AND HUMILITY ARE CRUCIAL.

It's important to be thoughtful about this work. The level of trust and understanding we have of the communities in which we are bridging differences really matters. Knowing the research and practices doesn't mean you're an expert on a given community. As many of the skills in this Playbook suggest, bridge building requires empathy and humility; approaching it with arrogance and too many assumptions can sabotage your efforts and even deepen divides

REMEMBER TO HOLD YOURSELF.

This work can be emotionally and spiritually taxing, and it's difficult for a myriad of reasons. Having a supportive community around you is important. We encourage you to take the necessary steps to care for your own well-being as you build bridges with and for others.

Practices and Principles for Bridging Differences

Try Self-Distancing

Sometimes we get so caught up in our own thoughts and emotions that we have a hard time considering someone else's point of view. To avoid this trap, try to think about yourself or talk to yourself in the third- or second-person instead of the first-person. Research suggests that "self-distancing" through this simple change in pronouns can help us better regulate our emotions and engage in difficult conversations with greater equanimity and less distress.

HOW TO DO IT

It can be hard to practice self-distancing in the heat of a disagreement. For starters, it might be easier to try these steps on your own, removed from a conflict, then eventually work your way up to applying them in the midst of an argument or debate. This can be a conflict you're having with someone close to you, like a romantic partner, or you can apply this skill to the way you're thinking about members of a group with whom you have differences or disagreements.

1. First, think about this conflict from the perspective of a neutral third party who wants the best for all involved—a person who sees things from a neutral point of view. How might this person think about the disagreement?

2. As you think about the conflict, shift your perspective of what is happening from the first-person to the third-person. For example, if your name is Leo, instead of asking, "Why do I feel this way?" ask yourself, "Why does Leo feel this way?"

3. Taking this third-person perspective can be challenging, especially around intergroup conflicts—and especially in the heat of the moment. Ask yourself: What obstacles do you face trying to take this third-person perspective? What might help you overcome them? For example, if you find yourself getting caught up in the heat of the moment, it might help to pause and take a deep breath.

4. Despite the obstacles to self-distancing by taking a third-person perspective, people can be successful in doing so—but it takes practice. Over the next few months, try your best to take this perspective during disagreements. What effect does it have on the interaction? What effects can you feel it having on your body and thoughts? How could you be more successful at it? Allow these reflections to inform your future interactions, make your disagreements more constructive, and prevent them from escalating.

WHY TRY IT

When we experience conflict with others, we typically take a first-person perspective, preoccupied with our own thoughts, feelings, and values. That can overwhelm us with emotions like anger and resentment, making it hard to engage in constructive conversation, especially around charged or polarizing issues with someone who we might see as an adversary or a threat. But when we take an outsider's perspective on the situation, and get some distance from ourselves, we can respond from a place that is more calm and conciliatory. Distancing ourselves from the problem also helps us recognize that alternative viewpoints exist outside of our own.

KEEP IN MIND

If it feels too awkward to refer to yourself by your own name, you can use a third-person pronoun, like he/she/they, or even try a second-person pronoun ("you"). And you don't have to do so out loud—changing your perspective in your inner monologue is more than enough.

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THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

Learn how John Sarrouf, co-executive director of Essential Partners, **applies the skill of self-distancing to their work fostering constructive dialogue across divides.**

Teresa F. Frisbie, the director of the Dispute Resolution Program at the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, promotes self-distancing **as a tool to enhance mediation** and resolve disputes.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

Kross, E., & Grossmann, I. (2012). **Boosting wisdom: Distance from the self enhances wise reasoning, attitudes, and behavior** *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 141(1), 43.

Ayduk O. , Kross E. (2010) **From a distance: implications of spontaneous self-distancing for adaptive self-reflection**. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 809–29.

TO READ MORE

How to Get Some Emotional Distance in an Argument Getting angry? Try a practice called "self-distancing" to help resolve conflict.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

AFTER YOU TRY IT

Then, after you've had the chance to try it out, consider these reflection questions:

- How did it feel to practice this skill? What, if any, positive impact did it have on you or others?
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- How might you improve upon it? Is there anything you'd suggest adding, revising, or removing in order to make it feel more relevant or effective?
- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Practice Mindfulness

Research suggests we can reduce social biases by building moment-to-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings through practices like meditation.

HOW TO DO IT

We can practice mindfulness in simple ways: taking a few minutes to focus on our breath, paying attention to our surroundings on a walk, or being deliberate about our intentions when we start a conversation. University of San Francisco Rhonda Magee has adapted contemplative practices to cultivate awareness of bias. Here is an example of a two-person practice, which she calls "Insight Dialogue." You can put this practice to work in a Facebook conversation or face-to-face with a partner.

1. Simply sit, bring awareness to breath, and notice any sounds that occur. We label them as sound, noticing perhaps when they arise and fall away, and any impact on the body, or tendency to go into a story about what the sound represents.

2. By developing this capacity to hear sound with less judgment, we enhance our capacity to hear words with an ear for the multi-dimensionality of the messages they convey.

3. Pause, allow thoughts to settle and open to the wisdom and honest truth that might support deepening connection, while trusting in the process of bringing awareness into the experience of being with another. Only then do we speak.

