

Guidelines for Civil Discourse

The Town of Bedford respects and recognizes each citizen's right to free speech. In order to guarantee all people's right to free speech and to ensure productive civil discourse, we request that all citizens respect the following guidelines.

- **Recognize a person's right to advocate ideas that are different from your own.**
"Democracy is a means of living together despite our differences. Democratic deliberation is an alternative to physical violence. It is predicated on the assumption that it's possible to disagree agreeably, that it's better to laugh than cry, that one can vigorously contest the positions of one's adversary without questioning his or her personal integrity or motivation, and that parties to a debate are entitled to the presumption that their views are legitimate if not correct."

-Thomas Mann
- **Show respect for others.**
 - Discuss policies and ideas, not people
 - Only one person should be speaking at any given time
 - Use helpful, not hurtful language.
- **Speak as you would like to be spoken to.**
 - Use courtesy titles (Mr., Ms., Sir, etc.) and ask if unsure
 - Restate ideas when asked
 - Use a civil tone of voice
- **Agree to listen.**
 - Respectfully hear and listen to differing points of view
 - When unsure, clarify what you heard
 - Realize that what you say and what people understand you to have said may be different
 - Recognize that people can agree to disagree
- **Speak for yourself, not others.**
 - Speak from your own experience
 - Use "I" statements ("I think that the ideas presented...")
- **Follow agreed upon guidelines regarding who speaks when and for how long.**

(Adapted with permission from Lexington No Place for Hate Committee Guidelines, May 2004)