

Exploring Misguided Arguments

There are times when you will be involved in conversations with well-intentioned people who are inadvertently sharing inaccurate information. While they may passionately believe that they have shaped their positions carefully, there are flaws in their thinking. The best persuaders can accurately describe the sources for disagreements and respectfully point out misguided arguments. Use this handout to structure your responses to individuals who hold inaccurate ideas about the topic you are studying.

What core belief do these people hold that you think is flawed? (Be as specific as possible when describing their point of view. Include statements that they have made or facts that they have used to defend their point of view.)

Why would a reasonable person think this way? (What is it about the flawed point of view that would resonate with reasonable people?)

Are there any public figures who agree with this flawed point of view? If so, what kinds of messages are they sending to listeners? (Use the Internet to track down any comments being made by public figures—politicians, musicians, sports stars—that might influence the way people think about the topic you are studying.)

Specifically, what is wrong with the core belief you are questioning? What evidence can you provide to prove that this core belief is flawed? (Questioning the emotions and personalities of the people you disagree with is unproductive. Instead, stick to the facts. What is it that you think your opponents have failed to think through carefully? What clear and convincing evidence can you provide to call their flawed thinking into question?)

Note: Remember that your opponents feel as strongly about their core beliefs as you feel about yours. Effectively challenging flawed thinking often means finding the admirable qualities in their position. Doing so makes it clear that you don't doubt their intentions or competence.