4. The listener settles into presence, creating a safe container in which the truth may be spoken. The speaker listens not merely for the words spoken, but also for the body language through which deep meaning is often conveyed.

PRO TIP

You might notice that your mind may start to wander. This is natural. Just notice that your mind has wandered and then gently redirect your attention back to your breathing. You might feel yourself having a strong emotional reaction to what a person says. This is also natural. Watch those feelings like you'd watch weather in the sky, knowing that weather changes.

WHY TRY IT

When we encounter strangers, we're prone to taking mental shortcuts in evaluating them—and sometimes, these shortcuts become stereotypes. *Asians are good at math, Muslims are terrorists.* Being mindful of these mental shortcuts can help us to see others in a less lazy, judgmental, cynical, or reactive way. In effect, practicing mindfulness encourages our minds to wake up and pay attention to the details that make other people unique. It can be a tool to strengthen our feelings of kindness and connection towards others—even those who are different than us.

KEEP IN MIND

There are many kinds of mindfulness practices, many of which you can find in our library of research-tested practices, Greater Good in Action (**ggia.berkeley.edu**). The culture of where you're bridging could play a role in the kind of mindfulness practices you do. A breathing exercise might not feel appropriate for an audience, so perhaps a walking meditation through a nearby park would be a better alternative.

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THE SKILL IN PRACTICE:

The Engaged Mindfulness Institute trains professionals and volunteers to use trauma-informed mindfulness practices as they support individuals and communities that have been marginalized and underserved.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Price-Blackshear, M. A. et al (2017). Mindfulness practices moderate the association between intergroup anxiety and outgroup attitudes. *Mindfulness*, 8(5), 1172-1183. **http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0689-y**
- Lueke, Adam & Gibson, Bryan. (2014). Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias. Social Psychological and Personality Science. 6. 10.1177/1948550614559651.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

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- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Perspective Taking

Imagining the perspective of someone from a different group—trying to see the world through their eyes and understand where they're coming from—improves our attitudes toward that other group and makes us less likely to see them as the "Other." However, for members of groups with less social power, giving their perspective to a member of a higher-status group might do more to improve their attitudes toward that group.

HOW TO DO IT

Perspective taking is an excellent skill to practice when you're in conflict with someone. But in the heat of an argument, it can be hard to have the presence of mind to pause and see the world through their eyes.

That's why it's helpful to practice the steps below during more relaxed moments, when you're feeling less stressed, angry, or defensive--then work your way up to deploying this skill in moments of conflict or division.

1. Pick a person from whom you feel estranged or with whom you might be at odds--perhaps they have different political beliefs than yours, or they're not part of your ethnic or religious group, or perhaps they're a close friend or family member with whom you're having an argument.

2. Imagine for a moment that you are this person, walking through the world in their shoes and seeing the world through their eyes. If you're present with this person, think about how you, as this person, would experience that shared situation; if you're not together, try to recall a moment that you shared, or imagine where they might be. What does the world look like from their point of view?

3. As clearly and vividly as possible, try to imagine how it feels to be them. What emotions are they experiencing, and how might that feel in their body? How might their feelings in the situation differ from yours? Can you imagine how their own unique life experiences could contribute to their own particular emotional response?

4. If you're in a debate with this person, try to imagine taking their side and formulate an argument on their behalf. You might have an "a-ha" moment that reveals nuances about their point of view.

5. If you have the time and capacity, even try to imagine a day in the life of this person as if you were them, looking at the world through their eyes and walking through the world in their shoes.

PRO TIP

Perspective taking doesn't necessarily require direct interaction: We can practice it by seeing the world through the eyes of a character in a book, movie, or another form of storytelling.

WHY TRY IT

Negative attitudes toward other people or groups often stem from the limits of our own perspectives: We get so caught up in our way of seeing the world that we dismiss or even dehumanize people who might see things differently. Deliberately trying to take someone else's perspective can not only help us better understand where they're coming from and empathize with them but also make them seem less foreign or alien to us--it reduces our tendency to stereotype people from other groups.

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KEEP IN MIND

Your sense of another person's perspective is often based on your own assumptions. We can never *truly* know what someone else's experience is, but imagining and asking them directly are important steps in the right direction.

And if you're a part of a group with less social power, it may be more important to offer your perspective—to feel heard—rather than try to take the perspective of someone from another, more powerful group. Research suggests that, in these situations, this "perspective giving" may do more than "perspective taking" to improve attitudes toward the other, higher-status group.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

- **Narrative 4** builds connections between individuals from different cultures by connecting them through shared storytelling. One of their projects **introduced students** from the Bronx in New York City to students in a rural district in Eastern Kentucky.

- **All Sides** is a website that works to widen perspectives by introducing readers to how different sides of the political spectrum report on and discuss news events. The organization help put together **Mismatch**, a resource that pairs people of different perspectives to have conversations, **focusing on American classrooms**.

- **The National Conflict Resolution Center's** (NCRC) works with thousands of individuals worldwide in mediation and conflict resolution settings, encouraging both perspective taking and perspective giving as a means upon which to resolve tensions.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Galinsky, A. D., & Moskowitz, G. B. (2000). Perspective-taking: Decreasing stereotype expression, stereotype accessibility, and in-group favoritism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(4), 708-724. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.78.4.708.

