
TEACHING GUIDE

**WE NEED
TO TALK**

HOW TO HAVE
CONVERSATIONS
THAT MATTER

**CELESTE
HEADLEE**



HARPER WAVE

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About this Book

It's no secret that the art of effective communication is on the decline. Between the rise of technology and the increasingly volatile political landscape, Americans feel less connected and more divided than ever. But the erosion of our conversational skills as a society lies with us as individuals.

In an incredibly timely and insightful book, NPR veteran Celeste Headlee outlines strategies to become a better conversationalist and improve communication skills so that every person can have more productive and meaningful conversations.

About the Author

Celeste Headlee is a TEDx Speaker and host of the daily news talk show “On Second Thought” at Georgia Public Broadcasting. She was the Midwest Correspondent for National Public Radio before co-hosting the Public Radio International show “The Takeaway” and guest hosting a number of NPR shows including “Tell Me More,” “Talk of the Nation,” “Weekend All Things Considered” and “Weekend Edition.” Headlee also anchored election coverage for PBS World in 2012 and has been a featured guest on CNN and BBC. She lives in Atlanta with her son and two rescue dogs.

Celeste was also featured on our podcast series, HarperAcademic Calling. To listen to her episode, [visit our podcast page](#).

About this Guide

The first part of this guide contains discussion questions for Part I of *We Need to Talk*. Part II of the guide provides questions and activities designed to utilize the techniques Headlee discusses in chapters 6 through 16 of *We Need to Talk*.

Discussion Questions

PART I

- How does Headlee show that conversation is a “nuanced skill”?
- What are the two reasons Headlee articulates for needing to get better at communication? What are the impacts of these two reasons for ourselves and our relationships?
- Why is empathy vital to successful communication?
- What are the ways in which technology (especially mobile phones and the internet) affects our communication habits?
- What is “System 1” thinking? What are some of its advantages and disadvantages?
- Why is it good practice to pay attention to our communication weaknesses?
- When Headlee talks about “setting the stage” for conversations, what does she mean? How does that practice help make conversations more productive?
- What are the five key strategies Headlee identifies that help facilitate productive dialogue?
- How does bias affect how we communicate?
- Why are sincere apologies helpful in communication? How are they effective at resetting dialogue?

PART II

- What are some arguments for and against technology improving interpersonal communication?
- Describe an instance where bias affected how you were trying to communicate with someone. What were the outcomes of that conversation? With hindsight, how could that conversation have gone differently if bias were acknowledged openly?
- Have you ever been in a conversation where someone keeps turning the conversation back to themselves, like the “conversational narcissism” Headlee discusses (105)? How did that experience make you feel about the conversation you were trying to have?
- How can we practice being more present and engaged in conversations with others beyond simply paying attention?
- Do you admit when you don’t know something in conversation? If you don’t, why not? If you have, how has acknowledging what you don’t know helped in conversations you have had?
- With a partner, write a two-minute exchange between two people about an important topic that demonstrates at least four bad conversational habits. Perform your script for the class and be prepared to pinpoint when and how the speakers failed to communicate.
- That perception is the problem. They are a living, breathing part of society. Their hopelessness, their poverty, their violence, their lack of education lands on all our doorsteps. They are our children, and their choices—or lack of choices—affect us, whether we want them to or not” (265-66). Why is changing our perception of so-called marginalized kids necessary to improve society as a whole, and not just for a select few?

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