

Activity 1: Three Essential Skills

Make an impact anytime, anywhere, on any topic, with anyone. Guaranteed.

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ANALYZE

When Jesus was twelve years old, his parents took him to Jerusalem. Then they left without him. When they returned to Jerusalem, they found him in the temple. What was He doing? *Listening and asking questions.* We should do the same. (See Luke 2:46.)

When Peter argued for salvation in Jesus before the people in Jerusalem at Pentecost, he quoted Hebrew texts and based His argument on Jewish prophecy (see Acts 2:14-41). When Paul stood before the philosophers on Mars Hill, however, he didn't quote the Jewish prophets. He quoted the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (see Acts 17:16-34). Why the difference? Both men were meeting their audience on common ground. They started with shared beliefs. They agreed first, before making their case.

We also can master these *Three Essential Skills* illustrated by Jesus, Peter, and Paul:

Skill #1: Ask Questions with an Open Heart

- Don't assume you *know* what the other person thinks, feels, intends. *Ask!*
- Type I – Gather Information / Ask for Clarification / **What?**
Examples: "What do you believe?" & "What did you mean by...?"
 - Note: A good starting point is to ask questions about which abortions a person believes should be legal, in terms of timing ("Up to what point in the development of the unborn do you think abortion should be legal?") and circumstances ("Should abortion be legal in the circumstance of poverty?").
- Type II – Ask for Reasons or Evidence / **Why?**
Example: "Why do you believe this?" & "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- Type III – Gently Offer a Challenge (once you understand a person's view)
Example: "If that's true, then wouldn't this other thing also have to be true?"

Skill #2: Listen to Understand

- Focus on the ideas the person is sharing, rather than just thinking of your next response.
- Listening shows we care about the other person. It builds trust and rapport. It helps others enjoy talking to us.

Skill #3: Find Common Ground when Possible

See the book *Common Ground Without Compromise* (by Stephen Wagner) for an explanation and tips for building common ground. See *Activity A* (p. 11) for a summary. In general, we should always look for things with which we can agree in order to make the conversation more civil and enjoyable for everyone.

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IMITATE

Pro-Life: What do you think about abortion? [Type I: What]

Pro-Choice: I'm pro-choice.

L: By "pro-choice," do you mean that you think abortion should be legal? [Type I: What]

C: Yes.

L: Do you think abortion should be legal through all nine months? [Type I: What - Timing]

C: No way. I'm against late-term abortion.

L: I am, too. I have some pictures here of the unborn at different stages of development [Exhibit Brochure, Page 3]. When you say you are "against late-term abortion" are you thinking that abortion should not be legal after a certain point?

C: [Pointing to the 18-week picture] I think after this point it should not be legal.

L: I agree that abortion should not be legal after that point. [Common Ground] Are you saying that you think abortion is okay before that point?

C: No, I think it's bad, but I just can't tell other people what to do.

L: So, let me see if I understand you. You think abortion is generally bad, but you think there's a point in pregnancy when it should not be legal, and that point is at approximately 18 weeks. [Type I: What]

C: I'm not totally sure what I think, but I think that's pretty close.

L: I think it's understandable if you're still thinking through your position on abortion. It seems like you're pretty open-minded.

C: I try to be.

L: What do you think about some of the circumstances in which women get abortions, such as the situation when a woman says she "doesn't feel mature enough"? [Type I: What - Circumstances]

C: Early or late in the pregnancy?

L: Good question. Let's just talk about abortions early in the pregnancy since you and I have agreed that abortion shouldn't be legal late in the pregnancy. What about the "I don't feel mature enough" circumstance when the unborn is 4 weeks from fertilization?

C: I don't think feeling immature is a good reason to have an abortion no matter if it's early or late.

L: What do you think about a woman aborting a female fetus just because she would prefer to have a male child? [Common Ground]

C: What? That happens?

L: It's common especially in India and other places where there's a strong preference for male children.

C: I'm totally against that.

L: I am, too. [Common Ground] What do you think about a woman having an abortion because she doesn't want to be a single mother? [Type I: What - Circumstances]

C: That's really understandable. I'd feel sorry for her, but it doesn't seem like a good reason for abortion.

L: I agree. I'd want to do everything I could to help, but I don't think it's a good reason either.

C: These are great questions. I haven't ever really taken the time to think through this. What are your thoughts about abortion?

L: Well, for one thing, I think abortion should not be legal even early in the pregnancy.

C: But what about a woman who's really poor? Shouldn't she be allowed to get an abortion?

IMPROVISE

Use the prompt below to create a dialogue from scratch. *Pro-Life Advocate*, use the Three Essential Skills. *Pro-Choice Advocate*, assume the role of someone who is angry about the Justice For All Outreach Event.

Pro-Life: What do you think about abortion?

Pro-Choice: I'm pro-choice.

Pro-Life: ???

NOTES AND ADDITIONAL HELP

- See *Chapter 3* for more information.
- Although Type II questions (“Why do you believe this?”) aren’t represented in the Imitate dialogue above, they can be very important. Generally speaking, the person who makes a claim bears the burden of defending that claim. If done graciously, it’s actually a service to people to ask them to give reasons for their views. Perhaps they haven’t thought about it before.
- Agree whenever possible: “I think so, too.”

Activity A: Using Common Ground to Create Dialogue

Suggestions from the Book, Common Ground Without Compromise

Stephen Wagner

ANALYZE

In the past, pro-life and pro-choice advocates have made two mistakes regarding common ground. It is either the entire purpose of the discussion, or it is mostly absent. Instead, we should build common ground to begin a dialogue about truth. We should also retreat to common ground frequently, not to give up on finding truth, but to gain necessary footing so we can move forward to a new consensus on what is true. If the dialogue we are having is like a car taking us to the beach of truth, then common ground is the fuel. Your dialogue will have to access common ground from the outset if it is to move forward. You will need to stop and refuel at times, too.

IMPROVISE

With a partner, choose *Pro-Life* or *Pro-Choice*. Imagine you are discussing abortion. The conversation is getting nowhere. One of you decides to try to make things more productive by asking one of the following common ground questions. Either side can start seeking agreement by asking these questions!

1. What do you think about **late-term abortion**?
2. Should abortion be used **as a form of birth control**?
3. Do you believe **men should have the choice to abort** their fetuses?
4. What do you think about aborting a fetus **simply because she is female**?
5. Would you prefer that there were **fewer abortions**?
6. Do you believe it is sad and tragic when a woman **dies from an abortion** (legal or illegal)?
7. Do you think women should be encouraged to **consider adoption**?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See the resource table or www.commongroundbook.com to read *Common Ground Without Compromise: 25 Questions to Create Dialogue on Abortion* by Steve Wagner.