



Real Talk about Abortion: Conversation Starters

The Abortion Conversation Project, as its name suggests, encourages open and honest conversations about abortion. We are abortion providers and allies who believe that this country desperately needs a different conversation about abortion. The March for Women's Lives in April 2004 was an historic event and the experience of marching with hundreds of thousands of pro choice activists has inspired the next generation of activists. Over 11,000 conversation guides were distributed to activists "en route" to the March and a slightly revised version follows. Activists told us that these conversation starters were also helpful in organizing meetings of pro choice groups, training for activists, and women's issue events on campuses. We hope they will be useful to you and we invite your feedback. We believe strongly that an open conversation about abortion can make us stronger pro choice advocates.

Two observations:

1. Abortion is the most divisive social issue in the US today.

The abortion debate has polarized people to the point that most folks don't want to even discuss it in ordinary conversation. Yet the extreme right wing uses the issue to push a radical agenda on the economy, war, and the suspension of civil rights. It's serious way beyond the issue itself.

2. Women who are making a decision about a pregnancy are silenced.

Even though more than a third of all women will have an abortion in their lifetimes, individual women can easily feel that they are alone. They face shame and secrecy from our culture and they typically find it difficult to find a safe place to have their feelings about this life event. Women, and the partners, friends, and family supporting them, are stigmatized to a greater or lesser degree, by society's conflict about abortion.

It's time for an open and honest conversation about abortion.

The Abortion Conversation Project has assembled this packet of information to help you start conversations in your own community. Engage friends, classmates, colleagues, and fellow pro choice activists to end the silence about our experiences of abortion. Together, we can create the cultural change, conversation by conversation, to ensure the right to safe, legal, accessible abortion

in the US. In the process, we can create safe zones for our daughters, mothers, sisters, and friends to make good decisions for their lives.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

A Note about Feeling Safe: One of the things the Abortion Conversation Project has noticed is that abortion is a difficult subject for many people. Even though more than a third of all women will have an abortion in their lifetimes, abortion is still highly stigmatized in our society. We want to create a safe place to talk about abortion right now. That means that information of a personal nature is not repeated without that person's permission. It means we listen to each other attentively but without judgment. It's a good idea to assure each other of these agreements. Remember, it is completely normal to have a lot of feelings about this life event--that doesn't mean that abortion is right or wrong for a particular person.

Start with one person or a small group of 2-4 people. In a larger group, break into dyads or small groups. If two people are having the conversation, try an interview approach. Person A asks the question, Person B answers, then switch roles for the same question, and move on to the next question. If you are in a larger group, make sure each person gets a turn to talk. Take about 3-5 minutes to answer a question. You can come back to the topic later if you want to talk more.

Before moving to the next question summarize for your partner what she/he said in a few sentences. Give her a chance to add or correct your summary.

Conversation 1: Why abortion rights?

Is there an event in your life that moves you to organize around reproductive rights? What is it?
Please tell the story.

What do you think the April 2004 March for Women's Lives accomplished?

Conversation 2: Talking about abortion

Has anyone ever talked to you about having an abortion, or asked you for help?

Do you think it is difficult for people who might need an abortion to ask for information or support?

Are you someone they might want to talk to? How do you let your friends, coworkers, your children or their friends know that you are willing to talk about abortion?

Tell about an experience of abortion-- not necessarily your own, if you have had an abortion. Talk about what you know of that person's situation. Did she have support?

Do you think that it is difficult to talk about abortion right now, even among fellow activists or supportive friends? Take a minute to think about why this is. What does having an abortion mean? What feelings does it bring up?

Conversation 3: Pregnant?

Have you ever been pregnant or missed a period or had a pregnancy "scare"? Talk about that time when you were trying to decide about what the right thing was for you (regardless of your eventual choice).

If you have never been pregnant, talk about how it would be if you just discovered you (or your partner or daughter) were pregnant in the present circumstances.

You don't need to tell what you would do, but please include what would come up for you-- relationship, family, career or education, hopes, goals etc.

What is the "gift" (benefit) that abortion has given to us? What is the hard part?

Conversation 4: Carrying it on

What encourages you or discourages you from identifying as pro choice--to friends? to family? to co-workers or fellow students?

What do you see as the next step in helping people have constructive conversations about abortion?

If you could sum up your conversations into a slogan for a bumper sticker or sign, what would it be?

For more resources, see One-to-One Conversations and Community Conversations at www.abortionconversation.com.

FEEDBACK

The Abortion Conversation Project would very much appreciate your feedback on this conversation packet. You can sign up for our e-newsletter online at our website www.abortionconversation.com. Or send us a message Info@abortionconversation.com or to **The Abortion Conversation Project** 908 King St. #400W Alexandria VA 22314.