

Relationships Matter

Overview

In Living Room Conversations, six people come together to get to know one another in a more meaningful way. Guided by a simple and sociable format, participants practice being open and curious about all perspectives, with a focus on learning from one another, rather than trying to debate the topic at hand.

The Living Room Conversation Ground Rules

Be Curious and Open to Learning

Listen to and be open to hearing all points of view. Maintain an attitude of exploration and learning. Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking.

Show Respect and Suspend Judgment

Human beings tend to judge one another, do your best not to. Setting judgments aside will better enable you to learn from others and help them feel respected and appreciated.

Look for Common Ground and Appreciate Differences

In this conversation, we look for what we agree on and simply appreciate that we will disagree on some beliefs and opinions.

Be Authentic and Welcome that from Others

Share what's important to you. Speak authentically from your personal and heartfelt experience. Be considerate to others who are doing the same.

Be Purposeful and to the Point

Notice if what you are conveying is or is not "on purpose" to the question at hand. Notice if you are making the same point more than once.

Own and Guide the Conversation

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the quality of the conversation by noticing what's happening and actively support getting yourself and others back "on purpose" when needed.

Though feedback is consistently positive, some people are concerned about managing people that dominate the conversation as well as off-topic, or disruptive situations during the Living Room Conversation. We offer these tips:

- Everyone shares responsibility for guiding the conversation and is invited to help keep the conversation on track.
- The group can decide to keep track of time in some way to help people remember to keep their comments similar in length to others. Soft music when the time is up is a great reminder.
- If an area of interest has arisen that has taken the group off topic, ask the group if they would like to set aside the new topic for a separate Living Room Conversation.
- If someone is dominating, disruptive or has found their soapbox, respectfully interrupt the situation, refer to the Ground Rules and invite everyone to get back on track with the current question so the group can fulfill the current Living Room Conversation.
- If the group opts to shift from the format of the Living Room Conversations, please provide us with feedback for future learning. Thank you! feedback@livingroomconversations.org

Heart and Head: Relationships Matter: Human dynamics that affect the way we work in the world

Emotion vs. Intellect- Experiments have revealed that often our intellect is in service to our emotions. In other words, first we have a gut reaction and then we justify it. Heart and intellect impact how we hear each other. If you like someone you will listen to them with greater openness and an inclination to believe them. If you hear the same thing from someone that you do not know or do not trust for political or cultural reasons, you will be far less likely to hear or believe what they say.

Our natural drive to conform to community norms- There are basic instincts that reinforce our tendency to listen to people in our community and dismiss information from people outside our community. In ancient times people that promoted ideas considered dangerous or too different were shunned or ejected from their community. Ejection from the community could lead to death. The instinct to conform to community norms is hard to overcome for most people.

Confirmation bias, also called **confirmatory bias** or **myside bias**, is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's beliefs or hypotheses, while giving disproportionately less consideration to alternative possibilities. It is a type of cognitive bias and a systematic error of inductive reasoning. People display this bias when they gather or remember information selectively, or when they interpret it in a biased way.

Listening is one of the most powerful ways to develop rapport and ultimately be heard. People that feel respected and heard tend to listen well in return.

Respect is key for good relationships and problem solving. Eye rolling, talking over people and other forms of disrespect dramatically diminish the ability for people to work together for a common goal.

Build on shared values- The reason Living Room Conversations start by asking individuals to share some personal values is that most of us share core values. Once we recognize we share key values we tend to listen to each other with greater interest and empathy.

Holding the tension of our differences is a discipline that is worth developing. People may disagree strongly on some topics yet be able to work together productively in other areas. And when we are able to understand viewpoints that are different from our own this sometimes reveals opportunities to solve problems in ways we had not thought of. In fact at times different priorities may create opportunities for people to craft win/win outcomes.

Cognitive Dissonance- In psychology, cognitive dissonance is the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas. Liking someone you disagree with can create some discomfort.

Benefitting from everyone's best ideas- When we listen with respect to people that have different perspectives we often find that our collective intelligence is better than even expert opinion.

Collaborative problem solving produces more win/win solutions- Working collaboratively there is more flexibility and room to be creative in efforts to meet everyone's core needs. Adversarial problem solving tends to produce lose/lose solutions where everyone feels they have lost.

Rounds/Questions: The Living Room Conversation Starts Here

A Living Room Conversation flows through 5 rounds of questions and the closing. During some rounds, each question will be addressed. In other rounds, the multiple questions are intended as conversation starters and you need only respond to the one or two that matter the most to you. In the event the conversation wanders off track, we will refer to this Conversation Guide to get it back on track.

Round One: Getting Started / Why Are We Here?

- What interested you or drew you to this conversation?

Round Two: Core Values

Answer one or more of the following:

- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?
- What would your best friend say about who you are and what makes you “tick”?
- What most concerns you about your community and/or the country right now and long-term?

Round Three: Relationship experiences.

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- Have you ever seen or been in a conversation where people were not listening to each other? How did that turn out?
- Have you ever taken a position or voiced an idea that was very different from a group you are part of? How did that feel? Or have you ever decided against speaking out because it just wasn't worth the repercussions?
- Can you remember a time when you and a friend interpreted the same information very differently? Why do you think that happened?
- Describe a friend or relative with whom you are able to talk about hard things in a respectful way and “hold the tension of your differences.” What is the difference you have with this person - and why do you find it worthwhile to talk in this respectful way together?
- When have you used respect and listening to resolve a problem? Did it work?

Round Four: Reflection

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- In one sentence, share what was most meaningful / valuable to you in the experience of this Living Room Conversation.
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on this topic?
- Has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?

Round Five: Accomplishment and Next Steps

Answer both of the following questions:

- What is one important thing you thought was accomplished here?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing – Thank you! Please complete the feedback form to help improve Living Room Conversations.

Host & Participant Feedback Form

Please complete following the form, AND TAKE PICTURES OF YOUR GROUP!

Turn into your host or take pictures and email them to feedback@livingroomconversations.org

You have permission to use my photo in materials for Living Room Conversations.

Host, Location & Topic: _____

<p>1. Before it took place, how did you feel about this conversation? (check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nervous</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not worried at all</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Excited</p>	<p>3. Did you learn or become aware of something valuable during the conversation?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>2. How do you feel now that the conversation is over? (check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My fears were confirmed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I am relieved it's over</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It was more enjoyable than I expected</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I was grateful to be a part of it</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It was absolutely worth it</p>	<p>4. How do you feel about these kinds of conversations in the future?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I want to co-host with my friends.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would enjoy doing another in the future.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would enjoy getting involved in lots of them.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would rather not have these kinds of conversations again.</p>
<p>5. Which of the following statements apply to your relationship with other participants after the conversation? (Check all statements that apply)</p>	
I feel closer and more connected to them	I feel more distance between us
I know them more personally	I don't know them any better
I like them more	I like them less
I see more goodness in them than before	I don't see any more goodness than I did before
I see more common ground now	I see less common ground now
I understand where they are coming from more	I am more confused at where they are coming from

Comments _____

Thank you for helping us learn about how the Living Room Conversation process worked for you! If you have any further feedback or a quote we can use, please write them on the back side or send us a note at info@LivingRoomConversations.org

We are conducting research on the impact of Living Room Conversations. May we contact you for more information?

Name _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Yes! Keep me updated on Living Room Conversations. We will only send you email updates if you check the box.

Privacy statement: Your contact information, including name, email and phone number will be used only for the purpose of gathering your feedback, unless box is checked above to be added to the Living Room Conversation email update list.