



A DCI Deliberation Guide

Speech, Harm, & Offense:

Can speech harm, and what is the relationship between harm and offense? What do our answers mean for autonomy and dialogue about contentious topics?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

Read this document (Required)

Reflect on your own views as well as the arguments in the Guide.

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting the Expectations - 5 min.
- II. Getting to Know Each Other - 15 min.
- III. View 1 - 15 min.
- IV. View 2 - 15 min.
- V. View 3 - 15 min.
- VI. View 4 - 15 min.
- VII. Synthesis, Application, & Critique - 20 min.
- VIII. Reflections - 15 min.

Background

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words may never harm me.”

— *The Christian Recorder*, published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1862)

“Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts.”

— Robert Fulghum, *All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (2004)

The quotes above represent two distinct views on the effects of speech. One suggests that speech does not harm us, while the other asserts that it does, although perhaps in different ways than physical attacks do. These different views underlie much of the contemporary debates about freedom of expression on college campuses, in the workplace, and elsewhere, but the reasoning that they are based on is not always well understood. This Deliberation Guide maps out the underlying reasons that ostensibly animate these positions to help us think through our own positions in these debates and identify our areas of agreement and disagreement with others.

The guide begins with a description of different types of problematic speech, including hate speech. It then proceeds to explain the differences between harmful speech, morally wrong speech, and illegal speech, and maps out a series of arguments for why, when thinking about how to respond to problematic speech, it is best to consider these categories of speech as both conceptually and normatively distinct, even though they may overlap in some instances. The guide then introduces four different views on whether speech constitutes harm and to what extent it should be regulated. The discussion questions provided at the end of the guide provide deliberation participants an opportunity to deliberate about each of these views, both individually and as a set of contrasting perspectives.

The motivation for deliberating about the relationship between speech, harm, and offense stems from what seems to have become a key social issue over the past several years. Concerns about harmful speech and efforts to regulate speech have animated recent debates on and about both college campuses and social media, as we discuss below. These arguments revolve around an inherent tension in pluralistic communities and democratic societies.

A healthy public discourse plausibly involves respecting those who disagree with us, which may involve protecting them from undue harm. But a healthy public discourse also plausibly involves the respect for our autonomy to express ourselves and the autonomy of others to engage with others’ opinions and public discourse. This tension raises many complex questions, and this guide does not—and is not intended to—settle them. Rather, it is designed to serve as a useful jumping-off point for thinking about what proper respect and care for others, proper regard for autonomy, and proper regard for other values might mean for how we should speak with one another in a variety of contexts or settings, and to what extent we should regulate speech in these different contexts.

I. Examples of Problematic Speech

It is first helpful to map out different types of problematic speech. We tend to accept, in liberal democracies,¹ that certain speech acts ought to be criminally prohibited. Standard examples include:

- i. ***Speech intended to induce panic***, such as yelling “Fire!” in a theater where there is none;
- ii. ***Defamatory speech***, such as falsely asserting something as fact in order to damage someone’s professional reputation;
- iii. ***Fighting words***, or speech that incites people to violent action, such as seriously insulting someone to instigate a physical altercation.

In some liberal democracies, **hate speech** is also forbidden by law. There is no universally accepted definition of hate speech, and the notion is defined differently by different nations. The UN defines hate speech as:

Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.²

Countries that place legal prohibitions against hate speech, include Canada, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, South Africa, Australia, and India.³ The United States does not have federal legislation prohibiting hate speech, and what some deem to be hate speech is legally protected by the First Amendment.

Some speech acts can also clearly fall under the category of other crimes. For example:

- iv. Speech may constitute *treason*, as when a person provides state secrets to an enemy state.
- v. Speech may constitute *fraud*, as when companies make false advertising claims about their products.
- vi. Speech may constitute *verbal abuse*, as when a pattern of abusive verbal behavior exists in the context of a domestic relationship.
- vii. Speech may constitute *sexual harassment*, as in the case of unwanted verbal advances by one colleague toward another in the workplace.

Then again, harmful action and illegal action come apart in the following sense. Not everything that is illegal is necessarily harmful, and not everything that causes harm is necessarily illegal.

¹ A liberal democracy is a system of government in which the rights and liberties of individuals are legally protected and the powers of government are limited by these individual rights.

