

Candid Conversations: Israel/Palestine Conflict Discussion Group

Goals, Guidelines, and What to Expect

Facilitated by Soren Barnett

Note: These goals and guidelines are subject to change as I work to improve this conversation space, incorporate feedback, and experiment with what best serves the group. Please be patient with me through this process.

Join the WhatsApp announcement channel here: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/JDv1CGgq78741fV7Qesglk>

My Goals

1. First and foremost, to provide a constructive and inviting space for myself and others of varying perspectives to express ourselves, process, and explore this challenging topic.
2. To provide a space that allows for open exploration and increased understanding of participants' own perspectives and those of others.
3. To support the practice of healthy conversation and disagreement habits, with a focus on listening and curiosity.
4. I want each participant to leave the discussion feeling: respected, genuinely listened to, like their emotions and perspectives were recognized and valued, like they felt comfortable expressing themselves in the group, that they learned something new or are thinking about something in a new way, like they are more curious about something the group explored, and empowered to be more comfortable discussing and engaging around this topic in other settings.

Guidelines

1. In order to support a constructive discussion, we will have one speaker at a time. I ask that participants use the "raise hand" feature and wait to be called on before speaking, unless specified otherwise.
2. Speak from the I perspective.
3. Assume generously of others and practice humility. Most people are not looking to cause harm. And we don't know what information or life experiences have shaped others' perspectives.
4. Rather than listening for what you agree or disagree with from another's perspective, try listening for what you can learn from their perspective, or what in their perspectives feels challenging for you.
5. Based on my knowledge, experience, and multi-faceted beliefs* around conflict navigation and this topic, as well as toward the goals outlined above, I aim to censor little and thus will offer a fairly high level of tolerance for statements and perspectives that some (including myself) may find challenging or offensive. This includes words and terms associated with this topic that are highly controversial and emotionally charged. In respecting the open expression of others, I invite us all to let ourselves feel challenged and to notice our emotional responses. We then get to explore together the statement/perspective in order to better understand the participant's intention and to see it from different angles.
6. If someone says something particularly hurtful or offensive, you can private message me in the Zoom chat. When I think it's feasible and/or appropriate, I will seek to address or explore the hurtful comment more thoroughly in the session or follow up with the respective participants afterward.
7. That said, personal attacks or speech that indicates a clear intention to hurt others will not be tolerated. I reserve the right to interrupt and/or remove any participant who does not follow this

guideline. If you would like to follow up about something that was or was not addressed, feel free to include it in the feedback form or to email me at orchidconflictcoaching@gmail.com.

8. This topic and the perspectives we might explore can be quite emotionally challenging. Sometimes we need space/time before we feel ready to come back constructively to the table. So please feel free to take a break or step away as needed.
9. Want to invite a friend? You are welcome to share the WhatsApp channel link (found at the top of this document) or the flyer with others! However, for security purposes, please do not share the Zoom links with others, as I want each attendee to sign up individually.

What to Expect

- Biweekly conversations will take place on **Tuesdays, 7-8 pm EST**. They will be facilitated by Soren Barnett and will be highly structured, consisting of mixed opportunities for personal reflection, sharing, and conversation based on provided prompts.
- This group is drop-in, so feel free to join on any week that suits you or your schedule. Each week, I will try to balance creating a space that is helpful for new folks with also building upon the previous week's discussions, in part through spending a portion of each session exploring a different subtopic or theme.
- One or two days before each conversation, I will send a reminder via the WhatsApp announcement group, along with the Zoom sign-up link for that week's session and that week's subtopic/theme. After each conversation, I will share an anonymous-optional feedback form for the conversation.
- You can join the WhatsApp announcement channel at the following link. This channel will contain all reminders, information, updates, and changes from me:
<https://chat.whatsapp.com/JDv1CGgq78741fV7Qesglk>
- All participants are expected to have read and to follow the guidelines above.
- Any additional questions or concerns can be directed to orchidconflictcoaching@gmail.com.

*Some insights and beliefs underpinning my guidelines for this space:

- Sometimes, only once we are able to fully express our viewpoint (including in its most extreme iteration), can we then become more able to listen to others and even let our beliefs start to moderate or shift.
- Sometimes, arguments of substance that deserve real consideration and grappling unfortunately lie behind a more distasteful or extreme "headline" statement. It is like the volume of an iceberg that remains unseen beneath the water's surface - it is important to continue exploring beneath that visible tip.
- Even when we disagree or feel offended, we can benefit from honestly grappling with the reality of and more deeply exploring the opinions in the room, rather than silencing a person or silo-ing ourselves into comfortable chambers of agreement. Though this might not be the best option for everyone all the time, when we feel ready, it can be a transformative learning opportunity to explore and better understand how someone arrived at their belief.
- The controversial and emotionally charged words and terms on this topic hold several different definitions or understandings in popular discourse, which contributes to their controversy regarding appropriateness. The language both does matter and sometimes doesn't matter. It will thus be valuable for us to assume generously of others, assume initially that we might not know precisely what the speaker means or believes with the use of any such term, and remain open, continue listening to others, and focus on the main conversation goals, even if we disagree with the applicability of or feel hurt by a term.