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10 Tips to Having Meaningful Conversations

In a world full of distractions, it can be easy to fall into surface-level chats. Around the topic of transgender and nonbinary people, specifically in sports, we often can't get past our initial thoughts and find ourselves stuck.

But meaningful conversations - those that foster connection, understanding, and growth - are what truly strengthen relationships and empathy towards others. Whether you're talking to a friend, a colleague, or someone you've just met, here are some tips to help you go beyond small talk and engage in conversations that matter.

1. Know Your Goal

Having a conversation means having an exchange, a back-and-forth with someone. A conversation is different than a debate, where the goal is to win. Your goal in conversation should not be to win, and it shouldn't even be to "change hearts and minds" or "make someone an ally." Instead, think about engaging on this topic with the intention of connecting with the other person and sharing your values and thoughts, and also hearing theirs. By removing the outcome of "win" or "lose," we can engage more thoughtfully and more fully.

2. Listen Actively

Great conversations start with great listening. Pay close attention to what the other person is saying, not just to respond but to understand. Show you're listening by nodding, making eye contact, and asking follow-up questions. This creates a space where both people feel heard and valued. Just as you don't want to be dismissed, interrupted, or ignored while you are speaking, you should give the same grace and respect to others.

3. Ask Thoughtful Questions

Try digging deeper with questions that invite reflection. When someone tells you what they believe and that doesn't match your beliefs, ask them for more information on how

they formed those opinions. Asking questions like, “How did you come to this conclusion?” or “what did you read/see/hear that informed this opinion?” These types of questions often lead to more personal and meaningful exchanges.

4. Be Present

Put away your phone, close your laptop, and give your full attention to the conversation. Being present not only shows respect but also allows for a deeper connection. When we're fully engaged, we can pick up on subtleties, body language, and emotional cues that make the conversation richer.

5. Share Honestly

Authenticity is key to meaningful dialogue. While it's important to listen, don't be afraid to share your thoughts and feelings openly. Vulnerability can build trust and create a more genuine exchange. That said, balance is important - ensure that the conversation remains two-sided, not just about your own experiences. When talking about trans people and specifically trans athletes, data and studies do not move people as much as personal stories. If you are an athlete, sharing your experiences can help others understand the reality for trans people in sports. If you are a cisgender ally, sharing how you came to understand trans inclusion is good for sports can help inform other people's opinions.

6. Avoid Judgement

A meaningful conversation thrives in a non-judgmental space. Whether you agree or disagree with someone, focus on understanding their perspective. When you listen with an open mind, it encourages others to do the same. Respectful dialogue helps both parties learn and grow.

7. Be Curious, Not Interrogative

Curiosity is essential for a stimulating conversation, but be mindful of how you ask questions. Instead of sounding like an interrogation, let your curiosity flow naturally. Ask open-ended questions that allow for deeper reflection, and follow the thread of the conversation where it leads. Be cautious not to frame questions as leading: for example, avoid saying “don't you think...” as a lead in to a question, like “don't you think it's unfair to single out a group of people?” Instead, asking people “tell me more about that?” can open up non-judgmental communication.

8. Know When to Pause

Sometimes silence can be just as powerful as words. Allow for pauses in conversation—this gives both parties space to think, reflect, and process. You don't always need to fill the silence; it can create room for more thoughtful responses and

deeper insights. Also, know when to cut the conversation; if it's not feeling productive, it's okay to end the conversation.

9. Keep Your Cool

Even if the conversation becomes triggering, keep your cool. If the conversation includes personal attacks, you do not need to tolerate that. But if someone is saying something that is offensive, a response that shares how the statement landed for you personally can actually deepen your connection to the other person.

10. Know Your Facts

Knowing what studies and facts are valid and helpful in responding can strengthen your conversation. As an ally you don't need to know everything, but you should feel confident with a baseline level of information about the topic.

For detailed talking points on how to respond to anti-tran rhetoric around sports, gender-affirming care, and bathrooms, consider joining me for an allyship workshop:

**Responding to Anti-Trans Rhetoric:
How to talk about sports, gender-affirming care, and bathrooms**

January 2, 2025

7-8:30 pm Central time

Online

[Click to register](#)

REMEMBER:

Meaningful conversations aren't about having the "perfect" thing to say—they're about being present, open, and willing to connect. By following these tips, you can build conversations that enrich your relationships and lead to more fulfilling exchanges.