

Guide to Hosting Interracial Dessert-Conversation Meetings

Introduction

Our Purpose

The purpose of the dessert-conversation is to create a welcoming social environment where we can talk openly about our experiences of race and listen to others' stories. We encourage people to be intentional in reaching out to others in their daily lives, to be open, talk honestly, and develop relationships of trust.

Our Goal - Friendship!

The ultimate goal of the dessert-conversations is to build friendships which not only enrich our lives, but also make the social fabric of the community stronger and more prosperous. Research shows that work-related information is often shared among friends through informal social networks. Building friendships takes time and intention and a habit of being honest. The dessert-conversations create environments for black and white citizens to begin, or continue, to do the work of intentionally forming lasting friendships.

Why Dessert?

We decided on dessert because it is easy to host and does not limit the size of the group. We invite anyone to bring a dessert. Appetizers or a meal may work just as well. We also chose not to serve alcohol.

What Is Meant by Interracial?

Our focus is on black and white, but any diversity can be included.

What Kind of Conversation?

We do not discuss politics or religion at our meetings. Whether in large or small groups, the focus is on telling our own stories based on our experiences. From our experiences come a deeper understanding. Whites often think they do not have a story, but when they listen, they begin to realize they do, and sometimes they did not realize it was about race. We observed that participants - black and white - need to feel they can be honest and do not have to protect the other race from hearing the truth. An honest conversation can be liberating for both black and white. There may be tears; there may be laughter; there will definitely be listening.

Toolkit

This toolkit suggests a process that we use for conversation on race, but you may have a better way. Please share with us what you do.

Getting Started:

- Find another person – or a few interested people – and talk about your reasons for doing this and what you would like to see come from it. Your intentions will shape your effort more than anything else, so be clear and open with each other from the beginning. Write it down because you will need to refer to this many times.

Decide On a Location:

- The location is more than just a logistical issue; it sets the tone. Is this a place where both blacks and whites can go and feel welcomed? We have found that a home sets a tone of warmth and openness.

Who Will You Invite?

- Start with people you know and ask for others. Strive for a balance of blacks and whites, ages, and gender. Adjust the list as needed based on who has responded.

Roles:

You can divide roles among yourselves or share the tasks with others. Do what works best for you, but assigning these tasks might be helpful.

- **Host** – person in whose home the event is held or who arranges for the location, gets things ready, welcomes guests, etc.
- **Facilitator** – person who begins and ends it, introduces the guidelines, keeps things moving, makes sure no one dominates, assures that everyone feels welcome and that people feel free to speak, etc.
- **Tracker of Guests** – someone who keeps track of guests' names and contact information.

Evening of Your Event:

Arrival of Guests

- Host and/or facilitator greet guests as they arrive. Guests are invited to complete a name tag, help themselves to the dessert table, mingle while other guests are arriving, and introduce themselves to others.

Welcome and Introductions

- Facilitator/host introduces himself/herself, welcomes guests, and explains the reason for the gathering.
- Guests say their names and (optional) state one **brief** fact about themselves.

Conversation Guidelines

- Facilitator introduces the conversation guidelines. Suggested guidelines may include:
 - o focus on your own experiences

- o listen attentively and respectfully to others
- o be courteous and do not pass judgment on another person's story
- o avoid side conversations when someone else is talking

Small Group Discussions

- Facilitator instructs guests to break into small groups, keeping a balance in each group
- Beginning with the facilitator or a person of the facilitator's choosing, each guest is invited to talk openly and honestly about their experiences with race.
 - o Optional: The facilitator may introduce a topic and open it up for discussion. This usually results in guests discussing their own story or experiences relating to the topic. For example, what are your childhood memories of race?

Reassembling the Large Group and Closing the Evening

- Facilitator brings everyone back into the large group and asks a representative from each small group to make comments about their discussion.
- Facilitator concludes the discussion and encourages people to be intentional in their daily lives, to invite people out for a meal, to continue to talk honestly, and develop trusting relationships.
- Guests may stay and talk while having dessert.

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