



# Discussion Guide

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The viewpoints presented here are meant to spark conversation and are not meant to be exhaustive. Please consider other possibilities not included*

**Topic 1: When it comes to the impact of chemical exposures on our health, people vary in their level of concern. We invite you to share any concerns you may have.**

**VIEWPOINT A:** Chemical use and exposures do not concern me.

I trust that most products for sale are safe or receive enough scrutiny to be safe. I think that air, water, or other types of pollution are regulated well enough to protect my family and me. I am much more concerned about other threats to my health.

**VIEWPOINT B:** I'm a little concerned.

I've read in the news about dangerous chemicals and about lapses in our nation's chemical safety system. I'd like to avoid some chemical exposures. For instance, I don't buy toys for my child that might contain lead and I avoid eating fish containing high mercury levels. While I think I can maintain good health without paying a lot of attention to this issue, I'd like to learn more about the potential risks of chemical exposures.

**VIEWPOINT C:** I'm very worried about my everyday exposures to chemicals.

I think that harmful chemicals are used far too widely in the United States. I try very hard to avoid exposure to them. I drink filtered water, buy mostly organic produce and natural cleaning and personal care products, and work to educate others about the issue.

**VIEWPOINT D:** I'm more confused than concerned

I hear conflicting reports about the risks posed by chemicals. I don't know whom to trust or where to go to get accurate information that I can understand.

**Topic 2: Think about and discuss a few values you believe should guide our nation's approach to protecting us from harmful chemical exposures. Here are some examples:**

**VALUE A:** Transparency

We need to make information readily available about chemicals and public health. For instance, government decisions should be made openly and businesses should list publicly the ingredients in their consumer products.

**VALUE B:** Convenience

Chemicals support our modern way of life. We should look for ways to reduce exposures that do not force us to make huge changes in our lifestyles.



REMEMBER, THESE  
QUESTIONS HAVE NO  
"RIGHT" OR "WRONG"  
ANSWERS.

### VALUE C: Prevention

While much about the effects of chemical exposures on human health is still unknown, we should nonetheless try to stop exposures to harmful chemicals.

### VALUE D: Justice

Chemical exposures are not borne equally across the United States population. Everyone should enjoy a clean and healthy environment and access to resources that can help protect health.

### VALUE E: Personal Responsibility

People should take personal responsibility for their health by making choices that limit their exposure to harmful chemicals in their food, consumer products, water, and environment.

**Topic 3: We can learn a from specific stories of success or failure related to protecting people from harmful chemical exposures. Have you experienced any successes or failures regarding protection from chemical exposures? If so, discuss what contributed to such successes or failures.**

### VIEWPOINT A: Success

Successes come in many forms. Perhaps...

- After meeting with local community members and hearing their concerns, a business voluntarily replaced a toxic chemical in one of the products it makes with a safer, less expensive substitute.
- A government agency investigated health concerns of our community. They involved us in the process, addressed many of our questions, and helped us understand why other questions couldn't be answered.
- The city stopped using pesticides in the parks after a local university collected data on children's exposures.
- A group of nurses educated parents about ways to reduce asthma triggers in their homes.

### VIEWPOINT B: Failure

Failures also come in many forms. For instance...

- Our community asked a government agency to investigate a local chemical release but could not get anyone to respond.
- After hearing about chemicals in some personal care products, I tried to switch to safe options. I had a difficult time finding information to help me make a decision.
- The health department investigated health concerns in our community but in the end it didn't have enough information to provide us with any answers.
- My doctor dismissed my concerns about chemical exposures.



HELP US HAVE AN OPEN,  
RESPECTFUL AND  
PRODUCTIVE  
CONVERSATION.

**VIEWPOINT C: I don't know**

I'm new to this issue. I might have a story to share later on during the *National Conversation*.

**Topic 4: Many groups, from government to businesses to nonprofit organizations, have a part in protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures. After listening to the personal accounts you just heard, or other experiences, share your thoughts on steps one or more of these groups might take to prevent harmful exposures.**

**VIEWPOINT A: Build capacity at the state and local levels to address public health concerns related to chemical exposures**

While many policy decisions related to chemical exposures occur at the federal level, public health concerns are often local. Currently, state and local governments vary in the resources they have to protect the public from chemical exposures and, when problems are identified, to respond adequately to those exposures. Federal agencies should commit resources to make sure that state and local governments can adequately respond to residents' concerns and can provide protection from local environmental health threats.

**VIEWPOINT B: Involve members of the public in decisions that affect their health**

Government agencies, corporations, universities, community groups, and others should provide meaningful opportunities for interested members of the public to participate in decisions at local, state, and national levels.

**VIEWPOINT C: Encourage partnerships**

We need to do a better job of working together to promote health and to prevent chemical exposure. At the local level, building effective partnerships may require federal agencies, foundations, and others to provide resources to community-based groups. At the national level, federal agencies ought to coordinate their research and share information more freely.

**VIEWPOINT D: Take a comprehensive approach to promoting health**

Promoting public health requires government agencies to look at chemical exposures in addition to the other public health issues that communities face. For example, while a health department works with a community to study possible risks from local water contamination, it can also work with this same community group and others on programs to combat obesity and poor nutrition.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS  
ON PROTECTING PEOPLE  
FROM HARMFUL  
CHEMICAL EXPOSURES.