

Conversation Guide: Conversations in Troubled Times

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-7 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our over 150 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. *Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate.*

Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgment aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Conversations in Troubled Times (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Disruption, tragedy and conflict are part of our human story. Whether in our own backyard or internationally, deep histories of trauma and loss can make it difficult to speak about current events. For some people the hurt or anger or frustration or fear are simply too present for conversation on the topic to be helpful or even possible. When a beloved person dies, sometimes all we can do is express sympathy. Talk may come later. How can we balance the need for immediate action with the ability to check in, listen, and support each other. How do you honor a complex history or context as well as personal connections to troubling events?

In preparation for this conversation, take a moment to reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with the group:

- Are there things that are too painful for you to talk about right now? Can we agree to leave these topics out of this particular conversation?
- How did you make the decision to have this conversation? Is there something you want the group to know about that process?

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- How has the recent news affected you? And people you love?
- In troubling times, we sometimes retreat to our in-groups and let blame turn into the dehumanization of those we perceive as bad actors. Do you see this happening? If so, in what ways?
- Sharing on social media can amplify discord rather than deepen human connection. Which voices are you listening to right now and which are you missing for a fuller picture?
- What wisdom can guide us in responding to deepening divides and violent conflicts that perpetuate suffering? What are your hopes at this time?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation shifted your perception of others or yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

- *Give us feedback!* Use livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/ or QR code
- *Donate!* Make more of these possible; give at livingroomconversations.org/donate/
- *Join or host more conversations!* With a) this group by exchanging your emails; b) others in person and/or by video call online. Get more involved or learn how to host at livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/



Thank you!