

## Cancel Culture: Free Speech and Accountability

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, 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 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.

### 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 and/or the country?
- 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 -- Cancel Culture: Free Speech and Accountability (~40 min)**

*One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.*

With the advance of technology, it's easy to broadcast our thoughts and feelings and connect with both friends and strangers online. With the rise of the 24/7 news cycle and social media, there has been an increase of high-profile cases in which people receive public rebuke or lose professional opportunities due something they do, say, or post online, or when something from their past surfaces. Some believe that these instances are appropriate forms of accountability, while others believe they represent an out-of-control "cancel culture" that violates the spirit of free speech.

This conversation provides an opportunity to discuss our personal relationships with free speech, the lines we draw for ourselves, and whether we see the need for lines to be drawn by the government and other public or private entities.

*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 does your expression vary in personal interactions, via text, or on social media? What norms do you follow?
- Have you had a personal experience where you received backlash from something you said or posted? Have there been times when you were hesitant to speak or to write/post something for fear of backlash or "being canceled?"
- How do you define "cancel culture"? Where have you seen it happen? What impact has it had on you, on the "canceled" person, on society?
- What do you see as the difference between "canceling someone" and "holding that person accountable"? What are some examples you have seen of this?

## **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 changed your perception of anyone in this group, including 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/](https://livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/) or QR code
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- *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/](https://livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/)



*Thank you!*