² [Hate Speech: Understanding Hate Speech](#). United Nations. September 2023.

³ Liptak, Adam. [Hate speech or free speech? What much of the West bans is protected in the U.S.](#) New York Times. June 2008.

Speech may be harmful without being illegal in cases where:

- viii. A statement manifests or expresses a bigoted or otherwise morally bad attitude (without being hate speech), as in the case of making a joke at someone else's expense about some aspect of their identity.
- ix. A statement constitutes what have come to be known as *microaggressions*, or everyday slights having to do with one's identity that are frequently emotionally painful but may not be intended to cause pain.
- x. A statement that puts others down by making them appear unskilled, talentless, or unintelligent.
- xi. A statement that insults someone personally.

And some types of speech may be *morally wrong* and not obviously or not necessarily harmful nor illegal. This category includes examples like:

- xii. Lying to one's family and friends for one's own personal gain.
- xiii. Failing to apologize to someone after clearly wronging them (notice that this is an omission of speech).
- xiv. A statement that dishonors someone or a group they belong to such as their family, community, or social group.
- xv. A statement that insults someone "behind their back."
- xvi. Verbally blaming someone for something one knows she did not do.

The variety of examples above includes speech that is *illegal*, speech that is *harmful*, and speech that is *morally wrong*. These are three conceptually and normatively distinct categories, and what follows for one set of claims will not necessarily follow for another. The section below explores this idea further.

II. Harmful Speech, Wrongful Speech, and Speech that Should be Regulated

In the above section, we saw how harmful speech, wrongful speech, and speech that should be regulated are conceptually distinct. But they are also distinct in another sense—that is, how we should think about or respond to speech in one category may differ from how we should think about or respond to speech in another. How can we see that these categories are indeed normatively distinct, and that different kinds of things are true of speech that is illegal, speech that is harmful, and speech that is wrongful? Consider the following four examples:

- I. **Plausibly, not every harm constitutes a wrong.** An entrepreneur may open a new shop on Main Street in her hometown. As her business grows, she ends up outcompeting a different, long-established local business in the same industry on the same block. The other owner is now out of business and has clearly been harmed. His interests have been set back as a result of having been outcompeted (after all, he wanted to keep his business running—we can suppose that he wanted to keep it running to support his family and to do what he loved). But it is not clear that the owner of the new shop has *wronged* the owner of the old (now closed) shop. And this is plausible even if the harms that come to the old shop owner are quite severe.

Insight: Since not every harm constitutes a wrong, plausibly, it is not the case that every harmful statement constitutes a wrong either. Therefore, we cannot conclude that all harmful statements are also wrong, or morally prohibited. That is, some harmful statements don't amount to moral wrongs.

- II. **Not every wrongful action ought to be illegal.** Even widely agreed upon wrongs, such as betraying a loved one or breaking a promise, ought to be legal. It is simply not a liberal democratic state's business to regulate deeply private affairs, such as betrayals between friends. This does not mean that morality has no bearing whatsoever on what ought to be legal and illegal; intuitively, the moral prohibition against murder and the state's duty to protect our right not to be killed is the justificatory basis for laws prohibiting murder. But the mere fact that something is morally wrong does not by itself entail that it ought to be illegal. Some ways of wronging others should not be regulated by the state or by other institutions.

Insight: Although something may be wrong, it is very possible that that action should be legally permissible. So, although a statement may be wrong (i.e., morally prohibited) to make, it does not automatically follow that that statement should be legally regulated. It likewise does not follow that it ought to be regulated by some other institution.