- Bruneau, E. G., & Saxe, R. (2012). The power of being heard: The benefits of 'perspective-giving' in the context of intergroup conflict. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(4), 855-866.

TO READ MORE

Perspective taking is a key part of empathizing with other people. Check out the Greater Good Science Center's **Empathy Definition** page for more on the science and practice of empathy.

People Before Politics

It can be hard to have constructive, political conversations--especially when we're often quick to stereotype people based on their political views. But if you get to know the other person first as an individual, and perhaps even better understand why they developed their perspective, the conversation is likely to be more productive.

HOW TO DO IT

Many of us have been there: We're at a dinner with strangers when someone starts talking politics, and it's not long before tempers flare and insults get hurled across the table.

When you encounter someone who seems like their views differ from yours—perhaps because they're carrying a National Public Radio tote bag or wearing a Make America Great Again hat—it can be tempting to dig into a political conversation. But if you actually want to have a productive dialogue, you'll be well-served by steering clear of politics and first learning more about them--and sharing more about yourself.

You can start by asking questions that uncover stories and experiences. The People's Supper uses these discussion questions to bring diverse groups together to share a meal, which are great suggestions to learn more about people before politics:

- Tell us about a moment in which you've been made to feel unwelcome, or misunderstood.
- Tell us about someone from this community who makes you proud to call this place home.
- Share a story about someone you love but with whom you disagree about something.
- Tell us about a common misconception or belief people on the outside hold about our community. Describe an experience you've had that would surprise them.
- Tell us about a recent experience that gave you hope.
- If the conversations around politics are unavoidable, it's helpful to ask questions like, "How did you develop this belief?" or "Who impacted the way you see the world the most in your life?" These questions help them focus on the reasons behind their views, which builds more understanding and deeper relationships with those we disagree with.

WHY TRY IT

When you see the person before you as a three-dimensional human rather than an abstract representation of the Other, you're more likely to treat them with care and respect.

When you talk about a candidate you voted for or a policy you're in favor of, others might have assumptions about you because of those decisions. By getting to know people's stories and their upbringing, we build more empathy for them and are able to navigate difficult conversations more easily.

KEEP IN MIND

The questions we ask matter, and should be adapted based on the context. "We typically tailor the discussion questions to the particular community we work in," said Lennon Flowers from the People's Supper. Finally, it's important to remind people that they don't have to answer personal questions they aren't comfortable with. Depending on power dynamics or circumstances, getting to know people's backgrounds might feel threatening or unsafe—another reason why it's important to tailor questions.

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THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

- People's Supper organizes dinners for people across the political spectrum and prompts conversation over the meal with questions that focus on people before politics such as, "
- Sisterhood Of Salaam Shalom requires a pair of Muslim and Jewish women to spend a year getting to know each other before they talk about political issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

McDonald, M. et al (2017). Intergroup emotional similarity reduces dehumanization and promotes conciliatory attitudes in prolonged conflict. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20(1), 125–136. **https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430215595107**

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

AFTER YOU TRY IT

Then, after you've had the chance to try it out, consider these reflection questions:

- How did it feel to practice this skill? What, if any, positive impact did it have on you or others?
- What was difficult or challenging about it? What barriers did you face in applying it, and what other barriers do you anticipate in bringing it into another part of your life or work?
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- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Moral Reframing

If you're trying to appeal to people with a different ideology, try to discover what values resonate with them—then present your argument in terms of how it supports those values, not in terms of your own values.

HOW TO DO IT

First, it's important to make sure the values or morals you believe others have aren't based on your own assumptions or stereotypes. You can do this by asking questions like, "What are important values that you try to uphold in your life?" and "Who taught you those values, or what experiences formed those values for you?"

Next, think about how those values might be the same or different from your own; you might discover that you have more in common than you initially thought. If they seem very different, then consider how those values might shape the issues you care about. You don't need to agree with those values. The point of this exercise is to *understand* them.

You might then find yourself better able to argue for a certain position based on the other person's values. Even if you fail to persuade them to your position, you'll have gained something from arguing from a position of empathy rather than hostility.

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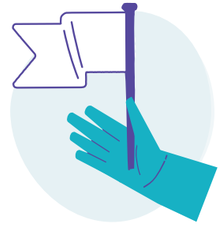
WHY TRY IT

Typically, when we discuss the issues we care about, we tend to give our own reasons, based on our own morals or values. However, we sometimes forget that the people we're talking to might not share these same morals or values. The purpose of this practice isn't to simply persuade another person to agree with you; rather, it's to help them understand where you're coming from and to understand where they're coming from. Ultimately, this practice enables you to have more civil and less polarizing political conversations, even if you don't ultimately agree on the issue.



KEEP IN MIND:

Moral reframing is a tool for understanding other people. It might also help you to win someone over to your position, but try to remember that understanding, not persuasion, is the goal.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE:

- The **Better Arguments Project** at the Aspen Institute aims to help Americans change the way they argue with eachother about political and social issues -- promoting a more constructive and respectful way to have disagreements.

