

DEBATE AND DIALOGUE

When we have a difference in opinion, we can engage in debate or dialogue. In debate, we are working to persuade or advocate for our own point of view, trying to prove that our perspective is correct and that another's perspective is wrong. With dialogue, on the other hand, we are working to understand another's point of view and re-evaluate our own point of view in light of that dialogue. With a true dialogue, the process is collaborative as people work to achieve a shared understanding.



20 minutes



Pairs



Opposite cards,
as per instructions

Source: Adapted from the *Big Book of Conflict Resolution*

DEBRIEF (*following the activity*)

- During the debate portion of the activity, how did you feel about your mini-conflict?
- Was it difficult to listen when someone had a different point of view than you?
- Is this normally how you react in conflict situations? Why or why not?
- What happened when you switched from debate to dialogue?
- How did the dialogue portion of the activity feel?
- When someone disagrees with you, do you stop to ask questions and understand their perspective?
- How can you remind yourself to engage in dialogue versus debate moving forward?

WHAT TO DO



1. In advance of the session, prepare enough word pair “opposite” cards for each team to have its own card. Each card will have two opposite words listed on it (e.g., cats vs. dogs, early birds vs. night owls, e-books vs. printed books, staycations vs. travel, summer vs. winter, fruit juice with pulp vs. fruit juice without pulp, etc.).
2. Ask everyone to find a partner.
3. Provide each pair with their own “opposite” card.
4. Invite each partner to choose one of the topics on the card.
5. For five minutes, team members are invited to debate with each other about why their respective topic is better.
6. Stop the debate. Share with participants that the intention of this process was to place the pairs into a mini-conflict by picking opposing views on their respective topics and debating why their perspective was better.
7. Discuss with the group the differences between debate and dialogue.
 - In debate, we are trying to “beat” another’s perspective.
 - In dialogue, we are trying to “understand” another’s perspective.
8. Now, repeat this activity with a new approach. Instead of debating the two topics, invite the pairs to engage in dialogue about their respective topics. In doing so, invite them to ask questions and take the time to truly listen to the answers. The goal of this round is to create the space for each person to have a chance to be heard and learn from each other in order to come to a shared understanding about each other’s respective topic.
9. After five minutes, stop the dialogue.
10. Debrief with the group.