

The Conversation

#1 in an
Ongoing
Series

JUSTICE
FOR ALL

Note: "The Conversation" is a series of articles from Justice For All, an organization that trains thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions, one person at a time. Each article in the series allows you to learn from a JFA mentor or volunteer the skills of good dialogue on abortion by looking in on one of their conversations. In this article, Jacob Nels (JFA's Regional Account Manager for Georgia) illustrates three key JFA concepts: 1. Modeling in real time in a conversation with a real pro-choice advocate is essential for mentoring inexperienced volunteers so they can become proficient in dialogue skills. 2. The SLED Test can help someone change his mind even right in front of you. 3. Sometimes the person who changed his mind is so excited about what he learned that he starts sharing it with others. – Stephen Wagner, Director of Training

Unexpected Turnaround at Kennesaw State

Jacob Nels, JFA Mentor

When volunteers come to campus for the Justice For All Exhibit outreach (the “feet work” phase of our training), we encourage them to listen in on several mentor-led conversations with university students before attempting to dialogue with students on their own. This is the story of one of these mentor-led conversations.

I was standing with one of our trained volunteers, “Sarah,” near the place where the Justice For All Exhibit was set up at Kennesaw State University. I said, “There’s a guy over there. Let’s try to engage him.”

I asked the student (let’s call him Steve) a simple question to start the conversation. (In the picture below, I’m in the sunglasses, Sarah is to my left in black, and Steve is in the red cap.)

“Have you ever seen pictures like these before?” Steve said, “I think so, but I can’t remember where.”

“Do you think this organization should have the right to be here displaying these pictures?”

“Yeah, I guess you have the right to be here. It’s free speech, but I don’t agree with you.”

“I really appreciate that you agree with our right to free speech, even though you don’t agree with us on the subject. Do you think abortion should be legal through all nine months?”

“Well, it’s not, is it?”

“Unfortunately, it is.”

“Wow. I don’t agree with that.”

“Well, we can agree on some things! We both agree that late-term abortions are wrong and we agree on free speech. That’s two for two! Can I ask you at what point in the pregnancy you think it’s wrong to kill the child?”

“Well, it’s not a child. It’s a fetus.”

At this point I could see my trainee connecting the dots mentally: “In less than two minutes we’ve brought the conversation around to the one question that matters: *What is the unborn?*” I then engaged this young man in a textbook discussion on the points of the “SLED Test,” a tool we teach people during the “Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue” seminar. (The SLED Test was created by Stephen Schwarz.) The SLED Test addresses the four major arguments from the pro-choice side about why an unborn child is not a human being worthy of



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protection. We hit all the points of SLED in order...several times! Our discussion was very similar to the model dialogue we share at the ADD seminar:

Jacob: *Why do you think the unborn is not a person?*

Steve: *It's small; it doesn't look like a person. [Size and appearance]*

Jacob: *I agree that the unborn is smaller than you and I. But how is size relevant to value? Would we say that a toddler is less of a person than an adult just because he is smaller?*

Steve: *I guess it's not size exactly. The unborn can't feel pain or think. It's not self-aware. [Level of Development]*

Jacob: *You're right that the unborn can't feel pain early in its development. And it's not thinking or self-aware until much later. But how does level of development determine our value? Aren't there many humans outside the womb who can't feel pain or have worse thinking skills than others or have more self-awareness than others? If those things give us value, don't those of us with more thinking skills have more value than those of us with less?*

Steve: *Interesting point. But still, it's in the womb. It's not even in the world yet. [Environment]*

Jacob: *You're right that it's in a different location than we are. But should environment or location matter when we're talking about human value? If changing location doesn't change the value of human beings outside the womb, then how does it change the value of those inside the womb?*

Steve: *Well, I don't mean location exactly. It's just that the unborn can't live without the mother. [Degree of Dependency]*

Jacob: *That's true. But how does our degree of dependency determine our value? Isn't it the case that newborns and toddlers can't live without someone else either? I agree that the unborn is more dependent, and I think I'd even agree that it's dependent only on the mother.*

Steve: *So it can't be a person. It's not independent.*

Jacob: *Let me ask you this: If a one-year-old falls in a pool and you're the only one nearby to save him, would you?*

Steve: *Sure.*

From here, Steve would start down the list of SLED objections all over again. I was actually glad for this because it was giving Sarah (our trained volunteer) lots of great exposure to the SLED tool. About an hour into this conversation while staring at a picture of an aborted child, Steve finally said,

“I guess I never saw the unborn as a person before. Maybe I should.”

Soon after this comment, a friend of Steve's walked up (I'll call him Bob) and Steve started asking his friend what he thought about the exhibit and abortion. His friend gave a non-committal answer with a shrug, “I don't know. It's legal.” Before I could engage Bob in conversation, Steve jumped in and said, “Yeah, but come on, man. You know not all laws are good.”

Before I understood what was happening, Steve and Bob were engaging in a dialogue about abortion with Steve defending the pro-life side!

I continued to converse with Steve and Bob (with Sarah listening intently) for another hour. I don't want to make it seem like Steve became a fully-onboard pro-life advocate at that time, but he definitely walked away with a pebble in his shoe and major questions in his mind.

Sarah went on to engage students in her own conversations and at the end of the day she reported back to me that she had several productive conversations. It was a great day of learning for all of us!

Jacob Nels is JFA's Regional Account Manager in Georgia.

Thanks to Brit Nels for contributing to this report.

Thanks to Greg Koukl at Stand to Reason (www.str.org) for the “pebble in the shoe” illustration.