



 **BEL**  **VED**
COMMUNITY
TALKS | LET'S
BRIDGE



A Conversation Starter Toolkit

Produced by The Martin Luther King, Jr.
Center for Nonviolent Social Change

“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This toolkit is designed to help you spark a conversation that will ignite change within yourself and your community through five easy steps. This guide may be used as a workbook for notes on what will work best for you individually. It is also important to keep in mind that ultimate change must be systemic. In other words, this process of change must be rooted in a belief that every facet of our thinking and approaches to each other in what Dr. King called our “World House” must also change in order to have a positive, effective global influence.



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“I am convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other, and they don’t know each other because they don’t communicate with each other, and they don’t communicate with each other because they are separated from each other...”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

In keeping with Dr. King’s assertion that people are divided because we are disconnected, during the 2017 King Holiday Observance, The King Center launched, via the **Beloved Community Talks (BCT)** platform, a two-year campaign, **Let’s Bridge the Racial Divide**. The campaign, which supports the unifying vision of the Center’s founder, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, will culminate in 2018 during the year of the 50th Anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination and 50th Anniversary of The King Center. The purpose of the campaign is to provide the roadmap and tools necessary for individuals and communities to have the challenging and difficult conversations to bridge the racial divide in America by addressing the pains and unrest of racism rooted in a historical context. The goal is for individuals to connect... come together and work to create actionable solutions that bridge the racial divides in America.

The **Beloved Community Talks: Let’s Bridge the Racial Divide** is the catalyst for the long-term goal to promote understanding, address forgiveness, encourage positive behavior modification activities, and influence equitable change to the national and ultimately global infrastructure. The King Center’s BCT toolkit was developed to guide individuals and groups to have the “courageous conversation.”

Mission and Vision

The Beloved Community Talks (BCT) mission is to create an environment conducive to open, honest, and unapologetic conversations that are civil; bringing people out of their comfort zone to promote understanding and to ultimately influence equitable change to the national and global infrastructure.

We envision that individuals and communities will find commonalities that bring them together in order to work on initiatives in their respective communities. The BCT will provide an environment within communities where people can get to know each other, seeking first to understand and then to be understood.



Courageous Conversation

I. Why it is important to have a “courageous conversation”?

A **Courageous Conversation** is one that is difficult, yet necessary, to have, with a goal of coming to a common understanding that reaches for the ideals enshrined in the constitution for all citizens. It is important to have a **Courageous Conversation** because the discourse in our nation is increasingly provocative and contentious. It is now time to discuss and address the racial divide... It is now time to connect with each other in order to bring healing to our community. When our communities are healthy and we are working together... we can formulate solutions for our communities, our nation and ultimately our world. It is only then when may we realize Dr. King’s dream of “**The Beloved Community.**”

II. Conversation Preparation Guidelines

This campaign, “Let’s Bridge the Racial Divide” is a huge undertaking, but it is one that we must take on in order for this nation to realize the essence of its identity... “The United States of America”. Having the conversation regarding race relations and truly seeking to get to know each other requires open hearts and minds. **The Beloved Community Talks** is a platform that creates an environment conducive for individuals and communities to engage in honest and candid conversations. The foundation and catalyst for these conversations and for all King Center endeavors is Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy and methodology, which the Center calls **Nonviolence365™**. Nonviolence365™, inclusive of Six Principles and Six Steps, is more than a tactic for social change. It is a way of life and a choice for how to engage each other and the earth, with building the **Beloved Community** as the ultimate goal. Nonviolence365™

also provides insight on how to communicate truthfully without violating the dignity and spirit of yourself or the other person, whose views may oppose your own. For your reading, the Six Principles and Six Steps of Nonviolence365™ are included on page 12. For more understanding of how to employ Nonviolence365™ in everyday life and for individual, organizational and systemic change, we invite you to join The King Center for Nonviolence365™ Education and Training. Please use the guidelines below for engaging in Courageous Conversations:

III. Guidelines

Start the session by conducting introductions, providing a statement of purpose and agreeing to the following ground rules:

- Listen carefully and intently.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Take ownership of your statements by using “I.”
- Use each other’s name during the dialogue.
- Respect each other’s attempt to share and receive information.
- Be mindful of communication styles/language that may be a barrier.
- Discuss the issues and do not attack people (verbally or physically).
- Allow one person to speak at a time, without interruption.
- Avoid side bar conversations.
- Keep discussions focused.
- Ask questions and answer questions honestly and respectfully.
- Acknowledge the acceptance of ground rules.



