



## Citizen Toolkit

Are you **concerned** about the divisiveness of today's politics?

**Tired** of political gridlock?

**Horrified** by the continuing practice of incivility throughout our society?

Then become a **Citizen for Reviving Civility!**

### What is Civility?

What do we mean by civility and incivility? To answer that question, NICD commissioned research on what people consider to be civil and uncivil. The findings are:

#### Civility is:

- Showing mutual respect;
- Carefully listening to, and showing respect for, all persons;
- The effective consideration of all arguments;
- Active listening; and
- Questioning and disputing, but doing so in a way that respects and affirms all persons, even while critiquing their arguments.

#### Political incivility is (in order of "most uncivil" to "less uncivil"):

- Threatening physical harm, encouraging others to threaten physical harm, and using racial, religious, ethnic or sexual slurs;
- Mocking or making fun of a political opponent, getting in an opponent's face, making disrespectful or demeaning statements, refusing to listen to arguments or points of view with which one disagrees, and making exaggerated statements that misrepresent or obscure the truth;
- Name calling, using insulting language, using obscene or vulgar language, engaging in character assassination to damage an opponent's reputation,



intentionally making false or misleading statements, and preventing those with whom one disagrees from taking part in the discussion; and

- Failing to provide reasons or evidence for one's conclusions, verbal fighting or jousting, shouting at an opponent, attacking an opponent's personal character or conduct, interrupting those with whom one disagrees, eye rolling, and repeatedly emphasizing an opponent's minor flubs, oversights or improprieties.

When we talk about political incivility, it can help to look at specific examples. Below we've analyzed statements by political leaders that contained varying levels of incivility:

*"I have obviously failed to galvanize and prod, if not shame enough Americans to be ever vigilant not to let a Chicago communist-raised, communist-educated, communist-nurtured subhuman mongrel like the ACORN community organizer gangster Barack Hussein Obama to weasel his way into the top office of authority in the United States of America." -- Singer and political activist Ted Nugent, January 2014.*

**ANALYSIS:** This rhetoric suggests President Obama is a communist, but – while Obama may support more government intervention than Nugent and other conservatives – he hasn't supported anything like a one-party government controlling 100% of the economy. Also, it describes him as less than human, and as a criminal.

*"The problem is, is that the way [President George W.] Bush has done it over the last eight years is to take out a credit card from the Bank of China in the name of our children, driving up our national debt from \$5 trillion for the first 42 presidents -- number 43 added \$4 trillion by his lonesome -- so that we now have over \$9 trillion of debt that we are going to have to pay back. \$30,000 for every man, woman and child. That's irresponsible. It's unpatriotic." -- Democratic presidential contender Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL), July 3, 2008.*

**ANALYSIS:** It's fair to argue about whether or not government should borrow money, but it's not acceptable for Obama to declare that Bush's actions and intent is unpatriotic, indicating that he doesn't love and support his country.

*"I'm not like the Republicans, who pick a position and stick with it regardless of evidence and try to, you know, live in an evidence-free zone the best they can." -- Democratic presidential contender former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, January 11, 2016,*



during interview with the editorial board of The Des Moines Register

**ANALYSIS:** No doubt, just like most of us, Republicans have said things that are demonstrably false. But, if someone – Republican or Democrat – says something they should have known was false, does that mean they don’t care about truth and evidence at all?

*“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending the best. ... They’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” --* Republican presidential contender Donald Trump, June 16, 2015.

**ANALYSIS:** It’s true that some people who have crossed the border illegally have committed further crimes, but there’s no evidence that that’s true of the majority of them. Without citing any proof, Trump makes it sound as if good people are the exception to the rule.

**Civility is not a partisan issue. We believe the civility of public discourse can be improved across the political spectrum.**

## Becoming a Citizen for Reviving Civility

We asked civility experts, political leaders, and researchers for the best, most effective actions citizens can take to help Revive Civility. This toolkit contains their ideas, in three simple steps.