- **Street Law** is an organization that helps classrooms and communities teach about law and government. Their **resources on deliberations** help facilitate conversations about some of the thorniest and most controversial topics in the context of a social studies classroom.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2015). From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(12), 1665–1681. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215607842

- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. (2009). Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations. J*ournal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 96. 1029-46. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015141

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

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Intergroup Contact

Don't underestimate the power of connection. When we come into contact with a member of a different group, we can build more positive attitudes toward that group—provided that four key conditions are met.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Think of two groups who are very different and normally do not come in contact with each other. They might have different interests, religious or political beliefs, or life experiences. This might even be two groups who are in conflict with each other.
2. Before making an invitation for these two groups to come together, set up the following four conditions:
- First, the interaction should have the support of legitimate authorities. This could, for instance, be a neutral mediator.
- Second, identify a common goal that the two parties share.
- Create a sense of interdependence—the parties should feel like they have a shared stake in meeting that goal, giving them incentive to cooperate.
- Lastly, create a sense of equal status. If, for instance, the contact involves a large number of people from one group simply lecturing a smaller number from another, it is unlikely to succeed in bridging differences.
3. Ensure you're not operating off your own assumptions. Run these set of conditions past each group and get their feedback. Make sure there's buy-in from both groups before you invite them to come together.
4. Finally, create a space for reflection so that you can learn from each intergroup experience and refine it for the next time.

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WHY TRY IT

When people from different groups are segregated from one another, stereotypes and prejudices about each other can take hold. Bringing together members of these groups, helping them get to know one other better--that's a fundamental way of reducing misperceptions and biases, and creating warmer feelings between them. In fact, research suggests even having a friend from your own group who befriend a member of a different group can reduce your own prejudices.

KEEP IN MIND

If people from different groups come into contact with each other and have a negative experience, that can actually reinforce and exacerbate tensions between them. Those negative interactions are more likely when the four conditions listed above aren't met. For instance, rapid increases in immigration that aren't accompanied by support from authorities can increase inter-ethnic conflict.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

The People's Supper project has brought together thousands of Americans of different backgrounds to meet each other by sharing a meal.

Seeds of Peace brings teenagers from both communities involved in a violent conflict to build friendships, engage in dialogue and work on shared goals at a summer camp in Maine.

The **One America Movement** uses community projects—such as tackling the opioid crisis in West Virginia—guided by faith institutions to build bridges across divisional lines.

- **Several studies** by University of Minnesota academic Edward Schiappa found that the presence of gay characters in major television programming was associated with less prejudice among viewers. Including gay characters in major television programming, millions of Americans were exposed to a group of people they wouldn't have met otherwise.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). **A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory**. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90(5), 751-783.
-
- Zhou, S., Page-Gould, E., Aron, A., Moyer, A., & Hewstone, M. (2019). **The Extended Contact Hypothesis: A Meta-Analysis on 20 Years of Research**. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 23(2), 132–160.

TO READ MORE

What Makes a Good Interaction Between Divided Groups? Intergroup contact can help bridge divides, under certain conditions.

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- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Identify Common Goals

When people from different groups identify a goal that they share, and they recognize that they need to work together to achieve that goal, they're capable of putting aside their differences to come together, replacing distrust with a spirit of goodwill. Though you may have disagreements, look for the goals that you have in common with members of other groups—and if you're in a position to bring different groups together, try to highlight for them the goals that they share.

HOW TO DO IT

One way to help people identify common goals is to call their attention to a big problem that is affecting both of them. There are subtle ways that you can call people's attention to the common goals they might actually share with those who they see as being different from themselves.

1. **Strengthen relationships grounded in trust and open-mindedness.** "The starting point is getting in the same mind space and having the right kinds of trusting relationships," said Steven Olikara from Millennial Action Project, which brings legislators across the partisan divide together to identify common goals and support solutions in their community. "You can only start to listen to new ideas if you really trust the source...that really starts by having a trusting relationship," Steven added.

2. **Identify individual goals.** Start by asking everyone to take a few minutes to individually write down their individual goals and what they sense might be common goals shared among all members of the group. Then, each person in the group shares their responses. When someone is sharing, the other group participants should practice active listening and not interrupt or respond to the goals presented.

3. **Discuss and workshop until you've identified common goals.** The goals shared might seem different, but if you dig deeper as a group, you'll discover overlaps. This is exactly what happened for Millennial Action Project's work in Iowa as they brought legislators together to do renewable energy projects in the state. Republican legislators were on board because of the high paying employment and economic opportunities. Democratic legislators were on board because it was a concrete action to address climate change.

4. **Discuss the nuts and bolts involved with accomplishing these common goals, and learn how others have been successful in the past.** After they identified this common goal in Iowa, legislators then embarked on a renewable energy tour together to listen and learn from existing efforts. One example that happened at a recent Millennial Action Project summit was a legislator in Ohio who methodologically explained how he framed these common goals to constituency who have different values.

WHY TRY IT

People are often hesitant to work with—or even interact with—people they see as different from themselves. To overcome that resistance, it can be useful to appeal to their enlightened self-interest, helping them see how those other people can actually help them achieve goals that they share. Even if they have trouble identifying commonalities in their backgrounds, identities, or other traits, focusing on common goals can shift their perceptions of one another--from adversaries to collaborators who are part of the same team.

