

Beyond the Picnic



LET'S

TALK

PEACE

*The Summer*  
Conversation

GUIDE

# **Kitchen Table**

**CONVERSATION** **STARTERS**



# Kitchen Table

## CONVERSATION STARTERS



*A simple guide to starting meaningful, change-making, peace-based conversations in your home or community.*

Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs) are small, informal, and deeply human spaces for people to listen, reflect, and imagine a better future together. They can happen anywhere; in your home, community hall, or even at a park picnic table.

For generations, honest conversations around kitchen tables have helped families and communities work through challenges. KTCs build on this tradition and give people a simple, gentle way to talk about big issues – like peace – in a way that feels safe, grounded, and real.

### **The Purpose of a Kitchen Table Conversation:**

Why do this? Because change begins in small circles. A KTC is designed to:

- Create a safe and relaxed space where everyone can share their experiences and perspectives without judgment.
- Build understanding and connection. People often leave feeling seen, heard, and supported – which is foundational to peace.
- Explore a topic in depth. Whether broad (“What does peace look like to you?”) or specific (“How can we respond to divisive moments in our community?”), the aim is thoughtful dialogue.
- Spark practical ideas and commitments
- Strengthen community fabric. Peace grows when people talk honestly, listen deeply, and feel part of something bigger than themselves.

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### Who Can Host One?

Anyone. You just need sincerity and a willingness to guide a gentle, respectful conversation. Most conversations work well with a group or groups of 4-10 people – small enough for depth, big enough for diversity.

### Where Do/Can They Happen?

Anywhere people feel comfortable:

- Around your dining table or living room
- In the backyard
- In a quiet corner of a park
- In a community hall



The environment should feel relaxed, warm, and welcoming.

### What You Need to Prepare

- A facilitator to help keep the conversation on track. A KTC is guided more by posture than by expertise. Come with calm curiosity, a willingness to learn, and an openness to being wrong. A facilitator's presence shapes the atmosphere more than their words
- A simple welcome, thank people for coming and explain why you're gathering. For example:

*"We've gathered here because peace isn't something that only happens on the world stage, it begins in rooms like this, in small circles of people willing to listen, reflect, and imagine something better. These conversations give us the chance to explore what peace looks like in our own lives, our neighbourhoods, and in Sydney. There's no pressure to have the 'right' answers. This is simply a gentle, open space to share perspectives and hear from one another. Thank you again for being here and offering your voice to this conversation."*



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- Gentle ground rules
  1. No right or wrong ideas
  2. Everyone gets a chance to speak
  3. Listen deeply; avoid interrupting
  4. Ask clarifying questions
  5. Be curious, not combative
  6. Speak from personal experience ("I feel..." "I've noticed...")
- A scribe (optional): Someone can jot down thoughts, themes, or commitments, but sometimes it is also helpful to let it flow organically.
- A light snack or drink (optional): Sharing food helps people relax and open up.

### What To Do If Someone Becomes Distressed

- Pause the conversation
- Acknowledge the emotion gently
- Ask whether they'd prefer a break or would like to continue
- Invite someone to accompany them outside if needed
- Re-centre the group with a grounding breath when resuming
- If someone brings a strong political view that creates tension, you might say:

*"Thank you for sharing that. I can hear this issue means a lot to you. I'd love to hear how this has shown up in your everyday life as well. Could you share a moment or experience that shaped your view?"*

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### Topics & Questions

What does a peaceful and neighbourhood look and feel like for each of us?

Did anything in the news make you feel proud, worried, or confused this week?

Share a story from your childhood about a time you learned something important about peace or fairness. How did this shape who you are?

Who in our community might be feeling isolated, unseen, or overwhelmed right now?

How could we be a source of encouragement or companionship this season?

What small gestures may build trust between neighbours?

What recent events (local or global) have affected you emotionally? Why?

How can we talk about tough topics – war, displacement, racism, injustice – with respect and care?

Imagine Sydney in 2035: what would tell you it has become a more peaceful, inclusive city?

What's your favourite peaceful place in Sydney? Are there enough peaceful places that we can all freely access?

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### Topics & Questions

Do you think Australia feels more peaceful or less peaceful than it did a year ago?

What does peace look like in your everyday life?

What divides people most in our city? What could bring us together?

What does solidarity look like for ordinary people, especially when we feel helpless?

What responsibilities do we carry for peace – as neighbours, parents, siblings, friends, or even as voters?

If you could change one thing in our community that would make life more peaceful, what would it be?

What small commitment can we each make between now and February that can help build a more peaceful neighbourhood, community, Sydney?

How does the news or social media affect your sense of peace?

What gives you hope right now?

What part of your culture influences the way you think and feel about peace?

How do we create spaces where people from diverse backgrounds feel safe to talk about peace?

How do we talk about hard things while still preserving connection?



**ACTION!**





# ACTION!

Beyond KTCs, there are many ways you can act on your commitment to peace in everyday life at an individual level, within the fabric of your families, or amongst the greater community. Below are more ways to continue the conversation after your KTC and carry its energy into your everyday life.

### **Start with yourself: Peace in your heart**

Reach out to someone who shared something vulnerable. A simple “thinking of you” message can strengthen trust and connection.

Take a “peace pause” each morning. One minute of deep breathing before picking up your phone. Notice how you feel when you wake up. Before the world’s noise enters your mind, ground yourself in intention and gratitude.