The three steps to become a Citizen for Reviving Civility are:

### 1. Agree to uphold the Standards of Conduct

Created by civility experts, political leaders and researchers, the Standards provide a framework through which we can revive the spirit of civility by modeling civil behavior. [Join us in supporting these Standards](#), for our campaigns, our media, and our everyday lives.

When you agree to the Standards, you are taking the first step to becoming a Citizen for Reviving Civility. Agreement to the Standards will put your city on the



Revive Civility Map, and you will receive a weekly Revive Civility email newsletter which includes a weekly civility action and civility news of the week.

## **2. Take Weekly Action to Revive Civility**

Once you agree to the Standards, you will receive a weekly Revive Civility email newsletter. In this newsletter, we will send you a Weekly Action to take to Revive Civility in our politics and everyday lives. These actions won't take a lot of time, but collectively, with other Citizens for Reviving Civility, they will change the spirit of our politics and the civility of our discourse.

Example actions include promoting a civility message on social media, writing articles on the importance of civility for your local newspaper, and sending your elected officials the Standards of Conduct.

## **3. Be the Change you wish to see in the World**

This next step is up to you. The following pages of this Toolkit are intended to provide you with guidance and resources on how to model civil behavior everyday. You can choose the tactics and strategies to employ. Test them out. You'll not only experience the satisfaction of making a difference but also the pride of achievement.

If you discover a new tactic, don't keep it to yourself! Share it with the others who are committed to Reviving Civility by sending the new tactic or idea to Raquel Goodrich at [rgoodrich@email.arizona.edu](mailto:rgoodrich@email.arizona.edu). Your idea might just be added to our toolkit, email newsletter, or as a weekly action!



## Be the Change you wish to see in the World

### Tactics & Strategies

What's the best way to revive civility? Practicing it every day! There are many ways to do this, from being civil to a rude person or simply discussing with a friend what civility means.

Below are some examples:

### Debunk Myths about Civility

**OBJECTION #1:** *"Civility means compromising your principles and not criticizing ideas you disagree with. We're all just supposed to be bipartisan and sing 'kumbaya' together."*

**RESPONSE:** Civility doesn't dictate what you're supposed to believe, it's about how you defend your beliefs. In sports, we advocate "fair play": strive to defeat the other team, but without cheating or demeaning one's opponent. Civil debate is like fair play, just for politics: argue for what you believe, but don't resort to name-calling, distortions, etc. Civility is about being honest – but saying it respectfully.

**OBJECTION #2:** *"It's a false equivalence to say both sides are uncivil. It's perfectly obvious that the other side engages in far more incivility than we do."*

**RESPONSE:** Even if it seems like one side is guiltier than the other, each side has plenty of room for improvement. Plus, we need to develop unbiased standards of civility, because we tend to highlight the misbehavior of others (while overlooking our own), convincing ourselves that we're better behaved than we really are.

**OBJECTION #3:** *"When it comes to political issues, I'm passionate about what I believe. Why should I have to censor what I say?"*

**RESPONSE:** Passion should prompt us to behave in a way that's respectful and dignified. Whenever passion is inciting us to demonize or insult others, we should ask ourselves if there's a better way to express what we believe. Remember that having passion about an issue is a good thing; but if you can't express your beliefs without insulting people, others are not going to listen to



you, which often means you're not going to be successful in getting your point across.

## Talk about Civility

Civility can be a hard conversation to bring up. Case in point: every time you try to talk politics with your uncle, the conversation quickly degrades into a name-calling match.

Here's a better approach: bring up the conversation through "Text, Talk, Revive Civility", a fun and interactive text-messaging platform.

**Here's how it works:** Whenever you are ready, gather a few friends, pull out your cell phone, and text CIVILITY to 89800. Your group will then receive a series of text messages that will guide you through a conversation on civility: what it is, what it means to your group, and how we can revive civility in our politics and everyday lives.

This activity works well in cafes, living rooms, conference rooms, classrooms and afterschool settings. Anywhere where there is cell phone reception!

The conversation takes approx. 45 minutes, and people find it fun, which is more than you can say about the talking politics with your uncle.

