

Carsey School of Public Policy

Coffee & Conversations: Engaging in Dialogue Across Differences

September 1, 2021

Questions?

You can send a message using the chat feature.



**University of
New Hampshire**

Carsey School of
Public Policy



Our Mission

Our mission is to help New Hampshire residents talk, listen, and act together so communities can work for everyone.

Our Vision

We envision a New Hampshire where residents are connected, engaged and heard in decisions that impact their lives and where all have equitable access to justice, opportunity, and liberty.

<https://nhlistens.org>

NH Listens Local
*Strengthening
Communities and
Connections*

Building trust and sustainable civic infrastructure

Solving Problems, navigating controversy

Community dialogues, conversation, shared learning, and deliberation

Anti-polarization and misinformation projects with neighbors

NH Listens Research
*Civic life , learning, and
participatory
democracy*

NH Civic Health Index and replicable, local civic health strategies

Youth voice and youth civic engagement

Collaborations with applied research teams within and outside the college and university systems

**NH Listens Learning
Exchanges**
*Civic engagement
learning and
leadership building*

Project-based coalition building -people involved in policy and change at many levels learn together
Learning exchanges for equity

Facilitator trainings and roundtables - public, organizational, and community based

Treat Student Fellows and NH Listens Fellows

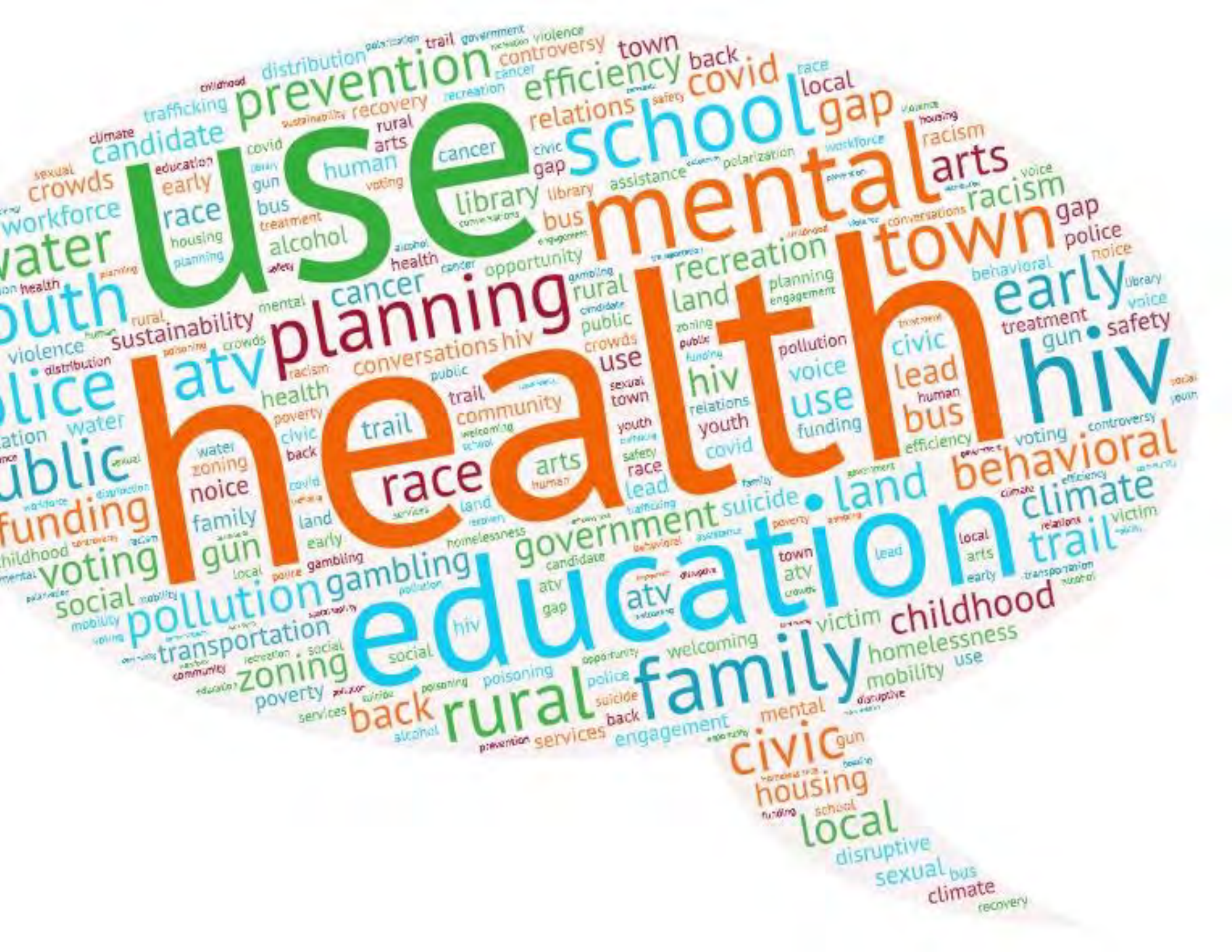
Graduate-level coursework through the Carsey School of Public Policy

