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About Encounter's Communication Guidelines*

Encounter's Communication Guidelines help to create a framework in which deeply contentious and charged topics can be explored respectfully by people of diverse ideological viewpoints. These guidelines enable questions to be framed in ways that speakers are able to hear, without feeling attacked, and reframing comments and statements into genuine questions. This educational resource is inspired by a model developed by the [Public Conversations Project](#) from their work with pro-choice and pro-life leaders.

These guidelines enable participants to:

- (a) hear and learn things they might otherwise miss, and
- (b) ask challenging questions in ways that can be heard by the person being addressed.

We have found that using this framework, while it may feel counter-intuitive at first, can actually liberate us. First, we are forced to clarify for ourselves and for others the burning question at the heart of our discomfort or curiosity; second, we are able to communicate *more openly* because we are no longer afraid of offending. Encounter's Communication Guidelines enable us to ask the most challenging questions in ways that are respectful, genuine, and open.

Encounter suggests that listening, specifically in context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is a radical act. Listening does not mean that we endorse a viewpoint, or an interpretation of facts, nor validate the facts a person chooses to present or omit. *'Resilient listening'* allows a person and/or a community to live with tension, to hold multiple perspectives at the same time, and to continue to be open to learning what is new rather than guarding against it and shutting down. Only when we can learn from those with whom we disagree can we be more effective and solution-oriented advocates and change-agents.

***Encounter welcomes you to download and use our Communication Guidelines.**

Please attribute Encounter when doing so. Thank you.



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Communication Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to enable us to speak with כבוד / *kavod* (honor) and אמת / *emet* (truthfulness) in all our conversations during Encounter programs. These Communication Guidelines apply both to conversations with other participants as well as with Palestinians.

1. I will speak for myself, not as a representative of a group. I will not ask others to represent, defend or explain an entire group. I will make **'I' statements** rather than 'we' or 'you' statements.
2. I will **avoid making broad generalizations** and grand pronouncements. Instead, I will connect what I know and believe to my experiences and particular sources of information.
3. I will **express my different viewpoints in a thoughtful manner** and without an insulting spirit. I will keep in mind my goals of learning and reflection. I may respectfully disagree with others, but I will resist the urge to persuade them to "my side."
4. I will **listen with resilience**, "hanging in" when I hear something that is hard to hear. I will take personal time if I find that I am no longer able to listen with a clear mind and an open heart.
5. I will **share airtime** and refrain from interrupting others, except to indicate that I cannot hear a speaker. I will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitators.
6. I will **"pass" or "pass for now"** if I am not ready or willing to respond to a question - no explanation required.
7. All **small-group conversations and listening pairs are confidential**. Outside those, if asked to keep something confidential, I will honor the request. In conversations outside of the group I will not attribute particular statements to particular individuals by name or identifying information without permission.
8. During **question and answer time periods**, I will avoid making lengthy statements. I will not argue with speakers or other participants. Instead, I will ask questions that represent my genuine curiosity.

*When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand...
Listening, not talking is the gifted and great role... So try listening.
Listen to your wife, your husband, your father, your mother, your children, your
friends, to those who love you and those who don't, to those who bore you, to your
enemies. It will work a small miracle. And perhaps a great one.*

— Brenda Ueland, from *The Art of Listening*

Encounter's Communication Guidelines are inspired by the 2004 Public Conversations Project, Watertown, MA.

