

INTERMEDIATE

How to Keep the Conversation Flowing in a Group

Everyone knows what it is like in a group situation when the conversation dries up. Often you won't know why everyone has stopped talking but also you may feel one of two things, both of which are unhelpful responses to the situation.

You may feel you are personally responsible for getting the conversation going again or conversely you may feel it is nothing to do with you and allow an uncomfortable silence to reign as you wait for someone to step in.

There is a more constructive way to keep the conversation flowing

1. First, prepare. Have a few topics in your head that you could bring up to talk about. They should be simple things that everyone would easily feel able to contribute about. If you are meeting for a specific reason, the topics could be specific to your group, e.g. local arts projects. Other things could be TV, weather, vacations, etc, that everyone can talk about.
2. When the conversation lulls for a while, take a deep breath and relax. That will help you think of something to say and will ease the tension within you.
3. Be realistic. There are always times in a conversation when things get a little quiet. People could just be thinking or they may be helping themselves to refreshments. Silences at these times are no bad thing and can serve a useful purpose.
4. Relax. You are not solely responsible for getting the conversation going again if you are in a group situation. Any one of you could do that, so don't just jump in with the first thing that comes to your mind.
5. Stop over thinking. You don't have to think of something terribly funny and intelligent to say. Often, the simple things are the best to say because then others won't feel intimidated about responding to you.

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6. Focus outward. Too often when there is a silence in a conversation the tendency is to panic and think 'What have I do wrong? Why is nobody speaking?' That is especially true if you were the last person to say something before it went quiet. The chances are the silence is nothing to do with you at all. So find something external to remark upon. Look to the surroundings and make a positive comment about the occasion or the setting. That is the thing you all have in common so it is a good place to start a conversation.

7. Make eye contact with one person in your group. Often that is less intimidating than feeling you have to engage the entire group in conversation.

8. Smile at that person. You will then ease their tension and your own and that may elicit a comment from them.

9. If they don't speak right away, ask them a question. Make it simple and make it positive. Open questions are best so that you get more information.

10. Listen to the answer they give you and that should give you and others in the group some material to talk about.

11. You can then ask a follow up question if you want to, related to the first. So if you asked them where they are spending their vacation this year you could ask them if they had ever visited before or what they know about the destination or why they chose it.

12. Involve others in the conversation you have started. Ask if anyone else has been to that same place or if they have other vacation plans this year.

Pretty soon, you will find that the group conversation is flowing again and you can all relax and enjoy yourselves, getting to know each other better. Don't be nervous as almost any conversation is better than none so the other people in the group will most likely be thrilled you got the conversation flowing again.