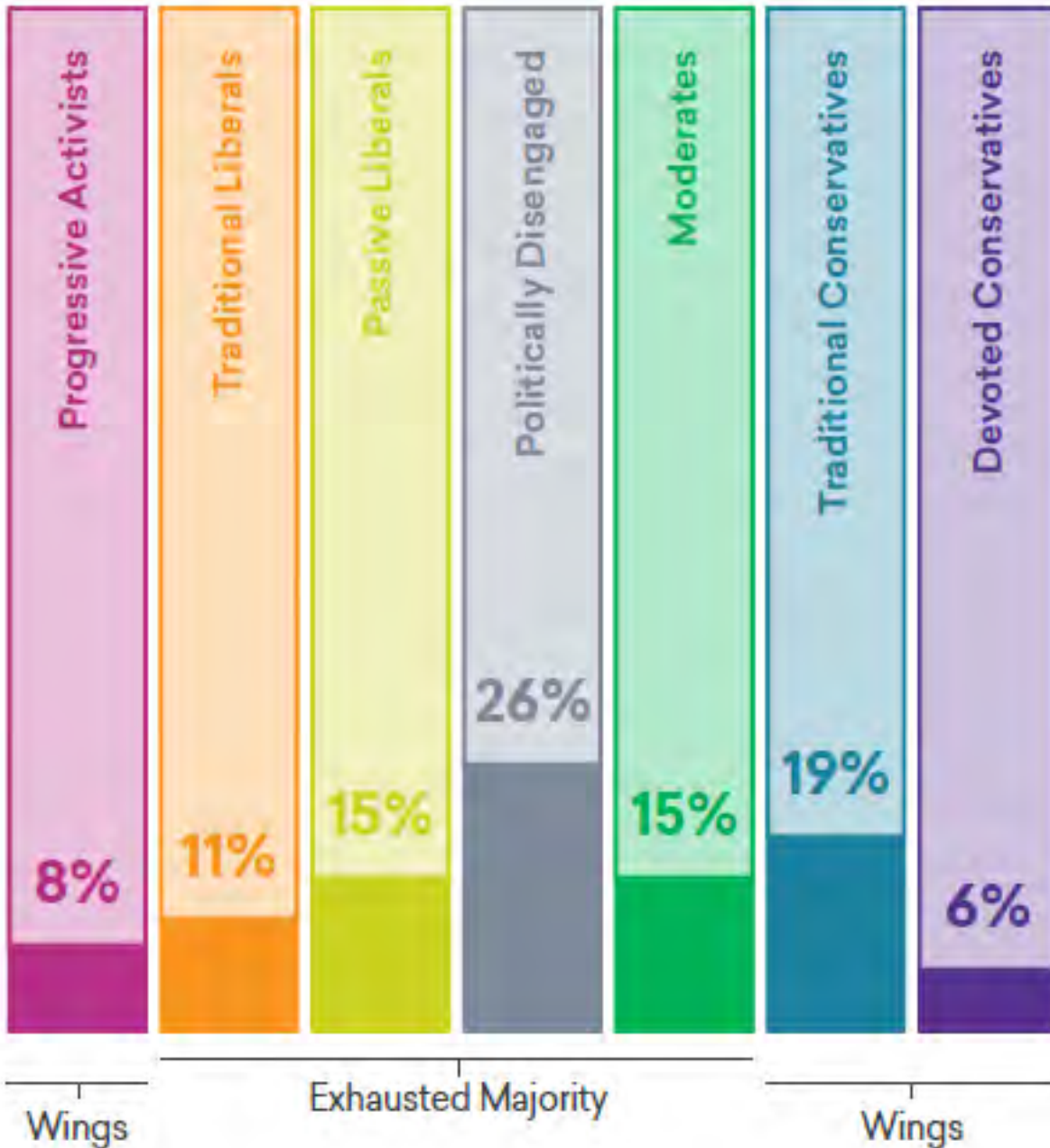
**NH Listens Supports
Transformational
Change**
*Systemic and structural
equity dialogues to
promote collaborative
change*