Greater Good Science Center

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KEEP IN MIND

If you have the opportunity—for instance, if you're working with youth in a school or camp—you could even create a problem, with the goal of motivating two separate groups to realize that they have to work together around a common goal. This is what researchers did during a famous experiment in the 1950s, when they brought boys to a summer camp and divided them into rival groups, but then informed them that there was a problem affecting the entire camp (a threat to the water supply) that could only be solved by working together. They put aside their differences to solve their common goal. This won't work in every context, but it might be possible for some to create a problem that leads to identifying common goals.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

- The Millennial Action Project brings millennial legislators across partisan divides to identify common goals, future-focused solutions and necessary democracy reforms.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

Sherif, M. (1958). Superordinate goals in the reduction of intergroup conflict. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(4), 349-356.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

AFTER YOU TRY IT

Then, after you've had the chance to try it out, consider these reflection questions:

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- What was difficult or challenging about it? What barriers did you face in applying it, and what other barriers do you anticipate in bringing it into another part of your life or work?
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- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Focus on Solutions, not Identities

To reduce polarization, don't fixate on the identities someone brings with them into a conversation--that might only reinforce partisan divides. Instead, zero in on the issues affecting your community or country, and share your ideas for solutions. You might be surprised by how your ideas overlap.

HOW TO DO IT

This is an especially useful activity to try when you're bringing together people from different, supposedly "opposing" groups. They might be inclined to focus on the other person's identity--they're a Republican, she's Muslim, he's Latino---and make all kinds of assumptions based on that identity, putting themselves on edge before the interaction even begins. Whether you're facilitating this conversation--or participating in this conversation yourself--your goal is to transcend those assumptions and biases as quickly as possible, and instead surface the issues that actually matter to each person--and the solutions that they have in mind.

- First, start by understanding the issues and problems people would like to address. Everyone might have a different priority--for one person it might be improving the educational system, for others it might be more accessible health care--but it's important for everyone to share their perspective.

- Then, start to get more nuanced and specific about those problems--eg, ask questions like, "What about the educational system would you like to see change?" This breaks down the issue into something more digestible. Try to understand as much as you can about why they're interested in that issue. Think about using questions like, "Why is this issue important to you?" or "What are examples of how this issue is affecting people's lives?"

- Finally, invite suggestions for solutions to these problems. Talking about solutions can highlight how people from seemingly disparate groups are actually more aligned in their views than they might think. It can also build empathy across group lines as people more deeply appreciate one another's experiences and perspectives. And it can inspire hope and optimism as they rally around the shared desire to tackle issues they both care about.

WHY TRY IT

People often agree on the issues affecting their communities, and have similar ideas for the solutions to those problems, yet they still feel like they're at odds with one another based on their social or cultural identities. This has become an even greater problem in recent years, when people have developed more partisan political identities even though their actual positions on the issues haven't changed much--they have the sense that they're more different from one another than they actually are. That's why focusing on solutions instead of identities can make those conversations less charged and create a deeper sense of unity, as people appreciate the actual agreements they have.

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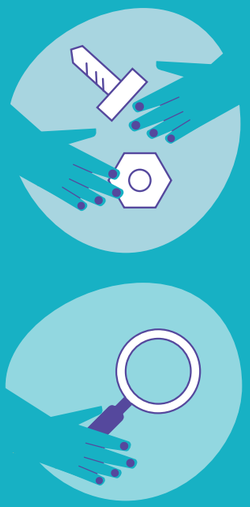
KEEP IN MIND

Sometimes it's important simply to create opportunities for people to talk candidly about the issues affecting them, and not feel forced to introduce solutions where no easy solution exist. It's important at least to understand what problems we're all trying to address, and deeper discussions can unearth new insights and approaches to solve these issues.



THE SKILL IN PRACTICE:

- The **Millennial Action** Project connects millennial lawmakers across party lines at the state and national level to work on policy solutions and democratic reforms aimed at solving some of America's biggest problems.
- **Convergence** is a nonpartisan organization that brings together a diverse set of stakeholders from across the ideological spectrum to identify problems and devise policy solutions.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Mason, L. (2015). "I Disrespectfully Agree": The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization. American Journal of Political Science, 59(1), 128-145. Retrieved from **http://www.jstor.org/stable/24363600**

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

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Focus on Individuality

We often see others in terms of their group membership: he's old, she's white, they're immigrants. But according to research, when we view people in terms of their own individual tastes and preferences, we feel less threatened by those who might seem "not like us."

HOW TO DO IT

The essence of this practice is to shift away from seeing another person as an anonymous member of a group and instead view them as a unique human being. This could mean looking for those features and quirks that define them as an individual, just like you.

To get into that mindset, ask yourself questions about that person's particular tastes and preferences. You don't need to discover the actual answers to those questions—just thinking about them can be enough. For instance:

- What's their favorite vegetable?
- Do they prefer dogs or cats?
- How do they like to exercise?
- What's their favorite color?
- What do they like better, staying up late or waking up early?

PRO TIP

Be aware of the tell-tale signs that you're feeling threatened: faster heart rate, quicker breaths, sweat. If those happen when you meet someone new, it's time to try this practice!

