LivingRoom Conversations

Respect. Relate. Connect.

weave the social fabric project
THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Conversation Guide
Weave the Social Fabric: Conversation 1

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 nearly 100 topics. Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn. 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. Some hosts may offer a Q & A after Closing.*

I. 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.

II. 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 judgement 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.

III. 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 the following question:

- What does community mean to you?

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Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Weaving a Strong Social Fabric (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Many people sense that something is broken in society. Surveys show about half of young adult Americans are lonely. Opioid addiction, suicide, gun violence, ethnic tension and depression have been rising. We face rapid change from a globalized economy, cell phones and social media, job-hopping, online dating, immigration, and uncertainty about our future health and wealth. Our social fabric seems to be shredding. Others observe that the social fabric of our communities and nation was never really woven to include everyone in the first place. Yet, there have been many times as a country when people looked past their surface differences and came together as neighbors to support each other.

We've come together today to get to know each other, share our experience of isolation and connection, and consider how we might work together to build connections that allow us to feel recognized, respected and valued. Living Room Conversations has partnered with the Aspen Institute's Weave Project and others to hold discussions across the country. Our aim is to explore what might be behind today's rising sense of isolation, loneliness and distrust and what each of us can do to weave a strong social fabric.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. The group may choose to have everyone answer: A) whichever question speaks to them individually or B) the same question with an option to pass. Once everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for any clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring with other topic or related questions as time allows.

- Is it easy or hard for you to connect with others who were raised differently, or live and think differently than you? What have you seen getting in the way of that from happening?
- Are there people in your community you feel close to? What makes you feel close?
- Describe a time, if ever, when you saw your neighborhood come together to have fun or face a common challenge.
- What do you think could be done to help bring your community together?
- What connection, if any, do you see between what is happening in our nation and what is happening in our neighborhoods or communities?

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?
- Is there one change you will make in your life because of our discussion?

Closing (~5 min)

- *Give us feedback!* Use livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/ or QR code
- *Donate!* Make more of these possible: 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!

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