



The holidays are coming! It can be a wonderful time of year. Perhaps all you want to do is eat your mashed potatoes in peace, but it's more than likely that you'll spend at least some part of the holidays at a gathering with family, friends, and maybe the "friend of a friend" acquaintance you saw at last year's holiday gathering. Given the many ways gender may come up in conversation during these occasions, we thought it might be helpful to think ahead about how to handle these discussions so that people come closer to one another, rather than leaving farther apart.

In our daily lives, each of us mostly talks to people who share our views. Holiday gatherings can be a rare time when we talk with people who have a greater variety of perspectives and opinions. Discussions about current news and topics can be challenging to navigate, but they represent an opportunity for greater connection with the people in our life.

One thing we find helpful to keep in mind is that most people haven't thought much about gender, so sharing a framework like Gender Spectrum's, which looks at gender in three dimensions—body, identity and expression- can be a good starting place to make sure there is shared language and understanding about gender. You may want to refresh your thinking by reviewing "[Understanding Gender](#)" from our website.

In your conversations about gender, engage the heart first. Ask questions that open up conversations about gender from an emotional place. Move people away from politics and share your personal experiences and ask others about theirs. When we open our hearts and create room for others to do the same, there's a chance of creating understanding around issues that we may not all agree with or understand.

Here are three strategies for keeping conversations centered on personal experiences and feelings:

1. **Lead by example:** Those who are worried about offending someone may not want to participate in conversations about gender, but not participating means they won't learn about the topic or discover something about themselves they may not have seen before. Break the ice by sharing something about yourself and then invite others to share as well.
2. **Appeal to their values:** For example, if you know a particular uncle doesn't like the government telling him what to do, appeal to that same value when describing how you don't want the government defining your gender or telling you who you have to be.
3. **Connect people to their own gender story:** Everyone has a gender story and has been affected by gender norms and stereotypes. Helping loved ones think about their own gender stories often leads to meaningful self-reflection and further understanding

about gender.

If you want to be proactive in bringing up some interesting conversations around gender that prompt connections with your loved ones, try asking some of these questions:

- When was first time you were aware of your own gender?
- What is something you were taught about gender when you were young that has changed in your lifetime?
- What were some gender messages you received when you were young and would you pass those same messages along to kids in your life?
- What are some things you find confusing about the way ideas about gender are changing?
- What's one way that gender has worked for you and what has not worked?

If the conversation at some point seems to be going off track and the discussion seems to be heating up with the potential for conflict, look for ways to foster empathy for everyone sharing their experience. Of course, even with your best effort, you may encounter resistance from some family members or friends. If someone is really unwilling to engage in a meaningful conversation, respectfully ask that you not talk about the topic anymore so you can enjoy being together.