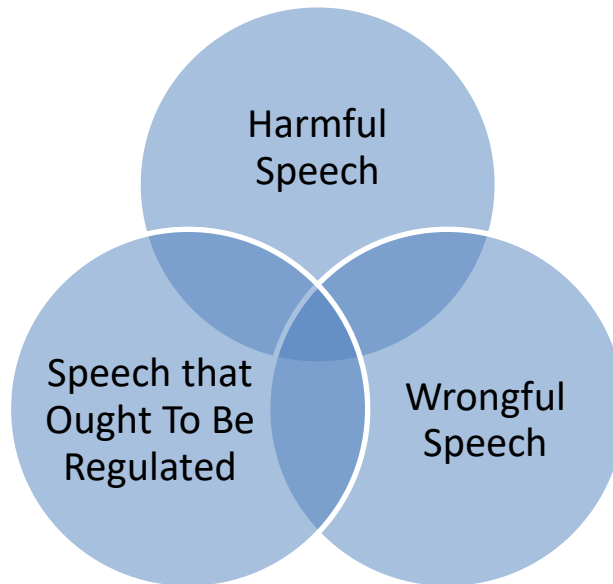
- III. **Not all things that cause harm ought to be regulated.** Consider again the example of the new shop owner who (by way of fair practices) causes the neighboring shop to go out of business. That may very seriously harm the other shop owner, but intuitively it ought not be regulated (and one can hold at the same time that government should heavily regulate business activity).

Insight: A statement may cause harm but we can have reason not to regulate against such statements.

- IV. **Not every action that ought to be illegal harms or wrongs people.** There may be victimless crimes; that is, crimes that do not have any identifiable victim. Examples of victimless crimes may include trespassing or possession of contraband. No one is directly harmed or wronged in these cases, and yet there may still be good reason to legally regulate these actions.

Insight: It is possible that some statements ought to be regulated even though no one is harmed or wronged.

What is the conclusion we should draw? That we should not be too hasty to collapse the notions of *harmful* speech, *wrongful* speech, and speech that *ought to be regulated*. As the Venn diagram below shows, these are distinct categories that may overlap but are conceptually distinct.



III. Recent Views on Harmful Speech

Building on the previous discussion of different categories of speech, this section outlines four distinct views on harmful speech that vary on the degree to which speech is considered capable of rendering harm and the extent to which it should be regulated as a result.

View 1: Speech can seriously harm and ought to be regulated relatively strictly

In our current political climate, many people worry about speech that they perceive to be *harmful* and there is a growing concern that harmful speech ought to be either legally or institutionally regulated, depending on the case.⁴ For example, many people are drawn to the idea that some types of speech are harmful and that institutions of higher education ought to have clear policies prohibiting harmful speech.⁵

⁴ Research suggests that the percentage of Americans who worry about harmful speech is a minority, but a significant one. The percentage of Americans who believe speech should be regulated on social media websites varies depending on political party affiliation and other demographic differences, and it varies by content category. [Free Expression, Harmful Speech, and Censorship in a Digital World](#). Knight Foundation. 2020. See also [College Student Views on Free Expression and Campus Speech](#) 2022. Knight Foundation. 2022.

⁵ Hidalgo Bellows, Kate. [More Students Endorse an Expansive Definition of ‘Harm.’ Colleges Aren’t So Sure](#). The Chronicle of Higher Education. May 2023. [Resolution 31: Mandating Content Warnings for Traumatic Content in the Classroom](#). Cornell University Student Assembly. March 2023.

Proponents of this view tend to believe that speech should be regulated strictly, either legally or institutionally. Although one could hold the view that any harmful speech ought to be regulated somehow, this view is typically intended to apply to speech that its proponents think causes serious harm to a group that deserves protection from this harm. On this view, harm can be emotional and/or psychic, not just physical. Examples of harmful speech that ought to be regulated on this view include:

- Hate speech (recall that there is no universally accepted definition);
- Intentionally misleading medical information;
- Harassment;
- Racial slurs;⁶
- Triggering classroom content in an educational setting;⁷
- Speech that threatens students' perception of their own "emotional safety."⁸

Multiple arguments can be used to support the view that speech can harm and that it ought to be strictly regulated. Consider the three different arguments below:

- i. Just as a concern for public wellbeing should lead us to regulate speech that induces needless panic, we should likewise regulate speech that intentionally misleads people about their medical or health information. After all, one of the main reasons we have a state at all is to protect people from needless harm.
- ii. Certain settings, such as college settings, exist to help people meet particular goals. Feeling emotionally safe is a fundamental prerequisite for learning. A college institution, therefore, should limit the expression of speech that makes students feel emotionally unsafe.
- iii. Emotional harm and psychic harm are serious harms on a par with physical harm. Therefore, speech that causes such harm—such as hate speech or harassing speech—ought to be regulated in ways that are analogous to how we would regulate physically harmful things. Just as cigarettes, which cause physical harm, come with a warning label, we should have content warnings or trigger warnings for psychically harmful speech.

