

Talking to Our People

SURJ guide for talking to white people in the moment of Trump

Many SURJ members and supporters from across the country have been grappling with the best ways to Show Up for Racial Justice in the current political moment.

The racist rhetoric is escalating, led by Donald Trump himself. Verbal taunts are turning violent. As white people of conscience we feel we need to act. We are not always 100% agreed on the best way forward, but what we're certain of is that now is NOT the moment to stay silent.

Our work as white people is to undermine support for racism and racist policies and practices within the white community.

Stokely Carmichael put the challenge to us white folks in the 1960s: "can white people move inside their own community and start tearing down racism where in fact it does exist?"

One way to begin tearing down racism is by engaging our people in conversation. What follows is a guide on how to engage people in meaningful, one on one conversation about the current political moment, to challenge them around racism while maintaining a space for dialogue and building a trusting enough space to support willingness to be moved toward a more racially just understanding of the world.

Who are the "people" we want to talk with? They are our people. They are our family members, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers. They are people who may be open to Trump's message. They may or may not be Trump supporters, but they are people who might be swayed by his rhetoric. They are our people, and we need to talk to them.

Why do we need to talk to them? Not talking to them gives space to Trump's message to sit out in the world unchallenged. It is up to us to challenge the message and offer an alternative.

- It's not the job of POC to lead this conversation.
- White folks often open up to other white folks about how they really feel. We are in a unique position to help move people.
- Our relationships with them give us a greater chance of moving them.
- We need more white people in this movement.

How do we do it? Use these tips and the questions on the following pages as a guide.

- Notice and create opportunities for individual conversations and then prioritize having them.
- Make the space as comfortable and trusting as possible.
- Keep it conversational and avoid arguments. It's really important not to call people out publicly if we are hoping to change their minds. Social media has

many important uses, but posting publicly to someone's Facebook page is the same as calling them out publicly. So is raising the conversation in front of a large group of friends or coworkers.

Embarrassment is not the goal here, but connection and understanding.

- Look for ways to get into the conversation where you can actually hear what your people are saying and work at moving them to seeing how important it is to show up in this moment rather than waiting this one out.

When do we start? Now.

What if it's awkward? It will be. *That's okay.* We're doing this *because* we believe that living in a racially just society is way more important than experiencing awkward moments. Our society allows racism to run rampant and people of color to be hurt in numerous ways in large part because too many of us are silent. If ever there was a moment to change what feels *normal* to talk about, it's now.

What should we keep in mind as we enter new conversations?

- This isn't about winning an argument, no matter how high the stakes might feel.
- We must bring sincere curiosity into our conversation, otherwise this won't work.
- Showing our own vulnerability is essential.
- Breathe!
- This gets easier over time. As white people, we don't talk about race much. Over time, we will get stronger at this.
- It is not a failure if we don't swing someone 100% to our side. We're planting seeds. It's unreasonable to expect to totally reverse someone's position in a single conversation.
- It's important to let the conversation come to a natural conclusion. Asking someone to go with us to unfamiliar conversational territory is good, but pushing them beyond what they are willing to talk about won't allow for further conversation. Take care to seek this balance.

Before you begin - answer THESE three questions for yourself!

- 1) Why don't *you* think Trump will solve the problems/challenges people face in their lives?
- 2) What about Trump's leadership style doesn't appeal to you?
- 3) Who in your life and community is hurt by Trump's ideas and actions?

Thank you for showing up!

The Conversation

Questions and Language to use as Starting Point

Framing – Starting points and questions

I'm wondering if I can talk to you about something we don't usually talk about – politics. I'm asking because I've been thinking so much about what's in the news recently. I know you and I often have different views of politics and I'm wondering what you think about what's happening. I really want to hear what you think. May I ask you about it?

So you may have guessed that what I'm thinking about is the Presidential race and specifically Donald Trump. Have you been following the news about Trump? And what do you think about it?

Talking Trump -- draw your people out – do your best to hear them

A lot of folks I've talked to about politics recently are really concerned about challenges in their day to day to lives -- like access to good jobs or housing, finding good schools for their kids, providing what their families need in an economy that still hasn't gotten much better for regular folks. What concerns do you have in your day to day life that you think need change? What do you think needs to happen in your town or community to address those concerns?

What concerns do you have in your day to day life that you think Trump could address?

What about him do you think will make a positive contribution to the country?

What about his leadership style do you think would make things better for people in America?

Share Alternatives – use examples from your own life

I hear many of your concerns, but don't understand Trump being the answer to fixing those challenges. And I have to say that a lot of what I see coming from Trump and his supporters I find really scary. I see him taking advantage of people's fears by blaming anyone who is different – immigrants, people of different religions, women, people of color – and there's two things that bother me about that. First, generally, I just really think that all people should be treated with respect. But second, and most importantly, that hurts a lot of people I really care about.

(Give as specific examples as you can, and if possible let it be of people who you know your conversation partner also knows either personally or respects as a public figure. If you don't know the person you are talking to that well, go for types of people they could relate to such as members of your place of worship, or the families at your kid's school, people associated with other institutions in your community.)

I see Trump making remarks that he is pretending are off-hand and he's doing it to make a splash and get press coverage, but then I see how people are taking those remarks at his rallies and what they are doing with the hateful statements and that scares me even more. He might just be saying the things about building a wall to keep

Mexicans out of this country and pretending it's policy, but then when people of color protest at his rallies, he is encouraging participants to rough up protesters. That's not leadership, that's violence.

Some people have been comparing Trump to Hitler. Not everyone agrees with this comparison, but it's getting made because feel bullied by his comments. If you've been bullied, or know someone who has, then you know what it's like to be powerless and pushed around by someone who is enjoying exerting power over you. That's how Trump is using this moment to play on fear and push people around.

I hear Trump talking about his business and making America great all the time. But I've heard that jobs at Trump's businesses are actually not good jobs, and workers don't feel treated right by him. So if his own workers are unhappy, I don't see how he can understand and represent the concerns of regular working people.

I see Trump using people's fear against us. There is a lot I want to see changed in the world too. But when I hear him playing off of people's fear, I see a rich man trying to use regular people to get more power for himself. His statements and the way he is using people to promote his own brand and business make me believe that the only person Trump is out for is Trump himself.

I want a great America to be a place where there is space for everyone. I'm really hoping this is what you want too.