Step One: Have a Courageous Conversation with Yourself

Have a courageous conversation with yourself. Ponder the following questions and complete the self-assessment before engaging in group dialogue. Ask yourself the following questions then proceed to complete the self-assessment:

A. Do you exhibit nonviolent love that is rooted in spontaneous actions, motivation and creativity?

Reflection: If so, examine how you display that within your setting

B. What barometer do you use to assess the race relations within your community?

Reflection: Using that barometer, have you observed what you would say is the racial flash points of your community?

C. Have you compared your observations to other communities with similar racial struggles?

Reflection: If so, what conclusion could you draw?

D. Are you actively working within your community to create networks, impact issues and find solutions that pertain to everyone?

Reflection: Are you accepting of the backgrounds, political and economic views of others even they are different from yours? Are you taking time to enrich the community around you by engaging in activities with said populations?



Self Assessment

Take this assessment to evaluate your beliefs, actions and historical context as it relates to others. Evaluate the areas where your score is below a three and determine how to improve in that area.

Rating:

1 | Almost Never 2 | Seldom 3 | Sometimes 4 | Often 5 | Almost Always

- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I cooperate and respectfully interact with all people. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. I respect individual approaches and beliefs different from my own. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I recognize that there may be common ground with others. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I try to value each person's uniqueness and acknowledge that they bring value to the table. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. I can positively communicate with others who are perceived to be different from me. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. I recognize when my experiences and cultural upbringing are influencing my behavior and attitude toward others. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. I believe there are benefits to diversity. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. I consciously make an effort to reduce barriers of discrimination. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. I apologize when I have offended someone without trying to justify the offense. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. People within my social group are different from me in ethnicity, race, age, gender, religion, and sexuality. | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. I make an effort to address statements that are prejudice when in conversations with others. | <input type="radio"/> |



Step Two: Setting the Tone

A productive conversation starts with the environment. The environment must be indicative of one that allows critical thinking and positive problem-solving. We also aim to foster a safe environment conducive to constructive conversation. When you nurture the needed environment for such a conversation, dynamic shifts beyond our comprehension begin to occur. We find ourselves establishing a moral commitment that allows us to connect effectively with others. When setting such a tone consider the following:

- Choose an exclusive but welcoming setting, where all parties will be physically comfortable.
- Be mindful of the weather, if outdoors.
- Pay close attention to the needs of each participant, (e.g. disability.)
- Position participants so that they are able to see one another.

During the conversation:

- Begin with icebreakers and introductions.
- Identify the objectives for each meeting.
- Encourage participants to be open, honest and respectful.
- Listen intently!
- Encourage clarification of discussion with questions.
- Avoid generalizations and polarizing statements, e.g., “All of you are.” or “you people.”
- Be mindful of your body language; don’t close off your body or your mind.
- Consider that each individual’s background and upbringing is different and that this is a learning experience for everyone.

When wrapping up the session, be sure to:

- Explore future levels of commitment to “continue the conversation.”
- Thank the individuals/group for participating.
- Establish a protocol for follow up discussions and points of action.
- Examine if the meeting successfully met or worked toward the assigned objectives.
- Conduct an exit exercise that ensures everyone feels comfortable to return to future meetings.



Step Three: Continuing the Conversation

After you've had an honest conversation with yourself, it's time to engage others in the conversation. Remember to be conscious of your body language while communicating with others. Often times your body language will speak louder than your words. Denote that your intention is not to engage in dialogue that humiliates the other person (s) but to reach a platform of understanding and ultimately one of deeper, richer conversations.

Evaluate the following during the discussion:

- Your facial expressions and stance.
- Make eye contact, however, don't stare.
- Restrict hand motions and body shifting in case someone perceives it as a threat.
- Mirror speaker's body language.

Tips for identifying if the conversation is beneficial, or if you need to end it.

- Energy is diverted to blaming.
- Barriers to understanding and cooperation are created.
- Perception of stereotypes and biases are reinforced.
- There is fear of being open and honest.
- The conversation begins to increase polarizing behaviors.
- Attempts to prove the other person wrong or continuous focus on the past, with no forward movement in thought or dialogue.

Go For It! Functional Conversations

- Each person is attentively listening to the speaker.
- Everyone feels safe to be a part of the conversation.
- Participants are asking respectful and insightful questions.
- Better communication and understanding is developed.
- People are engaged and the ideas flow consistently.



Step Four: Determine the Demographic

One-on-One or Small Group Conversations

This method of conversing must become a way of our normal thinking process and ultimately our lifestyle. As Dr. King stated, we must recognize that we are all interdependent of each other. Therefore, we must collectively work together to resolve our conflicts - nonviolently. However, if you are not quite ready to engage in a large group conversation, then identify one person, on your job, at school, or a neighbor, and have a one-on-one conversation. In any event, you must be bold with your intentions of having such a conversation.