⁶ For this item and the preceding items in this list see: [Free Expression, Harmful Speech, and Censorship in a Digital World](#). Knight Foundation. 2020.

⁷ [Resolution 31: Mandating Content Warnings for Traumatic Content in the Classroom](#). Cornell University Student Assembly. March 2023.

⁸ Hidalgo Bellows, Kate. [More Students Endorse an Expansive Definition of 'Harm.' Colleges Aren't So Sure](#). The Chronicle of Higher Education. May 2023.

View 2: *Speech can seriously harm, but ought to be regulated only in limited cases*

One could also hold a view that these very types of speech are harmful, but also believe that they ought *not* be regulated, legally or institutionally. Proponents of this view do not have to deny the moral significance of harm, and do not have to ignore the pain that certain instances of speech bring about. Rather, proponents of this view tend to believe that the badness of harmful speech can either be mitigated by some other measures besides the regulation of speech, that there are too many significant factors that are compromised if we regulate the harmful speech, and/or that harmful speech does not meet the conditions for something being regulated at all.

Three different arguments for this view are provided below:

- i. Although speech can cause harm, the best way to combat this harm is not through regulating harmful speech but by providing channels for other speech to be accessible to the relevant community. For example, a speaker who is invited to a college campus and who makes some students feel less emotionally safe should be protested rather than disinvited, and these students ought to be allowed by their college to engage in such protest (e.g., by being allowed to protest at or near the site of the speech).
- ii. Although speech can cause harm, there are many other countervailing values besides the prevention of harm that must be taken into account before we regulate something that causes harm. These values include:
 - a. The speaker's personal autonomy;
 - b. Respecting the autonomy of others to engage the thinking of others in their community, college, or in the public sphere;
 - c. The "marketplace of ideas;"
 - d. Liberty to express oneself.
- iii. If something should be legally regulated, it must cause a clear and direct violation of rights.⁹ Speech can only cause a clear and direct violation of rights in very limited instances, and so should only be regulated in these cases. However, to be offended by or emotionally hurt by someone's speech is not to have one's rights violated by it. Therefore, we should not regulate speech to the extent that proponents of View 1 (above) believe.

⁹ Mill, J.S. [*On Liberty*](#). 1859, 2011 (p. 17-18); Jacobson Daniel. [Freedom of Speech Acts: A Response to Langton](#). 1995.

View 3: Harm is not the key concept we should employ when deciding whether to regulate speech

Moral wrongs come in many forms, and harming someone is just one. Other morally relevant considerations besides whether someone is harmed include:

- i. What the agent's/speaker's intention is;
- ii. What other good things come about as a result of an instance of speech, even if someone is harmed. We should always consider the balance of good and bad consequences before deciding to regulate something with some bad consequences;
- iii. The protection of fundamental liberties and rights, like our freedom of expression;
- iv. Non-moral considerations, such as aesthetic value, historical value, purely intellectual value, scientific value;
- v. What constitutes a meaningful life, and in particular, how some forms of self-expression can contribute to a meaningful life.

This view represents a family of views, each of which claims that there is at least one other significant moral concept besides harm, and that whether something is morally prohibited is either not a function of harm at all, or that it is a function of harm plus this other moral concept (e.g., the speaker's intentions, the speaker's fundamental liberty to express themselves, etc.). The idea is that how exactly we should regulate speech will depend on how other moral considerations weigh against the badness of harm.

Consider the view that whether an action is wrong at all depends entirely on the quality of the agent's intention.¹⁰ On this view, if a person had a morally good intention when they asserted something, then that statement couldn't have been morally wrong to make, even if it brought about unintended harm. Proponents of View 1 would most likely reject this claim, because they tend to believe in the moral significance of unintended harm. However, one could also hold an amended version of View 1 on which only speech that harms *and was intended to harm others* ought to be prohibited or regulated in some way, because only then is harmful speech also wrong.

