



Friends Committee
on National Legislation
Lobbying with Quakers

Talking Across the Gun Divide

Attitudes about guns are complex and nuanced. Don't think of it in terms of absolutes, with one side that's for eliminating guns and another that wants absolutely no restrictions at all. There is a wide spectrum of attitudes and beliefs on both sides. For example, many gun owners support closing loopholes in background checks and are open to an assault weapon ban. Conversely, many gun violence prevention advocates support responsible gun ownership.

Start by Getting to Know the Other Person

When talking about guns and gun violence, it is best to start by getting to know what you can about the other person and finding out where they are on that spectrum of beliefs. You might say, "I'd love to hear about your own experiences with guns." Be sure to intentionally listen. Then, share about yourself, for example, "I never really had them in my life, though my father took up skeet shooting later in life and really enjoyed it. Unfortunately, we lost a family member in a shooting about 10 years ago." Respectfully, ask for more information. You may have the same positions, but for different reasons. You may greatly disagree.

Find Points of Common Belief

Ask what has shaped their perspective and opinion on gun ownership, gun control, and/or gun violence. One way to start is to ask a question like this: "You seem really passionate about this issue. Could you tell me more about how you came to feel the way you do?"

Another approach is finding some point of common belief or value. One such value might be the general desire to protect our families. One may be convinced that not having guns is the safest approach for my situation. One may be unsure. Find out what the other person thinks.

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If someone has guns in their home (as approximately 35% of Americans do), you could ask how they store them and see if it is consistent with safeguarding the family (that is, locked and unloaded, with the ammo stored separately.) If a person is a moderate gun owner, ask them what they think would cut down on using guns for suicide or preventing children from accessing guns.

A good question to ask to get people to open up more might be, “Can you tell me more about that?” Really listen to what they say; don’t ask questions from a judgmental or accusatory mindset.

Words Matter

Gun violence prevention advocates tend to use the terms “gun violence prevention” and “safe storage.” Gun rights people often use “gun safety” and “secure storage.” Listen for differences like this and try to use language with which the other is comfortable. It may not be helpful to start with the intention of forcing language on another person or wordsmithing their voice.

Set Reasonable Expectations

If a person is a gun rights advocate, one or two conversations will likely not change either one of your minds. Some guns rights advocates view the 2nd Amendment almost as a sacred object and gun ownership as an important part of their view of an American cultural identity. Gun violence prevention advocates often feel that addressing the harm done by guns is so important that they disagree with how the courts have interpreted the 2nd Amendment in today’s world.

It can be difficult to find common ground in this situation. Part of dialogue is building relationships. Lead with honoring the Divine in all humanity. Focusing on our shared humanity helps us to work through different convictions and perspectives with dignity.

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Lead with honoring the Divine in all humanity.

Additional Resources:

1. Tibbals, Karen. Persuade, Don't Preach: Restoring Civility across the Political Divide, 2020.
2. Lee, Justin. Talking across the Divide: How to Communicate with People You Disagree with and Maybe Even Change the World. Penguin, 2018.



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