

ONE SMALL STEP

Created by StoryCorps, One Small Step (OSS) is an effort to bring together people with different political views to engage in respectful, personal, and meaningful conversation.

These conversations are not meant to be debates over politics, beliefs, or personal choices. Instead, they're a chance to share the stories and experiences that helped shape who you are.

In this space of sharing and listening, we find an opportunity to remind ourselves of the humanity present in each of us—including those with whom we disagree.

Your willingness to personally engage with someone different from you represents one small act of dismantling the political divide that many compatriots feel today.

The conversation will be entirely self-guided by you and your conversation partner.

YOUR ONE SMALL STEP CONVERSATION IN THREE EASY STEPS

PREPARE (one week before your conversation)

Read through this conversation guide to familiarize yourself with the activity.

Write up a 500 character bio that will be shared with your conversation partner before your actual conversation. You will also receive their bio before your actual conversation.

Reach out to your conversation partner and schedule a date and time for your conversation. The conversation will probably be no less than one hour and can last as long as the two participants want it to.

HOLD THE CONVERSATION

Using this packet as your guide, launch into your conversation.

AFTER YOUR CONVERSATION

A day or two after your One Small Step Conversation, you will be invited to reflect on your experience by responding to two questions.

1. What is your opinion of the One Small Step process?
2. What suggestions do you have to improve the One Small Step experience?

You will be able to respond either in writing or by phone.

STEP ONE: LEVEL SET

Take turns reading aloud through “The Successful One Small Step Conversation” and our ground rules.

THE SUCCESSFUL ONE SMALL STEP CONVERSATION

OSS conversations create a space to discover your partner’s values, life experiences, and motivations on a deeper level—and to simply connect. Both partners should leave with the sense that they’ve been heard, acknowledged, and treated with respect. Most importantly, each should walk away feeling that their partner is a human being who deserves to be regarded with dignity.

Steps to Creating a Successful One Small Step Conversation:

1. Listen actively. Be genuinely curious about how your conversation partner’s life experiences—and your own—have shaped your world views.

During the conversation, follow your curiosity and what intrigues you. Feel free to ask, “Can you tell me more?” Your partner may respond, or may say, “I’ll pass on that one.”

The best conversations feature active listening. It’s often helpful to wait an extra moment before asking your next question. This allows you to adequately digest what is being said, and to respond thoughtfully.

2. A respectful, personal conversation can plant the seed for a valuable new relationship—one perhaps outside your usual circles, allowing you to seek a different perspective.
3. It’s okay to disagree. The important part is understanding and acknowledging the validity of your conversation partner’s point of view.
4. Don’t go in aiming to duke out politics. Sincere connections happen by exploring who you are, what you care about, and your dreams for the future.
5. Telling personal stories can help you to anchor in a place of respect for your shared humanity.
6. Cultivate regard for your differences. Don’t try to persuade one another.
7. These conversations are just one small step, but they’re crucial in cultivating unity despite differences. Make a plan for what your next step will be.

GROUND RULES

1. Refrain from using any harmful or derogatory language.
2. Share the time equally.
3. Don’t interrupt each other.
4. Don’t make assumptions about your conversation partner or their beliefs.
5. Speak for yourself and about your own experiences: do not try to represent an entire party or belief system.
6. Respect each other’s differences. Do not try to persuade each other.
7. Respect each other’s privacy. Agree not to share personal information from this conversation without permission from your conversation partner.

Okay, do we both agree to these ground rules? Great, let’s get started.

STEP TWO: INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO YOUR PARTNER

1. Together, take a few minutes each to talk about why you agreed to participate in One Small Step, and what you hope to get out of it.
2. Now, take a few minutes each to tell a bit of your “life story.” You don’t need to describe your entire life here, but share a few details that give a sense of who you are—for example:
 - where you’re from
 - big life events that shaped you
 - any issues that have directly affected your life

If your partner says anything that surprises or interests you, feel free to ask additional questions.

STEP THREE: GET THE CONVERSATION ROLLING

The following questions aim to help you understand where your partner comes from.

Spend about a few minutes per partner, per question. Remember not to interrupt your partner, but feel free to ask follow-up questions when they’re finished.

3. Who has been the most influential person in your life? What did they teach you?
4. Can you recall your earliest memory of politics?
5. Could you briefly describe, in your own words, your personal political beliefs?
6. Was there a moment or experience in your life that helped shape your beliefs?

STEP FOUR: GOING DEEPER

Take this opportunity to go deeper by asking your partner more questions about what they have shared, or by choosing from the suggested questions below.

1. Is there something about my beliefs that you don’t agree with but still respect?
2. Do you ever feel misunderstood by people with different beliefs than you? How so?
3. Do you ever feel troubled by people with the same beliefs as you and how they communicate those beliefs to others?
4. When thinking about the future of the country, what are your fears or concerns?
5. Have you ever experienced doubt in your political beliefs?
6. Have your political leanings affected your relationships with friends or family?

STEP FIVE: CLOSING

This is the time to reflect on your experience. Ask each other the following:

1. Is there anything you learned about me today that surprised you?
2. Was this experience what you thought it would be?
3. Is there anything you have shared today that you would prefer I not share with anybody else?