Educational and racial equity in public schools - student, educator, family, and community engagement

Community, regional, and statewide issue deliberation; structuring and sustaining equity and engagement

Project support - focus groups, interviewing, public engagement through conversation and dialogue, coaching





Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape

Stephen Hawkins
Daniel Yudkin
Míriam Juan-Torres
Tim Dixon

And this was 2017!

**It is possible
to talk stick
with a tough
conversation!
But framing
matters.**

- Formal and friendly opportunities to bring people together across difference
- What ties people together? Same NH town or same topic of interest, ex. education
- Framing matters – ‘What issues are important to you?’
- Who is the invitation coming from?
- Environment – community center, school, town hall, or a living room, coffee shop. online (ball pit or friendly bench)
- Informal, fly-by moments are tough! Be proactive.
- Practice helps.

***“The only cure for bias is
other people”***

Jonathan Haight

Author, *The Righteous Mind: Why good people are divided
by politics and religion*

Resources
from our
friends at
Essential
Partners



Why is this so difficult?

- Politics is one way we express what we really care about – our hopes, our values, our deepest concerns.
- Someone challenging our hopes or belittling our fears can put us instantly on the defensive, and provoke us to attack or shut down, which in turn provokes the other person to attack or shutdown

Why bother: Why is it so important? What is at stake?

- Most of us have at least one important relationship that has either been strained by painful conversations about political differences or silenced due to fear that it could get ugly.
- Knowing how to talk with each other across differences is an important component of sustaining relationships, communities, and our country – we need these skills! We need to practice!

What is Dialogue?

DEBATE

About winning
One right answer
Combative
Finds flaws in other's points
Closed-minded
Seeks closure



DIALOGUE

About learning
Finding the solution together
Collaborative
Finds strengths in other's points
Open-minded
Seeks new options

<https://dapinclusive.org/news/lesson-1-the-difference-between-debate-and-dialogue/>
<https://www.usip.org/public-education/educators/dialogue-versus-debate>

How to Start

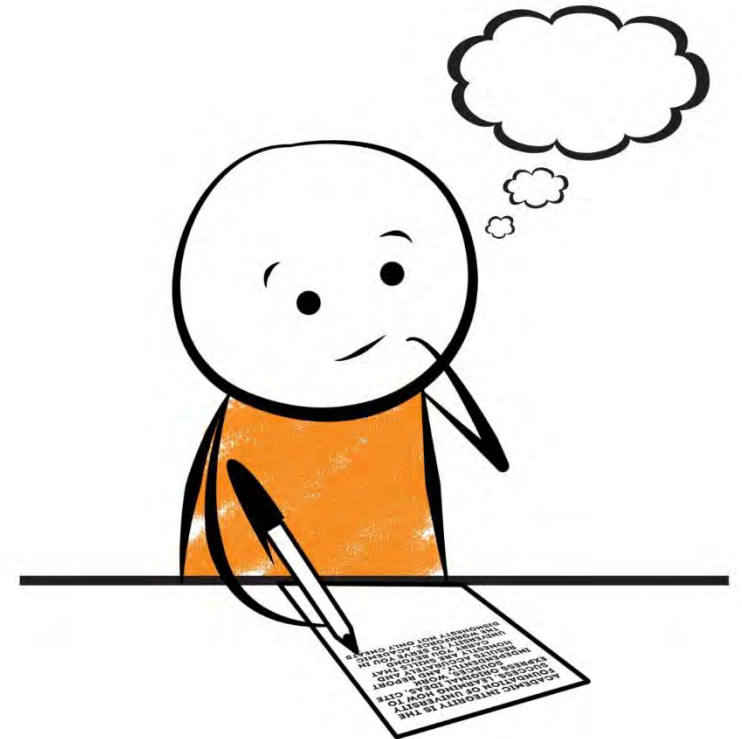
Are you ready? Are they? Ask yourself:

- Why do you want to connect? What do you want to learn?
- Are you ready to resist the strong pull toward getting angry or frustrated?
- Is just trying to understand each other enough, or will you feel the need to persuade them to concede certain points?

