

# How-To: Conversation Skills

A guide to holding productive conversations on Palestine and Gaza.

We acknowledge that APAN works on unceded First Nations land.

# Contents



## **Introduction:**

- Why conversations?
- What do we want to achieve?



## **Messaging 101**

- Messaging Principles
- Useful terms to describe the situation in Palestine/Gaza
- Responding to Difficult Questions



## **Conversation Techniques**

- Telling stories to convey values
- Story of Self/Us/Now
- Deliver a clear message, quickly
- Activating Allies
- Turning an opponent to an ally
- Strategic Audiences



## **Additional Resources**

# Introduction

## Why conversations?

We are currently living through one of the most audacious and horrific times in modern history; a genocide is being committed by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people. Having conversations about Palestine has never been more urgent or needed - we must not let the sense of horror and outrage pass.

We must sustain and continue to facilitate the shift in public opinion and make it more visible to our policy and decision makers.

The inaction and complicity of Western governments does not correspond to the growing global and local mass support for Palestine on the ground. With tens of thousands attending unceasing weekly rallies, direct actions popping up at ports, factories and headquarters around the country and politicians unable to avoid Palestinian supporters at their public appearances, not to mention the tens of thousands of phone calls and emails sent to the Minister, it is clear that we have power and momentum on our side right now - with crisis has come opportunity.

# Introduction

## Why conversations?

But it is not enough to just activate those who are already on-side - we urgently need to be bringing more people into our campaign, from across all sectors of society, activating those who are unaware or indifferent.

We must build widespread public support across Australia to secure desperately needed changes, starting with an immediate ceasefire and the resumption of aid to starving Gazan's. We also need an end to the illegal and ongoing siege on Gaza, the reconstruction of Gaza's housing and infrastructure, an end to the apartheid regime across all of Palestine, and ultimately justice and the right to self-determination for Palestinians.

We intend to use the power of conversations to achieve change. Alongside the protests, direct actions, emails and phone calls, we want to expand the base of our movement by engaging with new communities, using the genuine and authentic connections you have with your neighbours, colleagues and acquaintances. Through persuasive conversations we intend to reach out to new audiences, re-activate those feeling disengaged, as well as those who are skeptical, confused or mis-informed that justice for Palestine is not just morally right, but inevitable.

# Introduction

## Why conversations?

**Better than a billboard:** For grassroots campaigns, our strongest ambassadors are our volunteers and supporters - people who are deeply embedded in their communities through relationships built on trust. When our supporters share our message with their communities, they are received much more warmly than they might be from an external influence. People are much more likely to be persuaded by someone that they know and trust than from a third-party source. That means that your conversations about Gaza with your neighbours, colleagues and friends-of-friends are infinitely more valuable to our campaign than any billboard could ever be.

**Reach new audiences:** The diversity of our supporters is our strength - not least because of the immense size and variety of audiences we have access to, through you. If humanity and justice is to prevail in Palestine, then we need to normalize this campaign across all segments of Australian society - regardless of race, class, geographic or religious divide. Through you and our diverse supporters, we can reach these audiences.

# Introduction

## Why conversations?

**Demonstrate genuine, long-term community support:** Conversations are the foundation of sustainable, community-led grassroots movements. While tactics like rallies or petitions are fantastic at showing mass power all at once, it's critical that we show our collective power over a longer, more sustainable timeline, and we need to show politicians and corporations that the issue of Palestine is not going to go away. To enable this long-term, sustained engagement we need to be investing in genuine, sustainable growth at the grassroots level. This is where values-based conversations are an incredible tool, equipping you with the skills to bring new people from your community into the campaign where they feel empowered to contribute ideas and invest energy, in an environment that is familiar, which means they will stick around for longer!

# Introduction

## What do we want to achieve?

### What do we want?

Ultimately, we want to make the most of this catastrophic crisis and turn despair into opportunity by building a long-term, sustainable movement of supporters who can advocate for a ceasefire and the immediate resumption of aid in the short-term, as well as call for justice and self-determination for Palestinians in the long-term.

We want to provide you with the skills to:

- a) Confidently and persuasively advocate for Gaza and Palestinians anywhere, at any time, to any person.
- b) Use your own community networks and contacts to continue to build our movement at the local level, bringing in new and unlikely allies.



