Talking about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

Tips for engaging with one another:

<u>Find the right time and place.</u> Make sure you have at least a few minutes to listen. This is not a small issue. Speaking face-to-face (even on video), and somewhere without lots of noise and distractions, is usually best so you can read (and successfully convey) emotion and body language.

<u>At all times, maintain respect and calm.</u> No name-calling. No interrupting. Take a deep breath if you feel your blood pressure rising. Speak calmly, even softly. Watch your tone and your body language. Try to relax your posture. Folding your arms or putting your hands on your hips may send the wrong signals.

If it becomes too heated, everyone should know that it's alright to pause the conversation for another time (or never). You may have any number of excuses to break it off. But if you're feeling especially honest, you could try: "I'm sorry. I really appreciate talking with you about this, but I'm really feeling overwhelmed right now. Could we maybe pick this up another time?"

<u>Open with what you share, a common purpose.</u> Start by asking about them. A natural starting point is shared pain, a shared struggle to absorb the situation, and a shared desire to be able to support each other. "How are you doing with all this stuff going on in the Middle East? Do you have any personal connections there? Is everyone you know alright? I know it can be sensitive, but I'm concerned about how everyone is handling this and just wanted to ask how you're doing."

When they respond, be empathetic and compassionate: "Wow. I hear you. I'm so sorry to hear how this is affecting you." Usually, you'll get asked the same in return and can share your own answer to those questions. You may find that it's safest to start with feelings, not opinions. No one can argue with feelings.

<u>Make your goal to listen and learn.</u> The point is not to make a point. It's simply to have a successful conversation, where you walk away on good terms and understand and support each other better. It's not to argue or prove anything to anyone (other than what a good, compassionate listener you are). Pretend you're interviewing them about their feelings and experience. Ask questions. Listen more than you speak.

Really try to understand: Why do they think or feel as they do? Listen actively rather than waiting to pounce with a zinger. Resist the temptation to keep thinking about your next retort or argument. Instead, think about your next question. Even when you get into the land of opinions, be willing to admit you don't know it all. Consider questions like those suggested by <u>Dr. Raina Brands</u>:
- "What experiences have shaped your thinking on this issue?"
- "I've never thought about this perspective before. Can you tell me more?"
- "I can see you feel strongly about this. Why is this issue important to you?"
- "That's an interesting thought. How did you arrive at this view?"

<u>Be humble.</u> Admit when you don't know something. It not only keeps the conversation more factual and human, but it also shows some vulnerability, which will make the other person feel more comfortable.

Be graceful. Be generous. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Assume that they have the best intentions even if the words don't come out perfectly. Don't try to twist their words or take offense. Don't take it personally, and don't make it personal. Remember your shared purpose; you're not there to judge what kind of person they are. If you find yourself thinking like an attorney cross-examining a witness, take a step back in your mind and a deep breath to avoid heading down the wrong path.

Acknowledge them. As you listen, show it by nodding your head or acknowledging what they're saying. Even if you don't agree, you can say, "I hear what you're saying." If they are describing something painful, hurtful, or scary, definitely respond with "I'm really sorry" or "that sounds so painful/scary."

Look for, and point out, areas of common ground. Where you do agree, lean in. Try to find opportunities, even small ones, to say "for sure," "totally," or "I see what you mean." Even if you don't agree with their final conclusions, you can say, "I understand where you're coming from and how you got there." Maybe you can point out that you share the same goals, like peace and security for all people, even if you don't agree on the history of the conflict or how to solve it.

Know when to end it. End on a point of agreement, even if you're agreeing to disagree about many things and mostly circling back on your shared purpose. Remind them that you care about them in this moment and appreciate understanding better what they're going through, how they feel, and/or what they think. Express gratitude: "So many people are having trouble even talking about this. I really appreciate that we were able to have this conversation."

For more information about the thousands of Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders who do this every day, please visit www.allmep.org.