What can you do to prepare yourself to listen without interrupting and to speak with care?

Your conversation is most likely to go well if you:

- 1) share the same hopes for the conversation,
- 2) have some good agreements about how to talk and work together,
- 3) and have some good questions to start you off.



Examples of Learning Community Agreements

Be fully present, try not to multitask

Listen to each other

Lean into discomfort

Take risks, be messy, make some mistakes – then let go

Take responsibility for what you say and how you say it

Speak for yourself. You don't have to speak for "your group."

Be open to another perspective

Share airtime so people get a chance to share their thinking and learning

Be respectful and use respectful language.

If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point. Don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.

Ask curious questions, especially if you disagree

Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.

If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.

We all share responsibility for making our time together productive.

Bring your authentic self - this is a learning space, not a performance space

Honor Confidentiality: stories stay here, learning leaves here

Agreeing on HOW to talk:

Creating some agreements to follow so that you can listen.

Having a good conversation can be a lot like driving, it's amazing how people are able to navigate around each other if they have a few rules of the road. Make them simple and easy to remember:

Try this:

“It's going to help me bring my best self if we can agree to three simple things:

Let's:

- *share the time*, let's not interrupt each other and no one person goes on too long.
- *speak for ourselves*, from our personal experience, and not try to represent or defend an entire political party.
- *respect each other's differences* by avoiding being too critical or dismissive, aiming simply to understand and not to persuade each other.

“Do those work?”

Extending the Invitation:

Try this:

“I really want to be able to talk about this with you. Do you think we can have an honest conversation about this – not just an argument? Can we try to hang in there and listen even when one of us says something the other really doesn't understand?”



Start with a good question:

If you ask a yes or no question, you will get a yes or no answer. But if you ask a question that invites people to talk about what is important to them, what issues are most complex to them – you will be half-way to a productive and civil conversation.

Try this:

- What is at the heart of your political beliefs?
- What hopes, concerns and values do you have that underlie your beliefs?
- What is it in your life experience that has led you to believe the things you do?

Once people have been able to talk about the things they really believe in and care about, they may be more willing to talk about what is complex and difficult.

Getting Back On Track:

Bringing it back when the conversation has been hijacked, sidetracked, and lost in translation.

When things get really tough or the disagreement is profound -- and there is a good chance that will happen – remember your purpose is to understand, not persuade.

Tune in: Are you really listening? Are you listening to understand or to find fault? When you hear something that just doesn't make any sense to you or that you really disagree with, make sure you have heard the person and let them know you are trying to understand.

Try this:

“Let me make sure I understand what you mean, you are saying that this is important to you because _____ and that you really wish _____. Is that right?”

Get Curious: when you are most frustrated is when you have to get most curious. First about yourself – why is this so difficult for me? And then about them.

Try this:

- How did you come to believe that? Is there a story there?
- Why is that really important to you?
- Do you ever feel conflicted about it in any way or have questions or uncertainties?

