Real Talk About Abortion: Conversation Starters

The Abortion Conversation Projects encourages open and honest discussions about abortion. We are abortion providers and allies who believe that our country desperately needs a different dialog about abortion. The following conversation starters may help you have productive conversations with others about abortion and all reproductive choices.

Two Observations

1. Abortion is the most divisive social issue in the US.
   The abortion debate has polarized people to the point that most folks will not discuss it in ordinary conversation. Yet the extreme right wing uses the issue to push a radical agenda on the economy, war, and infringement of people’s civil rights.

2. People who are making a decision about a pregnancy are silenced.
   Even though more than a third of all women will have an abortion in their lifetimes, many individuals feel alone and isolated. Society shames them into secrecy and they have difficulty finding a safe place to share their feelings. Girls, women, and transgender individuals — and the partners, friends, and family supporting them — are stigmatized for choosing abortion.

Individuals and society at large need open, honest, judgment-free conversations about abortion.

The Abortion Conversation Projects offers this brief guide to help you talk about abortion in your own community. Engage friends, classmates, colleagues, and fellow activists to end the silence about our reproductive experiences.

Ground Rules

First, create a safe space. Every conversation should begin by setting ground rules that will ensure respectful and dignified communication. Here are some common rules:

• Listen actively and without judgment, taking turns of about 3 to 5 minutes.
• Summarize what you hear in your own words to ensure understanding. Ask if you got it right.
• Use “I” sentences to focus on your own experiences and to avoid generalizing about others.
• Have courage to question what you hear, but focus on clarifying ideas, not challenging the speaker.
• Be aware of body language to keep it respectful.
• Allow silence that gives time for others to think.
• Remember that the goal is mutual understanding, not agreement.
• Keep conversations confidential unless you get permission to share.

Conversation 1: Why abortion access for all?

• Is there an event in your life that moves you to advocate for abortion access and reproductive justice? What is it? Please tell the story.
• How do you think inequalities around gender, race, and economics impact people's reproductive experiences?
• What do you think marches and rallies can accomplish?

**Conversation 2: Talking about abortion**

• Has anyone ever talked to you about having an abortion, or asked you for help?
• Do you think it is difficult for people who need an abortion to ask for information or support?
• Are you someone they might want to talk to? How do you let your friends, coworkers, your children or their friends know that you are open to talking about abortion or any other reproductive topic?
• Tell about an experience of abortion -- either your own or someone else's. What was the situation? Was there support?
• Do you think that it is difficult to talk about abortion right now, even among fellow activists or supportive friends? Take a minute to think about why this is.
• What does having an abortion mean? What feelings does it bring up?

**Conversation 3: Pregnant?**

• Have you ever been pregnant, or missed a period and had a pregnancy “scare?” Talk about when you were trying to decide what was right for you, regardless of your eventual choice.
• If you have never been pregnant, talk about how it would be if you just discovered you (or your partner or child) were pregnant right now.
• You don’t need to tell what you would do, but share what would come up for you regarding your relationship, family, career, education, hopes, goals, and dreams.
• What is the “gift” (benefit) that abortion has given to us? What is the hard part?

**Conversation 4: Carrying it on**

• What encourages or discourages you from identifying as an advocate for abortion access among your friends, family, coworkers, classmates, neighbors?
• What do you see as the next step in helping people have constructive conversations about abortion and other reproductive experiences?
• If you could sum up your conversations into a statement for a bumper sticker or sign, what would it be?