



# Guidelines for Meaningful Dinner Conversation

On Thanksgiving, or any day!

1

**Practice the Positive.** Name-calling, complaints and sly digs are off the menu! Stick to “I” statements and choose topics that open people up, not shut them down. For example: Music, hobbies, favorite movies or foods....

2

**Listen to Understand...not to respond.** Show active listening with eye contact and open body language. Ask yourself, “Am I hearing the feelings behind their words?”

3

**Reframe with Respect.** If you hear something that concerns you, ask, “I think I just heard you say....” and restate. Rather than becoming upset, ask, “Can you explain to me what you meant?” Or you might try “I’m curious about...” for gentle inquiry.

4

**Welcome People, Not Arguments.** Steer towards conversation topics that are inclusive and uplifting, and if something unpleasant comes up, calmly say “I hear you, and I’m open to talking more at another time. But right now, let’s enjoy each other’s company. How about we talk about...?”

5

**Get Everyone Involved.** Offer the chance for every person to suggest a topic or game. If someone seems especially quiet, make sure to ask them a direct question or offer a compliment to help them feel included.

6

**Share a Smile.** Whether it’s a literal smile on your face or a lighthearted story, joke or silly cartoon, nothing keeps tension away from the table like a positive mood. Ask everyone to share a funny or warm holiday memory to get the ball rolling!

*Gathering for dinner together should be a healthy, welcoming activity for all.  
Display these rules at your table to help everyone participate and connect.*