Greater Good Science Center

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WHY TRY IT

When you encounter someone new, you might be quick to categorize them by their race, gender, age, political party, or other group identity. That makes you more likely to see them as an "Other"—someone not like you—and feel threatened. The practice described here reduces that fearful response, fostering a greater sense of connection and making your own experience less stressful.

KEEP IN MIND

The key to shifting your perspective is to humanize the other person, giving them more individual features and agency, rather than seeing them as a monolithic group member. So you might want to avoid questions that center on their passive social identities—Are they over or under 21?—and focus more on the active choices and preferences they express.

Similarly, try to avoid questions that can elicit cultural stereotypes. For instance, thinking about someone's favorite genre of music might just invoke the group identities of "country music lover" or "hip hop fan" and all the associations we may have with them.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

Narrative 4 brings together diverse groups of people through storytelling. One project, for instance, encourages students from the Bronx, Eastern Kentucky, and Mexico to befriend each other through virtual discussion sessions.

Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom forms bonds between Jewish and Muslim people in the United States, Canada, and England through interfaith exchange programs designed to create lasting friendships.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2007). **Social groups that elicit disgust are differentially processed in mPFC.** *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 2(1), 45–51.

- Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2009). **Social neuroscience evidence for dehumanised perception**, *European Review of Social Psychology*, 20:1, 192-231.

TO READ MORE

How to Beat Stereotypes by Seeing People as Individuals

We often judge people by their group membership—but research suggests another way to view each other.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

AFTER YOU TRY IT

Then, after you've had the chance to try it out, consider these reflection questions:

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- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?

Find Shared Identities

Even when someone seems different from you, chances are you can find at least one important identity you have in common—it could be a group you both belong to (you're both Midwesterners) or a role you share (you're both parents). Often those shared identities are bigger and more significant than our differences. For instance, you might root for different soccer teams, but you're both soccer fans. Instead of focusing on the differences, try to find those important threads of similarity.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Before you meet with someone who seems different from you--or even during or after your interaction, is possible--make a list of the defining characteristics that you share in common with this person. These could be groups to which you both belong or identities that shape how you see yourself. Perhaps you both work or live in the same community. Maybe you are a part of different religious communities but both believe strongly in faith as a value. Maybe you have different political views but you are both active participants in the democratic process. You can make this list in your head, but best to write it down.

2. Review this list of shared identities—ideally do it together. Do they feel accurate? Are there any identities missing from the list?

3. Consider: How do these shared identities make you see this person in a new light? If possible, talk with the other person about how your list impacts the way you see each other.

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WHY TRY IT

Focusing on a shared identity allows people from distinct groups to bridge their differences by widening their sense of who they are and who is part of their "tribe." Research suggests that when we identify our commonalities, without necessarily suppressing what makes us different, we are more generous, empathic, and helpful toward other people.

KEEP IN MIND

Members of marginalized communities may not benefit from being asked to identify with members of a dominant group. If they feel that their identities or concerns are being made invisible by the larger group identity, that can harm their psychological well-being and even undermine their willingness to participate in the larger collective.

It's also important not to suppress our own varied identities in the interest of finding a bigger shared identity. For instance, at an interfaith forum between Muslims and Christians, you should acknowledge the differences between these faiths (such as their distinct practices and worldviews) while encouraging parishioners to discuss where their faiths overlap (such as a belief in monotheism)

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

- **Citizen University** hosts programs designed to foster civic renewal and a shared sense of purpose among Americans. Its programs include Civic Saturday, where diverse people come together to build a shared sense of community and citizenship, celebrating the civic values that bind them to one another.

- **Better Angels** seeks to reduce political polarization in the United States by bringing liberals and conservatives together to understand each other beyond stereotypes, forming red/blue community alliances, teaching practical skills for communicating across political differences, and making a strong public argument for depolarization.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

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- Nier, J. A. et al (2001). **Changing interracial evaluations and behavior: The effects of a common group identity.** *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 4, 299-316.

TO READ MORE

How Americans Can Find What They Have in Common Can we bridge differences without suppressing what makes us different in the first place? Yes, say social scientists and civic organizations.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

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Seek and Promote Counter-Stereotypical Information

As we're exposed to information that challenges the stereotypes we hold, our views can change and our attitudes toward other groups can become more positive.

HOW TO DO IT

It's important to start by acknowledging we do hold stereotypes about individuals, based on their group identities. If we become more aware of the stereotypes we hold, we can ask where they come from. The next step is to go out of your way to find counter-stereotypical information that can challenge these assumptions.

You could take a direct approach by getting to know someone who is a part of a different group. You can ask, "What's a common misconception or stereotype people on the outside have about you because of the groups (e.g., race, faith or gender—as examples) you belong to?" You can follow up with a question like, "What experience did you have that would counter their stereotype?"

You can also make a deliberate effort to expose yourself to counter-stereotypical information through the news or content you consume. For instance, if you notice you have stereotypes about hunters and anglers—you think they don't care about the environment, for instance—you could learn more about organizations where communities of anglers are protecting rivers and oceans from pollutants.

