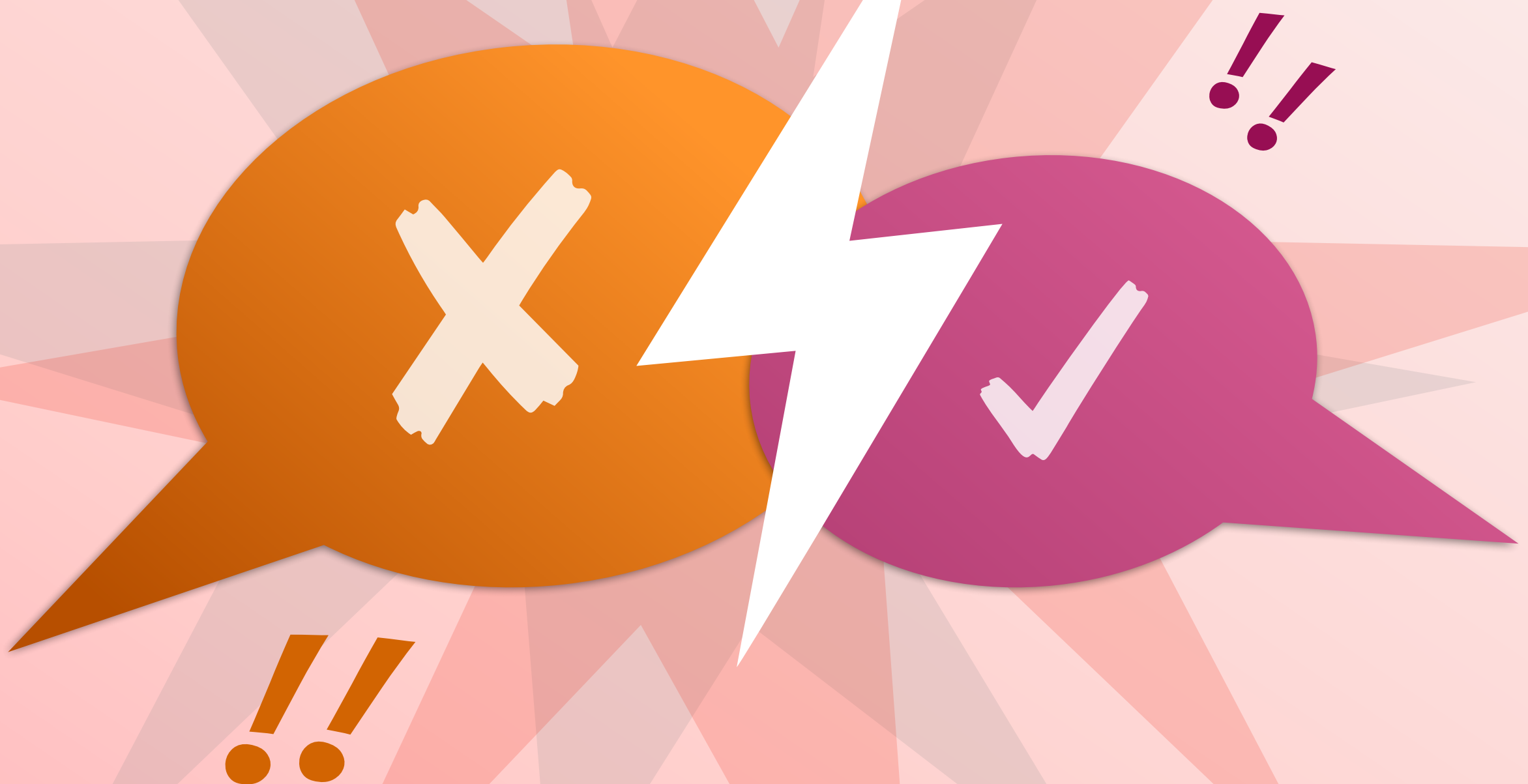
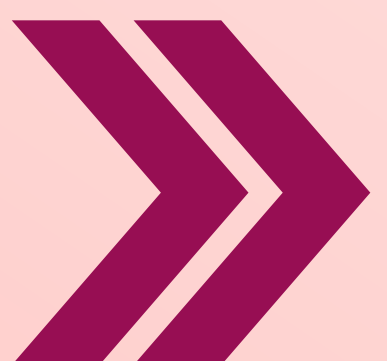


# HOW TO TALK TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO VOTED DIFFERENTLY

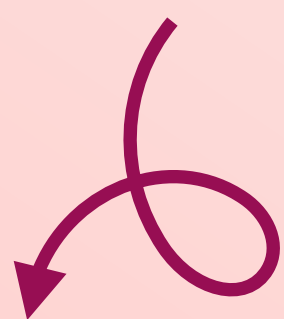


A CAPE explainer on how to navigate uncomfortable political conversations



We often feel strongly about our stances on political issues, and in turn grapple with speaking to loved ones and friends who voted differently from ourselves. This may be especially difficult when the candidate that they voted for had made racist, sexist and xenophobic statements.

Check out some tips we have compiled that you can use to engage in a **constructive conversation on democracy and social justice** with those around us:



## 1 Do: Affirm Your Relationship

Start the conversation by checking in with them. Ask about their day, and demonstrate genuine interest to listen. The fastest way for a conversation to shut down is when the other party realises you just want to shove your opinion down their throat!

