



BEING A GUIDE TO HOPEFUL CONVERSATIONS AT THE THANKSGIVING TABLE

Navigating Tough Topics with Curiosity and Care



INTRODUCTION

Thanksgiving is a time to connect, reflect, and share gratitude — but some conversations can feel heavy or controversial.

As a CWS friend or supporter, you think globally and act compassionately toward “our neighbors” — including refugees, families experiencing hunger or those in crisis.

This guide offers simple ways to introduce these topics gently, approach tough moments with curiosity and kindness, and keep conversations grounded in empathy and hope. Use the tips, prompts and questions to help one another see the people behind the issues, and leave the table feeling more connected, informed and inspired to act.



CONVERSATION SKILLS TO USE

Evidence-based practices to keep discussions grounded, kind and open

1. LISTEN TO THEIR STORY FIRST

Ask questions before sharing your viewpoint:

- "What experiences shaped how you feel about helping neighbors in need?"
- "How did your family handle generosity when you were growing up?"

Helps the other person feel seen and reduces defensiveness.

2. FRAME YOUR THOUGHTS IN "I" STATEMENTS & VALUES LANGUAGE

Say: "I feel strongly about supporting refugees because I believe everyone deserves safety."

Avoid: "You're wrong if you don't do more for refugees."

Values-based communication opens doors to common ground, e.g., "We both value safety, dignity, and helping those in need."

3. BE CURIOUS RATHER THAN CONFRONTATIONAL

Ask reflective questions:

- "What do you see as the biggest challenge when people come here seeking refuge?"
- "What might stop someone from giving to a food-insecurity cause?"

Invites reflection instead of resistance.

4. LOOK FOR SHARED VALUES AND GOALS

Example: "We both want children to be safe and fed."

Shifts the conversation from "us vs them" to "how do we help together?"

5. RECOGNIZE WHEN TO PAUSE OR REDIRECT

If the conversation heats up or someone shuts down, shift topics:

- "Let's bring it back to what unites us..."
- "Let's revisit this later when we're both calmer."

THANKSGIVING TABLE PROMPTS

Practical Scenarios

SCENARIO A: SOMEONE IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT WELCOMING REFUGEES

- "I understand your concerns about resources and integration. I'm curious: what qualities would you hope a new neighbor brings or receives?"
- Share a short story: "Last year, a family fleeing violence arrived here. Their young daughter started school last month — it reminded me how fragile safety is."
- Invite reflection: "How is their story similar or different from someone in our town who's new? What support might they need?"

SCENARIO B: SOMEONE SAYS, "THERE ARE ENOUGH HUNGRY PEOPLE HERE; WE DON'T NEED TO FOCUS GLOBALLY."

- "That's a valid point — hunger locally is urgent. From your view, what drives food insecurity at home? Could we address both local and global hunger together?"
- Share values: "I believe every person deserves a full plate and dignity. Seeing children in crisis zones go without meals reminds me of the same risk to families locally."
- Invite ideas: "What program could help both local and global neighbors?"

SCENARIO C: A LOVED ONE SAYS, "I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT HEAVY STUFF TODAY — LET'S ENJOY THE HOLIDAY."

- "I hear you — today is for gratitude and connection. Could we spend five minutes later talking about one thing we're thankful for that involved someone helping someone else?"
- Share a short story: "A refugee family new to our area invited us for coffee — just simple neighborliness. It made me think about what it takes to feel welcomed."
- Transition: "If you like, we'll move on to pumpkin pie and football — thanks for being open."

FRAMING QUESTIONS

For Deeper Dialogue

PLACE ON CARDS OR WEAVE INTO CONVERSATION:

- “What does the word ‘neighbor’ mean to you today?”
- “When have you seen generosity change someone’s life?”
- “If you were new in our community and didn’t speak the language, what would you hope neighbors would do for you?”
- “What scares or excites you about migration or displacement?”
- “When thinking about global hunger or poverty, what role could our community play?”

TIPS FOR GETTING READY

- Pick 1–2 prompts ahead of the meal rather than trying to cover everything.
- Take two minutes before the meal to reflect on the values you want to bring (e.g., compassion, curiosity, humility).
- Listen more than you speak; summarize what you hear before offering your own thoughts: “What I hear you saying is...”
- Have a positive “exit line” if conversation grows uncomfortable: “Thank you for sharing — let’s move on when you’re ready.”
- After the meal, consider sending a brief note: “I appreciated our talk today. Your story about _____ made me think about _____.” This helps build ongoing understanding.

WHY THIS CONNECTS TO CWS'S MISSION

BY GIVING SUPPORTERS TOOLS TO TALK ABOUT REFUGEES, HUNGER, POVERTY AND NEIGHBOR-CARE WITH EMPATHY AND HOPE, WE:

- Align with values of human dignity, inclusion and generosity.
- Build awareness that “neighbors” include both local and global communities.
- Equip people to share the work and stories of CWS through conversation, not just statistics.
- Strengthen relationships at home while advocating for justice and compassion abroad.

The information in this guide is based on research from the Greater Good Science Center, Psychology Today and CWS's mission to care for neighbors everywhere.