

# Health Story Conversation Guide

By Alexis Allison, independent journalist

## Invitation:

Health Story is an opportunity to talk thoughtfully with someone who thinks about an issue differently than you. It's not a debate, but a conversation — a space in which both people come together to learn about how you each approach a health issue. The purpose is understanding, not persuasion. We encourage you to enter this conversation with gentleness, compassion and curiosity.

## Eligibility:

People who live in Tarrant County, have personal experience with the subject matter and are open to constructive dialogue are eligible to participate. You can be an expert, but you don't have to be.

## Process:

This is a self-directed conversation, but one that follows a specific structure. Before the conversation, reporter Alexis Allison will give you a “solutions” story related to your conversation topic to read. Solutions journalism investigates solutions, rather than focusing on problems. The purpose is not to endorse an existing solution but to explore if, how and why it works. Read the story and come prepared to discuss your impressions, including whether you think the approach highlighted in the story could work in Tarrant County.

The conversation should last about one hour and take place via Zoom or in person. Alexis will join as an observer, timekeeper and helper if you get stuck. The audio will be recorded and published, along with an edited transcript. Your full names will be included. If you have questions about the process, email Alexis at [byalexisallison@gmail.com](mailto:byalexisallison@gmail.com).

## Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to Braver Angels, Preemptive Love Coalition, Solutions Journalism Network and StoryCorps, whose resources Alexis referenced when creating Health Story. Finally, thanks to the Solutions Journalism Network's “Complicating the Narratives” fellowship for making this podcast possible.

## Setup

When the time comes for the conversation, get cozy! Warm beverages are strongly encouraged. For Zoom, choose a quiet place and silence any devices that might make noise during the conversation.

Then, decide who will be Person 1 and who will be Person 2. The order doesn't matter. Once you've decided, Alexis will start recording.

Person 1 will read the purpose aloud. Person 2 will then read the guidelines.

### Purpose

- Gain a deeper understanding of each other's experiences and beliefs about a decision, practice or policy in health.
- Discover areas of agreement while exploring differences.
- Consider whether an approach to the health issue from another community would work in Tarrant County.

### Guidelines

1. We're here to explain our perspective and listen to each other with a shared goal of understanding. We're not here to assume, debate, persuade, convert, criticize, advise, correct or otherwise offer feedback. When the conversation ends, we may still disagree.
2. Understanding requires listening quietly. We're not here to interrupt, attack or talk over each other. Please monitor your own sharing to make sure that your partner in the conversation has enough space to share. One helpful strategy is called looping: repeating back the ideas your partner shares with you to make sure you're understanding (i.e. "It sounds like X," or "What I'm hearing you say is X"). Follow-up questions, too, can be helpful. We recommend open-ended questions like "could you give me an example?" or "would you tell me more about that?"
3. We commit to be thoughtful and gentle in our language, especially when we reference beliefs and experiences that differ from our own. That said, we may disagree on the "right" way to say things. If so, let's give each other the benefit of the doubt and focus on the spirit behind the words.
4. Finally, all emotions are welcome! It's OK to laugh, cry, be angry. We're here to embrace what we're feeling and thinking, while creating space for each other's perspective.

Are we both open to the conversation purpose and guidelines?

## The Conversation

Here's a script to guide your path. As you take turns asking and answering questions, feel free to tweak the language to make it sound more like you. Also, feel free to ask follow-up questions or take less time to respond.

1. **Can you tell me something about you?** (*Introduce yourself! Consider sharing how long you've lived in Tarrant County, what you do, how you spend your days, etc.*)

Who asks first? Person 1  
Time to respond: 2 minutes each

2. **Why did you decide to participate in Heath Story?**

Who asks first? Person 2  
Time to respond: 1 minute each

3. **How would you describe your stance on this issue?**

Who asks first? Person 1  
Time to respond: 3 minutes each

4. **What life experiences have influenced your values and beliefs about this issue?**

Who asks first? Person 2  
Time to respond: 3 minutes each

5. **Where do you get your information about this issue? How do you decide which information to trust?**

Who asks first? Person 1  
Time to respond: 3 minutes each

6. **What do you hope someone who disagrees with your perspective on this issue understands about you?**

Who asks first? Person 2  
Time to respond: 3 minutes each

7. **Where do you feel torn? Is there any part of the "other side's" position that makes sense to you?**

Who asks first? Person 1  
Time to respond: 3 minutes each

Next, Person 2 briefly summarizes the “solution” presented in the news story you read before this conversation. Then:

**8. What did you think about the solutions story?**

Who asks first? Person 2.

Time to respond: 3 minutes each

**9. How would the approach work in Tarrant County?**

Who asks first? Person 1

Time to respond: 3 minutes each

**10. How are you? How do you feel after having this conversation?**

Who asks first? Person 2

Time to respond: 2 minutes each

**11. What will you take with you from this conversation?**

Who asks first? Person 1

Time to respond: 2 minutes each

To end, thank each other for sharing. Alexis will stop the recording and let you know next steps, i.e. when the story may run. She’ll send you a link when it does.

After that, you’re free to sign off. We hope you continue these dialogues beyond the scope of Health Story.