Another view that has not been discussed yet states that human flourishing involves not only moral goodness, but also *non-moral excellence* or *non-moral virtues*.¹¹ On this view, we should not subsume all human activity under the umbrella of morality. Rather, moral goodness is one kind of goodness, aesthetic goodness is another, athletic goodness is yet another, and so on. So, our speech might manifest a non-moral virtue (such as artistic excellence) that should be weighed against its negative impact on others.

¹⁰ Kant, Immanuel. [Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals](#). 1785, 2002.

¹¹ This kind of view is typically attributed to Aristotle in the [Nichomachean Ethics](#) (2003). It has been developed (and altered) by contemporary philosopher Susan Wolf in: Wolf, Susan. [Moral Saints](#). 1982.

View 4: Speech cannot harm in any genuine way; it can personally offend, but personal offenses should not be regulated

The final view we will consider is one that says speech may cause emotional *pain*, or hurt feelings, but does not *harm*. Hurt feelings do not constitute harm, or—perhaps more to the point—*they do not constitute a legitimate complaint against someone’s autonomy to express themselves*. Therefore, hurt feelings cannot justify any view on which harmful speech should be regulated. Speech that harms by cutting against someone’s rights are another matter.

This view is consistent with the idea that hurting someone’s feelings calls out for certain responses on our part. The fact that we have hurt someone’s feelings may call for an apology from the speaker and/or an attempt to reconcile. It may call for blame from the listener or even for some kind of retribution. But these are *interpersonal* dynamics, and they don’t call for regulation from a third party, such as the government, a social media company, or an institution of higher education.

What might be the main arguments for View 4?

- i. One argument relies on the idea that emotional “harm” is not real harm. This view holds that many people call “emotional harm” is not something against which we ought to be protected from by a third party, and it is not something that “counts,” morally speaking, in the calculation of how we ought to regulate the behavior of others. Our *sensibilities* may be *offended* by someone’s speech, we may be *personally offended* by someone’s speech, and we may be *offended on someone else’s behalf*, but what we might call *mere offense* and *harm* are not morally on par with one another.
- ii. Another argument relies on the idea of *concept creep*. This argument says that our concept of harm is fundamentally the same as the concept of bodily harm, or physical harm. Over time, we extended the concept to include psychological harm (for example, as in the case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). More recently still, some people have extended the concept of psychological harm to include emotional pain and have called this emotional harm. Since harm is a morally significant concept (that is, it figures in our thinking about how we ought to treat others and ourselves), it is tempting to think that emotional harm is *just as* significant. But it is not. We cannot be emotionally *harmed*. We can suffer great emotional *pain*, but pain and harm are not the same thing. After all, one can experience pain without being harmed. For example, one gets a painful vaccine in order to protect one’s health—one experiences pain but isn’t harmed. Not all physical pain amounts to physical harm, and likewise, not all emotional pain amounts to psychic harm.¹²

¹² Haidt, Jonathan and Greg Lukianoff. *The Coddling of the American Mind*. 2018. See [Chapter 1](#): “A culture that allows the concept of “safety” to creep so far that it equates emotional discomfort with physical danger is a culture that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become strong and healthy.”

I. Setting Expectations (5 min)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” “Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to deepen our understanding of the arguments regarding the nature of speech and harm, and how we should change our behavior or regulations in light of the best arguments about this topic. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own experiences and beliefs related to this topic. By the end of the conversation, we will have deliberated about the strongest and weakest arguments about the relationship between speech, harm, and offense, and how and when we should regulate speech, if at all. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a *commitment to egalitarianism, openmindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation*, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators’ stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgments
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., “All people think this,” or “No educated people hold that view”)

II. Getting to Know Each Other (16 min)

In this section, we will take less than a minute to share our names and 2-3 aspects of our identities that are important to us. These could be our gender pronouns, our occupation, our family status (e.g., husband, mother, etc.), our hometown, our favorite hobby, etc. Please also explain briefly why these aspects of your identity are important to you.

If you are online, while there is no pressure to do so, everyone is welcome to type in any, all, or none of these aspects of your identity into your Zoom nameplate after your name (just right-click on your own image and click “Rename”).

III. Evaluating View 1 (16 min)

Now that we have introduced ourselves, we will discuss View 1, **the view that speech can seriously harm and ought to be regulated relatively strictly**, and the main arguments for and against it. We will each take up to one minute in turn to address the questions below (without crosstalk) before we engage in open deliberation using the time we have remaining.

