



Braver Angels

“Rules of Engagement”

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Stephen Covey

The following is intended for a general overview of Braver Angels’ principles and practices. It is not intended to replace the skills someone can learn at a Braver Angels workshop. More information about Braver Angels’ workshops can be found on the flipside of this page.

As individuals, we try to understand the other side’s point of view, even if we don’t agree with it.

- Listen without thinking about your points. After the other person has shared their thoughts, summarize what they said. Check for understanding before responding.
- Be humble and vulnerable.
- Ask only questions that help you better understand the other person’s position/s.
- Refrain from asking “gotcha” questions.
- Consider (or even ask the other person) “What life experiences have influenced your values and beliefs about public policy and the public good?”

In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.

- Agree on ground rules before a challenging discussion.
- Use “I” statements. For example, “I’m having trouble understanding that thought process” rather than “Your thought process is wrong.”
- Speak only for yourself, not for your “side.”
- Share points from someone on the “other side” who made valid points.
- Share valid criticism of your own side.
- If the other person says something offensive to you, re-engage respectfully and/or ignore and move on.
- Stick to facts and avoid exaggeration.
- Avoid sarcasm.

In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.

- Avoid name calling and labeling (e.g. “wingnuts,” “Bible thumper,” “libtards,” “snowflakes.”)
- Look at how you and your side may have contributed to the problem.
- Avoid characterizing other’s beliefs.
- Realize it’s OK to have strong opinions as long as we express them respectfully.
- Criticize the policy, not the “side.”
- Avoid “they all” or “you all;” it’s a classic sign of stereotyping.

Braver Angels Workshops

To register for one of these workshops (presented in-person or online), learn more about Braver Angels and the other offerings, or become a member, visit the BA website at braverangels.org.

Skills-Based Workshops

Skills for Bridging the Divide workshops help you through difficult political conversations with people in your life. Learn how to talk across the divide in a constructive, empathetic way.

Depolarizing Within workshops teach participants to look within and develop strategies for engaging politics without demonizing, and how to constructively intervene in social conversations with like-minded peers.

Families and Politics workshops show participants how to talk about politics with their loved ones in a way that brings us closer together — not farther apart.

Depolarizing Conversations About Race and Public Policy A skills workshop for difficult but necessary conversations between White Americans about race and public policy.

Being Red in a Blue Environment workshops are for political conservatives who are surrounded by liberals in key areas of life like work, family, social circle, religion, or community. Participants learn safe and effective ways to communicate conservative values and beliefs in environments where liberal ideas are assumed to be correct.

Being Blue in a Red Environment workshops are for political liberals who are surrounded by conservatives in key areas of life like work, family, social circle, religion, or community. Participants learn safe and effective ways to communicate liberal values and beliefs in environments where conservative ideas are assumed to be correct.

Skills for Social Media teaches strategies to share and discuss political viewpoints online without contributing to polarization.

Experiential Discussion-Based Workshops

Red-Blue workshops bring together a small, evenly divided group of conservatives and liberals, or “reds” and “blues,” for a series of exercises designed to help participants clarify disagreements, reduce stereotyped thinking, and discover common values.

Common Ground workshops allow participants to dig deeper into specific issues, recognizing that there is often more that unites us than divides us.

For more information and new workshops, visit our website at braverangels.org