# Messaging 101

## The importance of framing

One of the most urgent tasks we have as advocates and campaigners for Palestine, is to reframe and contextualise the discussion around Palestine into one that takes historical context and Israel's policies and practices as a belligerent occupying force into account.

This means that we remind and inform people of the ongoing nature of the Nakba and over 76 years of ethnic cleansing and colonisation.

What is currently happening in Gaza didn't start in October 2023. It started with the colonisation of Palestine by the British and their support of the political ideology of Zionism, that targeted Palestine as a Jewish homeland.

The issue is straight forward, but also multifaceted. It involves ethnic cleansing, military occupation, apartheid, land, resource and water theft. It involves economic strangulation and the medieval siege of Gaza. Ultimately it's about one group of people having power over another and using that power to deny people their fundamental rights - rights that every human being should enjoy.

**This did not start with October 7, and it is important that our conversations reflect this.**

# Messaging 101

## Messaging principles

- Lead with universal values like rights, family, freedom and equality. Highlight the fact that Palestinians want exactly the same as any Australian - to survive, care for their family, provide for their children and live in safety, to be free to dream about a better future, without the threat of bombs or starvation.
- Always avoid fallacies of conflating Judaism and Jewish identity with Zionism or the state of Israel. . It is essential to untangle Zionism from Judaism and focus on criticising Zionism as a political ideology and the actions of the Israeli State. The same forces that permit antisemitism encourage islamophobia, and since the movement for Palestine stands against all forms of racism, it is important that we call it out whenever possible. When advocating for Palestine, ensure that your language reflects the core values of the Palestinian struggle for liberation, freedom, justice and equality for all.
- Be explicit about who is committing what and why. Palestinians are not just starving - they are being starved by Israel. They are not just dying - they are being killed in violent and appalling ways by Israel. To break this down as a problem with a clear solution, people need to understand that a specific person, or people, have caused it.

# Messaging 101

## Messaging principles

- Know what you stand for and what your key messages are. We need to be proactive in reinforcing our own frames and references about Palestinians, their safety, rights and freedom rather than repeating or debating tropes around terrorism and anti-semitism. If you encounter a negative frame about Palestinians, do not repeat it or engage with it defensively, use it as an opportunity to reinforce a positive frame and your key message
- Provide solutions, rather than just highlighting harm. Provide tangible things that people can do right now, and explain the impact it will have.
- Use simple and accessible language - terms like 'one state solution', 'Intifada' or 'Nakba' may be unfamiliar or meaningless to some people. Either use simpler language with relatable examples, or take the time to unpack some of these terms and what they mean.
- Don't just speak on the macro-level, highlight individual stories with real people. Emphasise Palestinian voices and describe what they want - not just what they are subject to. Undoubtedly, you will have already heard countless stories about Palestinians and Gaza, both tragic and incredible. If not, you can seek out these stories by attending and listening at local rallies, following local Palestinian journalists on social media, or reading Palestinian authored news and articles.

# Messaging 101

## Messaging principles

- Paint a better picture and propose a better alternative, spend time outlining what we want to see - a world where Palestinians can live safely and securely on their ancestral lands with equal rights.
- Know your audience - use your time wisely by sticking to the key messages and expanding from that. If you're speaking to a group of allies, feel free to expand and talk more freely about the issue. If you are speaking to a less receptive audience - for example, on local radio - focus on reiterating your key message and delivering it as clearly as possible.
- Target your audience - there is very little use trying to persuade Zionists - you will only get angry, disillusioned, upset and it is a huge waste of time. Rather, seek people who are in the middle or open to persuasion - perhaps audiences who support Palestine but are not yet actively engaged in the campaign, or people who lack knowledge and are unsure about the issue.

# Messaging Principles

## Words matter.

Some terms, phrases and frames have been used so much in the media, by politicians and our opposition that even repeating them provokes an automatic association of negative bias and stereotypes.

Try to replace some of these words with better, more productive terms.

### Instead of this:

“Pro-Palestine”

### Try this:

Palestinian Allies  
 Palestinian Rights Supporters  
 Palestinian Rights Activists

### Because:

Using the term “pro” makes it seem like there are two legitimate sides to the argument, and all we need to do is pick one.

