

The Fox Detox: A How-To Guide for the Holidays

For many of us the holiday season has become synonymous with political tension.

It seems that no matter what battles you're fighting — on issues ranging from universal health care to climate change to racism — there's a family member or friend you dread seeing around the kitchen table as the winter months begin. The inevitable political disagreements weigh our familial gatherings down with tension, anger, frustration and fear.

There's a common enemy across most all fights for equity and justice and it spends more time in the presence of our most dreaded family members than we do: Fox News. The network that masquerades as "fair and balanced" is little more than a racist spin machine and at the close of the decade is basically a state-run media empire in support of the Trump administration.

And anyone who pays for cable — which is most people paying for internet access — is subsidizing the network's reach into our homes.

Talking to your loved ones about how to detox from Fox News can feel really intimidating. It can be hard to accept that your father/sister/uncle/whoever has always harbored biases that could be exploited by a network that runs on racism, xenophobia and other forms of hatred.

But the (evil) genius of Fox News is that it exploits the biases that are deeply embedded in society. The United States was founded on colonization, genocide and slavery. Our national problem with white supremacy runs deep. What Fox does is show up and profit off of it.

Detoxing a family member off Fox News is no easy feat. Studies show we have the greatest opportunity to change hearts and minds if we have a dialogue with our friends and families. So if you're up for the challenge of getting loved ones to turn off the toxic sludge, read on for some tips to get the job done.

1) Be realistic

The chance that you're going to win over a family member before dessert arrives is slim to none. Let's be realistic: Detoxing may take a while. It's a process.

Consider the story of Jen Senko's father, the subject of her 2016 documentary *The Brainwashing of My Dad*. "In practice it will require a longer deprogramming process, which is what I had to do with my dad," Senko [told Salon](#). "That didn't happen overnight. It took me about two years. But you may be able to reach one out of 10 Fox News people and those others stuck in the right-wing echo chamber."

Walk into any conversation with a realistic set of expectations and prioritize making connections and building trust without sacrificing your values or beliefs.

2) Check your safety

Not everyone is going to be able to have these conversations and that's OK. Don't put yourself in a position that jeopardizes your safety. Not only is there a spectrum of Fox News viewers — ranging from those who are likely moveable to those arming themselves for a revolution — but many of us don't feel safe having these conversations because of the risk it presents emotionally or physically.

Consider your privilege in society as you make this assessment. Don't give yourself a pass if you're in a position to make change, but don't put yourself at risk if you don't feel safe.

3) Consider Using OARTAC

The OARTAC model (Open, Ask, Reflect, Tell, Ask, Close) can be a useful approach for having a difficult conversation. Following this structure can help minimize tension and open up room for understanding:

- **Open** up the conversation by setting the tone and asking for anything you need (i.e., no cellphones, calm voices, etc.).
- **Ask** open-ended questions to help you understand where the other person is coming from.
- **Reflect** back what you heard them say so they know you're hearing them.
- **Tell** them how you're feeling or what you're thinking about. Keep it brief.
- **Ask** open-ended questions, including asking what they think of what you've said.
- **Close** out the conversation respectfully and leave the door open for more discussion in the future.

4) Ask questions and be curious

It's impossible to move someone who feels they're being attacked. While you may feel like screaming at your racist uncle for, well, being racist, this tactic will only escalate the tension and widen the gap between you.

Instead, ask questions and express curiosity about their motivations. Fox News leverages fear and a lot of Fox viewers harbor deep fears about their economic future and their limited power in a capitalist society. Look for opportunities to delve deeper and see what's motivating the fear.

5) Find common ground

This may feel like an impossible feat given the stakes, but you *are* gathered around the same table so at the very least there's a starting point.

What can you agree on? Are you both concerned for your children's/grandchildren's future? Are you personally experiencing the impacts of climate change? Do you both find it ridiculous that every single thing that happens is labeled as "breaking news"? This is a critical step toward having a conversation that actually advances your objectives.

But don't confuse finding common ground with ignoring politics altogether. Growth comes from confronting the uncomfortable. Anyone who is in a safe enough position to challenge their relatives should.

6) Focus on the systemic

You're unlikely to get anywhere by trying to debunk every single Fox News myth. Instead, zero in on what Fox does. Talk about the profit motive for keeping viewers glued to the screen. Roll your eyes at the idea that everything that happens is "breaking news". Point out that the constant cycle of interrupting viewers is engineered to keep people watching.

That doesn't mean you should never raise specific examples. If you're looking for a place to start, here's a great [rundown of the many ways Fox has been racist](#) through the years.

7) Emphasize stories over data

People — especially people who succumb to the spell of Fox News — are far more likely to be moved by stories than data. You know you're right, we know you're right, but sharing statistics is not likely to have as much of an impact as telling a personal story.

If your family member starts dropping racist Fox talking points, relay your own stories and experiences or those that you've read about to counter them. Don't lean into statistics about immigration or police brutality but instead share the real-life stories and impacts that Fox's language and this administration's policies are having.

8) Offer up alternatives

There are a few fundamental reasons people flock to Fox News — each requiring its own antidote and approach.

- *Community*: To be a Fox News viewer is to be part of a community.
- *Easy answers*: Many find comfort in the simple narratives Fox has to offer about the complexities of our world.

Some alternatives to watching/participating in the Fox News political-theater production include:

- Getting involved in a local organization: What is the person watching Fox interested in? What do they like to do? What organizations are accessible to them? This may mean gathering in person or on the phone. So much of our news and information is shared outside of "traditional news". Being involved in a local group is an opportunity to build/strengthen community while sharing news and information among local residents.
- Developing a balanced local-media diet: What print, broadcast, digital or radio news organizations exist in the town/city/region of the person watching Fox News? Are public meetings/governmental hearings broadcast somewhere? What resources does the local library

have access to? Work with your friend and/or family member to map out an alternative media diet where they can acquire news and information. To figure out ways to more actively participate in or have a voice in local news, visit newsvoices.org.

- Looking for trust indicators in national news: The Trust Project, a consortium of top news companies led by award-winning journalist Sally Lehrman, is developing transparency standards to help you easily assess the quality and credibility of individual pieces of journalism. Look for these trust indicators in national news. Share them with your friends and/or family. For more information, visit thetrustproject.org.
- Strengthening your relationship: Where do you get your news and information from? While it may not be the same place your friends and/or family get news, it's nonetheless news you can share. Email or text an interesting article. Stop by and talk about something you recently learned. Visiting and talking more often can strengthen your relationship and make it safer to discuss detoxing from Fox.

The bottom line

Fox News isn't news — it's political propaganda. The more friends and family we can free from its clutches, the better off we'll all be.

Taking down this racist media empire will require a multi-pronged approach. In addition to the cultural shifts we're trying to make one on one with friends and family, we need to attack Fox News where it hurts most: its profits. [Pressure the companies](#) that are still advertising on the network to ditch it once and for all.