

Healthy Debates and Discussions

When are both sides of a discussion important?

When we're talking about which testing framework to use or where to go for lunch.

Person A: Let's do the burrito cart today.

Person B: I think I'd rather do pizza today, I've already eaten burritos twice this week.

Person C: It has to be the pizza on 10th, I can't stand the place in our building.

When we can be respectful and listen to each other.

Person A: I'm going to have to split, the one on 10th doesn't have a no-dairy option.

Person C: Oh, I didn't realize. Well, I could have a salad and just skip the slices.

When everyone who has a stake in the outcome can participate as an equal.

Person B: Alright, let's get moving, I'm hungry.

When is it harmful to offer space to both sides?

When one of them negates the identity and participation of minority groups.

Why do you care if our office has a working elevator? Taking the stairs is great exercise.

The moving icons on the page are really cute, let's do more of them! If it bugs you just ignore it. You're over-reacting.

When it reinforces power imbalances.

If you really think women are just as good at this, why aren't you a senior developer yet? Stop whining.

When one side is explicitly calling for harm to other people.

It's too bad lynching went out of style.

How can we have healthy conversations together?

Be aware of the people around you and how your points of view may be affected by your experiences.

If you're not talking about something that you have personal experience with, listen.

Ask other people who share your privilege to do the same.

For more ideas, check out *The Responsible Communication Style Guide*.

Self-care and community care in difficult situations

Often we put the burden of speaking out on the people who are experiencing the most harm.

It's not your fault that people around you don't understand your needs and perspective. You get to decide what you have the energy to handle. If you step out, you're not making things worse — that's on the people who continue to do harm.

Hey, this really isn't okay but I need to get back to what I'm working on now.

People with more privilege need to do more work.

If you're a bystander, speaking out against bad faith and marginalizing arguments is a way you can be an ally. You're taking the responsibility off of the people who experience harm, and that's important because pushing back on these problems is a double burden for them. You also need to do your own research — marginalized people don't owe anyone an education.

What you're saying here is really hurtful to our coworkers. You don't have to agree with everyone but you can't push this bad faith argument. Here's a resource I found that explains why that's not a fair discussion.

You don't have to do this all yourself.

Change isn't a one-person problem. Talk to other people who share your concerns and think about how you can have the most impact together.

I'm pretty concerned about what our teammate is saying. Can you help me push back on this?

You can't convince everyone, so focus on those who have the most power in your space.

People who might be able to offer support include the teammates of the person/people propagating harm, team managers, and other leadership. Think sideways: who's a peer who could be an ally? and hierarchically: who has the power to enforce changes?

Here's why that argument isn't helpful or supportive of the people we work with. Can you say something? I think they'll listen to you.

Know your limits and do what has the most impact.

Put a time limit on things. Can you come to a resolution today, or does everyone need to move on? Decide how much energy you can invest and how you'll know if you're being productive.