

A FIRST-DRAFT CONVERSATION



a post-election exercise

This exercise is designed to invite each person to be heard, fully—without interruption or distraction. That dedicated opportunity to share a personal story enriches the experience of being heard while advancing the connection between speaker and listener.

Although it begins with a familiar question, this exercise invites a bit more structure and intention than a traditional conversation. The deceptively simple design creates a unique experience for each person to be heard and seen by the other.

Instructions

- 1) Find a conversation partner you trust, who trusts you in return. Invite them to have an honest, open conversation about the election—one that doesn't require filtering, debating, or convincing. There will be no fear of being dismissed. This should be someone with whom you are already in close relationship such as a partner, a close friend, a family member, or a confidant. With that partner, decide who will be interviewed first.
- 2) The first person simply asks, "How are you after the election?" Then they listen deeply to how their partner responds. They'll listen not just to the language and the content, but also what that person is trying to communicate about their emotional state and direction, their core values, and their perceptions of the world. When you listen, pay particular attention to these five elements:
 - a) Peculiar or unusual language (especially if it feels unusual for that person)
 - b) Words that repeat, stick out, don't seem to fit, or are particularly arresting
 - c) Words that coincide with a shift in non-verbal behavior
 - d) Words that coincide with a shift in tone or gesture
 - e) Language that seems to be used with strong or unexpected affect
- 3) The first person then responds to what they heard by asking a follow-up question. Not just any question, though. It should delve more deeply into just one of the things you heard (see examples in the graph below). Follow-up questions might invite a richer description of something shared, explore deeper meaning in the language used, or open a reflection on the person's values, meanings, or assumptions about themselves or others. As you respond and ask questions, here are four tips:
 - a) It might sound artificial, but if you get stuck you can always return to the first question to invite deeper responses: "So how are you after the election?"
 - b) Feel free to focus on one word or phrase you heard them say and get curious about it, especially if you're having a hard time forming the "perfect question." Use their language



to show them you've heard them and to invite a deeper reflection into what they've said. For example: "You said '[repeat their words],' could you tell me more about that?"

- c) As you listen to worries, complaints, or fears, keep in mind that these expressions imply an opposite that is not named: isolation implies a wish for connection; despair implies hope for a different future. When people name something that upsets them, listen for that and ask questions that invite your partner to speak to the values, hopes, and commitments you hear.
 - d) If a question either leads to a response that isn't constructive ("well I can tell you about what I hate more than what I love") or gets the other person stuck ("I don't know what you mean" or "I'm not sure I can answer that") don't take it personally! It happens all the time. That response provides insight into another direction your next question might take. Or, if you really get stuck, you can ask, "Is there something else I could understand better?" or "is there a question you wish I had asked you?"
- 4) Repeat this cycle until half of the time you set aside for the conversation is over—or until you both decide the conversation has reached a natural stopping point. Then repeat steps 1–3 with the roles reversed.

