



**BASIC  
INCOME  
ALBERTA**

**TOOL KIT #1**

**Managing  
Challenging  
Conversations**



## Managing Challenging Conversations

*Talking about subject matter that challenges the status quo can be tricky, but it's an important thing to do. From ending racism and sexism, to preventing poverty and beyond, we need to make changes to how our society functions, and we can't do that if we don't discuss it widely — especially with people who may not already agree with us.*

*Conversations about Basic Income can sometimes follow a challenging path.*

*Here are some tips for managing these conversations, in real life, and on social media, so that they stay balanced, respectful, and ultimately, productive.*

### 1. Meet people where they're at, be gentle, and flex your empathy muscles.

Everyone has had a lifetime of experiences that reinforce how we think about the world. Making a sincere effort to understand other perspectives will shift the tone of a contentious debate to a more productive dialogue.

So, ask questions, demonstrate listening, use open and invitational body language and words, and encourage positive interactions through smiling, nodding, mirroring body language, etc. A little positivity can take the steam out of a potential argument, and can lead to more willingness on the other person's part to react and respond positively to you and what you're saying.

Therefore, you might open the conversation about basic income like this: *"I'm curious to know what you think about..."* or *"I'm so interested in your thoughts about \_\_\_."*

Follow up with prompts like *"Tell me more about why you feel this way..."* or *"I'd really like to better understand your point of view. Could you tell me more about \_\_\_."*

Even if you'd rather shake your head, or confront their ideas, or make a snarky comment, do your best to keep the conversation positive and give them the space to share their concerns.



**2. Acknowledge the other person’s emotional state, and validate their feelings.**

Talking about change can sometimes feel threatening. It’s often politicized, and it can quickly trigger negative emotional reactions that reflect a person’s deeply held fears, beliefs and identity. Denying or deflecting those emotions shuts down the conversation, and doesn’t lead to productive outcomes. As much as you may disagree with them, their feelings about the subject aren’t going to change if they don’t feel respected or understood. In fact, they may just dig in even deeper – the [Double-Down Effect](#) can make people even more resolute in their beliefs if they feel attacked or confronted.

And when talking about a subject as nuanced as Basic Income, some of their concerns may be valid (mitigatable, but valid).

So, these phrases might help: *“I hear you.”*  
*“I get your concern about \_\_\_ that’s totally fair.”*  
*“Thanks for letting me know where you’re coming from, and I understand your perspective.”*  
*“I can definitely understand why you’d feel worried about \_\_\_.”*



**3. Seek points of agreement.**

Look for common ground, and acknowledge it. Position yourself as on the same side, instead of in direct opposition.

Phrases like: *“I totally agree that \_\_\_ is important.”*  
*“I’d like to see \_\_\_ happen too.”*  
*“I’m with you on more \_\_\_.”*



**4. Share your personal perspectives.**

It’s easy to argue with sweeping statements. But personal perspectives are harder to dispute, particularly if you’ve also given them space to share their perspectives. This can provide them with insight about why you feel the way you do, and if they’re not feeling threatened by you and your ideas (because they perceive you to be on the same side), they might be more willing to consider your point of view.

Your personal perspective can often be shared in a ‘positivity sandwich’ to soften differences of opinion. Use, *“Yes, and…”* language, instead of “Yes, but…”





Phrases like *“I totally agree that \_\_\_ is important. And I’d love to see \_\_\_ happen. I know, for me, it would make a huge difference if \_\_\_. That’s why I support the idea of basic income, because it would allow me the opportunity to \_\_\_.* And I also think [what you said] is important, and we need to find a way to...”

Also, make liberal use of *“In my opinion...” “IMHO...” “I believe that...”* Again, it’s much harder to argue with personal statements, and humility helps keep the other person from feeling threatened.

## 5. Resist the “Well, actually...” urge.

No one likes a know-it-all, and definitely no one likes to be told that they’re wrong. Therefore, sandwich points of disagreement (as above), and provide data and information in gentle, empathetic ways.

Try the *“What if...”* approach instead.



For example: *“That’s an interesting point, and I totally hear you about the concern. What if it could be addressed? I recently read a study that suggested \_\_\_ and that relieved my mind about that. It’s so important to find a way to manage that issue...”*

By doing so, you’re able to acknowledge the person’s concerns, and validate their emotions, while at the same time providing compelling data, without turning it into a confrontation.

## 6. Be prepared.

Understand and anticipate the typical objections.

Most objections to Basic Income follow a similar path – most frequently, “We can’t afford it” and “It’s a disincentive to work.”

Educate yourself so that you understand how to address those narratives (see Toolkit #2), and provide the counter argument before the other person brings it up – which means that you can shape the conversation the way you want to around the objections, and you can provide data and information to say *“What if...”* instead of saying, “Well, actually...” (as above).

For example, *“I’ve heard some people say that as a country, we can’t afford basic income, but what if we actually could? Are there ways we could make it work? For example, poverty costs a lot of money, upwards of \$9 billion dollars in Alberta alone...”*



By acknowledging that you’re aware of and understand the objections, you validate the fair critiques, and provide a counter to them in a non-confrontational way.

## 7. Don't try to win, instead, build the relationship.

Accept that you may not change the person's mind in one conversation.

Having a positive interaction is more important than 'winning' a debate, and is ultimately more productive. People are more likely to shape their attitudes, values and beliefs off of people they like and respect.

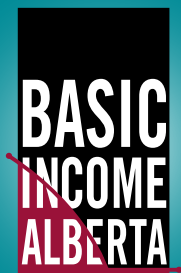
By preserving the relationship, you're opening the door for them to see things your way. By pushing a debate, someone wins and someone loses, which closes that door.

*"Thanks for this conversation. I know we don't agree on all points, and that's ok. I appreciate understanding you better, and I look forward to chatting again."*



*Be patient. Changing the world isn't easy, and talking about change — especially with people who are resistant to it — can be a hard task, and often takes some time. By approaching folks with empathy, and a sincere focus on building relationships, instead of 'being right,' you'll have a better shot at more productive conversations that lead to positive change.*

*For more detail about how to talk about Basic Income across the political spectrum, please [check out Tool Kit #2!](#)*



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