In reality, the choice is between justice and injustice.

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“Pro-Israel”

Zionists

As above, the term ‘pro’ is misleading. It’s also important to be specific about who we mean.

**Instead of this:****Try this:****Because:**

“IDF/Israel Defence Force”  
 “Israel Security Forces”

Israel’s military  
 Israeli Soldiers  
 Israeli Occupation Forces

They are a state-sanctioned military undertaking an assault on another population - it is not about security, nor defence.

“Palestinian/Arab - Israel Conflict”

Israel’s military invasion  
 Israel’s military occupation

“Conflict” makes it sound like there are two equal sides having a dispute, rather than an unjust and belligerent aggressor and an illegal occupation.

Israeli Settlements

Illegal Israeli settlements  
 Israeli settlements built on stolen Palestinian land.

“Settlements” sounds benign, like families are merely building new houses on unoccupied land.

# Messaging Principles

## Useful terms to describe the situation in Palestine/Gaza.

These words are useful in describing what is actually taking place in Palestine. However they are not always well understood and some people may even react negatively to them. It's important to be aware of your audiences reception to these terms, and make sure you are taking the time to unpack them.

**Apartheid** is a system of discrimination based on race. It was what was happening in South Africa where a minority of white South Africans ruled over black South Africans. In Palestine there are more than 60 laws that discriminate against Palestinians (*resource listed at end*). In the West Bank there are great roads that only Israelis can access, Israeli illegal settlements with power, water and modern amenities next to Palestinian villages denied these services and the list goes on

**Ethnic cleansing.** The state of Israel has been displacing Palestinians from their homes and lands since its creation in 1948. This displacement has been by military means, including massacres, the denial of Palestinians right to return to their homes as guaranteed by international law, by stealing their land and by making life untenable for Palestinians (*resource listed at end*).

# Messaging Principles

## Useful terms to describe the situation in Palestine/Gaza.

**Occupation.** Palestine is under an illegal military occupation. The United Nations has passed numerous resolutions demanding that Israel stop its occupation. Israel has ignored all these demands (*resource listed at end*).

**Settler colonialism.** Jewish people have always lived in Palestine living beside other Palestinians of other religions - mainly Muslim and Christian. Zionism, however, is a settler colonial movement and a political ideology inspired by European politics. It does not seek to co-exist with the indigenous Palestinians, rather its aim is to take over Palestinian lands, while denying the rights, culture and very existence of the Indigenous people in Palestine. This is the same process that western countries used when they invaded the world and subjugated the people of Africa, Central and South America and Asia. It's an ideology of supremacy and privilege.



# Messaging Principles

## **Responding to difficult questions.**

By engaging in debates that are centered around Israeli propaganda we inadvertently strengthen and perpetuate their narrative and weaken ours. To avoid falling into that trap, here are some examples for how to respond when faced with Israeli propaganda talking points:

### **“It all started on October 7”**

Context is incredibly important. Insist on contextualising this date against the backdrop of longterm Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Israel has been consistently practicing ethnic cleansing, land grab and military occupation against the Palestinian people for over 76 years. Israeli governments have been systemically violating international law, subjugating and oppressing Palestinians without impunity for decades.

2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza have been living under inhumane and illegal military blockade for almost 17 years, 3 million Palestinians live under Israels military rule in the West Bank, and another 2 millions live as second class citizens inside Israel.

The root cause of the problem is the ongoing denial of Palestinian rights and the continuation of illegal military occupation of Palestinian lands.

# Messaging Principles

## Responding to difficult questions.

**“But what about Hamas?”**

Again, context is important. We need to zoom out and consider the broader historical context.

The issue here predates any Palestinian political faction or groups and extends beyond the context of Gaza. Palestinians in Gaza, West Bank, historic Palestine, refugee camps and diaspora are subject to Israeli aggression and violence in one way or another, from denial of their right of return, to discriminatory laws, apartheid, siege and military occupation.

According to Amnesty International, Israel is practicing the crime of Apartheid against all Palestinians, in Gaza, West Bank, inside Israel and in the diaspora. This is about the rights of Palestinian people, an Indigenous people to live on their ancestral lands and to have self determination over their lives and future.

