What to do when immigration comes up over family dinner.

You know how “The Holidays” are. They are supposed to be a time for families to come together, to share food and to nostalgically retell stories about years gone by. Sometimes frantic travel, combined with too short breaks from school or work can result in being curt with the people you love. Like your conservative Uncle David who wants to talk about immigration before you even get to the cranberry sauce…

Here’s how to talk about Immigration… With OUT walking out before dessert!

Take a deep breath and remember you want to preserve a deeper connection with your family, one that will last for years and years. Recognize their humanity and, truthfully, what makes you a human being, too.

Consider THIS: Conflict can be good!
Conflict creates the energy necessary to solve a dilemma and it opens the door to consider new ideas and new approaches for solving old problems.

If oppression = monologue, then dialogue = liberation, right?
Ask some real questions, and actually listen to the answers. Is there a real fear around a statement or opinion Aunt Sue is making? Why would she feel that way? What are her core beliefs? Try not to assume you already know what motivates other people. Try to understand where she’s coming from and tell her you’re listening, then share your own thoughts and stories.

Stay true to yourself. In the end, that is what will make it easier to sleep at night. Chances are you care a lot about your family, and what they think. You may be listening to things that are hard to hear, but you don’t have to give up your core beliefs.

Resist the urge to be self righteous. It is an easy thing to do when we believe we see what’s right and others don’t seem to. But it’s pretty easy to sound holier than thou and that can only undermine the values you are trying to espouse. We must keep our integrity,
even in the face of ridicule. It gives us a stronger sense of self-respect, and increases our desire to be an even better person. We’ll find our integrity still intact when we don’t become judgmental and bitter.

**Repeating hate speech isn’t ok, ever.** Sometimes people close to us repeat the negative narrative about immigration. Unfortunately, it’s spread by media, our policy makers, teachers, etc. At times, it permeates our culture so much, people don’t realize the dehumanizing words they are using.

Try pointing it out, and agree to use appropriate language, together. You could say something like: ‘I’m trying to stay away from using callous words about people in my community. That’s why I say ‘undocumented’ instead of ‘illegal alien’.”

Check out materials from the Drop the I Word Campaign here: [http://colorlines.com/droptheiword/](http://colorlines.com/droptheiword/)

**Stories Vs. Facts? Or Facts that add to Stories!**

Often using a story to illustrate your point can get to the heart of a matter quickly. Stories can show real live impacts of our nation’s immigration policies. Try to tell stories about yourself and your realizations. Be a good ally, stay away from stories that appeal to pity, tell stories to ignite change. Stories can have lots of good hard data and facts in them, as well.


**Can you end on a positive note?**

What can you agree on? What are the core beliefs you have that you can agree on? Give your family some food for thought, something they can mull over way into dessert. Maybe they need to see the sources for some of your facts; maybe they need to connect with some of the people you talked about in your stories.


**Your Holiday Homework:**

Hear someone out, ask some questions, try to understand their fear or perspective. Be open to changing how you feel or think.

**...or, now that you’re a pro...**

Maybe it’s time to talk to your mail carrier, or your dentist, or your neighbor...

Check out the Welcoming Colorado campaign here: [http://welcomingcolorado.org](http://welcomingcolorado.org)

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