ONE CITY
PETERBOROUGH

9 Tips for Discussing Homelessness with Loved Ones During the Holidays

The Dreaded Holiday Conversations

The Holidays are here; a time for family gatherings, dinner conversations and holiday parties with colleagues.

While this may be an exciting time, for many of us, this also means anticipating the inevitable and potentially divisive conversations around topics such as politics, climate change or homelessness.

These conversations can be anxiety inducing, stressful and uncomfortable. If you are dreading these gatherings, you're not alone! Finding productive ways to have these discussions can make a big difference.

One City has created this guide to help you navigate conversations around homelessness with your loved ones. Check out these 9 helpful tips for this holiday season!

01
Listen Respectfully

Active listening can reduce misunderstandings and the potential for conflict. Not interrupting, listening without judgment and staying focused without planning what you are going to say next all play a role in how the conversation may go. This can help to find common ground with one another.

02
Set Boundaries

Decide in advance how much or how long you are willing to engage in challenging conversations. You can set these boundaries internally, but also verbally with your loved ones so they understand when you need to disengage.

"I am willing to discuss this topic for a few minutes, but then I would like to get back to our dinner"

"I would rather not discuss this topic right now so we can enjoy our time together"

03
Ask Clarifying Questions

The goal of the conversation should be to understand where the person is coming from and why they hold such ideas or belief's, not to point fingers.

"I'm not sure I understand. Can you please explain again?"
"What do you mean by ___?"

05

Use "I" Statements

Using "I" statements allows you to reflect back what the other person is saying to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations of their points.

"I feel like..."
"What I'm hearing you say is that..."

06

Know Your Facts & Do Research

Be prepared by researching local statistics on homelessness and be willing to dispute potential myths or misunderstandings may come up in the conversation.

The other person may not be willing to listen to the facts, or may challenge you on them. If they are willing, share your resources and encourage them to do reputable research.

07

Focus on Impact

Focus your points and statements around individual impact or stories, such as how policies or decisions affect yourself, community or loved ones, without pointing fingers. If you have lived experience or have supported individuals experiencing homelessness, share these stories (while maintaining confidentiality and personal comfort levels) to demonstrate your stance.

"The decision made to [action] affects people experiencing homelessness because...."

"In my experience, I worked with people experiencing homelessness and I witnessed...."

08

Assess the Conversation

Ask how the conversation is going, and try to keep it focused. Assess whether both parties are comfortable diving deeper into the topic; if they're not, reorient the conversation to ensure both parties are comfortable speaking their thoughts.

"I feel like we have gotten off topic, let's go back to discussing [previous topic] instead"

09

Continue to Have Conversations

Shutting down difficult conversations can create more harm and cause division. By inviting people to have conversations, listening to their opinions and creating a safe space for dialogue, we can work towards finding common ground.

Always remember to maintain boundaries and know your limits for when you need to disengage from the conversation.

"Thank you for having this conversation with me today. I know it may take more than one conversation to understand one another, and I would like to discuss this topic again with you in the future."

Resources on Homelessness

The Homeless Hub
www.homelesshub.ca

Peterborough's Point in Time Count 2021
Link to download **here**

Podcast: On the Way Home
www.onethewayhome.ca

Research for Social Change Lab
www.socialchangelab.ca

Housing is Fundamental: United Way
Link to download **here**