



## Elements of an Open and Honest Conversation about Abortion

1. **REAL LIFE:** The best conversations are based on real life experience. We are not talking about abstract pronouncements of what is right and wrong but an understanding of the human experience.
2. **PRACTICE COMPASSION:** Put yourself, if you can, in the shoes of the women and men who are facing a difficult pregnancy decision and let their stories move your heart. Sometimes it seems, from outside the situation, that a pregnancy was preventable or that the person(s) were not being responsible. Consider this: Have you ever taken risks around sex (or driving a car, or sports, or any other time)? Each situation is unique. None of us is perfect. Practice Compassion.
3. **SAFE SPACE:** Speakers and audiences alike need to feel safe enough to explore difficult topics. No one should be exposed to personal attacks.
4. **THE HARD QUESTIONS ARE THE BEST:** Welcome those tough questions because they give you an opportunity to talk about the audience's unresolved feelings about abortion and bring to the discussion the real life situations that make the need for abortion clear.
5. **BE OPEN:** Openness comes from the heart. You can be open to all kinds of questions and opinions if you speak from your own experience and don't try to tell people what to think. Say, "In my experience..." "What I hear women saying..." Embrace a range of feelings, experiences and opinions.
6. **I CAN LISTEN:** Let the people around you know that you "get" the complexity of making a decision about a pregnancy and that you are a safe person to talk to. At home, with friends, at work, church, or school, especially among teenagers, let it be known that you can be trusted to listen and not judge.
7. **BE HONEST:** Not every question can be answered with a fact, but you can tell what you know from your experience and invite others to do the same. If you don't know, say so. Offer referrals to other sources of information.
8. **OFFER RESOURCES:** Always invite further exploration. A resource list of books, pamphlets, and web links can help people keep the conversation going even after you leave.
9. **KNOW YOUR STUFF:** Educate yourself about abortion and the abortion experience. You might start by printing out some of the articles on [www.abortionconversation.org](http://www.abortionconversation.org)), and [www.abortioncarenetwork.org](http://www.abortioncarenetwork.org) sites, or check out the *Pregnancy Options Workbook* at [www.pregnancyoptions.info](http://www.pregnancyoptions.info)
10. **GOOD AND BAD RESEARCH:** Help audiences evaluate studies that seem to serve propaganda. Is it published in a "peer reviewed" scientific journal, which looks at their methodology and conclusions? Have the findings been replicated? (In other words, has another study found the same result?) Is the total number of subjects large enough to be meaningful? Who funded the study?

11. **TALK GOES BOTH WAYS:** Having a conversation involves speaking and listening. Asking and answering is important. Listening is essential. “Conversation” implies a certain amount of good will and mutuality, even when disagreeing.
12. **WHAT ARE YOU SAYING AND HOW ARE YOU SAYING IT?** Is our own language polarizing and judgmental? Are we demonizing the anti-abortion side at the expense of understanding the issue? Are our words “battle bound” and war-like? For example: “Our side is under attack and we have to fight back.” “Those anti’s are crazy.” The abortion war has impacted us all and keeps us in an us/them conflict-driven mode that obscures what abortion is really about. Taking responsibility for our own language is a first step to self-awareness on this issue.
13. **DIFFERING VIEWS EXIST:** We are not trying to tell people what to think. We are encouraging compassion, tolerance, and an appreciation of real life dilemmas. We want audiences to understand the diversity of perspectives and experiences that individuals can have when faced with an abortion.
14. **BE PREPARED:** Think in advance how you would respond when someone says, “I could never have an abortion.” You might say, “Until you are pregnant, I don’t think you always know what you would or wouldn’t do.” Or, “I don’t know what I would do, but I hope there would be people to support me and not judge me.” Statements like these let anyone listening know that you understand should they need someone to talk to.
15. **GROUND RULES FOR CONVERSATION:** It’s always a good idea to agree on some basic ground rules. Check out sample ground rules at: [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org).
16. **WHAT DOES PRO-CHOICE MEAN?** If you don’t think you can decide for someone else, then you are pro-choice. Even if you are uncomfortable with some aspects of abortion you still want it to be an available option. Many people think of themselves as “pro-life” if they don’t think they could have an abortion themselves, but they don’t want to make abortion illegal so that others can do what they decide is best. They, too, are pro-choice! Unless you think you (or the government) can decide for someone else, you are pro-choice. Pro-choice does not mean a person necessarily has had an abortion. In fact, a sizable percentage of women seeking abortion state that they “had always been against abortion” until they had to deal with a difficult decision about pregnancy.

## Join the Conversation!

The Abortion Conversation Project is launching a blog and discussion site for those who are interested in learning how to have effective conversations about the difficult topic of abortion.

[www.aborticonversation.org](http://www.aborticonversation.org)

