

Advocacy Training Resource

Hard Questions & Pivoting

We come across questions that catch us off guard all the time. The good news is that there are techniques to pivot back to our original point and keep the conversation on track. Here are some best practices and potential frameworks when responding to tough questions.

Personal Stories

Personal stories can help us humanize the issues we work on and can be interwoven in the pivoting models outlined below. When using personal stories in your advocacy work, they should demonstrate the following: vulnerability, honesty, respect, relatability, and faith values.

AAR (Acknowledge, Answer, Redirect) Model

Use this model when responding to difficult, yet sincere questions. If you're not sure how to answer something, try the AAR model.

- **Acknowledge:** Demonstrate understanding or empathy with what the person is saying.
- **Answer:** Answer their questions in a straightforward and short way. If you don't know the answer, that's okay! Tell them you'll find out and get back to them.
- **Redirect:** Refocus back to your main points of conversation.

Example:

Question: How are you going to make sure women don't use abortion as birth control?

Answer: *(Acknowledge)* I can hear this issue is important to you. *(Answer)* When it comes down to it, we know that the vast majority of people seeking abortions do not use it as a contraceptive. *(Redirect)* It's important that we ensure all people can access safe and affordable reproductive care, including abortion, if we want healthy communities. This legislation will do that.

FFF (Feel, Felt, Found) Model

Use this model when responding to someone who shares similar values with you, but their actions don't align with their words.

- **Feel:** Show empathy and understanding for where they are right now.
- **Felt:** Connect by sharing a past personal experience that demonstrates a similar feeling that they're currently feeling.
- **Found:** Share how taking action has changed your perspective and how you feel differently now from how you did in the past.

Example:

Question: I'm just unsure, how could we possibly have any control over the courts?

Answer: *(Feel)* I get that, sometimes the courts feel very removed from our lives. *(Felt)* In fact, I was hesitant to get involved in organizing around the courts at first too. *(Found)* I have found that by educating the public and talking to our senators, we can have a huge impact on judicial nominations and really shape what our judicial system looks like.

Responding to “Whataboutism”

Use this approach when someone asks you an insincere question that is intended to derail the conversation. Typically these questions start with “but what about...”

- **Personal story contrary to concern**
 - Share a personal story that illustrates the exact opposite of their point.
 - If you don’t have one personal to you, share a story from someone else (with their permission).
- **Acknowledge concern**
 - Acknowledge but do not legitimize their concern. There is a big difference between “I hear that you have a concern” and “I understand why you’re concerned.”
- **Pivot back to main point**
 - “I hear that you’re concerned, but it’s really important that we stay focused on...”
 - “I know you want to talk about _____, but we came here to discuss_____.”
 - “It’s critical that we stay focused on...”
 - “I want to get back to why we’re here today, which is...”

Example:

Question: What about the women who make false harassment accusations?

Answer: *(Personal story)* I’ve met a lot of women who’ve faced sexual harassment, and not a single case was false. In fact, most women I know are so fearful of retaliation that they never report. *(Acknowledge concern)* I can hear that this is something you are concerned about, *(Pivot back)* but it’s important that we stick to the facts and talk about how to prevent sexual harassment.