Examining the things that happened over the course of the day before bedtime is also a good practice. Ask yourself how you responded to conflicts. Did you reach out in friendship and love to others, show kindness or offer or receive forgiveness? Were there moments I could have slowed down and listened more deeply?

Reduce one source of negativity in your media intake. Mute a stressful account, limit doomscrolling, or choose a hopeful newsletter to replace a draining one.

Keep a small “peace note” in your phone or journal. Write down one moment of kindness, beauty, or humanity you noticed each day. These moments accumulate and reorient your attention toward the good.



# ACTION!

Practise a “slow response.” When something frustrates you, take one breath before reacting. This single pause can shift the tone of the entire interaction.

Share one thing you learned or reflected on today. Tell a friend, colleague, or family member. Passing peace forward reinforces it in your own life.

Spend a few minutes outside every day. Touch the ground, sit in the sun, listen to birds; small moments with nature help settle the nervous system.

Light a candle, whisper a prayer, or sit in silence for one minute. Whatever your tradition, slowing yourself down invites calm, clarity, and compassion.

Practise micro-kindness. Hold a door, offer a smile, let someone go ahead of you in traffic or at the shop. Peace grows through tiny but intentional gestures.

Begin a weekly gratitude walk. A slow walk where you intentionally notice what's good, hopeful, or beautiful around you.

### **Strength with our loved ones: Peace in your families**

Build connection, understanding, and empathy with those closest to you. Strengthen the social fabric and replace assumptions with curiosity. When conflict arises, start with: “Help me understand...” a phrase that softens defensiveness and opens space for genuine listening.

Create small rituals of togetherness. Shared meals, a nightly check-in, a Sunday walk, or a weekly ‘peace ritual’ can help families reconnect and ground themselves amid busy schedules.





# ACTION!

## **Strength with our loved ones: Peace in your families**

Practice “slow listening.” That is, listening without planning a response, simply being present to the person in front of you and taking the time to reflect.

Protect time for connection. Five minutes of undistracted presence with a loved one – a child, partner, sibling, or parent – can restore warmth and trust in surprising ways.

Make space for difference. Not everyone in a family feels peace in the same way. Invite each person to share what helps them feel calm, safe, or seen – and honour those differences.

Repair gently and quickly. All families experience tension. What matters is the repair. A quiet apology, a warm gesture, or simply saying, “Can we start again?” can reset the whole tone of the household.

Share stories of peace across generations. Ask older family members what helped them through difficult moments. Invite children to share when they felt brave or kind. Stories build continuity and belonging.

Practise family check-ins after tough days. Try:

- “What’s one thing that went well today?”
- “What’s one thing that felt hard?”



# ACTION!

## **Strength with our loved ones: Peace in your families**

Share moments of quiet together. A short prayer, lighting a candle, mindful breathing, or even sitting quietly on the couch – shared silence brings families back to themselves and to each other.

## **Engage with others: Peace in our communities and neighbourhoods**

Think of peace as something we can build together. No one creates peace alone. It grows in the small interactions we share, in the relationships we nurture, and in the spaces we create for belonging.

Organise a 'Peace Walk' with your neighbours and others in your community. Use the time to talk, listen, share stories, and learn more about the people who live around you. Walking softens tension and builds trust.

Drop a holiday card into three neighbours' letterboxes. Choose people you don't know well. Wish them a safe, restful, and peaceful season. These small, unexpected gestures often mean more than we realise.

Start a Peace Bookclub. Choose books that explore peace, cooperation, hope, culture, or shared humanity. Conversation becomes a catalyst for understanding and community.

Join a local activity that brings people together. Try ParkRun, a local community garden, a Bushcare group, or a neighbourhood clean-up. These activities deepen social ties, improve local spaces, and bring a sense of shared purpose.





# ACTION!

## **Engage with others: Peace in our communities and neighbourhoods**

Support communities affected by global conflict. If events overseas are weighing heavily on you, reach out to those directly impacted here. Attend vigils, send messages of solidarity, or volunteer with organisations like Jesuit Refugee Service, House of Welcome, or local refugee support groups.

Use your digital presence to spread peace. Share hope-filled stories, check in on someone online, amplify community events, and pause before sharing anything divisive. Our online choices shape the emotional climate of our communities.

Approach your local school. Ask how they are helping students become peacemakers. Are there storytelling programs, buddy systems, anti-bullying initiatives, or cultural understanding activities you can support or volunteer for?

Connect through interfaith dialogue. If you are a person of religious faith, join or support an interfaith group. These spaces help break down stereotypes, foster respect, and build bridges across difference.

Start something gentle and local. A monthly cuppa in the park, a weekend “meet your neighbours” chat, a noticeboard of kindness, or a shared table where people place items to give away. Small invitations help people feel welcome and seen.

Celebrate differences with curiosity. Meet people where they are. Ask about traditions, share recipes, attend cultural festivals, or learn a greeting in someone else’s language.



# ACTION!

## **Engage with others: Peace in our communities and neighbourhoods**

Speak up gently when needed. If you overhear misinformation or something hurtful, respond calmly and kindly. Peace isn't passive – it often takes courage rooted in compassion.

Support local organisations that bring people together. Community centres, libraries, cultural groups, youth programs, and local councils all offer opportunities to strengthen the social fabric. Look for events, workshops, and open days.

Remember: small actions ripple outward. Peace grows through everyday gestures – multiplied across streets, parishes, neighbourhoods, and councils. Every smile, invitation, conversation, and act of care contributes to a stronger, more hopeful world.