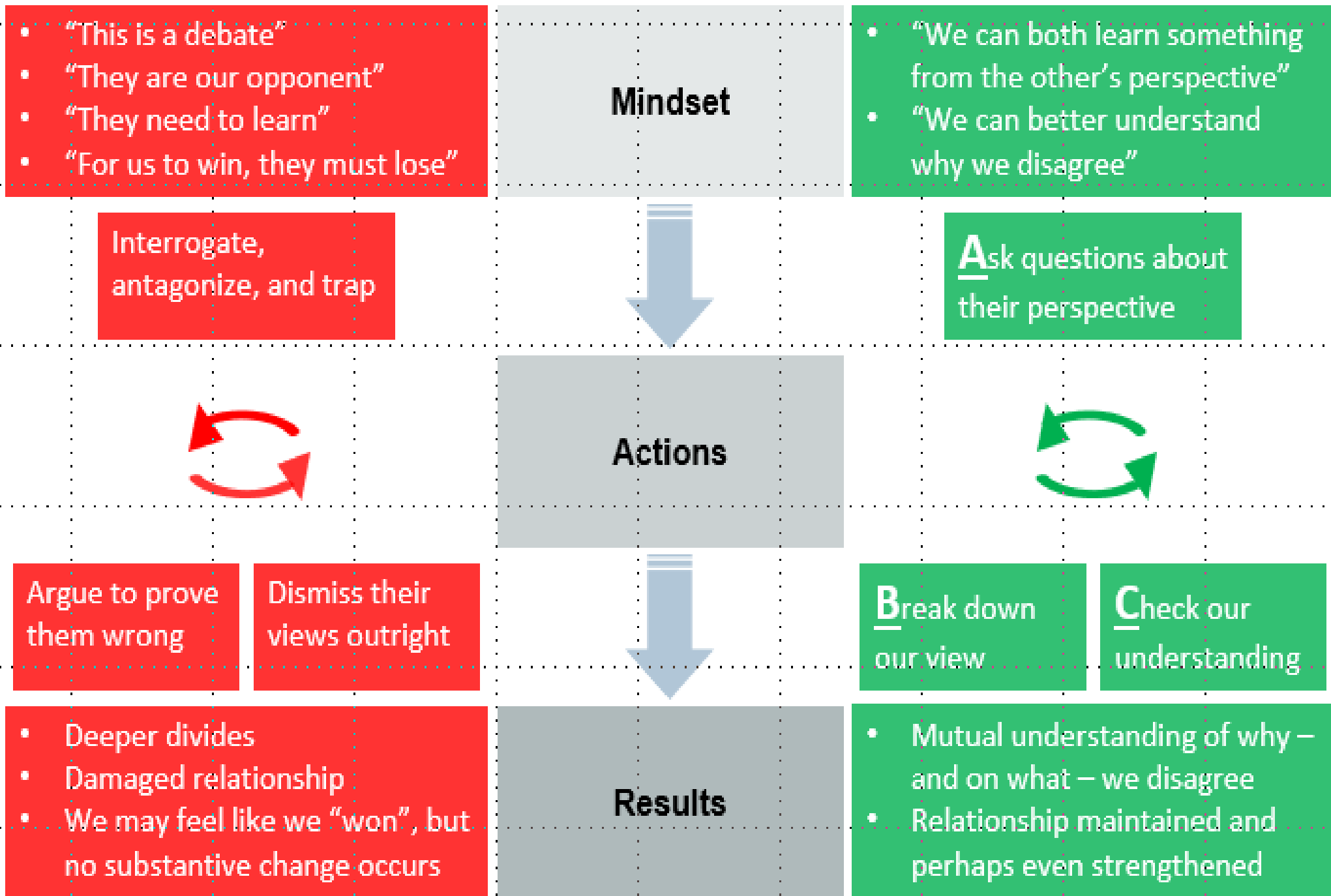
Take a Break: It's one of those things we learned in kindergarten, right? Now we know It takes about 20 minutes for the chemicals in our body to get back to normal when we have gotten really upset. Name your desire to continue and suggest a short break.

Appreciate each other: Name what you learned and thank your partner for the experience.

ABCs for Responding in Challenging Conversations

- **A**sk questions to understand their perspective
- **B**reak down our view so they understand our reasoning
 - **C**heck our understanding of their perspective

<https://www.uration.org/approach.html>



Unpacking Civil Discourse:

- Power dynamics connected to civility (tone police, “be civilized”)
- Safety and courage in the context of civil discourse
- Making room for emotions
- Protest and civil disobedience



Neutrality

- It is possible to be passionate about a topic without seeking a pre-determined end
 - Concept of passionate impartiality
- Make explicit the examination of patterns of power, privilege, and structural inequality underlying any public problem.
 - Goes beyond getting a mix in the room
 - Need to address values tensions
 - Creating brave space rather than safe space
- Trust the process: neutral deliberation, if done right, will foster social justice
 - Advocacy is a different strategy – we are advocates for diverse voices and for democratic process, not particular positions or solutions
- A non-partisan stance is important to earn trust as conveners and intermediaries; so is transparency and a willingness to create space for real analysis of disparity

**Bridges endure.
So can our friendships.
So can you.**



**Deepening Connection
& Understanding Across
New Hampshire's
Urban/Rural Divide**

An online initiative to build connections
across distance and difference in New
Hampshire

from
**New Hampshire Listens
& UR Action**

Join us at uraction.org/newhampshire

Q & A