It seems like we’re losing the ability to talk to each other about our political disagreements or to work together to solve our political problems. Often we are trapped in ideological bubbles where we only hear from people who already agree with us.
When we do try to talk to people who disagree with us, it feels like we’re talking past, rather than to, each other. Too often public discourse is disrespectful, angry, or even threatening. Many of us are tempted to give up on controversial discussions altogether.
WHY
Civil Discourse?
Why Civil Discourse?

The capacity for vigorous and respectful discussion across disagreements is fundamental for the health of our democracy.

Expands knowledge and promotes understanding

Builds civic trust and a sense of community
Why Civil Discourse?
Civil discourse does not replace other forms of democratic engagement, but it is the aspect of citizenship that a public university is uniquely well-positioned to promote.

Advances Ohio State’s mission and shared values

Encourages personal growth and social engagement
Be Curious
Be Charitable
Be Conscientious
Be Constructive
the 4Cs
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

be Curious

Assume that you have something to learn
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Engaging others

Humility
Try to identify conditions under which you would no longer hold your views

The 4Cs
be Curious
Assume that you have something to learn
The 4Cs

Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

- **Engaging others**
  - Humility
    - Try to identify conditions under which you would no longer hold your views

- **The 4Cs**
  - **be Curious**
    - Assume that you have something to learn

- **Responding to others**
  - Receptivity
    - Try to understand how other people’s views might inform your own
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Humility
Try to identify conditions under which you would no longer hold your views

be Curious
Assume that you have something to learn

Receptivity
Try to understand how other people’s views might inform your own

We often disagree about what key concepts mean, how to weigh competing values, and how to evaluate the evidence. Civil discourse requires that we remain open to the possibility that people we disagree with might have something to teach us.
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

The 4Cs
be Charitable

Assume that each participant has good intentions
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

- **Empathy**
  
  Try to describe other people’s views in a way that they would recognize and accept

- **be Charitable**
  
  Assume that each participant has good intentions
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

The 4Cs
Engaging others

Empathy
Try to describe other people’s views in a way that they would recognize and accept

be Charitable
Assume that each participant has good intentions

Responding to others

Forgiveness
If someone offends you, be prepared to accept a sincere apology

Civil Discourse for Citizenship
Center for Ethics and Human Values
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Sometimes we look for reasons to dismiss rather than engage those who disagree with us. Civil discourse requires that we try to understand where people are coming from and accept that we all sometimes make mistakes.
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

be Conscientious

Listen carefully and speak thoughtfully
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, **Conscientious**, and Constructive

**Engaging others**

**Fairness**
Don’t exaggerate the strengths of your views or the flaws of others’

**The 4Cs**

**be Conscientious**
Listen carefully and speak thoughtfully
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, **Conscientious**, and Constructive

**Engaging others**

**Fairness**
Don’t exaggerate the strengths of your views or the flaws of others’

**The 4Cs**

**Responding to others**

**be Conscientious**
Listen carefully and speak thoughtfully

**Resilience**
Don’t be hostile or defensive when your views are challenged
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, **Conscientious**, and Constructive

**Engaging others**

**Fairness**
Don’t exaggerate the strengths of your views or the flaws of others’

**The 4Cs**

**be Conscientious**
Listen carefully and speak thoughtfully

**Responding to others**

**Resilience**
Don’t be hostile or defensive when your views are challenged

It is sometimes tempting to make claims that we can’t back up with good evidence, and to try to talk over or shut down people who disagree with us. Civil discourse requires that we proportion our claims to the available evidence and allow others to challenge our beliefs and values even when it makes us feel uncomfortable or angry.
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Remember that the goal is not to win, but to promote better understanding.
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Engaging others

Practicality
Look for opportunities to work toward common ground

be Constructive
Remember that the goal is not to win, but to promote better understanding
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

**Engaging others**
- **Practicality**
  Look for opportunities to work toward common ground
- **Flexibility**
  Remember that the goal is not to win, but to promote better understanding

**Responding to others**
- **be Constructive**
  Be prepared to change your views
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Engaging others
Practicality
Look for opportunities to work toward common ground

The 4Cs
be Constructive
Remember that the goal is not to win, but to promote better understanding

Responding to others
Flexibility
Be prepared to change your views

A democracy whose citizens aren’t able to communicate across lines of disagreement lacks a healthy civic culture. Civil discourse requires that we remain open-minded and committed to working together to address important problems.
The 4Cs
Be Curious, Charitable, Conscientious, and Constructive

Engaging others
- **Humility**
  Try to identify conditions under which you would no longer hold your views

- **Empathy**
  Try to describe other people’s views in a way that they would recognize and accept

- **Fairness**
  Don’t exaggerate the strengths of your views or the flaws of others

- **Practicality**
  Look for opportunities to work toward common ground

The 4Cs

- **be Curious**
  Assume that you have something to learn

- **be Charitable**
  Assume that each participant has good intentions

- **be Conscientious**
  Listen carefully and speak thoughtfully

- **be Constructive**
  Remember that the goal is not to win, but to promote better understanding

Responding to others
- **Receptivity**
  Try to understand how other people’s views might inform your own

- **Forgiveness**
  If someone offends you, be prepared to accept a sincere apology

- **Resilience**
  Don’t be hostile or defensive when your views are challenged

- **Flexibility**
  Be prepared to change your views

Taken together, the 4Cs give us a concrete and practical set of guidelines for conducting ourselves in civil discourse, both as we engage with others, and as we respond to them.
CEHV’s work on civil discourse has been pursued with generous support from the Derrow Family Foundation and in partnership with Ohio State’s Civil Discourse Project.

cehv.osu.edu/civil-discourse-initiative