Key Questions:

1. What do you think are the most compelling reasons for regulating speech (either institutionally or legally), and in what contexts do you think we should regulate speech?
2. In which contexts do you think we should allow more free expression, and why?

IV. Evaluating View 2 (16 min)

We will now discuss View 2, the view that **speech can seriously harm, but ought to be regulated only in limited cases** and the main arguments for it. We will each take up to 1 minute in turn to address the questions below (without crosstalk) before we engage in open deliberation using the time we have remaining.

Key Questions:

1. Which of the above arguments for view 2 do you find to be the most powerful? Which considerations against regulating speech resonate most with you, and why?
2. What drawbacks or problems do you associate with this view, if any?

V. Evaluating View 3 (16 min)

We will now discuss View 3, **the view that harm is not the key concept we should employ when deciding whether to regulate speech** and the main arguments for it. We will each take up to 1 minute in turn to address the questions below (without crosstalk) before we engage in open deliberation using the time we have remaining.

Key Questions:

1. To what extent does the notion of harm figure in your own moral and political reasoning, and how do you weigh the significance of harm against other countervailing values, such as intention, good consequences, protection of rights (including the right to free expression), aesthetic value, etc.? In your answer, you might consider how some actions that may cause harm are nevertheless valuable because they support other values. For example, you might harm someone by speaking the truth, but perhaps telling the truth to that person is valuable in its own right, even though on balance it causes the most harm.
2. How does your answer help us address questions related to speech, harm, and the regulation of harmful speech?

VI. Evaluating View 4 (16 min)

We will now discuss View 4, **the view that speech cannot harm in any genuine way—it can personally offend, but personal offenses should not be regulated**—and the main arguments for it. We will each take up to one minute in turn to address the questions below before we engage in open deliberation using the time we have remaining.

Key Questions:

1. To what extent are you persuaded by the argument that speech cannot genuinely harm us?
2. What do you make of the distinctions that underlie the logic of this view? Do you agree with the distinction between mere offense and harm in the context of speech? Should we avoid concept creep and only refer to physical harm and not psychological or emotional harm? Are pain and harm two different things? Why or why not?

VI. Synthesis and Application (20 min)

We will now step back from the details of each view and consider the following questions, as time allows. Each of us will take up to one minute to address the questions below before we engage in open deliberation using the time we have remaining.

1. Now that we have discussed a variety of positions about the relationship between speech, harm, offense, and hurt feelings, which view do you most agree with, and why? Is there an additional view that resonates with you more? What are the implications of your current position for dialogue about contentious topics?
2. Our views about if and how speech should be regulated can depend largely on the context. The norms that should govern how we talk to one another may differ depending on our relationship with the listener, whether we are speaking in a public, private, or educational space, whether our statements and our social position represents a particular group or institution, among other things. What role should context play in the ethics of speech?

Optional Questions to Consider:

The questions below may be helpful as you think about the different views outlined above.

1. In this Deliberation Guide, there are more arguments than there are views. Are there any arguments that you find especially important to contend with, whether you ultimately agree OR disagree with the view supported by that argument?
2. Suppose that speech can do serious harm. Whose responsibility is it to “deal with” this problem? The speaker’s, the relevant institution’s, the offended/harmed party’s, the state’s? How does your judgment change when you consider different types of examples?
3. Do you think we can infer from the fact that someone’s hurt feelings were caused by an instance of speech that they were *harmed* by that speech?
4. Stepping away from the issue of speech, consider what instances of harm justify the curtailing of our fundamental liberties, and which ones do not?
5. What do you make of the argument that the best way to “fight” harmful speech is with more (non-harmful) speech?

VII. Reflections (10 min)

While today’s conversation is an important step in the journey, figuring out how to understand the relationship between speech and harm, and to what extent speech should be regulated, will take time and commitment.

Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer in less than one minute one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. How has your own position changed? Have you strengthened the views with which you started out, have your views been called into question, or are you in the same place where you started? Why do you think your view has been impacted—or has not been impacted—by our discussion?
2. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
3. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
4. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problem and its potential solutions?
5. Was there anything that was said or not said that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
6. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations on issues related to the ethics of speech?
7. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dc@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.