PRO TIP

The goal of exposing ourselves to counter-stereotypical information is to challenge our own assumptions and broaden our perspectives, not to create new stereotypes.

WHY TRY IT

Our assumptions about other people are often based on available stereotypes, perhaps ones you've seen in the media or heard from friends. For example, we might have a perspective from the news about refugees but never met one in real life.

We can expose ourselves (and others) to counter-stereotypical information by replacing our general impressions with first-hand experiences and understanding--for instance, instead of just relying on others' accounts of refugees, we can try to meet them in person, attend a public hearing with the voices of refugees present, or read more detailed accounts about refugee experiences.

KEEP IN MIND

Questions you have for people unfamiliar to you might betray your stereotypes about them, which could feel offensive. It's important to clearly state your intentions up front for asking those questions and remind them it's acceptable to choose not to respond. You should also try to be patient with irritation at your ignorance. Even if that conversation is difficult, you'll be better equipped to have another one.

Greater Good Science Center

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RESEARCH BEHIND IT

Paolini, S., Wright, S. C., Dys-Steenbergen, O., & Favara, I. (2016). Self-expansion and intergroup contact: Expectancies and motives to self-expand lead to greater interest in outgroup contact and more positive intergroup relations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(3), 450-471.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE:

- **Better Angels** holds events all over America to engage liberals and conservatives in thoughtful and empathetic conversations. One of their projects, the **Red-Blue Workshops**, enlist 5-7 Democrats and 5-7 Republicans to attend day-long events designed to understand the other side's experiences and points of view.

- **Encore.org** works to break down stereotypes about the elderly. Its **Gen2Gen** program connects young people with elders through entrepreneurship and volunteering -- bridging divides between generations in the process.

- **Junior State of America** works with high school students to get them involved in civic activism and leadership. Their **school chapters** plan events such as voter registration drives and community service projects.

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

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Expand Your Activities, Expand Your Views

Through exposure to new people, events, and experiences, we can broaden our own sense of what's comfortable and familiar to us. Popular ways to do this include traveling or consuming media outside of your typical feed.

HOW TO DO IT

In many respects, this exercise is really just a matter of living life to its fullest. Move toward the things that make you uncomfortable, just to see what happens.

Do you tend to have a low opinion of gun owners? Pay a visit to the local shooting range and sign up for lessons. If it's liberals you don't like, consider attending panel discussions hosted by liberal organizations.

It's important to approach these events with questions and an open mind. Don't arrive hoping to make other people like you, or looking for things to criticize. The next step, beyond that, is to bring others like you into your new experiences. In this way, you can reduce misperceptions and biases, and create warmer feelings between people.

WHY TRY IT

We tend to fall into ruts, becoming complacent about how we see the world and other people. If we're always doing and reading what seems familiar, and hanging around people who make us feel comfortable, then prejudices and stereotypes are more likely to fester. But breaking out of your comfort zone can help you to grow and expand your personal identity--and perhaps break down some social barriers. In fact, research suggests even having a friend from your own group befriend a member of a different group can reduce your own prejudices.

KEEP IN MIND

Superficial exposure will have limited impact; it often requires deeper, ongoing engagement.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

We are still working on this section, and we would appreciate your input on it. Please send your ideas to us at **greater@berkeley.edu**, with "Bridging Differences Playbook" in the subject line.

Greater Good Science Center

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RESEARCH BEHIND IT

Dys-Steenbergen, O., Wright, S. C., & Aron, A. (2015). Self-expansion motivation improves cross-group interactions and enhances self-growth. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 19, 60–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430215583517

Page-Gould, E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). With a little help from my cross-group friend: Reducing anxiety in intergroup contexts through cross-group friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1080-1094. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1080

TO READ MORE

How Americans Can Find What They Have in Common Can we bridge differences without suppressing what makes us different in the first place? Yes, say social scientists and civic organizations.

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Assume Good Intentions

Entering a conversation with the sense that the other person dislikes or distrusts you—or has a nefarious agenda—will likely put you in an anxious mindset that negatively affects your interaction. By suspending your judgment and assuming that the other person is approaching your interaction from a place of goodwill, the interaction will likely be better for both of you.

HOW TO DO IT

This practice can be done before or during an interaction. Before you engage with someone across difference, try to assume that their intentions are good and positive.

PRO TIP

Set the expectation to assume good intent at the beginning of your interaction to be clear about the mindsets you'd like everyone to adopt.

The next time you feel slighted during an interaction, stop yourself from taking offense and instead try to hear the underlying comment for what it was intended to be.

Recognize that your assumptions about others and their intentions can be shaped by your own past experiences of prejudice or mistreatment. Try to detach yourself from these experiences and remind yourself that the person you are meeting is not the person who mistreated you.

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WHY TRY IT

We often instinctively assume that if an interaction makes us feel bad, then the other person must have intended to make us feel that way. This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that causes others to distrust you. However, by assuming good intentions, we can sidestep any hurt we might feel and instead focus on the issues that are being raised in the discussion. This practice reduces the perception of threat—and can help you to connect with people who are different from you.