- Identify someone to have a **Courageous Conversation** with...
- Someone you perceive to be different than yourself
- Someone of a different race or ethnicity
- Someone whose existence you do not understand (age, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, etc.)
- Someone whose beliefs you disagree with (race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, etc.)
 - **Question:** Ask, "Will you join me in a courageous conversation to bridge the racial divide?"
 - **Response:** If person accepts invitation, revisit Step 3. If you intend to share your conversation on The King Center's website, it is important to disclose that information upfront to build trust. If person declines invitation, thank him/her and identify another person. Also, if the person would rather not share the experience, please do not allow that to be a barrier to having the conversation. While we hope you share your experience(s), the ultimate goal is to "Bridge the Racial Divide."
 - **Acknowledgement:** Be Sure to thank the person for joining you.
 - **Follow Up:** See if the individual would be interested in a follow up conversation and feel free to share The King Center's Conversation Starter Toolkit.

Community or Larger Group Conversation

Either join a group that is facilitating a conversation, or host a conversation yourself. An effective group discussion generally has a number of elements:

- One person should not dominate the conversation.
- All members of the group feel free to participate in the conversation without interruptions.
- Statements could be positive, negative, or merely clarifying or correcting questions or errors, however the statement is delivered, it is respectful and should be respected by others.
- A variety of point of views and positions are discussed openly and honestly.
- Even in disagreement, there's an understanding that the group is working together to increase understanding and to embrace differences.



Step Five: Agreement to Commit

After participating in these courageous conversations, make a commitment to continue the conversation. Encourage others to answer the call in your home, family, and community to advance racial equity and help to build long-term commitment and momentum. The key is to begin with our own intentions and to ask ourselves what efforts we have put into place to create a nonviolent setting. We need to also ask ourselves have we contributed in positive ways to building a Beloved Community?

Write a brief narrative concerning your commitment to continue the conversation.

Now that I have participated in a courageous conversation, I understand more about:

I will commit to:

I would like to gain information about:

Thank You Partners and Conversation Starters! Be sure to share your conversations with us on website at www.belovedcommunitytalks.org and on your social media platforms by using the hashtag #LetsBridge & #BelovedCommunity.



Foundational Resources Information

DR. KING'S VISION OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

The King Center embraces the conviction that the Beloved Community can be achieved through an unshakable commitment to nonviolence. We urge you to study Dr. King's Six Principles and Six Steps of Nonviolence, and make them a way of life in your personal relationships, as well as a method for resolving social, economic and political conflicts, reconciling adversaries and advancing social change in your community, nation and world. Additionally, these principles and steps are essential when engaging in **Courageous Conversations**.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

- 1. PRINCIPLE ONE: Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.**
It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.
It is aggressive spiritually, mentally and emotionally.
- 2. PRINCIPLE TWO: Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.**
The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.
The purpose of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community.
- 3. PRINCIPLE THREE: Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people.**
Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people.
The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil not people.
- 4. PRINCIPLE FOUR: Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.**
Nonviolence accepts suffering (allowed with an ultimate goal in mind, e.g. dogs and water hoses during the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s-60s) without retaliation.
Unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.



5. PRINCIPLE FIVE: Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.

Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body, not only refusing to physically harm, but also refusing to hate..

Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative.

6. PRINCIPLE SIX: Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.

SIX STEPS OF NONVIOLENCE

- 1. INFORMATION GATHERING:** To understand and articulate an issue, problem or injustice facing a person, community, or institution you must do research. You must investigate and gather all vital information from all sides of the argument or issue so as to increase your understanding of the problem. You must become an expert on your opponent's position.
- 2. EDUCATION:** It is essential to inform others, including your opposition, about your issue. This minimizes misunderstandings and gains you support and sympathy.
- 3. PERSONAL COMMITMENT:** Daily check and affirm your faith in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Eliminate hidden motives and prepare yourself to accept suffering, if necessary, in your work for justice.
- 4. NEGOTIATION:** Using grace, humor and intelligence, confront the other party with a list of injustices and a plan for addressing and resolving these injustices. Look for what is positive in every action and statement the opposition makes. Do not seek to humiliate the opponent but to call forth the good in the opponent.
- 5. DIRECT ACTION:** These are actions taken when the opponent is unwilling to enter into, or remain in, discussion/ negotiation. These actions impose a "creative tension" into the conflict, supplying moral pressure on your opponent to work with you in resolving the injustice.
- 6. RECONCILIATION:** Nonviolence seeks friendship and understanding with the opponent. Nonviolence does not seek to defeat the opponent. Nonviolence is directed against evil systems, forces, oppressive policies, unjust acts, but not against persons. Through reasoned compromise, both sides resolve the injustice with a plan of action. Each act of reconciliation is one step close to the 'Beloved Community.

