

How to Talk about Equitable Education With Family + Friends

While the fight for educational equity is happening on the national stage, conversations between friends, family, and loved ones occur in more intimate settings. As we navigate these potentially divisive discussions it's important to address what's happening in our communities and step away from the hot button language we see playing out in the media. Now more than ever, it's time to humanize the debate over educational equity, and that starts with us—not politicians or Fox News.

Below are messaging tips and guidance to help us navigate family dinners and holiday catch ups. Feel free to adapt as needed, the more local and community-specific the better:

Things to Keep in Mind

Speak on our terms — not theirs: Avoid amplifying harmful misinformation by using language that reflects your personal perspective without the hot button language that might limit understanding.

Aim to engage, not educate: People tend to shut down when they feel like they're being "educated." Instead, bring them into the conversation, by hearing their perspectives, asking questions, and thanking them for sharing.

Share the truth, but know when to leave: Remember that not everyone will be willing to listen, and it's not your responsibility to convince everyone at the table. Make sure to acknowledge how you're feeling and take time to practice routines of selfcare.

How to Respond

→ **Start local.** Ground the conversation in your own community by sharing the policies and legislation happening there.

[HB2988](#), a pending Oklahoma bill, will prevent students from getting the true history of our country — the good and the bad.

→ **Use examples that involve lived experience.** Focus on how bans are impacting students and their ability to understand the contributions and struggles of different communities.

My son's good friend recently got called a racist name at a track meet. He was upset and my son felt awful because he didn't know how to support him. I'm glad that schools are starting to talk more about race and discrimination in an age-appropriate way so my son can do right by his friends.

→ **Focus on the benefits** by sharing personal experiences, concerns, and hopes.

Love for my community is why I became a nurse. I was taught to love everybody, no matter our differences. Being able to talk about difficult topics and ask the right questions is what makes me good at my job. Kids that are comfortable having these conversations are better equipped for their careers, that's why I don't think we should be banning these conversations from the classroom.

→ **Center the future.** Whenever possible, make sure the other person knows that this fight is about creating classrooms in their community where every student feels accepted and valued — and that's something parents agree on.

Kids are not responsible for the past, but they do have a stake in the future. By helping students understand past struggles of different communities, they learn how to celebrate successes and avoid mistakes. This helps students construct a brighter future, for all of us.

Do's and Don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Do appeal to the shared values at the table—whether that's about kids learning life skills, compassion, or empathy—and look for common ground in education.	Don't use jargon that your friends or family might not be familiar with, or zero-sum language (i.e. describe the type of environments every student deserves rather than saying "equitable learning environments").
Do ensure that everyone has enough time and space to clearly discuss their point of view.	Don't use yelling or attacking language (e.g. refrain from calling someone racist or using hot topic buzz words).
Do use inclusive messaging (i.e. focus on the benefits for EVERY student).	Don't apologize for elevating, listening to, and advocating for students, especially students of color.
Do speak about bans on historical figures, authors, and other local concerns.	Don't use national examples or viral media that isn't actually based on the local reality and context.

To see what's happening in your state, explore this [tracker](#) from PEN AMERICA.