

# Disagree Better: USU Extension and BYU Wheatley Institute Launch Parenting Toolkit at National Governor's Association Meeting

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Nashville, Tennessee – Contentious conversations and deep differences are dividing countries, communities, and families, but disagreeing better is possible. Scholars from Utah State University Extension and the Wheatley Institute at Brigham Young University collaborated to create Disagree Better: A Parenting Toolkit, a free online resource to help families manage disagreements better inside and outside their homes. The team will present the parent education program at the National Governor's Association Meeting today in Nashville, Tennessee.

David Schramm, USU Extension family life specialist, created the bulk of three short e-courses to help parents and children learn principles and practices for better disagreements both inside and outside their homes. Jason Carroll, director of the Family Initiative at the Wheatley Institute at Brigham Young University, collaborated and directed the project.

Schramm said the goal of the project was to create simple, short, free online modules to help parents learn and apply principles related to civility, kindness, understanding, and respect.

Drawing on research, Schramm said the three lessons offer trusted tips, tools, and ideas to manage differences in better ways and take 20-30 minutes each online. The first lesson, "Start with Me," is designed for parents to assess what kind of example they are to their children in showing respect to others, even those they disagree with. The second lesson offers tips on how to disagree better with family members at home. The third lesson focuses on better ways to manage disagreements with people outside of the home – from friends and teachers to posts on social media to the referees at youth sports games.

"Better vision and understanding reveals that there is a person behind every problem," Schramm said. "It all starts with learning, living, and sharing these principles at home. The lessons emphasize what we call the PAUSE approach to handling disagreements, which involves Pausing, Asking sincere questions, aiming for Understanding, Seeking common ground, and Engaging in respectful discussion."

Carroll explained that in this time of polarization and contention, it is important to help young people learn to be peacemakers.

"This starts with us as parents and the type of example we are to our children and how we speak to and about others – it's all about seeking to build bridges of understanding when we have differences of opinion," he said.

The project is supported by the [National Governors Association's \(NGA\) Disagree Better Initiative](#). Schramm said that by collaborating with the NGA, the hope is that government officials from other states will share or link to these resources to help parents in their own states.

The parent toolkit was developed in support of Utah Governor Spencer Cox's [Disagree Better](#) initiative. As this year's NGA president, Governor Cox launched this initiative to address the growing polarization and divisiveness in public discourse by encouraging citizens to engage in open, honest, and respectful conversations about important issues facing the state and the nation.

The initiative includes public events, workshops, and online resources designed to provide Utahns and others with the tools and skills needed to engage in productive dialogue across political, cultural, and social divides. The governor's office will partner with community organizations, schools, and local leaders to promote the initiative and encourage participation. USU Extension will promote efforts to invite parents to watch and learn from the [free online courses](#).

"We know that conflict resolution takes work and involves difficult conversations," Cox was quoted on the Disagree Better website. "It's much easier to sow division than to persuade or find solutions. But we also know that no one ever changed someone's mind by attacking them. Through healthy conflict, we're confident that we can find common ground and improve our families, our communities, and our nation. Together, we can disagree better."

The full program can be reviewed at [DisagreeBetter.usu.edu](http://DisagreeBetter.usu.edu).

### **About the Wheatley Institute**

The Brigham Young University Wheatley Institute engages students, scholars,

thought leaders and the public in research-supported work that fortifies the core

institutions of the family, religion and constitutional government. Learn more at <http://wheatley.byu.edu>.

### **About Utah State University Extension**

Utah State University Extension provides research-based programs and resources with the goal of improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities throughout Utah. USU Extension operates through a cooperative agreement between the United States Department of Agriculture, Utah State University, and county governments. To learn more about USU Extension courses for families, go to <https://extensioncourses.usu.edu/product-category/relationships>.

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