ABOUT ASK BIG QUESTIONS
Ask Big Questions is a project devoted to helping individuals and communities engage in reflective conversations that build trust and understanding. Conversations that help us connect to and understand one another — not as labels but as human beings — are essential building blocks for strong and inclusive communities. We believe that good conversation changes us and can change the world.

USING THIS GUIDE
This Conversation Guide follows a structure called Ask-Share-Learn-Do. It begins by setting some common agreements about how we’ll talk together, moves on to sharing personal stories, and centers around reflection on a learning object. The instructions here and throughout the guide are meant to help you hold a productive and meaningful conversation.

Setting up your Conversation
- A conversation takes two – or more! Get together with someone you know or someone new, or gather with a group.
- For groups, small works best; if your group is large, we recommend breaking into small groups for more intimate interaction.
- Plan enough time so the conversation isn’t rushed—ideally at least 30 minutes.
- Be intentional about choosing and arranging a space for your conversation, where interruptions are minimized and, for groups, where chairs can be arranged in a circle so everyone can see each other.
Opening the Conversation

- Welcome everyone.
- Ask for everyone to be fully present. If appropriate, remind participants to silence their phones and set them aside until the end of the conversation.
- Ask for brief introductions.
- Setting the tone and intention for the conversation is important. Here is some sample language:

“This conversation is meant to help us connect by discussing questions that matter to everyone, and everyone can answer. The questions we will talk about don’t require expertise to answer. In this conversation, we will focus on sharing experiences and stories, not taking positions and debating issues. For our time together, we want to listen and share to understand and learn, instead of to convince, persuade or convert.”

Agreement of Mutual Responsibility

- An expectation of mutual responsibility helps create a more trustworthy space where participants agree about how they will interact and their responsibilities to each other and the group.
- Develop an Agreement that everyone commits to. Here are key commitments we recommend including:

1. **Uphold Confidentiality**: We will honor that what is shared here, stays here, while what is learned here, leaves here.
2. **Seek to Understand**: We will recognize the limits of our own knowledge and experiences, and open ourselves to listen and learn from one another.
3. **Speak only for Ourselves**: We will each speak from our own experience, not for others, not for entire groups, and not relying on outside sources that others don’t have access to.
4. **Reflect on our Motivations**: We will be willing to examine our own motivations for speaking, and ask ourselves: Am I speaking because I want to learn, share or show [what or how much I know]? Am I speaking because I want to contribute -- or to convince, debate, or advocate?
5. **Hold the Silence**: We won’t rush to fill silences, recognizing that we may need time to gather our thoughts or find our courage to speak.
6. **Lean into Discomfort**: We will be willing to grapple with challenging ideas and uncomfortable feelings, and examine our own reactions.
7. **Offer Respect**: We will disagree with respect and curiosity. Because disagreement can open opportunity for learning and growth, we have a responsibility to give voice to and listen to disagreement.
8. **Practice Generosity**: We will recognize that we are all people in process. We are more than we express in any one moment. We will give ourselves and each other permission to not know. We acknowledge that we don’t know what experiences each brings to this conversation and that meaningful conversation can evoke strong emotions. We will respect each other’s right to be fully human.
9. **Recognize we are all part of Something Larger**: Our unique life experiences are also connected to and informed by our social identities, heritage, cultural environments, and more. We will recognize that these aspects of our experiences inform our perspectives and reactions.
Guiding the Conversation

- Begin by asking all participants to consider the question under the Share heading. Give everyone a moment to collect their thoughts.
- Invite participants to share their answer to the question—either with the whole group or with a neighbor. Allow time and space for everyone who wants to answer to do so.
- When using the Learning Object, follow the general outline of the questions: first focus on the object, and only after you’ve really talked about it move on to what everyone thinks about it.
- As the conversation progresses, allow space for people to shift from sharing one after another to having open conversation. Some simple questions, such as the examples below, can help participants reflect on what they have heard, build on their initial comments, or relate their comments to what others have said.

Deepening the Conversation

Using questions and prompts to transition from a series of individual statements to more give-and-take can help deepen the conversation. Here are a few useful examples:

- What would you like to add to what you have shared so far?
- What more would you like to know from others in the group?
- What has resonated with you so far?
- What has started you thinking in new ways or about a perspective you hadn’t considered before?
- What has been interesting, surprising, challenging, or inspiring in what you have heard others share?
- What connections have you noticed among our stories?

Closing the Conversation

- Just as with opening, how you bring a sense of closure is important, too.
- Remember that closure does not mean that the group has to come to agreement or consensus.
- We’ve provided some closing questions at the end of this guide.
- Thank everyone again.
- If appropriate, take a group selfie or individual selfies to share on social media using #ConversationChallenge
ASK & SHARE
We’re here to talk about the question, When do you take a stand? Here’s a question to begin: Who is someone you know who has taken a stand? Share a story about when they did. (The person can be you!)

LEARN
Directions: Look at the picture of “Josh.” Josh is the little boy who is playing with the shield of a police officer during a Klan March in Gainesville, Georgia in 1992. Examine the picture closely.

Photo by Todd Robertson. Exercise adapted from Bowling Green State University’s “Learning From a Legacy of Hate,” available at www.bsu.edu/learningfromhate
Questions for Discussion:

What’s happening in the picture?
1. What is the first thing that you notice about this picture?
2. What do you think is going on in the officer’s head at this moment? What are his facial expressions saying?
3. What do you think “Josh” is thinking or feeling about the officer? About the Ku Klux Klan march?

What does it bring up for us?
4. What kinds of feelings does the picture prompt in you?
5. Would you feel differently about this picture if the officer that “Josh” is interacting with was not African-American? For example, what if the officer was white? Latino? Asian-American?
6. What kinds of things would you say to “Josh” if you were the officer?
7. If you were a bystander and observed “Josh” and the officer, what would you feel, think, and do?
8. If you could change anything about this picture, what would it be?

DO

As we consider how this conversation relates to our world today, here are some final questions:
1. When you think about this conversation in light of current events, what comes up for you?
2. Are you considering taking action? If yes, what? If not, why?
3. In one word or phrase, describe how you are feeling about our conversation.
4. What insights have you gained about yourself or others from our conversation?