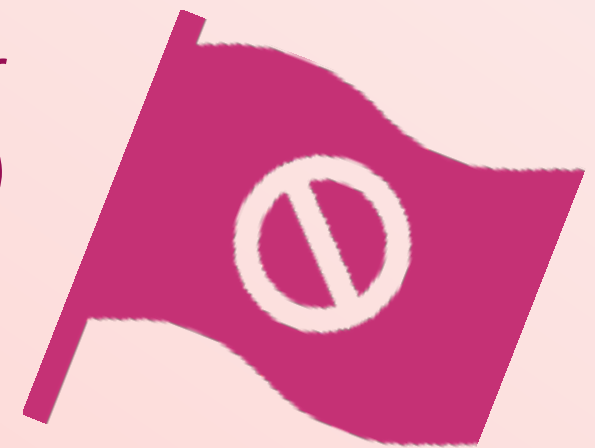


## 2

# Don't: Make Assumptions

Invite them to share why they voted for the way they did. Don't start the conversation by telling them why they voted "wrongly". **Sometimes, it may surprise you to hear how others rationalise their vote.** Voting is a complex and nuanced process that everyone approaches differently, so make sure you understand where the other person is coming from.

Voting for distasteful political positions or candidates (e.g. who use racist rhetoric) might be disagreeable.



**BUT**

1

This can be a form of **protest voting**, for which voters vote not for what the candidates stand for but what they are not. In many democracies, this is a legitimate and well-studied form of democratic participation.

2

This can come from real or perceived, but ultimately valid **socio-economic anxieties and insecurities** which should be called in, instead of dismissed.

### 3 Do: Acknowledge their concerns

After hearing why they voted the way they did, make sure that they feel heard! Rephrase or repeat what they have shared (even if you disagree) so they know you've heard them. If possible, **find a common issue that you agree with** and let them know that you feel the same way too.

### 4 Don't: Dismiss their concerns

Even if you vehemently disagree with what they have shared, do not dismiss or criticise their views. Instead, try to dig deeper - ask clarifying questions and show them that you are genuinely curious about their thought process.

Resist the urge to "fact-check" or correct them even when you know what they have shared is wrong. **Instead, focus on the underlying emotions that are driving their beliefs.** Arguments are never won by facts, but by convincing on a socio-emotional level.

## 5

## Do: Build Empathy

Now that you've shown them that you've listened, it's time for you to reciprocate by sharing your concerns. Focus on how certain political positions affects you or others around you. **The more personal it is, the more easily the other person can understand and empathise with you.**

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*For example, instead of simply pointing out that a candidate is racist or sexist (and therefore that it is wrong to vote for them), talk about why that matters to you.*



"He takes photos of women and uploads them on social media with objectifying comments."



"A friend had her photos taken and uploaded on social media when she was on the MRT. It affected her very badly, and I feel like such behaviour makes Singapore less safe for women."

## 6 Don't: Make Things Personal

A sure-fire way for a conversation to shut down is by accusing the other person of being a bad person for voting the way that they did. **It may make them feel defensive and unwilling to listen. It may also make them dig deeper and push them further away into the embrace of those peddling misinformation, conspiracy theories and worse.**

## 7 Do: Build (new) common ground

Instead, try scaffolding your conversation by **identifying the values or beliefs that you share in common** - for example, respect for others, kindness, equality. You can then talk about why the way they have voted may be inconsistent with these values that they have agreed are important to them.

Recognise that we participate in political systems and societies that are not perfect. It is not the fault of voters who feel they are forced to choose between flawed candidates/parties. **Evolve and link conversations to broader discussions of policies and history that undergird our political reality.** Do the work of educating yourself on these issues such that you can talk about it to loved ones.

*Pinch to zoom!*

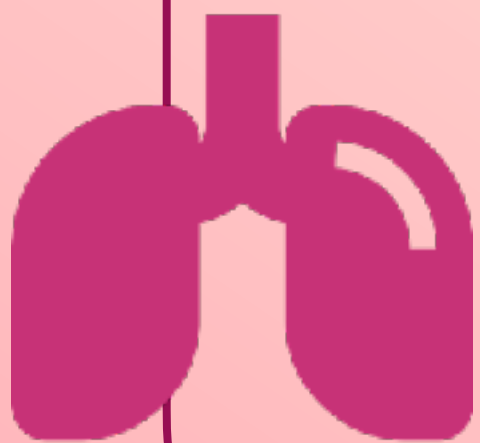
## 8

## Do: Keep Calm and Focused

Having constructive conversations about politics and social justice may be difficult. To meaningfully engage with others, it must be important for you to know why you are trying at all.

The easiest way for activism to backfire is to go into a conversation with the aim to change their mind. Just think about how you felt being approached by someone who was trying to sell you something!

Instead, **focus on strengthening your relationship** and understanding the other person you are talking to. Listen to their concerns and anxieties and let them know that you hear them. Show them that it is possible for us to build a fair and inclusive world, instead of one that is driven by fear and hatred of the other.



Take a deep breath if you feel you're tensing up! If the conversation is becoming tense, de-escalate with humour or by reaffirming your relationship.

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# It's all about Empathy!

"Empathy is at the heart of progressive thought... Empathy is the capacity to care, to feel what others feel, to understand what others are facing and what their lives are like... **Empathy is at the heart of real rationality, because it goes to the heart of our values, which are the basis of our sense of justice.**"

- Professor George Lakoff <sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, the aim of your conversation should not be to change minds, but to evoke empathy from the person you're talking to. Professor Lakoff identifies four key guiding principles that will help us in having constructive conversations:

- 1. Show respect**
- 2. Respond by reframing**
- 3. Think and talk at the level of values**
- 4. Say what you believe**