

## Strategies for Discussion

Excerpted from *How to talk to family and friends who ignore social distancing appeals*, [CBC News](#), Posted Mar 25, 2020, 4:00 AM ET, by Jessica Wong

There could be many reasons why friends and family members are ignoring directives against gathering and socializing in groups, whether it's believing the rules don't apply to them or feeling invulnerable to the notion "nobody is gonna tell me what to do," said Mary Pipher, clinical psychologist and author of *Reviving Ophelia* and *Women Rowing North*.

Accordingly, there are a variety of approaches you can try to persuade them otherwise, she said.

- One starting point is to get into the person's headspace with questions like "how do you see your situation?" and "how do you see it as different from other people?"
- Another strategy the Nebraska-based Pipher favours is appealing to a sense of heroism and community. "It's a chance to be a hero. It's a call to sacrifice, and it's an opportunity to grow into even more profound people," she said. "This is a chance when every person in the world can do their part by following the rules."
- When talking to older rebels taking an "I do what I want" attitude, a shift in perspective could help. You might suggest that they risk "putting a family that cares for them in deep mourning" if they fell ill or died from coronavirus. "Think about who would miss you," Pipher explained. "You owe it to those people to stay alive."
- For younger folks feeling invulnerable, try discussing the fact that they could spread the virus to a friend who may not have divulged an underlying condition that puts them at higher risk, she said. "You never know, even if you're out with a peer, what else that peer might be dealing with."
- A good tactic is to share your own experiences, feelings and worries. "Use yourself as someone who is struggling with the same issues. The other person can choose to listen and accept your story — or not."

Pipher stressed the importance of acknowledging that, for some, social distancing and staying at home can be a true struggle. For example:

- Extroverts.
- Those living on their own.
- People residing in tiny spaces.
- Those grappling with having lost (or being in danger of losing) their livelihood amid the pandemic.

Finally, she advises: "If you start an argument with somebody, you've already lost. The whole trick with persuasion is defusing resistance before you're in an argument."

If the person is looking irritated and your voices are being raised, "you might as well not go any further, because anything further is only going to make the person more resistant."

Pipher sees this unprecedented moment in history as an extraordinary teachable moment about our role in the wider world. "We're all interconnected, and if we don't take care of each other, we won't be OK. Each of our fates is tied to the fate of the whole."