# Conversation Techniques

## **Telling stories to convey values.**

Telling stories is a critical part of campaigning - it is a far more compelling way to motivate someone to act than a long list of facts and figures. By telling stories, we can explain why we are drawn to act, what our values are, and how we became drawn to this cause.

We naturally tell stories all the time, for example when we are meeting someone for the first time. We also tend to ask other people their own stories, in an effort to find common ground and connection. And we can each learn to tell a story that motivates others to take action.

A compelling conversation technique, called 'Story of Self, Story of Us, Story of Now' by Marshall Ganz, has three separate narratives which can be connected together, inspiring others to act:

# Conversation Techniques

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# Conversation Techniques

## Story of Self/Us/Now.

**Story of Self** reflects on the following questions:

- What compelled you to work on this issue?
- What did you witness, or learn, that drove you to take action?
- Which values do you hold that mean you are driven to act?
- What story can you tell about yourself, your history or your background that will show the audience why you care about this issue?

**Story of Us** expresses the values and shared experiences you want to build on between you and a broader community, your audience, essentially building rapport.

- How does your story connect to others?
- What values do you share with them?
- What changes do you want to collectively see in the world?
- What is a shared experience you have all had, that may help to communicate a common purpose?

This part requires consideration of your audience and their values - this will change, depending on who you are speaking to.

# Conversation Techniques

## Story of Self/Us/Now.

**A Story of Now** outlines the challenge and urgency of the issue, as well as explaining what we need to do about it.

- What is it that we are facing?
- What is so urgent about it?
- Why do we need to face it together?
- What will happen when we face it together?
- What will the world look like?

Spend some time working on and developing these stories by answering the questions above.

You can rely on these narratives when conversing with new people in a one-on-one setting, or when speaking to a group of people. It is a longer form than the message pitch above, and can be told in a much more casual and informal way, with a real focus on building connection and rapport with your audience.

# Conversation Techniques

## **Deliver a clear message, quickly.**

To become a strong, effective advocate for Palestine, you will need to spend some time perfecting your message so that you are ready to deploy it any time, anywhere - to a politician, on community radio, or to another parent at school pick-up.

## **A compelling message has three components:**

- a ‘why’, a compelling, values-based story that explains what the problem is in a way that humanises and creates relatability
- a ‘what’, a vision of what we want to achieve or see.
- a call to action, or a compelling and straight-forward explanation of what needs to happen to resolve the solution, that actively includes the audience

Your message needs to sound authentic, so be sure to retell it in words that come naturally to you.

# Conversation Techniques

## **Deliver a clear message, quickly.**

Practice getting the message across as concisely as possible, in just three sentences, while maintaining urgency and emotion. While it's great to elaborate if you have the audience and the time, often you may find that you need to get the message across quickly. By practicing your message often, you will be ready to deploy it at any time without going on a tangent, losing your focus, or losing your impact.

### **Example.**

*“One of the most horrific images I think of is Eman, a pregnant mother trying to survive in an overcrowded refugee camp in Rafah, without food, water or medical supplies. She is due to give birth any day without access to a hospital, privacy, or medical assistance since Israel destroyed the hospital. Eman deserves the dignity of delivering her baby in a safe environment, like any other mother in Australia. The Australian Government needs to step up and demand a ceasefire, and as voters we need to keep calling our MP to let them know we won't vote for an MP who endorses genocide.”*

**This message does it all - it humanises the issue, builds on shared connection, identifies the perpetrator, outlines the solution and makes a call to action in less than 20 seconds.**



# Conversation Techniques

## **Activating allies.**

Sometimes our job is not to convince someone to support Palestine, but to inspire them to take action.

We are more than seven months into an unfolding man-made humanitarian crisis and naturally people are feeling fatigued and hopeless. One of the best things you can do as a supporter is to activate other people by reminding them they are an integral part of a bigger mission and a global movement.

When all seems hopeless, breaking our mission and strategy down into simple language and logical steps can be enough to re-energise someone. They don't need to solve the issue at hand all on their own, but if we can get a certain number of calls/visits/letters to local MP/newspaper/radio station, then the current government will start to fear for their electability at the next election and will be compelled to act.