KEEP IN MIND

Sometimes, people do have bad intentions. Try to remember, however, that this is rare.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE

- **Spaceship Media** works with media organizations to journalism-supported conversation across divides. Their **Alabama-California Conversation** brought together women from California who voted for Hillary Clinton and women in Alabama who voted for Donald Trump for a two-month collaboration designed to break down stereotypes about the other side.
- The **National Institute for Civil Discourse** works to promote civil and productive dialogue about politics and contentious social issues. Its **National Civility Network** is composed of a dozen university institutes and centers that work to tackle political dysfunction and incivility.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Turner, R. N., & Cameron, L. (2016). Confidence in contact: A new perspective on promoting cross-group friendship among children and adolescents. Social Issues and Policy Review, 10(1), 212–246. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12023

- Trawalter, S., Adam, E. K., Chase-Lansdale, P. L., & Richeson, J. A.(2012). Concerns about appearing prejudiced get under the skin: Stress responses to interracial contact in the moment and across time. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48(3), 682–693. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.12.003

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BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

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Active Listening

We're more likely to want to bridge our differences with someone when we feel heard and understood by them--and we're more effective at connecting with someone when we really listen to where they're coming from. This practice helps you tune into what someone else is saying and convey that you're paying attention to them. It's a useful skill for fostering empathy and connection in our everyday lives, especially in difficult conversations.

HOW TO DO IT

Find a quiet place where you can talk with someone without interruption or distraction. Invite them to share what's on their mind. As they talk, try to follow the steps below. You don't need to cover every step, but the more you do cover, the more effective this practice is likely to be.

1. Paraphrase. Once the other person has finished expressing a thought, paraphrase what he or she said to make sure you understand and to show that you are paying attention. Helpful ways to paraphrase include "What I hear you saying is...," "It sounds like...," and "If I understand you right...."

2. Ask questions. When appropriate, ask questions to encourage the other person to elaborate on his or her thoughts and feelings. Avoid jumping to conclusions about what the other person means. Instead, ask questions to clarify his or her meaning, such as, "When you say_____, do you mean_____?"

3. Express empathy. If the other person voices negative feelings, strive to validate these feelings rather than questioning or defending against them. For example, if the speaker expresses frustration, try to consider why he or she feels that way, regardless of whether you think that feeling is justified or whether you would feel that way yourself were you in his or her position. You might respond, "I can sense that you're feeling frustrated," and even "I can understand how that situation could cause frustration."

4. Use engaged body language. Show that you are engaged and interested by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining an open and relaxed body posture. Avoid attending to distractions in your environment or checking your phone. Be mindful of your facial expressions: Avoid expressions that might communicate disapproval or disgust.

5. Take turns. After the other person has had a chance to speak and you have performed the active listening steps above, ask if it's okay for you to share your perspective. When sharing your perspective, express yourself as clearly as possible using "I" statements (e.g., "I feel overwhelmed when you don't help out around the house"). It may also be helpful, when relevant, to express empathy for the other person's perspective.

WHY TRY IT

Often we'll listen to someone without really hearing them. In the process, we miss opportunities to connect with that person—and even risk making him or her feel neglected, disrespected, and resentful. That can complicate any attempt to bridge differences with them. This exercise helps you express active interest in what the other person has to say and make him or her feel heard—a way to foster empathy and connection. This technique is especially well-suited for difficult conversations.

KEEP IN MIND

When you're listening, try to avoid expressing judgements or giving advice. Your goal is to understand the other person's perspective and accept it for what it is, even if you

Greater Good Science Center

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disagree with it. Try not to interrupt with counter-arguments or mentally prepare a rebuttal while the other person is speaking. And problem-solving or advice-giving is likely to be more effective after both partners understand one another's perspective and feel heard.

THE SKILL IN PRACTICE:

- The **Sustained Dialogue** Institute conducts workshops and trainings designed to teach people how to talk across differences. Their **Sustained Dialogue Campus Network** operates on 62 college campuses worldwide, helping communities bridge divides that exist among student bodies.
- **Resetting the Table** runs forums, workshops, and town squares to facilitate dialogue on controversial issues and heated topics. **One of its programs** targeted Midwestern counties that swung from Obama to Trump during the 2016 election; it brought together hundreds of people in Iowa and Wisconsin to discuss topics such as immigration and health care across differences.
- **StoryCorps** records the stories of Americans and syndicates them through public radio channels. Its **One Small Step** program invites people with differing political views to interview each other to encourage listening from outside your own perspective.

RESEARCH BEHIND IT

- Weger, H., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. International Journal of Listening, 28(1), 13-31. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2013.813234**

BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Now that you've learned more about this skill, think about where and how you could apply it. How might it *already* show up in your life or work—for instance, in a close relationship or work in your community—and where could it come in handy? Be specific.

AFTER YOU TRY IT

Then, after you've had the chance to try it out, consider these reflection questions:

- How did it feel to practice this skill? What, if any, positive impact did it have on you or others?
- What was difficult or challenging about it? What barriers did you face in applying it, and what other barriers do you anticipate in bringing it into another part of your life or work?
- What was unclear about it? What questions do you have about its steps or its overall purpose?
- How might you improve upon it? Is there anything you'd suggest adding, revising, or removing in order to make it feel more relevant or effective?
- In what situations—in your personal life, work or community—could you imagine using this practice in the future?