

# Curious Conversations: Just the Basics

Suggestions for how to have a fearlessly curious courageous conversation.

Adapted from “I Never Thought of It That Way” by Mónica Guzmán

For details on these tips, and much more, please see the book summary posted on the Atonement website: [\[link\]](#) or read the book. The intended goal of these conversations is to be open, to *learn* from others, to build bridges for greater understanding through honesty, curiosity and respect.

## Curiosity

A productive conversation starts with curiosity. Ask “what am I missing?”

1. **Find the gap** between what you know and what you want to know.
2. **Gather knowledge.** Putting yourself in an unfamiliar place in order to see the gaps between what you don’t know (and often assume) and what you want to know.
3. **Embrace complexity.** Reframe confusion as complexity, Ask questions.
4. **Reject easy answers.** Consider the opinions and stories of others. Do not simply dismiss any point of disagreement.

## Build Bridges, Not Walls

Seek a path to understanding, even in disagreement.

1. **Have the conversation in-person, if at all possible.** Start and stay at “the table.”
2. **Sufficient time must be available** to give both people the opportunity to tell their story and get the conversation started. (The conversation may become a series.)
3. **Attention must be given—be present and listen.** Invest your attention in what they are saying in order to learn, rather than just to plan your response.
4. **Parity.** 1-on-1 conversation on level ground (Equal status or equal speaking time.)
5. **Containment.** Keep the conversation between the parties involved.
6. **Embodiment.** Pay attention to the other person’s expressions and body language.

## Dos and don’ts to prevent getting bogged down or derailed:

### Do:

- ☐ **Listen** for the meaning people are trying to share.
- ☐ **Observe** the whole person who is speaking.
- ☐ **Offer** your thoughts for consideration, rather than imparting a “truth.”
- ☐ **Pull** (draw out) information. Allow the other person to offer their story.

### Don’t:

- ☐ **Make assumptions.** Let the other person tell you their how and why.
- ☐ **Insist** on your way or the highway.
- ☐ **Push** continuous point-counterpoint challenges.
- ☐ **Stomp** out complexity, over-simplifying the other’s position.

## Listen, listen, listen . . .

1. **To their story** with full attention to how they arrived where they are.

2. **For the values** behind the opinion. Recognize that while you share values, your values hierarchy may differ.
3. **In order to learn** and close the gap between what you don't know and what you want to know.