## Host a Living Room Conversation

There are so many topics that need a deeper conversation. Luckily, Living Room Conversations, a new, open-source project helps people explore the power of revitalized civil discourse in America. It provides a platform for people to come together through social networks to engage in self-guided conversations about specific topics. Typically, conversations have cohosts who hold differing views, perhaps from different ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds or political parties. Each co-host invites two friends and the group follows an easy-to-use format and set of questions to get acquainted with each other and with each other's viewpoints on a chosen topic. These conversations foster new relationships and often reveal common ground.

### A living room conversation in five easy steps

1. Invite a co-host, pick a date!
2. Select a topic (use our suggestions or create your own)
3. Invite friends (each co-host invites two friends)



4. Have your conversation (and have fun!)
5. Let us know how it went through our feedback form.

Living Room Conversations has created discussion guides on a variety of topics. [Click here](#) to find the perfect conversation to host.

## Just Being Civil, Being Kind

You've been cut off by a car and your first instinct is to cuss, blow your horn, and maybe even put up a middle finger. But today you've decided you will just be civil, to be kind. You can think of the many reasons why this person might be in a hurry (the person's rushing to the hospital, it's their first day at work, and they are running late because they got a flat tire, etc.) and take a few deep breaths and let it go.

The barista at your coffee shop is always rude and condescending. You could be rude right back, but you've decided to just be civil, to be kind. You think about why she is unhappy with her life, and realize she's not being rude because of something you did, but rather, because of other circumstances in her life. You accept your coffee with a smile, thank her, and leave.

The idea is, no matter how someone treats you, you can always choose to be civil, to be kind, to be thoughtful, to be understanding. It might just turn their day around. At the minimum, it will put you in a better mood, so it's worth it no matter what.

## Personal Reflection

- Think of someone with whom you share a close personal relationship.
- Think of the biggest difference the two of you share and why you disagree on that issue.
- Reflect on how that disagreement has affected your relationship with that person:
  - Do you avoid bringing up the issue?
  - Has it changed the way you communicate or interact with that person?
  - Have you allowed room for this disagreement in your relationship, so that you can continue to have a relationship with this person?
- Think about how you both have worked together to overcome this difference to maintain your relationship.
- Think about why you would allow this disagreement to exist between you and this person, but not necessarily with someone you have just encountered or don't know as well. Reflect on the ways you can use the lessons you have



- learned from overcoming differences in this relationship with others in the future.
- As you've likely witnessed in your relationship, many conflicts can't be solved by some magic formula based on incontrovertible facts. Most politics are based on value preferences that can't be proven. But what we CAN do is better understand the differences in our goals and intentions.

## Get Informed

There's a lot of information being "slung" around out there, but is it true? Next time you read an article, pay attention to where it came from, who wrote it, and what an underlying motive might be. An interesting experiment is to check a liberal news source and a conservative news source, and see how the issue is presented differently. Finally, use sites like [politifact.com](http://politifact.com) to fact check the information.

## Promote Civility on Social Media

**Campaign Hashtag:** #ReviveCivility

### Sample Messages

I just signed up to help #ReviveCivility. You should too, because America needs you:  
<http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

Help #ReviveCivility. Our democracy depends on it: <http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

Are people around you being uncivil? Learn what you can do to #ReviveCivility:  
<http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

Politics are so uncivil. So I'm helping to #ReviveCivility. You should too:  
<http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

Just be kind. Please. <http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

I wish our candidates, the media, and the public would use these Standards of Conduct. Sign up if you agree: <http://bit.ly/CivilityStandards>

There goes another example of incivility. Wish [insert candidate] would follow these Standards of Conduct instead: <http://bit.ly/CivilityStandards>





Taking a stand against incivility? Find out how here: <http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

Don't like what you are hearing? Speak up for civility: <http://bit.ly/ReviveCivility>

## Contact Your Elected Officials

[Contact](#) your elected officials and encourage them to sign the [Standards of Conduct](#).

[Contact](#) your elected officials and ask them to represent and take time to understand their constituent's interest, and to make decisions that are in the best interest of the majority.