

Conversation guide:

How to talk to friends and family about the rights of people seeking asylum and refugees

Powerful forces in our society have repeatedly made the choice to demonise and dehumanise refugees and people seeking asylum for political gain, particularly during election periods.

Speaking to our friends and family about the rights of people seeking asylum and how Australia's system is broken is one of the most important things we can all do to help deliver real change.



We know it can often be difficult to make a complex subject understandable in an informal setting. That's why we've produced this guide.

Our guide includes tips from people with lived experience, and ASC team members who have worked in refugee advocacy for years, on how to speak to people close to you about the lives and rights of refugees and people seeking asylum.

Pick your moment

Human rights issues aren't necessarily on people's minds all the time, so pick your moment to discuss the welfare and treatment of people seeking asylum. Thinking about how you approach the conversation and your talking points before the discussion can be useful.

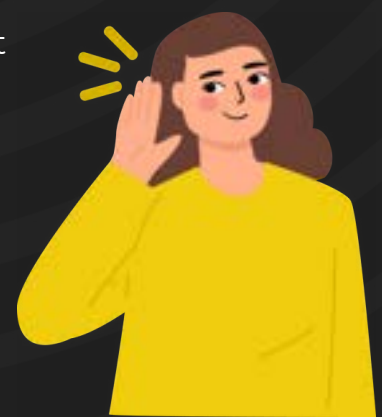
News coverage of global conflicts is often on our social feeds and TV screens. Appealing to empathy by asking what your friend or family member would do if they had next to no time to pack up their lives and leave their home is a good way to put them in the shoes of someone who is forced to seek asylum from war or persecution.

Remember to keep things respectful, and if the person does not want to discuss your concerns after you have explained them, politely end the conversation.



Listen and engage

It's important not to sound like you are lecturing your friend or family member. By volunteering your concerns, demonstrating a personal connection, and listening to what they think about the topic, you can invite a more constructive discussion. If they don't know much about the challenges people seeking asylum and refugees face or have certain misconceptions, explain patiently and calmly.



Appeal to humanity

At the Asylum Seekers Centre we use the term “people seeking asylum” over “asylum seeker” when talking about the people we work with and advocate for. The former centres the person - their humanity, their story, and their agency.



As ASC’s Client Support Services Manager Phuong Black explains, using human-centric language invites empathy.

“While ‘asylum seeker’ highlights a person’s need for protection, it fails to capture the individual’s full story, including their broader context, aspirations, and potential to enrich their community.”

Fatima Rahmati, an Employment Coordinator at the ASC and a refugee herself, believes human stories are important when talking to family and friends about people seeking asylum.

“It’s easier to dehumanise people when they are portrayed as a monolith. When there are no names, no faces, no humanness attributed to them. Learn about people seeking asylum and share their stories.”

“Did you know, for example, that Albert Einstein fled from Germany to Belgium and from Belgium he took a small boat to cross the English Channel and sought refuge in England? He took a boat to cross the sea to seek safety elsewhere... does that sound familiar..?”