# Conversation Techniques

## **Activating allies.**

Remind them of all the campaign wins (big or small) that have happened to date. Unions have spoken out, political leaders have changed their language, students have set up encampments all over their country, countries have taken Israel to the ICJ. We are a part of a bigger movement, and that must not be forgotten.

Make an ask. If you are dealing with someone who supports Palestine but is not actively involved yet, ask them to participate in some tangible, real life way. Make sure the commitment is tangible, time-bound and realistic, like “Can you make a phone call or write an email to Minister X’s office?” or even something as simple as “follow APAN on socials!”. Make sure to explain why this action will make an impact.

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# Conversation Techniques

## Turning an opponent into an ally.

It is only natural that during these conversations we encounter challenges, as we engage in discussions with people who do not share the same knowledge, passion or support for Palestine in the same way that we do. As difficult these conversations might be, they are crucial. Remember that people are on their own journeys with different starting points to yours. The useful thing to do is to help them move along and take the next step on their journey to becoming a supporter.

Learn how to calmly disarm people , remain in control of the conversation and focus on your goal and key message.

Listen actively and carefully to what they are saying. Are they revealing something about their values? Can you find some common ground with them? Often, the frames our opponents will use relate to safety and security for Israelis. Is there a way that you can introduce our framing, by leaning on those values? Can you provide historical context to the conversation?

Be empathetic, respectful and judgment free.. Often, people say things that are harmful or offensive because they don't have a proper understanding of an issue. And with the mainstream media so biased, it's harder to gain proper understanding of the cause. The best thing we can do for our movement here in Australia is to be empathetic, kind and inclusive.

# Conversation Techniques

## Turning an opponent into an ally.

Be patient, this is a process. Transforming someone else's perspective very rarely happens in front of your eyes, and you are unlikely to witness any concessions in the conversation you are having. However, with any luck, you will leave the other person with a new lens to consider this issue which they may return to over the coming weeks. You could be a catalyst for shifting someone's mind!

Be purposeful, and make sure what you are conveying is true to your key message and core values - remember what you practiced earlier! Don't repeat negative frames, or spend time debunking their facts. Return to your three key messages.

Use **flagging** to reiterate your main message if you feel like you might be straying from your core message or losing control of the conversation. Use phrases like "The most important thing is..." or "The bottom line is" to reiterate your key message.

Use **bridging** if you find that your opponent is taking the conversation away from where you would like it to be, by using phrases such as "that may be true, but the real issue here is ..." or "just to get back to the key message here, ...."

# Conversation Techniques

## **Turning an opponent into an ally.**

Stay calm. There is nothing more difficult than trying to get a message across if you are flustered, angry or upset. You can ask questions of your opponent to give yourself some time to collect your thoughts.

*It's important to point out here that you do not need to subject yourself to cruel, discriminatory or emotionally taxing conversations. Some conversations really are not worth having. Use the framework above only if you need to, or if you think your opponent is one worth convincing.*

# Conversation Techniques

## Strategic audiences

The key thing to remember is that to win this campaign, we don't need to convince everybody. We just need to convince the people in the middle.

We only need to persuade *some* voters, not all voters, for an MP to feel that they will lose their seat if they don't change their position. We only need to convince *some* consumers to avoid a brand, for their profits to dramatically decrease. Often, the very threat of something happening is enough to make decision-makers change their behaviour.

Try to seek out those people who are somewhere in the middle - people who are unsure about Palestine, people who aren't well informed, or people who are unengaged.

# Extra Resources

## ***The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine***

Ilan Pappé

[https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/jps/vol36-141/vol36-141\\_b.pdf](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/jps/vol36-141/vol36-141_b.pdf)

## **Interview with Ilan Pappé [Part 1] – The ethnic cleansing of Palestine**

<https://www.jetdencre.ch/interview-with-ilan-pappe-part-1-the-ethnic-cleansing-of-palestine-4544>

## **The Discriminatory Laws database**

Adalah

<https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771>

## **The UN Resolutions concerning Israel**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_United\\_Nations\\_resolutions\\_concerning\\_Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_Nations_resolutions_concerning_Israel)

## **Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians**

Amnesty International

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>